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# FEMINIST LEADERSHIP IN THE SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITION:

## A Case of Female and Non-binary Leaders in Finland

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# ABSTRACT

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The sustainability transition has been necessitated by the ecological crisis. The ecological crisis is a reality acknowledged in the political, scientific, economic, and activist spheres that only a few skeptics keep denying. This thesis brings gender into the debate on sustainability transitions. Specifically, it explores the ecofeminist hypothesis about possible connections between the unequal status of women and the exploitation of nature. This hypothesis is examined by analyzing feminist leadership in the context of the ecological crisis. In addition, this research connects the debate further to critical political economy debates contributing to the disruptive long-term and systemically transformative strategies that feminist theories have highlighted. To main research question of the research is to examine how (self-identified) feminist political leaders in Finland take into consideration the resolution of ecological crisis in their agendas. A directed approach to content analysis was used to analyze the data produced through semi-structured interviews of women and non-binary feminist leaders in Finland.

The results from the data analysis suggest that women and non-binary people are not essentially connected to nature. However, their material condition as a marginalized group influences them in making decisions that are inclusive socially and environmentally. In relation to the hypothesis put forth in ecofeminist literature, the results indicated that feminist leaders resort to the intersectional framework to solve the ecological crisis. The findings of this research also problematized the unlimited progress and logic of unsustainable growth in the capitalist economic system. On this basis, alternative economies were suggested and an ethics of care of the economy is revealed as necessary. Finally, the findings point out how patriarchy and capitalism are both outlined by feminist leaders as responsible for social inequalities and environmental degradation. While the research findings cannot be generalized due to the limited amount of data produced, this thesis contributes to expanding the multidisciplinary academic research by creating connections between ecofeminism, leadership studies, and political economy. Finally, this study also highlights the significance of studying the gendered nature of society to better understand the relationship between humanity and nature.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Leadership, Sustainability, Intersectionality, Ethics of Care, Alternative Economies, Patriarchy, Capitalism, direct content analysis,

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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## ABBREVIATION

**CE:** Circular Economy

# Chapter 1: Introduction

This master's thesis analyses the role of feminist leadership in the sustainability transition. The sustainability transition has been necessitated by the ecological crisis. It is a reality acknowledged in the political, scientific, economic, and activist sphere that only a few skeptics keep denying (Macgregor, 2014). According to Michael Mueller (2008), the term "ecological crisis" emphasizes an increasing awareness of the natural resource limitation and overall environmental degradation which is "caused in large part by human ignorance, greed, use of destructive technologies and economic practices, population pressures, and a lack of knowledge of how to live in sustainable ways" (Mueller, 2009, p.2). As an answer to this, Mueller (2009) emphasizes that promoting a sustainable way of living benefits individuals, the environment, and the entire ecosystem as everything is interrelated. In this thesis, I turn attention to the possibilities of feminist leadership in the transition toward a more sustainable world. Western societies are built upon patriarchal structures with leaders as main decision-makers (Hunnicutt, 2009; Ling, 2014). Ecofeminism, which provides the theoretical framework for this thesis, bridges the concepts of leadership and sustainability. As to leadership, human behavior is examined in its environmental context (Ropo, 2019), and sustainability is seen as an opportunity to explore the relationship with the Earth's ecosystems (Mueller, 2009).

Various projections state that the ecological crisis will amplify existing risks and create new ones for natural and human systems such as hazardous events and trends, leaving humans and ecosystems with a low adaptability range (IPCC, 2014). Thus, this definition of the ecological crisis helps question the narratives installed by capitalism that correlate economic growth and social progress (Bauhardt, 2014). According to ecofeminist scholars, the ecological crisis enables new perspectives and alternatives to the capitalist paradigm to emerge because a just transition requires economic change (see also post-Marxism, post-colonialism) (Bauhardt, 2014; Gard, 2015; Merchant, 2020; Ruder and Sanniti, 2019). Among these perspectives, new narratives occur when women and non-binary people

become the core element of the ecological crisis solution: “men may care about their children and the environment but may not be required socially- or may not be socialized- to do much work to care for them” (Macgregor, 2006, p.59)[1]. For example, the independent operating financial organization Global Environment Facility emphasizes that as the half of the world’s population and resource managers, women appear as essential in climate safety even though they have been historically discriminated against and marginalized in their needs, roles, and leadership (GEF, 2012). This interlinkage between gender equality, social, political, economic, and ecological dimensions has also been framed by the United Nations with the Agenda 2030, which includes the 17 Sustainable Development Goals; the record of this agenda is quite significant in many countries – however, it is considered insufficient to reach the 2030 target, which implies more solutions in the next 10 years (About the Sustainable Development Goals, n.d.).

My research draws on the ecofeminist theoretical framework that suggests a parallel between the exploitation of women’s work (e.g., care work) and the exploitation of natural resources and that has identified these exploitations as both necessary to patriarchy and capitalism (Bauhardt, 2014). Thus, this theoretical framework underlines that “an ethics that does not take account of the gendered nature of society is doomed to failure as it will confront neither the material structure of human society or the way in which that structure impacts on the materiality of the relationship between humanity and nature” (Mellor, 2000, p.1). Even though the term “ecofeminism” had been academically theorized for the first time by Françoise D’Eubaunne in 1974 (Odowaz-Coates, 2021), the relationship between the oppression of women and the degradation of nature had been discussed in grassroots feminist movements and ideologies in the non-western world (Mies and Shiva, 1993). Moreover, recent trends in discussions around leadership resonate with some ecofeminist points of departure opening

[1] The binarity expressed by Macgregor (2006) is, in this study, expanded to an intersectional perspective. Gender is discussed using terms such as “ideal masculine man”; masculinity and femininity as material constructs. The ideal rational economic man is opposed to the other – including everyone other being. (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016; Ko and Ko, 2017; Magregor,2014; Mellor, 2000; Ruder and Sanniti, 2020).

a window of opportunity to rethink the traditional approach to leadership as well as how leaders approach complex issues such as the ecological crisis (Ropo, 2019). Arja Ropo (2019) argues that traditional leadership conceptions have not taken into consideration the body, or relations to the more-than-human world[2]. Arguably, a parallel can be drawn in between the ecofeminist approach and such an expanded conception of leadership.

Thus, having these considerations in mind, the relationships between feminist leaders and the ecological crisis remains an understudied theme and a rich place for analysis. For this purpose, I chose to focus my research on feminist leaders in Finland represented by a set of women and non-binary people.

But why did I choose to have a case study in Finland? The Finnish government aims to lead the country toward sustainable development. Finland had already been ranked first in literacy and social stability worldwide, fourth-ranked in the global gender gap index (Eige, 2020), and second in low corruption. However, energy consumption and natural resource exploitation remain unsustainable despite a long tradition of environmental protection in the country (Lyytimäki & Lähteenoja, 2016). In addition, the social and legal situation of women and non-binary in Finland occurs to be better than the one in other European countries (Toivo, 2008), which will facilitate approaching feminist leadership. According to Kirsi Eräranta and Johanna Kantola (2016), Finland and other Nordic countries have been proactive in taking economic and social policies that advance gender equality. In Finland, policies regarding gender implications of household care advanced and developed fathers' caring responsibilities (Eräranta and Kantola, 2016). However, UNWomen Suomi (2021) declares that Finland is one of the most dangerous countries for women and one woman out of three has experienced intimate partner violence. Despite Finland's image of being progressive on LGBTQA+

[2] Following ecofeminist and animal rights scholars, the "more than human world" include the entire ecosystem (all species) in which human is an equal element of it (Gaard, 2015;Muller, 2020, p.51).

rights, the oppressive Trans Law of 2003 that requires sterilization, psychiatric diagnosis, and medical intervention remain to this day under discussion from parliamentarians despite civilian activism (Repo, 2019). Therefore, feminist critics of Finland's image as a sustainability and equality leader also bring forth perspectives on the opportunity for a transformative change.

In addition to being the country where this study is conducted, the Finnish state has the will and potential to become a leader in sustainability, with already a strong understanding of the correlation between gender equality and environmental protection. On December 3rd, 2019, Finland elected a new Prime Minister, Sanna Marin, the world's youngest female state leader. Marin has both gender equality (parental leave and pay gaps) and the ecological crisis (carbon neutrality by 2035) as the pillars of her agenda (Abend, 2020). The Finnish society appears, in consequence, a good case study for an analysis of feminist leadership and the ecological crisis.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between feminist leaders and the ecological crisis in Finland, by resorting to the ecofeminist framework. This research aims to **bring gender into the debate on sustainability transitions** through a case of feminist leadership. In addition, this research aims to connect this debate further to critical political economy debates, contributing to the disruptive long-term and systemically transformative strategies that feminist theories have highlighted. Concerning feminist leadership and gendered leadership, these concepts remain understudied due to the prevalence for centuries of traditional leadership studies also defined as male leadership (Jogulu and Wood, 2006; Kantola and Miller, 2022; Kark and Eagly, 2009)

Feminist theories have proposed a new narrative to the androcentric economy and political framework by adding women and non-binary people's experiences to it, thus generating an entirely new perspective on history and socio-economic relations (Peterson, 2005). Spike Peterson, for example, suggests that "making women empirically visible is … an indispensable project" (p.4). Other feminist

scholars and activists emphasize that a feminist analysis reveals the background stories of the masculinist narratives (Cross, 2018; Macgregor, 2014; Mellor, 2000; Peterson, 2005). Feminist assumptions claim that our political-economic order is gendered, therefore, people are affected differently according to their sex/gender as well as their materiality. In addition, thanks to the input of feminist theories, thousands of years of masculine domination have been problematized opening opportunities to critically study established dualistic and hierarchical structures (Peterson, 2005).

By adding intersectionality to the ecofeminist theoretical framework, this study also considers dimensions such as race, class, gender, ability, imperialism and scrutinizes how they are included in the fight for global and ecological justice (MacGregor, 2014). The input of ecofeminism to feminist theories introduces the consideration of the material fact of human embodiment and its implication for men and women/other's relation to nature (Armbruster, 2000). By rethinking the power relations and the current system – identified as patriarchal, imperialist, neoliberal, capitalist – a world where the "other" (e.g., women, non-binary people, indigenous people, animals…) is empowered can be developed (MacGregor, 2014). Going beyond the understanding of gender simply as a synonym of women, materialist ecofeminism theory, chosen for this study, tries to undo the normalized gender assumptions prevalent in traditional leadership and disrupts normative accounts of "non-masculine" leadership (Cross, 2018; Gaard, 2015; Ruder and Sanniti, 2019). While critics of ecofeminism remain in the essentialist affinity of women, a materialist ecofeminist approach argues that neither humanity nor nature is determinants, however, the consequences of their relations are ineluctable by nature (Armbruster, 2000; Mellor, 2000).

This research also approaches the ecological crisis and feminist leadership through a materialist ecofeminist perspective to encourage the development of new perspectives to capitalist narratives where gender and natural resources are neither ignored nor undervalued. According to Christine Bauhardt (2014), the ecofeminist economics theory bridges the ecological crisis and the crisis of

social reproduction. Social reproduction refers to the unpaid care work or "biological burden" that most women are trapped in, that is invisible to the mainstream economy (Bauhardt, 2014; Mellor, 2000).

Therefore, this study considers gender as an analytical category that pervades the ecological crisis. The focus of the study is on a set of self-identified feminist leaders in Finland. The main research question addressed is:

Q1: **How do (self-identified) feminist political leaders in Finland take into consideration the resolution of ecological crisis in their agendas?**

To approach this question, my additional research questions are as follows:

> Q2: To what extent is the ecological crisis gender-oriented (according to the respondents)?
>
> Q3: To what extent do (self-identified) feminist leaders in Finland consider alternatives to the capitalist economic order?
>
> Q4: How do (self-identified) feminists define and practice leadership?

The purpose of this study is to contribute to existing multidisciplinary approaches to the debate on the ecological crisis and feminism. On the one hand, I explore a feminist political approach to patriarchy and capitalism. On the other hand, this research explores the ethics of care from a philosophical and practical perspective through the concept of feminist leadership. This research reflects on feminist political leaders' relationship with the ecological crisis, and more broadly with the social-economic system. This thesis aims at reflecting upon feminist leadership practices' ability to make a transformative change in society. However, this research doesn't pretend to be normative or develop generalization, rather contributes to the diversification of narratives in the ecological and leadership debates.

The research project is divided into six chapters. Following the introduction, the second chapter introduces ecofeminism as a method and theory of this research. The third chapter explores the outlines of feminist research methods and processes and introduces the data production and categorization in detail. The fourth chapter presents the data analysis of this study followed by findings and discussion in Chapter 6. This study is finally concluded in Chapter 7.

# Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This thesis enquires into feminist leadership in the context of the ecological crisis. Therefore, ecofeminism provides a fruitful theoretical framework as it provides hypotheses about possible connections between the unequal status of women and exploitation of nature (Bauhardt, 2014; Mellor, 2000; Mies and Shiva, 1993; Salleh, 1997; Sturgeon, 1997; Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 2000). Moreover, the purpose of this research is to expand the already theorized phenomenon of the double oppression of women and nature (Hsieh and Shannon, 2018). This theoretical chapter explores the various ways in which the connection between the exploitation of women and nature has been articulated in ecofeminist literature. Following a directed qualitative content analysis method, the subsequent analysis chapter studies whether and how the data produced makes similar connections (Hsieh and Shannon, 2018).

## *2.1 Ecofeminism*

As with many other social science disciplines, ecofeminism cannot be understood nor defined through a single theory only as it is rooted in several other theories such as intersectional feminism, post-colonialism, or animal rights (Marek Muller, 2020, p.50). Ecofeminism is a multidimensional framework of different methodologies that share values such as justice and caring for human and non-human life (Phillips, 2014). Noel Sturgeon (1997, p.28–29) outlines five different ways of theorizing the hypothesized connection between the oppression of women and oppression of nature. 1) The first position suggests that patriarchy has degraded the position of women and nature equally, which has led to a double/connected domination of both of them. Feminist analysis is then necessary to liberate nature. 2) According to the second position, culture is understood as superior to nature in Western cultures. As women are associated with "natural" elements or close to it, they would be dominated in the same way. 3) The third position suggests that historically and materialistically, women have been more involved with land work, agricultural work, reproduction, and so on as a result of which they

are more affected by and inclined to notice environmental problems. 4) The fourth position proposes that women identify with nature as they are essentially connected with their body (e.g., menstrual cycles, birth…) and thus have a special connection and care for nature. 5) The fifth position centers on feminist spirituality and, in this context, ecofeminism may also refer to nature-based religions where women were worshiped as equals to men and nature. Exploring those five different approaches helps emphasize the core debate within the ecofeminism movement that refers to the repression of women and nature.

In her discussion of ecofeminism, Mary Mellor (2000) distinguishes between affinity, social constructionist, and materialist ecofeminist articulations of the woman/nature relation. The author argues that affinity ecofeminism sees women as bodily or culturally related to mothering, nurturing, and caring. Affinity feminists argue that there is an affinity between women and nature based on the common identity of motherhood: They "see women as having a bodily or cultural affinity with the natural world through their woman-ness as mothers, life-givers, nurturers, carers" (p.3). According to Mellor, affinity ecofeminists discuss how masculine and feminine values are unbalanced in a patriarchal society and it is the reason why destructive behavior occurs. This approach suggests more emphasis on feminine values to re-establish complementarity between masculinity and femininity and thus, re-built humanity that will not be harmful to the ecosystems. Mellor (2020) opposes affinity ecofeminism with a social constructivist approach of ecofeminism.

According to the author, ecofeminists who take a social constructivist stand will understand sex/gender inequality in parallel with history and domination. Therefore, women's position as subaltern rest in the capitalist patriarchal ideology as much as the exploitation of Earth is justified by human progress. The critics of the social constructionist theory, for the author, can be observed in the great attachment to the "power" of reproduction from women that will justify this "organic" connection with nature. Thus, Mellor (2020) prioritizes a materialist approach to ecofeminism as it

distances itself from the affinity or socially constructed basis of the relation between women and nature.

According to Mellor (2000, p.5), "materialist ecofeminism is based on the assertion that sex/gender inequality is not a byproduct of other inequalities, but represents a material relation of inequality between dominant men and subordinate women". She suggests that materialist ecofeminism broadens the scope of the timeless and essentialist statement of women's oppression by putting into the perspective of the sex/gender exploitation and exclusion also other oppressions, such as colonialism or imperialism. The author insists on the fact that the relationship between women and nature is neither innocent nor historically built, it is structural. A materialist analysis of the world would explore the position of the mediator and the mediated where those positions are defined and changed according to the person's material conditions in relation to the materiality of human existence. Therefore, the author highlights that the relationship between women and nature does not lie in women's reproductive ability but can be explained through the gendered mediation of human-nature relations.

Humans, as a natural species, interfere with other species and the environment, leading to consequences that can be identified according to privileges (e.g., the least privileged will face the effects first but everyone will face them at some point) (ibid.). Mellor (2020) draws attention to the ability of some humans to transcend the natural (e.g., freeing themselves from ecological and biological times) while others will remain imminent to those times. "Ecological time as representing the pace of ecological sustainability for nonhuman nature. Biological time representing the life-cycle and pace of bodily replenishment for human beings" (Mellor, 2000, p.6). Thus, transcendence and imminence are central to the materialist ecofeminism theory because they allow us to understand that men freed themselves from both biological and ecological times, leaving women trapped in the

biological times and nature in the ecological one. The author explains the relationship between women and nature through the materialist approach, as a consequence of the western/modern capitalist patriarchy ideology that wants autonomy ecologically and biologically. She concludes by stressing that the only way for women to free themselves from the obligated reproductive, nurturing, and caring labor is to "become" an autonomous individual fitting the ideal image of the western economic man. Finally, Mellor (2000) explores the limits of the "all women" theorization by affinity and social constructionist feminist as she also highlights that a white western woman is also able to occupy the position of mediator when for instance, exploiting the labor of others to carry out domestic obligations. Although ecofeminism mainly discusses gender relations through a binary and white/western perspective, materialist ecofeminism offers an open perspective of women's relationship with nature, leaving space for other factors such as race, class, (dis)ability to be included in the analysis. Mellor (2000) affirms that women's special relationship with nature is not linked to their physiological, social, biological affinity but because of "their material conditions in relation to the materiality of human existence" (p.8). Thus, the author discusses sex/gender relations instead of Women only, giving opportunity for inclusion of gender diversity and intersectionality.

Hence, the ecofeminism movement involves the different approach of theorization, that emphasizes contradictory ways of understanding the woman/nature relationship. According to Sherilyn Macgregor (2006, p.5–6), the essentialist/affinity discourse limits women to the biological condition of being a woman, in other words, having such "essential qualities" as caring for nature. Ariel Salleh (1997, p. 37) continues to dismantle the gendered biological assumptions by explaining that while oestrogens create empathy and receptive orientation in bodies, they are present in all species, including animals, regardless of their gender. Moreover, the author explains that environmental pollution is causing a higher production of oestrogens in bodies which can even ironically lead to the "feminization of males". Salleh stresses that the differentiation between men and women and gender

stereotypes cannot be rooted in biological traits, thus, political theories must avoid essentialism because all humans are equally related to nature. Instead of the essentialist definition, this thesis adopts a position where the connection between the oppression of women and nature is understood as materialist ecofeminism. Therefore, a "materialist ecofeminism" is preferred for this research as it "does not claim that women per se have a superior vision or a higher moral authority, but that an ethics that does not take account of the gendered nature of society is doomed to failure as it will confront neither the material structure of human society or the way in which that structures impacts on the materiality of the relationship between humanity and nature" (Mellor, 2000, p.1).

Focusing on a materialist explanation, the political and economic relationship between the environment's and women's oppression can be observed, for instance, "in the disenfranchisement of female farmers in the Global South with the introduction of industrialized farming (Shiva, 1988), or the pattern of advertising fast-food burgers as exceptionally masculine in contrast to plant-based foods (Rogers, 2008)" (Marek Muller, 2020, p.51). According to Mueller (2020), these oppressions are the direct consequence of dualist hierarchies established by masculinist ideologies which can be summarized as a man over woman, nature over culture, and human over animal. Thus, an ecofeminist framework underlines the linking between the different oppression and their structural legitimization by the patriarchal and, later, capitalist system: "From a historical materialist perspective, ecofeminism elucidates the role of power relations in resource access and allocation, exposing the gendered, material and historical processes that directly inform the embodied experience of men and women in nature" (Ruder and Sanniti, 2019, p.8).

The following table (1) summarizes the three different movements of ecofeminism to the double oppression of Women-Gender/Nature explained by Mellor (2020).

| | Affinity Feminists | Social Constructionist feminists | Materialist Ecofeminist |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Gender is discussed through a binary perspective: Men and Women / Masculine and Feminine.<br><br>Women are theorized through their bodily or cultural affinity to motherhood and nurture. | Gender is discussed through a binary perspective.<br><br>Women are socially constructed as subordinates. Women are the "other" the "non-rational" human. The exploitation of their reproductive rights and nurture capacity is justified by human progress. | The term Sex/gender is preferred to Women. Masculinity is also discussed beyond men.<br><br>Reject Affinity and Social constructivists approach.<br><br>The "other" gender = women are trapped in the biological time of reproduction; they cannot transcend it. |
| **Nature** | Nature is understood through motherhood.<br><br>Patriarchy as a structure praises male values over women, leading to nature's damages. A balance between male and female values can build an earth-centred society. | Nature is socially and historically constructed as an object in need of moral concern. The exploitation of Nature is justified by human progress. | The need for humans to transcend nature had led to the separation between humans and nature. Nature is trapped in ecological time. The dualistic separation creates a relation of domination: Humans over Nature. |
| **Double oppression Gender/Nature** | Both women and nature are linked in their ability to create life.<br><br>Men are envying this "motherhood" power, ability to create life, that's why they need to control it. | The hierarchical dualism is embodied in Capitalism and Patriarchy. The double oppression is socially and historically constructed. | The main concepts: Mediator / Mediated Transcendence / Immanence.<br><br>The relation of domination between Nature and Sex/gender is structural. |

**Table 1:** *Three ecofeminist approaches to the double oppression of Women-Gender/Nature (Mellor, 2000).*

This chapter will then, approach ecofeminism under different angles that will be presented as follows:

1) patriarchy, 2) capitalism/ecofeminist economic framework, 3) ethics of care, 4) leadership.

### 2.1.1 *Patriarchy: A System/Mechanism for Domination and Hierarchies*

Patriarchy is a sociological and anthropological term expressing the family structure where men get to rule and dominate (Ling 2014). Feminist theories then developed the term to emphasize an entire system built on the domination of men over women, and older men (dad) over younger men (children) (Ling, 2014). Gwen Hunnicutt (2009) discusses the emergence of the term "patriarchy" in feminist literature but because of its under theorization, other expressions such as "male-dominated society", "sex inequality" and "feminist approach" were more widely used. Many feminist scholars define patriarchy through the concept of male domination; "patriarchy" expresses that violence against women is caused by a gendered social system and power structures which exerts dominance of an ideal form of masculinity over other forms of masculinity and femininity (Yllo, 1993; Phillips, 2014; Connell, 2001; Hawkes, 2020).

According to Hunnicutt (2009, p.2), patriarchy cannot be defined through this simplistic definition as "(a) the concept simplifies power relations; (b) the term patriarchy implies a "false universalism"; (c) the ways in which the concept of patriarchy has been employed have ignored differences among men, casting men instead as a singular group; (d) a theory of patriarchy cannot account for violence by women or men against men; and finally, (e) this concept cannot help us understand why only a few men use violence against women in societies characterized as patriarchal". The author affirms that the relationship between a male-dominated system and violence against women is undeniable and widely agreed among scholars. However, Hunnicutt (2009) critics this simple definition of patriarchy as it implies that it is a fixed, static form of domination that is not dependent on the variation of context and other forms of domination other than gender. The author prefers theorizing a variety of patriarchy that allows researchers to consider a patriarchal system as intrinsically linked to other systems of domination. By theorizing patriarchy within a larger field of hierarchy, Hunnicutt (2009) includes an intersectional definition of patriarchy as age, race, class, sexuality, religion, ethnicity,

nationality, (dis)ability also influence privileges and power relations (e.g., old dominate young, white dominate people of color, developed nations dominate developing nations, humans dominate nature). Hunnicutt's discussion on the variety of patriarchy echoes Mellor's discussion on materialist ecofeminism as both emphasize the importance of theorizing relations of domination according to their material contexts (Hunnicutt, 2009; Mellor, 2000).

Patriarchy is a key term in materialist ecofeminists' examination of the connection between the oppression of women and nature (Mellor, 2000; Ruder and Sanniti, 2019). Materialist ecofeminism understands our current society as capitalist and patriarchal. In a patriarchal system, women are generally associated with "feminine values" such as body, feelings, nature, the private sphere, and weakness while men are associated with intelligence, culture, reason, and the public sphere (Ling, 2014; Macgregor, 2006; Mellor, 2000; Mies and Shiva, 1993; Ruder and Sanniti, 2019). For Ling (2014), this system of oppression legitimizes men to conquer women and nature similarly, positioning men as dominant and the "other" (e.g., women and nature, extended to non-binary and queer (Smith, 2018)) as a servant. Furthermore, patriarchy is a historical phenomenon, which also means that it can be overcome. Female figures or goddesses have been represented in various cultures as embodiments of nature. Later matriarchal societies were established focusing on glorifying women and nature (Lv and Wang, 2018). The authors notice the shift from matriarchal and ancestral societies to the patriarchal society as a turning point. Chunhua Lv and Ziyan Wang (2018) emphasize that this turning point corresponds to the moment when humans decided to alter and develop nature by using technology.

In addition, according to Carolyn Merchant (1981), women's and environmental liberation movements emerged in the 1960s. Many activists were fighting together as a united front as both environmentalists and women were victims of the similar rejection from the system (e.g., the words

or expressions used to oppose the movements connect them; “Man’s war on Mother Nature”, “solar energy is effeminate”, “penetrating the secret springs of Nature”, p.19). Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993, p.93) developed this critic of the modernist development of technology by emphasizing that it led to massive catastrophes such as Chernobyl. The authors problematize the myth of unlimited progress as an element of patriarchy giving the example that men are then becoming experts for technology and war while women took care of life after damages caused. They highlight the relevance of linking patriarchy to other forms of domination such as technological development and western modernization that enhance domination between North and South, men and women, human and nature (p.2). Salleh (1997, p.36) continues this discussion by affirming that the patriarchal system is built upon the assumptions that Man/Woman=Nature enhances stereotypical gender dualism oppressive to the “other gender” understood as non-male/non-masculine.

Moreover, ecofeminists have recently extended the criticism of patriarchy and its system of domination beyond the scope of humans. According to Greta Gaard (2015), one of the main aims of ecofeminism is to re-establish the balance between all species. The author advocates for human beings to be placed within the ecosystems as an equal element of it. Marek Muller’s (2020, p.51) animal rights theories build on the necessity to move away from patriarchal hierarchies to achieve justice for animals. The author explains that the current nature domination is achieved with colonial and paternalistic human intervention. According to Marek Muller (2020, p.51), ecofeminism complements animal law when advocating for the replacement of the traditional masculinist domination system by an intersectional framework valuing care, empathy, and equal treatment among all living species. Furthermore, Black vegan feminist movements/theories bring yet another perspective to the ecofeminist and white veganism theories by re-defining the term “animal”. Ko and Ko (2017) argue that the concept of “animal oppression” is Eurocentric, emphasizing that white intersectional feminists in the US do not necessarily claim to be vegan/animal rights defenders. By

contrast, black vegan feminism points out that "animality", as a Eurocentric construct, "has contributed to the oppression of any group that deviates from ideal white homo sapiens" (p.58). Therefore, the author's discussion on the varieties of patriarchy and its link with another system of oppression grounds ecofeminism within the materiality of human-human, human-nature, human-nonhuman relations (Ko and Ko, 2017; Mies and Shive, 1993; Marek Muller, 2020; Salleh, 1997). According to Salleh (1997), ecofeminism does not fight for women only, as "feminine suffering is universal because wrong done to women and its ongoing denial fuel the psychosexual abuse of all Others – races, children, animals, plants, rocks, water, and air" (p.14).

### 2.1.2 *Capitalism and the Ecofeminist Economic Framework*

Besides patriarchy, ecofeminists identify the capitalist mode of production as one of the reasons for the exploitation of women and nature (Bauhardt, 2014; Merchant, 2020; Ruder and Sanniti, 2019). Moreover, in contradiction with the modern society ruled by individualistic thinking and utilitarian economic practices, the ecofeminist theory is promoting a new way of interacting with each other, including our economic practices (Mies and Shiva, 1993). Gaard (2015) discusses, as well, the need for a just transition that could be implemented in a systematic way of assessing all economic practices on a local and global level. According to the author, marginalized people including women but also queer and transgender people, are denied access to many "basic" rights and resources because of the inegalitarian socio-economic structures, in addition, climate change is increasing this exclusion and subordination (ibid).

The links between social progress and economic growth have also been questioned by Bauhardt (2014), for example. The author emphasizes that our current economy, politics, and social relationships are founded in a binary hierarchical system where the rational man is distancing himself from the "other" – femininity, nature, and other minorities who do not associate with the

rational/masculine norms and values. Ruder and Sanniti (2020) theorize the concept of "predatory ontologies" explaining that the double oppression of nature and women is a consequence of perpetual violence rooted in the logic of domination. Ruder and Sanniti (2020) share the logic of dualism expressed by Bauhardt (2014), as a key element to the process of dissociation subject-object (e.g., human-nature) that lead to predatory ontologies, and allows domination. According to Ruder and Sanniti (2020), the concept of otherness separates one element/entity/being from another one, implying de facto, a logic of domination (e.g., human/nature, reason/emotion, civilized/primitive, men/women, etc.). The authors identify, within the western thought, the other as a product of negation (e.g., any non-white people are people of color) and emphasize the necessity of including intersectional practices within the framework of ecofeminism (ibid). Upon this, the authors give the example of interaction between classism and sexism as women are more likely to be poor than men, and poor women are more likely to be affected by ecological crisis due to their exclusion from decision-making, access to information, and resources (ibid).

Furthermore, Bauhardt (2014) underlines that a capitalist economy treats nature as a free good, which can be exploited just as other marginalized elements. The author continues by underlining that ecofeminist economic thinking highlights that women's work and environmental exploitation are essential elements in the survival of capitalism. Sarah-Louise Ruder and Sophia Rose Sanniti (2020) draw a parallel between the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of women through the appropriation of reproductive capacities by capitalism. The authors explain that "free natural goods" such as forested land, freshwater, or healthy soils, also defined as nature's reproduction capacity, are overly exploited for the logic of economic growth. Similarly, the authors express that capitalism appropriates all social elements that fall under the notion of "caring" or "social reproduction" (e.g., childcare, elderly care, teaching, household chores, food supplies, etc.). Moreover, they underline that "women presently perform three-quarters of unpaid care work and two-thirds of paid care workers

are women" (Ruder and Sanniti, 2020, p.9). Following an intersectional analysis, the authors also emphasize that the racial dimension of care work as women from the Global North tends to free themselves from this care duty by letting immigrant women carry it out for them; echoing Mellor's (2000, p.6) argument that "white western women may mediate biological time for their family, but exploit the labor of others, the resources of the South, and the sustainability of the Earth". Consequently, Bauhardt (2014) offers as a solution that the unpaid care labor should be, on the one hand, shared equally in the household to create equal access to the paid labor market. On the other hand, the author advocates for equal gender participation in the job market because it is essential to power relations and social involvement. Finally, the authors bring attention to the fact that the "Global Care Chain" continues gender labor division while accentuating inequalities within gender minorities (e.g., exploitation of women from the Global South) (Bauhardt (2014); McKinnon et al., 2008; Ruder and Sanniti (2020).

Adding to the critics of economic growth, Salleh (2012) argues that the green ecology within capitalism continues to commercialize living elements through economic value, which follows the logic of efficiency and growth, that eventually continues or at best displaces the problem. Nonetheless, the author discusses that marginalized communities and minorities (e.g., women, indigenous people) are developing alternatives to this exploitative model. Marek Muller (2020) develop this argument expressing that instead of using nature as good like capitalism, nature should be treated as a living element with equal rights. The author insists on the necessity to transform the entire logic of dualism because it is rooted in the need for domination of one element/being over the other.

> Relying solely upon a system of thought that has at once advocated for justice while intentionally denying it to others, a system composed and maintained by colonial ideals, would seem to ignore the multiple rhetorics of the marginalized, the systemically silenced, the "subaltern" (Spivak, 2003) that show how "getting"

> equality via the liberal legal process is not the same as "receiving" equality after the gavel has been put aside. (Marek Muller, 2020, p.50)

While not necessarily ecofeminist, critics of capitalism and theories on postcapitalist economies are inspired by feminist and queer critiques of the patriarchal societies (McKinnon et al., 2018; Peterson, 2005; Phillips, 2014; Ruder and Sanniti, 2019; Smith, 2018). In parallel, feminist scholars join post-Marxists and other economists who theorize alternatives to neoliberalism and capitalism that focuses on social inequalities: "The most fundamental and widely accepted shift among feminists is the rejection of neoclassical models of abstract rationality and 'choice' in favor of a more relevant and responsible model of 'social provisioning'" (Peterson, 2005, p.6).

Some feminist political economy scholars emphasize that the term "phallocentrism" highlights the presumed importance of male knowledge and experiences over "others" – women, non-binary, queer, and many others. Phallocentism puts the non-masculine in the place of the opposite/ negation (Phillips, 2014; McKinnon et al., 2018). McKinnon et al. (2018) argue that, similarly, as phallocentrism places male knowledge as a norm, capitalocentrism places capitalism as a norm and overshadows other types of economic relations. The authors underline that following the same logic of a patriarchy-phallocentric society, capitalism absorbs any other forms of the economy into a commodity available to be exploited: "human activity becomes the commodity of labor; households become spaces of 'capitalist consumption' and 'social reproduction', rather than non-capitalist spaces of production and consumption" (McKinnon et al., 2018, p.4). They emphasize that capitalocentrism is similar to phallocentrism because it is opposed to any alternative or "less dominant" economies which can be but not limited to unpaid work, care but is also unethical ones such as slavery or bribery. The authors mention that by making non-capitalist forms of labor invisible, capitalism prevents any possibility of an alternative economy. Gibson-Graham (2008) suggests moving to another framework called "the diverse economies", which depicts all forms of economies (Table 2), as a solution to work

individually and collectively to a post-capitalist world. While capitalism is empowering masculinity in the economy, a diverse economy invites everyone to play an active role in creating a better and just economy (Elias and Roberts, 2018, pp. 336-343).

| TRANSACTIONS | LABOR | ENTERPRISE |
|---|---|---|
| ***Market***<br>Domestic service market<br>Child-care market | ***Wage***<br>Hired housekeeper/Au pair<br>Worker in corporate childcare center | ***Capitalist***<br>Body-hire agency<br>Capitalist child-care center |
| ***Alternative Market***<br><br>Cash-in-hand to neighborhood baby-sitter<br>Alternative Currencies<br>Non-declared (taxed) care work | ***Alternative Paid***<br><br>Self-employed<br>Family day-care mother<br>Domestic servant paid in cash<br>Live-in student: childcare in exchange for accommodation | ***Alternative Capitalist***<br><br>Environmental ethic<br>Social ethic<br>Government-funded childcare<br>Non-profit<br>Community-based child-care center |
| ***Nonmarket***<br><br>Household work<br>Parents sharing childcare<br>Gift-giving<br>Family/Friends who offer to baby-sit<br>Indigenous Exchange | ***Unpaid***<br><br>Family Care<br>Care at home by parents/grandparents<br>Volunteer<br>Slave Labor | ***Noncapitalist***<br><br>Communal household<br>Family day-care<br>Child-care cooperative<br>Extended family with obligatory childcare |

***Table 2:*** *The diverse economy of childcare, a feminist approach to care work (McKinnon et al., 2018).*

Gibson and Graham´s (2008) framework of diverse economies contributes to post-capitalist theories developed by feminist political ecology, ecofeminist, and post-Marxist feminist scholars (Mair, 2020; McKinnon et al., 2018; Philipps, 2014; Sato and Alarcón, 2019). Sato and Alarcón (2019), for example, argue that through the study of "common" and "communing", ecofeminism, feminist political ecology, and eco-autonomist Marxist feminism complement each other. According to the authors, ecofeminism and autonomist Marxism share the understanding that the notion of "commons" must not be reduced to the little understanding of "resources" (e.g., animals, plants, lands, water…) and shouldn't be commodified, exploited and extracted in the logic of efficiency/productivity. Therefore, the authors emphasize that the commons should include knowledge, culture, and social elements. Mair (2020) adds to this discussion that both commons and household, 2/4 components of

the economy, shouldn't be considered as unproductive or value producers as in the neoliberal capitalist economy. A materialist ecofeminist analysis (Mellor, 2000), joined with postcapitalist economies, understand "commons", "communing" and gender as many processes that "intersect with others, social, political, legal and ecological, which, together, shape differentiated natural resource access and control between men and women and between women, as situated in specific spaces and places and at multiple scales" (Sato and Alarcón, 2019, p7). According to Chizu Sato and Jozelin Maria Soto Alarcón (2019), when rejecting capitalocentrism and its binarity (the logic of domination/exploitation), the problematization of "ownership" and "property" becomes clearer. The authors stress that it opens a new perspective of reconstructing and reinventing how multispecies (humans and nonhumans) are interdependent in the creation of community, thus, should interact equally (ibid). By acknowledging the gendered distribution of power, ability, and responsibility of our current economy, scholars explore how, in post-capitalist economies, humans and non-humans could reappropriate and reinvent their practices, knowledge, and treatment of resources (Bauhardt, 2014; Mair (2020); McKinnon et al., 2018; Philipps, 2014; Ruder and Sanniti, 2019; Sato and Alarcón, 2019).

Ultimately, Bauhardt (2014) discusses three alternative economic models through the lens of ecofeminist economics that can be complemented by Kate Raworth's (2017) theory of doughnut economics. The author argues that both the Green Deal, the post-growth society, and the solidarity economy question growth as it is currently practiced. Bauhardt (2014) highlights that although de-growth is actively promoted by feminist economists, the question of a different growth is also explored driven by environmental and social goals rather than monetary profit. Nonetheless, according to the author, in all economies, gender equity is achieved through the equal distribution of power and income materialized by fairly sharing the unpaid work in the private sphere between genders (ibid). Bauhardt (2014) mentions that to find viable solutions for the post-growth society, the gender order ought to be fully understood as part of the capitalist order. Therefore, the author

advocates for an economic change that respects both natural and social limits to growth. Bauhardt (2014) affirms that sustainable economic change would then imply a fundamental transformation of male-biased economic concepts, of gendered modes of knowledge production, and thus, of gendered power relations. Salleh (2012) continues this discussion explaining that the current system has some debts to pay when considering a new green economy: "a social debt to exploited workers; an embodied debt to unpaid women for their reproductive labors; a neo-colonial debt to peasants and indigenes for taking their land and livelihood away; and an ecological debt transferred to living nature at large" (p.3). Thus, according to the authors, before considering a green economy or a sustainable society, it is relevant that institutions, companies, etc. acknowledge the several layers of exploitation, domination, and power relations in the current economic system (Bauhardt, 2014; Mair, 2020; Salleh, 2012; Sato and Alarcòn, 2019).

Various definitions and theories can be found among scholars to define those alternative economies; a few approaches to a circular economy, solidarity economy, and doughnut economics can be put in relation to materialist-Marxist ecofeminism (Bauhardt, 2014; Nils Johansson and Malin Henriksson, 2020; Mair, 2020; Raworth, 2017). Johansson and Henriksson (2020) discuss circular economy (CE) as a system rooted in sustainable development goals and the three pillars: social, economic, and environmental. Nylén (2019, p.283) argues that CE is developed in opposition to the current economic concept based on a "take-make-use-dispose" which does not consider planetarian boundaries in terms of resource extraction or waste management. Musa Mohammed et al. (2021) add that CE is tackling one of the main downsides of the current economy, which is waste management, thus, centered around the three R, Reducing, recycling, reusing it extends the life cycle of each material and goods produced. Finally, Jouni Korhonen (2018) argues that the concept of CE involves renewable energy and maximization of the product's life cycle by following nature's boundaries, including nature at the heart of the economic dynamics. However, from a materialist ecofeminist perspective Bauhardt (2014) discusses the limits of CE by highlighting, on the one hand, the lack of problematization of

the logic of growth and on the other hand, the under theorization of gender issues. The author emphasizes that despite the will of creating an economy that respects environmental boundaries, the gendered responsibility for the care and reproductive work remains in the private realms, therefore, invisible from the economy. For instance, Johansson and Henriksson (2020) explain the valuation for care work through repairing and re-using but fail including the sex/gender inequality of household work such as childcare (Bauhardt, 2014).

Furthermore, Bauhardt (2014) explores the potentiality for the concept of solidarity economy to acknowledge the gender hierarchy as an economic structure and rethink the concept of economic growth. The author defines a solidarity economy as an economy that prioritizes value over profit, rejects the exploitation of labor for the accumulation of capital/profit and efficiency. According to the author, in a solidarity economy, commons are not exploited, and all human beings can equally satisfy psychological, physical, and mental needs. The author mentions that this economy focuses on local practices that will respect human labor capacity and aim at a self-sufficient organization that does not correspond to the capitalist logic of competition, accumulation, and explanation. Bauhardt (2014) also explores decision-making and power relation within a solidarity economy. The author explains that such an economy includes new ways of valuing commons and a problematization of the concept of "property" thanks to a democratic and emancipatory approach (ibid). A solidarity economy, according to Bauhardt (2014), answers the most to ecofeminist critics as it "reassesses the economic exploitation and hegemonic appropriation of the reproductivity of nature as well as of women and their work" (p.8).

Nevertheless, Simon Mair (2020) introduces the doughnut economics model through a materialist Marxist ecofeminist perspective that also offers perspectives on a just economy. The author explains that the economy is understood as the "system that a society uses to take in resources and produce and distribute goods and services" (p.2). According to Raworth (2017, p.19), the current economic

model is based on the concept of utility, and the utility of goods is measured via the price people are willing to pay for it; additionally, it is linked to the assumption that consumers choose more over less, thus, undermining the fact that the majority of people do not have the money to evaluate the utility, as well as most valuable things, that are not for sale. Therefore, Mair (2020), emphasizes that Raworth's model is reconceptualizing those economic dynamics by putting the focus on environmental and social factors (see figure 1 below).


***Figure 1:*** *Representation of the dynamics of the Doughnut Economics. The author on the basis of Raworth, 2017.*

Raworth (2017) explains that access to essential resources such as water, food, or energy is as important as gender equality and social equity. Therefore, doughnut economics advocates for a disruption of the economic system that echoes the ecofeminism transformative approach of dismantling the direct connection between people's economic gain and socio-political power (Merchant, 2020; Mies and Shiva, 1993; Marek Muller, 2020; Phillips, 2014). Moreover, by acknowledging the overexploitation of natural resources and including reproductive and care work as equal, Doughnut economics conceptualized answers to the urgent call from ecofeminists for an

economy that will understand the gendered and ecological nature of the society (Mair, 2020; Mellor, 2000; McKinnon et al., 2018; Raworth, 2017).

### 2.1.3 *Ethics of Care*

The rhetoric of ecofeminism importantly emphasizes the need for women to achieve equality by worshipping values such as care, nurture, kindship rather than seeking to level male values (Dobson and Lucardie, 1993, p.180; Merchant, 2020; Mies and Shiva, 1993; Marek Muller, 2020; Ruder and Sanniti, 2019). According to Merchant (2020), the separation between the private (female) and public (male) shall be removed to reach an equal share of care in the household (private) and outside. Mies and Shiva (1993) argue that when developing technologies, machines, and other non-natural practices, the environmental impact would also be minimal thanks to the will of care. The authors share that an ecofeminist perspective prioritizes care, love, and cooperation between all species, thus, moving beyond hierarchies and traditional masculine values (ibid). Feminist scholars agree on rejecting patriarchy as a male-dominated system that dominates the "other" (e.g., every being that does not correspond to the idealized conception of masculinity) (Bauhardt, 2014; Hunnicutt, 2019; Ko and Ko, 2017; Marek Muller, 2020). Merchant (2020) emphasizes that patriarchy promotes a model with "care" as a core value that has been associated and undervalued as "feminine" characteristics. Ruder and Sanniti (2020) mention that in the patriarchal society women are usually left with caring and reproductive duties. Merchant (2020) mentions that this biological burden creates a double challenge for women; on the one hand, they have to use care to heal the planet and on the other hand, to tackle discrimination towards minorities within the institutions. Furthermore, ecofeminists focus on the "masculine" and "feminine" socially and culturally constructed traits and advocate for balancing "feminine" skills currently undervalued and the "masculine" ones currently prevailing (Salleh, 1997, p.14).

Carin Lesley Cross (2018) apprehends the ethic of care through the perspective of ecofeminism as an answer to the ecological crisis. Following a materialist ecofeminist perspective, the author explores the gendered aspect of the dualism of human/nature and reason/emotion. According to the author, this dualistic logic is built upon the association of nature, emotion with empathy, and caring, then connected with a cognitive "feminine" rationality. Moreover, the author highlights that the "feminine" values also attributed as the "other" are a result of the hyper-separation of human-nature. Cross (2018) emphasizes the same logic of exploitation of caring and reproductive labor from the female body as well as nature's commons (e.g., lands, animals, water, etc.). The author argues that because of the separation of humans from nature, a speciest society has been built upon which, sexism, heteronormativity, racism, and colonialism intersect. Therefore, Cross (2018) advocates for "an ethic of care (that will) transcends the oppressive patriarchal hierarchies, institutions and cultures which are promoted by a masculinist view of rationality, and which result in the destruction of nature" (p.8).

According to Cross (2018), an ethic of care approach will change the materiality of nature and sex/gender by recognizing that humanity/human beings are part and bounded in the laws of nature, therefore interconnected with it, rather than separate from it and controlling elements of it. In practice, the author explains that an ethic of care includes responsive relationships where every element of the ecosystem (humans and non-humans) has a voice, is cared for and respected. In this new relationship, the author argues that the materiality of which nature had been developed is changed. Cross (2018) rejects nature as a blind and mechanical element with no voice and that is meant to be objectified and dominated. Instead, the author understands nature as an organic matter, alive, and a host of a diverse community of forms of life. The author affirms that, by moving from a dualistic, linear, and hierarchical approach to relationships, to an interconnected, equal approach where rationality is problematized and "feminine" values are embraced, nature can be repaired. A materialist ecofeminist

approach sees solutions to the ecological crisis in the materiality of our relations rather than in new "sustainable" technologies or science created under the same dualistic logic (Cross, 2018; Mellor, 2000; Merchant, 2020); because "the masculine and anthropocentric nature of modernity led to men denying any connection to nature, using masculinist psychological tools such as a certain kind of rationality and power to entrench their position as not only outside of but also controllers of nature" (Cross, 2018, p.11).

To reconnect humans with nature, Cross (2018) argues that skills such as openness, empathy, sensitivity, sympathy, attentiveness, and imagination need to be a synonym of morality. By promoting an ethic of care that prioritizes "feminine" values, the author underlines that the sexist nature of rationality is problematized. Cross (2018) stresses that rationality is used as a tool of oppression to dominate the "other" (e.g., nature, non-humans, the other sex/gender, etc.). Thus, the author emphasizes that an ethic of care gives an equal voice to every being, environmental voice being one of them, and reconsiders the human-nature relationship as interconnected elements. An ethic of care rejects the dichotomy of "us" (humans) and the "other" (nature), of the "ideal masculinity" and the "other" (e.g., femininity, other masculinity, non-white, etc.) that had created the concept of "rationality" used as a tool for oppression and exercise of power (Cross, 2018; Mello, 2000; McKinnon et al., 2018; Plumwood, 1993; Ruder and Sanniti, 2020).

The ethics of care is central to a transformative feminist political approach (de la Bellacasa, 2012), thus, can be further explored through the re-think of leadership practices and skills (Ropo, 2019). According to María Puig de la Bellacasa (2012), an ethic of care can be apprehended through three different angles: affective, ethical, and practical. The author argues that the ethics of care requires more than an abstract understanding and wishes: "Caring is more than an affective-ethical state: it involves material engagement in labors to sustain interdependent worlds, labors that are often

associated with exploitation and domination" (de la Bellacasa, 2012, p.2). Therefore, de la Bellacasa's (2012), critical study of the ethics of care through a practical labor approach opens a window of analysis for new ways of conceptualizing and practicing leadership.

### 2.1.4 *Leadership*

Following de la Bellacasa's (2012), study of the ethics of care from a practical labor approach, feminist studies of leadership draw critics of the traditional leadership studies through the ethics of care (Pullen and Vachhani, 2020; Smit, 2013). According to Alison Pullen and Sheena J. Vachhani (2020), leadership ethics has traditionally been researched through a gender lens. The authors explore a "rethink of leadership ethics towards ethical openness, intercorporeality, care and connections" (p.2) also called feminist leadership or relational leadership (Pullen and Vachhani, 2020; Smit, 2013).

Ronit Kark et al. (2016) argue that the traditional definition of leadership refers to a set of abilities and skills a person would have to manage, exercise their power. Matthew Laing (2020, p.8) argues that leadership is also usually defined thanks to three elements: influence, followers, and goals. Additionally, Laing (2020, p.144) discusses that studies show that political leaders' main characteristics are intelligence, masculinity, aggressiveness, emotional balance, confidence, sociability. According to materialist ecofeminism, those characteristics are defined as contingent on a patriarchal system and opposite to an ethic of care (Cross, 2018; Hunnicutt, 2009; Mellor, 2000; Mies and Shiva, 1993; Plumwood, 1993; Ruder and Sanniti, 2020). Various ways of conceptualizing leadership are discussed among scholars, however, Jogulu and Wood (2006) argue that the concept of leadership comes from the "Great Man" theory that defines a leader as a person with unique and exceptional abilities which correspond to a handset of humans. According to the authors, by using this terminology, philosophers and theorists understand that "the other" (e.g., not fitting in the specific understanding of masculinity) is not able to have those unique abilities. Thus, the authors explain that

this concept quickly associated leadership with masculine traits and built the contemporary concept of "think manager-think male" that led to the gender segmentation in the labor market.

Although those theories were born in the 18th – 19th century, Johanna Kantola and Cherry Miller (2022) emphasize that women's leadership/gendered leadership remains understudied by scholars. The authors argue that this phenomenon is explained by the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions or the patriarchal ability to invisibilize non-masculine / other masculine leaders. Materialist ecofeminist theories have criticized the modern duality of the private and public realms (Mellor, 2000) that, according to Ronit Kark and Alice H. Eagly (2009), is expressed through gender stereotypes in leadership. On the one hand, the authors argue that sex/gender inequality conceptualized femininity through kindness, empathy, care, and altruism. On the other hand, the authors explain that the "ideal" masculinity involves self-centeredness, control, competitiveness, and domination (ibid). Kark and Eagly (2009), explore the fact that for the past decades, studies had shown that leadership/management roles correspond to male characteristics rather than female ones. Smit (2013) argues that leadership studies were conducted only with men but generalized to all without acknowledging the gender bias of those research results. According to critical studies of leadership, those perceptions had led to gender discrimination regarding whether an individual is considered "able" or not to be a leader (Kark and Eagly, 2009; Pullen and Vachhani, 2018; Smit, 2013). This discrimination and stereotypes can be extended to an intersectional approach by including factors such as race, class, sexual identity… for instance, black women, are challenged by both race and gender when accessing the status of leader (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016).

Furthermore, feminist critical studies of leadership argue that gender stereotypes regarding leadership have a double effect on women/the "other", as either, they fit in the masculine characteristics facing critics over their lack of empathy, or, they embrace "feminine" traits facing critics over their lack of

"real" leadership skills (Kark and Eagly, 2009; Pullen and Vachhani, 2018; Smit, 2013). That's why Kark and Eagly (2009) emphasize that a feminist critic of the traditional leadership definition rejects the dualist relationship between leader/follower, powerful/vulnerable, rational/emotional. The authors explore new forms of interactions of people of influence: "This social political perspective can protect women leaders from merely replicating the power structure and privileges sustained by the hegemonic system, in which men (and privileged women) mostly hold the power and ability to lead" (p.18-19).

Similarly, materialist ecofeminism rejects the dualism logic (e.g., human-nature, emotion/rationality) (Cross 2018), feminist critics of leadership rethink the binarity and stereotyped definition that is excluding women and other minorities from being leaders (Kark et al., 2016). Pullen and Vachhani (2020) explain that the concept of "feminine" emotionality had been conceptualized in opposition to the "masculine" rationality, limiting "the other" to body affinities. According to scholars, while traditional leadership focuses on individual attributes and actions fitting the normative gender bias ideals, a feminist critical leadership approach discusses the role of an ethics/language of care, collaboration, intuition, trust, and responsibility (Pullen and Vachhani, 2020; Smit, 2013). Kark et al. (2016), discuss the concept of "influence" rather than "leadership" when discussing new ways of working. Smit (2013) argue that "leadership as relational influence has been performed by anyone; it was not a person or a place or a thing, instead it was a verb: leadership is the action of influence; it is relational, it does not exist by itself" (p.3). Pullen and Vachhani (2020) explore ethics of care as a practice distanced from stereotypical images of femininity where women/ "other" can transcend the political gendered role assigned to them, by focusing on communal relations. Kark et al. (2016), highlight the importance of non-hierarchical, collaborative, and multidimensional practices in leading that will eventually give space for women/minorities to reach leading positions. Kantola and Miller (2022) emphasize that rejecting dualism is even more necessary considering that studies show the remaining influence of gender norms and practices in the structure of political leadership.

According to Brigitte Smit (2013), ethics of care encourages leaders to engage with their followers in a perspective that they have a relation with as individuals. The author argues that a relational leadership approach enhances a trusting work environment, with a collaborative and inclusive mindset where shared ownership and cooperativeness are key elements to success. By rejecting a traditional practice/language of control, hierarchy, and division of labor, the author explains that a relational approach distributes power and creates a flattened organizational structure (ibid). According to Smit's (2013) study, women express discomfort towards power as they do not associate with the concept of power as a tool for domination but rather as a shared element for everyone. Pullen and Vacchani (2018) add that feminist leadership ethics problematizes the sex/gender differences and encourages to put those differences "in relation to each other, rather than at the expense of one another" (p.9). According to the authors, this critical perspective on leadership brings visibility to "otherness" and creates opportunities for subjected "non-rational", "non-masculine" leaders to thrive outside of patriarchal authority.

Besides the traditional masculine characteristics attached to the term "leadership", Ropo (2019, p.345), mentions the value of separating the leader from leadership because the current changing world should not put too much importance on having formal leaders anymore. This approach moves away from the top-down, hierarchical way of leading (Ropo, 2019, p.345) that fits the traditional masculine leadership style rejected by an ethic of care (Cross, 2018). According to Ropo (2019, p.347), a more democratic society aiming at a positive social change would focus on developing relational leadership, collaborative leadership, and more broadly explore the different possibilities to practice leadership in opposition to the traditional leadership style. Arja Ropo and Perttu Salovaara (2019) argue that, beyond the definition of leadership based on individual characteristics (a set of skills), there is the understanding that leadership is plural, collective, and constructed by the relationship between people and space. Pullen and Vacchani (2018) explain that feminist leadership

ethics “based on relationality, collective agency and intercorporeality constitutes organizational transformation, beyond the leader” (p.9). The authors’ studies join the materialist ecofeminism argument of valuing emotions, experiences, personal stories as forms of knowledge, and thus, taking some distance with the overruling rational and scientific paradigm (Cross, 2018; Mellor, 2000; Merchant, 2020; Pullen and Vacchani, 2018; Ropo and Salovaara, 2019; Ruder and Sanniti, 2020). Finally, feminist leadership is relevant in sustainability discussions because it includes ethics of care that problematize traditional leadership discourses and rethink the concept of power, from a tool of domination to a relational approach that includes power for everyone (Cross, 2018; Pullen and Vacchani, 2018; Smit, 2013).

This theoretical chapter has reviewed various and complex sets of perspectives on the concept of dualism in a patriarchal/capitalist society. The following table presents different articulations of the double oppression of women and nature (see Table 3 below).

| PATRIARCHY | CRITICS OF CAPITALISM | ETHICS OF CARE | LEADERSHIP |
|---|---|---|---|
| Relationship between male-dominated system and violence against women but it is also linked to other forms of domination: Intersectionality. | Capitalism is grounded in individualistic and utilitarian economic practices. | Worshipping care values in our social, economic, and environmental practices. | Traditional leadership has been theorized through men studies and generalized to all. |
| The patriarchal society has built the separation between the private and public realm. Feminine values versus masculine. Emotions and nature versus reason and culture. | There is a logic of domination and hierarchy in the economy. Economic growth is achieved at the expense of others (e.g., marginalized communities, nature, etc.). | The separation of humans from nature had created a speciest society justifying sexism, heteronormativity, racism, and colonialism. | Traditional leadership refers to the patriarchal set of masculine skills. It is linear and hierarchical. Following the same capitalocentric logic, traditional leadership shadows "other" forms of leadership. |
| Patriarchy had created the "other". Otherness includes every being who does not fit in the ideal "masculinity". | The same logic applies to nature and women regarding their status in the economy. Nature is a free good and so does care work. | Nature had been objectified and should be reinstated as an organic element and humanity is a full component of it. | Gender stereotypes are based upon the same dualistic logic. "Feminine" values are seen as a weakness and expected from the "other" gender. |
| Patriarchy is linked to colonialism and unlimited progress. Moving away from Eurocentric vision of the society. | Alternative economies to visibilize and value other economies. Rejection of binarity and domination. Promotion of a collective economy that involves multispecies. | An ethic of care is comprehended through three angles: Affective, ethical, and practical. Leadership needs to include an ethic of care to move away from "rationality" as a tool of oppression. | Feminist leadership is collective, relational, non-hierarchical, and transcends the political gendered roles assigned. It involves an ethic of care. Feminist leadership is democratic, communal and does not oppress "other" (e.g., marginalized communities, nature, etc.) |

***Table 3:*** *Summary of the findings in the literature that articulates the oppression of women and exploitation of nature through four different angles: Patriarchy, Critics of Capitalism, Ethics of Care, and Leadership.*

The following analysis, focusing on the materiality of the relationship between feminist leadership and the ecological crisis, explores how the different understandings of the oppression women/nature are articulated.

# Chapter 3: Data Production and Research Method

Being influenced by feminist research methods and queer studies, the data for this research was produced through a set of interviews with nine feminist political leaders. The initial research idea as well as the main research questions were theory-inspired from the key elements of ecofeminism which can be summarized through the interlinkage between gender oppression and nature oppression via the case study of Feminist Political Leaders in Finland. To go further, the research relates to feminist international political economy by offering potential alternatives to the current economic system. Although the initial idea is theory-inspired, the research analysis is data-driven as I let the data speak along the coding process.

The main research interest driving this research is expressed as follows: To what extent feminist leadership is a key player in the ecological crisis? The validity of the gender oppression linked to nature oppression argument is assessed while analyzing and interpreting the data. (Ackerly and True, 2020, p.170).

As a feminist student junior researcher, it is important for me to analyze my own constraints and boundaries through a feminist angle (Ackerly and True, 2020, p.93). I believe that the personal is political, as many other feminists claim, and this goes beyond the scope of values it is also emphasized in my daily life and what affects my research. The personal aspect, referring to the private sphere in feminist theories (Ackerly and True, 2020, p.93), is highlighted in my free time activities, volunteer involvements, and extra-curriculum projects which had been dedicated to advancing gender equality, sustainability, and DEI in Finnish society. For instance, I started an NGO during my research journey which promotes intersectionality between gender and climate. In addition, the overall process of writing took more than the “predefined” traditional academic schedule of one year, as I decided to take a pause, to focus on extracurricular activities such as student associations that focuses on gender equality and sustainability, but also to benefit from an internship in a research group which taught me

a lot regarding academia in general as well as to be more systematic during my research and writing. This internship allowed me to connect with other feminist researchers and helped me gather some readings, methods of research as well as having some peer and reviewing support from the Gender Studies unit of Tampere University.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to analyze the relation of women and non-binary leaders and with the concept of leadership and the ecological crisis in Finland, by resorting to the ecofeminist and feminist international political economy frameworks. A content analysis research method focusing on women and non-binary people's narratives was privileged to give visibility and empower them. According to Jo Woodiwiss et al. (2017), feminist research is about understanding and improving women's lives as feminist movements have taught us the importance of hearing what women had to say. For this reason, I first coded while allowing the data to speak as much as possible and then, brought the theoretical categories to my analysis. In addition, my research aims at giving a better understanding of the role of women and non-binary leaders in climate action toward a sustainable society. The study considers gender as an analytical category that, presumably, pervades the ecological crisis. The focus of the study is a set of self-identified feminist leaders in Finland.

### *3.1 Interview Structure*

The data production was performed through semi-structured-in-depth interviews. Interviews allow exchanging views, opinions, and experiences in a more or less intimate environment where the subject is not constraint to a pre-defined category. To successfully conduct a content analysis, a semi-structured format was chosen to give a full rhetorical turn to the interviews. This being said, this format gives space and opportunity for the participants to establish a context and take the directions he/she/they wanted creating a feeling of conversation for both researcher and subject-participant (Ackerly and True, 2020). While the main research question is "How do (self-identified) feminist political leaders in Finland take into consideration the resolution of ecological crisis in their agenda?"

Three sub-questions were elaborated to precise it and present as follows: “To what extent is the ecological crisis gender-oriented (according to the respondents)?” “To what extent do (self-identified) feminist leaders in Finland consider alternatives to the capitalist economic order?” “How do (self-identified) feminists define and practice leadership? Thus, the interview structure was built, based on the research questions, with the aim to cover the three main topics of the research: leadership, feminism, and the ecological crisis.

Content analysis of in-depth interviews was a relevant choice when the collected data is rather limited, in this research it refers to nine interviews which vary from 30min to 1h and consist of a set of approximately twenty questions which were all presented to the participants, however, the order and time spent on it varied. The discussions with participants yielded around ninety pages of interview content, which provided an extensive amount of data for analysis.

The objective is to explore the relationship between gender and the ecological crisis. Ecofeminists have argued that problematizing the connection between the double oppression, human over nature, and men over women is the answer to the ecological crisis as well as social inequalities. Furthermore, this approach can be updated by understanding that the concept of women’s oppression should include a non-binary approach (e.g., talking about gender minorities). Finally, intersectional feminism and black vegan feminism bring the perspective of race, (dis)ability, class, religion… in addition to gender, to the oppression discourse.

### *3.2 Participants*

Several methods were used during the search for participants; however, a specific sampling strategy was used to select participants. The targeted group was defined through gender and professional title. The gender factor allowed/allows me to bring visibility to minorities, which refers, in this research project, to women and non-binary people in the political field. (Ackerly and True, 2020, p.154). A top-down approach, referring to leadership positions in the political landscape (e.g., Prime minister

then ministers, then party leaders....), was used during the research and contact approach of key informants. The main goal was not to reach representativeness but rather to reach a certain scope for the research. To effectively reach this scope, leaders from the main political parties represented in the Finnish Parliament as well as in the City councils were approached. Following the top-down approach, the contacting has proceeded from Prime Minister to Ministers, Members of Parliament, City Councillor, Deputy of the City Council, NGO leaders who actively shape the political agenda. In addition to their titles, and political affiliations, future participants were also chosen based on their "publicly" assumed gender, nationality, origins, and age.

Diversity in the sampling strategy was revealed to be essential as it is one of the main ideological points of intersectionality (Collins and Bilge, 2016). Therefore, the sampled group gathers women and non-binary persons, with different cultural backgrounds (understood as Finnish and other) and different age ranges. The potential interviewees were informed via email on the topic of the research and its goal, an attachment was provided (Appendix 2). In other words, participants were aware from the first contact that they were approached for their leadership status, for being feminist, and having a political influence. Thus, one contacted person for instance declined the invitation as considering not having any relation with the political agenda. Out of twenty-one leaders contacted, nine accepted to participate in the research which can be cut down to approximate success to ½.

The main contacting tool was email, completed by a follow-up phone call when no answer was received in a week. As the targeted interviewees are politicians and, in most cases, people cumulating more than one position, it was very difficult to obtain meetings in a few weeks' notice. Moreover, ministers and members of the parliament were contacted via their public emails mainly found on the official website of the parliament (www.eduskunta.fi). However, it was observed a few days after the first set of contact emails was sent, that the request was to contact them via their secretary. This information is written only on the Finnish webpage and not in the English one, it caused some delays in the obtention of answers. Additionally, when no answer was received in an approximate 10 days'

notice, a phone call to the secretary was made, which in all cases was answered and, in most cases, accelerated the scheduling of a meeting.

The data production process was successful in the sense that all aimed political parties are part of the research, except for the Finns Party - Perussuomalaiset, the second biggest parliament group since the 2019 elections (Eduskunta). The new party leader declined the invitation due to unavailability during the Fall, the chairperson of the women's association of the party, Perussuomalaiset Naiset ry was also contacted via email, including the assistants' email, however, no answer was received.

The following table (Table 4) presents the participants' identifications, professional titles, and political affiliation as well as how and when were they contacted/encountered and their self-identification during the interview.

| NAME | Profession | Public Political Affiliation | Method of Contact | Interview date | Self-Identification L = Leader F=Feminist IF=Intersectional Feminist |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Raysa França | Co-Founder of Symbiois ry | None | Phone | 04.09.2021 | L / IF |
| Katja Pellini | Climate Advisor Specialist at Plan International Finland & Global | None | Email Phone | 06.10.2021 | L |
| Mai Kivela | First term Member of Parliament (MP) City councilor in Helsinki | Left Alliance - Vasemmisto | Email | 08.10.2021 | L / IF |
| Saara-Sofia Síren | Second term MP City Councilor Turku Chair of National Coalition Party (NCP) | NCP - Kookomus | Email Phone | 12.10.2021 | L / IF |
| Merve Caglayan | City Councilor Tampere City board division for the Greens Tampere | Green Party - Vihreät | Instagram | 14.10.2021 | L / IF |
| Katariina Haapea | Generation equality specialist for the Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) | None | Phone | 22.10.2021 | L / IF |
| Maggie Keskinen | Director of the Mayor's cabinet in Tampere | NCP-Kookomus | Email Phone | 27.10.2021 | L / F |
| Anni-Sofia Niittyvuopio | Chairperson of the Youth Sámi Council | Left Alliance | Email LinkedIn | 2.11.2021 | L / IF |
| Anonymous | Deputy member of the Centre Party Committee Tampere | Centre Party-Keskusta | Email | 11.11.2021 | L / IF |
| Anonymous | Member of the City Board Kangasala | Social Democrats - SDP | Instagram | Written sent out 29.10.2021 | CANCELLED (Due to language limits & difficulty in answering questions from a political point of view) |

***Table 4:*** *Information on the Participants and Interviews.*

The participants of this case study were found through Google and LinkedIn searches as well as based on my network from previous collaborations and/or encounters. The interviewees are all aged between 22 and 48 at the time of the interview and identify as female or non-binary gender, using pronouns she/her and they/them. Because of this gender diversity, first names will be used in priority, and the pronoun "they" will be prioritized when cases of anonymity occur. All interviews were conducted in English as it is the final language of the research project, as well as because the native languages of most of the participants (e.g., Finnish, Sámi, Turkish, Brazilian Portuguese) are not spoken by me. All of them self-identified themselves as leaders, however, their understanding of leadership differs from one another (e.g., leadership by title, role model, leadership in the background). All except Katja explicitly affirmed to be feminist. While Raysa, Merve, Mai, Katariina, Anni-Sofia, and Saara-Sofia defined themselves as intersectional feminists, Maggie identified as feminist while describing without mentioning the wording intersectional feminism. Finally, Katja expressed feminism and her understanding of feminism through Plan International's strategy and values, implying that she has shared understanding and values without stating that she was herself self-identified as a feminist.

### *3.3 Procedure*

The interviews were conducted from the beginning of September to the middle of November 2021. Due to the current pandemic situation, I always offered the online option of conducting the interview. Considering the location of participants which were not always in Tampere (e.g., Helsinki, Turku, Utsjoki) as well as the tight schedules of the interviewees, five interviews were conducted via Zoom/Teams, while four took place in Tampere in café and at the participants' place upon their request. All interviews were conducted verbally and individually apart from one that had to be canceled due to language comfortability and difficulty of answering questions from a political point of view. A set of predefined questions (Annex 1) was drafted to guide the interviews and ensure the collection of data around the three main them leadership, feminism, and the ecological crisis. This set

of questions was tested on the first interviewee where interesting data was collected, and complementary information was necessary to ensure a good interview. The same set of questions was asked from all participants, the order and the follow-up questions might have differed depending on the length and the professional title of the person. As Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True (2020, p.159) highlight, the choice of semi-structured in-depth interviews allows the researcher to keep track of the interview aim while leaving to the subject-participant some space for giving answers which do not necessarily conform to the researcher's expectations.

All participants interviewed consented to be recorded and all participants agreed to appear with their name at the moment of the interview. One participant asked to have a look at the use of data before publication to give their final confirmation. This hesitation is reflected upon institutional representation, the participant explains that it is important that some points of view are analyzed as "representing themselves" and not themselves in the institution they work for. A trustful method by giving verbal agreement was chosen, and I agreed to not disclose with their name certain parts of the interview. I am aware of the biases available in the data collected. Indeed, when the interviewees are not anonymized, e.g., answers given might be following the main political party's speech rather than personally oriented to avoid any harm to their public image.

### *3.4 Method of Analysis*

The method of analysis used in this research is based on the following process (Parameswaran and Latendresse, 2020):

- ◊ Creating and utilizing a semi-structured interview protocol
- ◊ Interviewing study participant(s) and audio/video recording
- ◊ Transcribing interview(s)
- ◊ Checking accuracy of transcript(s) by listening/watching with the transcript in hand

- ◊ Using transcript(s) to begin coding (depending on theoretical framework this could include multiple readings of the transcript) or identifying patterns in the data and developing themes
    - ♦ Developing codes based on theoretical approach and research design
    - ♦ Creating analytical memos by the research team members
    - ♦ Grouping codes or patterns into overarching categories or themes

The chosen data analysis method is the directed approach to content analysis as the initial idea of this research was to explore the theoretical framework retrieved from materialist ecofeminism and feminist international political economy theories. The two aforementioned existing theories are helping to determine the initial coding, as the research questions helped establish a total of twenty codes. This first method is defined as a deductive category application and is complemented by an inductive approach which was used after the first coding attempts of the interviews. (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

The data was produced through the semi-structured interviews as well as from the analysis, my influence in the interpretation is playing a key role in the data production. According to Ackerly and True (2020, p.152-166), each researcher's analysis results are unique and create a unique set of data as another researcher could understand and analyze the data from the interviews in a very different way. Regarding the coding method, a realist approach is privileged focusing on what is said during the interview; language is used as a representation.

### *3.4.1 Process of Analysis*

Each interview was recorded either with a mobile phone or through Zoom/Teams recording functions, while the data was transcribed with the use of Otter.ai online program. Otter.ai was chosen for its limited "free" services which were considered as more secured for data use than fully "free" programs. Each transcription was revised to ensure the quality of the transcription. Each word was revised and transcribed except for repetition, partial words, and filler words, due to time constraints,

silences, laughs and changes of tones were not noted down and thus, erased from the analysis. After being transcribed, the data was imported into the coding software Atlas.ti. After getting acquainted with the software, I believe Atlas.ti was the best choice for my research as it helped structure 90 pages of interview content and create key figures which became relevant during the analysis.

In addition, a research diary was created in Atlas.ti to help remember and follow the process of the analysis. This process began in parallel with the interviewing process, in fact, the first coding happened on 11th October 2021 while interviews ended mid-November 2021. The first step of the coding started with the deductive application which consisted of thinking of the main aspects of ecofeminist and feminist international political economy theories combined with the elaborated research questions while creating codes. The first list of codes appeared such as “Leadership”, “Feminism”, “Agenda 2030”, “Capitalism”. However, having two of the interviews in mind, and consulting with a former colleague from the gender studies department, it was decided that those concepts could be narrowed down as follows: “leadership_by title”; “leadership_reframing”; “Feminist intersectional” until reaching the amount of twenty codes before starting to code my first interview.

The second step was to import the transcripts of the interviews and read them a first time with the deducted codes. After this, it was easier to visualize which codes were not fitting the research and which new codes should be created. Using the inductive application which results in the creation of new codes while reading through the interview data, previous codes were alternated such as “economic alternative” with “capitalism alternative” and new codes were created such as “feminist actions” or “gender diversity”. After reading many times through the interviews, I could already identify some common discourses between participants for instance regarding their relationship with the Agenda 2030 and the 17 SDGs. New codes continued to appear while others could be identified as unnecessary.

Halfway through the coding of interviews, 27 codes were created, and the most referenced codes are “problem-solving”, “leadership reframing”, “feminist leadership” or “oppression of nature” which emphasizes the three main topics of the research. As Stuckey (2015, p.8) mentions, coding is not a one-way process, it is an iterative process that requires patience and consistency during the analysis, indeed, when a code is changed, deleted, or created, the researcher must read again previous interviews having in mind those changes. The third step consists in creating code groups, for instance, gathering “feminist” related codes together. After this part is executed, Atlas.ti offers a visualization tool called “network” which allows the researcher to combine two or more codes, as in relation, to understand how codes, understood as concepts, can be related. In the scope of this research which aims at putting in relation gender and the ecological crisis, such a tool can be useful. The following figure (2) is a network between two codes “oppression_Nature” and “oppression_Women” generated through Atlas.ti network function. Thanks to this network, it is possible to visualize which quotes retrieved from the interviews refers to both the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women (non-binary people).

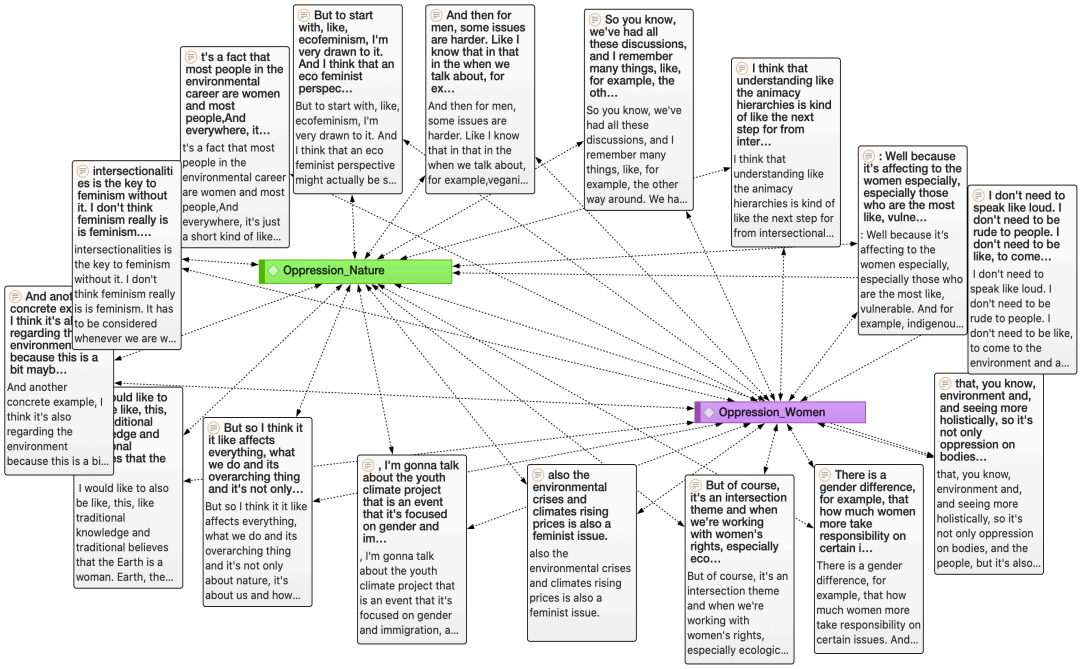


***Figure 2:*** *Network Oppression Nature and Women.*

Finally, the memos or comments were used during the coding process. As Heather L. Stuckey (2015, p.9) mentions, memos helped dissociate the interpretation of the researcher over the data compared to the original form of data. However, in this study, it is understood that the data is produced which understands the direct or indirect influence over the data (Ackerly and True, 2020, p. 157-158).

### *3.4.2 Ethics and Limitations*

#### *a. Ethics*

Regarding the ethical considerations during the research, I tried to ensure that a trustful relationship is established with the participants. The privacy of the participants is respected according to their wishes and special attention was given to not exploiting nor distorting women (self-identified as such) and non-binary's voices. However, it remains relevant to acknowledge the limitations of the coding practice. As Uma D. Parameswaran et al. (2020) emphasize, coding reduces participants to words and erases to some extent the joint interaction between the interviewer and interviewee and can as well depersonalize the process. In order to diminish those limitations, I bear in mind the political affiliation, age, gender, and other important characteristics of the interviewee when proceeding with the coding and overall analysis. Upon participants' request, the final material will be shared with them, and some parts of the draft analysis will be shared with some participants to ensure their consent. Finally, following feminist research methodology, I understand that the share of my interpretation with the data reflects my exercise of power in the research (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, p.154)

#### *b. Limitations*

Certain limitations were considered regarding the data production and analysis. First of all, the sampling method aimed at bringing diversity, however, the time constraints, availability of the participants as well as the knowledge over the political scene in Finland from the researcher (myself), limited this goal. Moreover, due to the limited number of participants during this study,

representativity nor generalization can be achieved. This research can pretend at putting in the light minorities (women and non-binary people) in the political field, via introducing feminists' narratives on the ecological crisis in Finland.

Future research could expand this study to other fields such as the business sector and other industries which have a direct effect on the ecological crisis.

# Chapter 4: Data Analysis

## *4.1 Patriarchy: A System Mechanism for Domination and Hierarchies*

As introduced in the previous chapter, the participants were selected based on background research on their relationship with feminist claims and movements. When I contacted the leaders, I openly discussed the topic and aims of my research, therefore, the participants knew that they were selected because they identify as being part of the feminist movement. The question of patriarchy was not asked directly to the participants. However, the concept and elements of patriarchy are connected to codes such as "feminism_definition", "feminism_intersectional", "gender equality", "oppression_women", "leadership". Participants were able to reflect on the different materialization of patriarchy through the definition and meanings of feminism as well as on the role of gender in their life and work. The coding process revealed that respondents are reflecting on the varieties of patriarchy through their definition of feminism and leadership. For instance, the codes "feminism_definition", "feminist_leadership" and "oppression_women" were the most frequently mentioned.

### *4.1.1 Gender Equality in a Patriarchal System*

Many feminist scholars define patriarchy through the concept of male domination; "patriarchy" expresses that violence against women is caused by a gendered social system and power structures which exerts dominance of an ideal form of masculinity over other forms of masculinity and femininity (Yllo, 1993; Phillips, 2014; Connell, 2001; Hawkes, 2020). In 2020, Finland ranked 4$^{th}$ in the EU on the Gender Equality Index, which focuses on the gender pay gap, access to education, housework, political participation, and gendered division of the labor market but does not include gender-based violence (Eige, 2020). Beyond statistical reports on social improvements towards gender equality, it appears relevant to highlight personal experiences. A patriarchal system is generalizing "ideal masculine narratives" (e.g., rationality, sciences, culture, etc.) to all (the other")

shadowing personal experiences, for instance, of women and non-binary people (Ackerly and True, 2020; Hunnicutt, 2009, Macgregor, 2006; Mellor, 2000; Salleh, 1997).

In my data, discussions that relate to patriarchy were coded for instance, as "feminism_definition", "feminism_intersectional" and "oppression_women". To the question: Do you think gender affected your career? Maggie shares insights on the several layers of oppression of the patriarchal system:

> Unfortunately, gender had affected my professional life. It had been a disadvantage sometimes; I do have negative experiences about it. Especially as a young woman, now that I am in my 30s and have a kid it's easier, but in my 20s I think I had to work extra to be taken seriously. Also, I think running into situations where there are people and men because they have never experienced anything on gender discrimination. They don't think it's an issue. Also, it is hard to be credible, and give credibility to my negative experiences based on gender here because you know the job is done so women are equal, but you know it's not always the case.

Other participants also share how gender affected their career life in terms of professional orientation. On the one hand, Raysa emphasizes that she felt more "fit" to pursue a career path in social and environmental work. On the other hand, Merve and Katja, for instance, both from technical fields (male-dominated fields) have been directed to work on gender equality through a career change or by involving a gender perspective in their work. Those answers raised a relevant aspect of feminist advocacy that refers to "who" should carry the burden of gender equality advocacy. Mellor (2000) discusses the burden of the "biological" duty involving paid and unpaid work of care. The author also explains the limits of the emancipation from this burden within a patriarchal system by having to transfer this burden to other minorities (e.g., Global Care Chain). Both Maggie and Saara-Sofia mention the importance of the role of men in feminism as well as concerning the battle for gender equality. As those participants are both from the same political affiliation, Kokoomus, a center-right party, a relation can be drawn between the political ideology and the understanding of gender roles in the feminist actions and feminist priorities. Maggie draws briefly the attention to toxic masculinity

which is for instance intensively discussed in queer studies through the concept of stereotypes around masculinity (Bridges, 2014):

> I think feminism considers different sexual minorities; it doesn't concern only women but also men. What is toxic male culture, what are toxic cultures in general associated with gender and society? (Maggie)

Hunnicutt (2009) explains that the variety of patriarchy is an important element to consider when discussing male oppression and gender equality goals. The author argues that patriarchy needs to be understood as a complex element that differs and evolves. Moreover, materialist ecofeminism addresses sex/gender inequality by criticizing the concept of "ideal" masculinity, which highlights the different layers of domination in a patriarchal system (Mello, 2000). Saara-Sofia addressed the importance of the creation of the feminist parliamentary group, which she has created, as it was the first time within the institution when men would also be implicated in the feminist scope and gender equality. This argument can be put in relation to the complaint many of the participants (Merve, Anni-Sofia, Katariina, Maggie, Saara-Sofia, and Anonymous) observed regarding the negative connotations the word "feminist" would have in society.

> In Finland, unfortunately, I think feminism is associated with this negative clang, associated with other political backgrounds and identities, and not recognized as a universal concept. It annoys me, because people associate "good feminism" maybe with green policies and left-wing views on the economy, and I don't think it has to be that limited. I think it is something everyone could take and make their own. (Maggie)

Anni-Sofia answers Maggie's concerns by justifying the history of the movement:

> I feel like the feminism movement comes from the leftist movement. It has a long history there before other parties that are feminist these days. They go kind of together. Indeed, they usually do not anymore. But it used to be at least on the left, it's rare that people are not feminist.

Maggie and Anni-Sofia's discussion on feminism, as a term/concept/framework, explores the evolution of the movement within political parties in Finland. According to the participants' arguments, feminism also raises concerns regarding the economic system that will be explored further below with the critics of capitalism. Upon Saara-Sofia's argument of engaging every gender in the "fight" for gender equality and advocacy for a feminist society, the willingness of having feminism as a universal concept is suggested. According to scholars and studies, feminism remains a heterogeneous movement that cannot be reduced to a simplistic approach in a similar way to patriarchy (Hunnicutt, 2009; Mellor, 2000).

Thus, it is interesting for this research to emphasize the common aspects of feminism that are discussed among all the participants that I will analyze in the following section.

### *4.1.2 Feminism, Beyond Gender Equality there is Intersectionality*

Despite the different political and cultural backgrounds of the participants, all of them discussed, directly or indirectly, feminism and gender equality through an intersectional perspective. By emphasizing intersectionality, interviewed feminist leaders of this research connected gender oppression to other forms of oppression. According to Sirma Bilge (2013, p.6), intersectionality is in "theory and praxis, an analytical and political tool elaborated by less powerful social actors facing multiple minoritizations, in order to confront and combat the inter-locking systems of power shaping their lives, through theoretical and empirical knowledge production, as well as activism, advocacy, and pedagogy". Bilge (2013) argues that intersectionality suffered from a western and white appropriation that led to its depoliticization; Therefore, the author discusses that it is difficult to give a simple definition of the concept. In this research, intersectionality refers to the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, who conceptualized power relations and hierarchies through the term of "intersectionality" (Cho et al., 2013). The authors argue that an intersectional approach reflects on factors such as race/gender/class/sexuality/religion (etc.) when discussing social, political, economic, and

environmental issues. Finally, it resonates with a materialist ecofeminist approach as it emphasizes that “intersectionality” is dynamic and tightened to context, therefore involved in the materiality of relationships (Cho et al., 2013; Mellor, 2000).

In my coding of the interview material, ideas related to intersectionality were coded, for example with “feminism_intersectional” and “Oppressions”. Raysa, for instance, discusses feminism as a collective project of societal liberation:

> For me, feminism is a project of societal liberation. So, for me, we will not be free as individuals if we don't have feminism. And I don't mean only women and transgender people, people of color, etc. I mean, everyone, even white cis male person from the global north. This person will not be free as long as we don't live in a feminist society. So, I think that my personal take on feminism is that I will not be free as an individual if we don't have societal liberation.

Following Hunnicutt’s (2009) discussion on the varieties of patriarchy, the participants’ arguments can be categorized as critics of the current patriarchal system that has is linked to several forms of oppression and domination. As the author argues, feminist scholars and activists advocate for the emancipation of society from this multi-level system of domination. Following the feminist claims, “the personal is political” such as in the anthology of work edited by Moraga and Anzaldúa (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983), who gave a voice to the experiences of women of color in the United States. Experiences of women, their feelings, impressions, and narratives are political as they challenge the historical separation of two different realms: “personal” in the private sphere of love and “political” in the public sphere of power (Bauhardt, 2014, Macgregor, 2006, p.5). Moreover, power relations are related to people’s lives, their advantage or disadvantage, and how they interact with each other (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, p.11).

Despite a set of questions on feminism, most of the participants did not wish to discuss “feminism” but rather “intersectional feminism”. Black feminists add to feminist and ecofeminist theories the

racial perspective in the critiques of the objectification of animals. Ko and Ko (2017, p.47-48) argue that within the concept of nature/animal oppression lies a racist and sexist narrative because the term "animal" is understood as non-human. The authors argue that black feminists reclaim this term the same way they reclaimed blackness to emphasize that, as black people, nonhuman animals are also excluded from the current system by being considered as "non-living" and thus, objects. A resonating claim is expressed by Merve when she self-reflected about her relation to feminism: "The thing is that the more you get educated about feminism, the more you realize how the same things that affect your life are the things that actually are affecting everyone's lives in society".

All the participants clearly identified as intersectional feminists or expressed the basics of intersectionality while describing their understanding of feminism. For some participants it was important to define themselves by adding the term "intersectional" to differentiate them from other types of feminism:

> That's how I like to describe myself because feminism alone can also mean a lot of things. Trying to work with people who identify as feminists, but are kind of like, white feminists, in those cases, the thing that separates you from them is the intersectionality that you try to bring to the table and also educate others. (Merve)

Intersectionality and materialist ecofeminism were born as an answer to the "whitewashed" narratives and were developed throughout the waves of feminism with the particularity of going beyond the narratives of women as wives, thus, middle income, heterosexual, white, from the Global North (Bell et al., 2019; Mellor, 2000). The theorization of intersectional feminism appeared in the late 20$^{th}$ century and is led by the African American feminists; however, it was already present in the nineteenth century in the work of Savitribai Phule (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, p.13). Intersectionality as an analytical tool gives politicians, activists, scholars, and people, in general, better access to the complexity of the world as it is analyzing social inequalities through multiple axes of social division (e.g., race, gender, ability, religion, age, etc.) (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, p.11-

13). Anni-Sofia defines intersectional feminism as the following: “It means that everybody, not just women and men have the same possibilities but that trans people, LGBTQIA+, every minority has the same possibilities. I don't say just feminism, but I say that feminism must be intersectional to be feminism”. Moreover, Maggie and Katariina emphasize the critical aspect of feminism as well as its attachment to a certain context: “However, the different waves of feminism reflect the time we are in. So maybe in the future, there will be a new concept or new issues we will have to look at.” (Maggie) They highlight a key element of materialist ecofeminism that refers to the material construction of the mediator and mediated in our society that constantly changes.

Materialist ecofeminist theories gather intersectional dimensions such as race, class, gender, ability, imperialism and include them in the fight for global and ecological justice (MacGregor, 2014). This discussion can be integrated into Katariina’s thoughts which bridge intersectionality with animacy hierarchies. In terms of my coding, those reflections refer to “oppression_nature” and “oppression_women” also analyzed simultaneously through the generated network (Figure 2).

> There is this thing called animacy hierarchies that we are valuing beings whom we associate with, like human-like qualities. And I just found, like, that's so interesting. And that goes also to, like, how we, how we see other people, but also how we kind of like are putting like animals also in hierarchies, we don't want to see, for example, dogs are something that is close to human. We don't like to see them suffering. But when it comes to, cows or chickens or something like that. It's okay because we don't think of them as, emotional or feeling beings. And that's something that has really broadened my vision of feminism.

This reflection had broadened this research scope to include the relation with other species understood as a non-neglected part of the ecological crisis. Serpell (1996) focuses on the unequal human-animal relationship revealing its ethical and moral contradictions which contribute to the perpetual exploitation of nature and “other” species (understood as non-humans). Besides, the opposition between animal and human, explored through the scope of black feminists, underlines the importance for researchers and activists to include anti-racism perspectives in theories. This claim is materialized

by re-thinking the concept of human/humanity which had been thought via specific codes including, race, characteristics, geographical locations (…) that had legitimized the subordination of every other being not fitting in those categories, and therefore non-humans (e.g., black people, animals, other species…) (Ko and Ko, 2017, p. 57). Ko and Ko (2017) highlight the importance of not falling into the narrative of similar oppression as a direct connection and therefore comparison (e.g., women/nature, black people/animals), rather focusing on the concept of "the human" which will decolonize the system in general.

## *4.2 Critics of Capitalism*

Globalization is rooted in the excessive takings from women, indigenous lands, cultures and resources, animals, and the ecosystem in general (Bauhardt, 2014; Mechant, 2020). In the interview material, the codes "gender_equality", "oppression_nature", "oppression_women", and "feminist leadership" were interlinked through the idea of the economic system coded as "capitalism". Thus, the relationship between the exploitation of nature, women, non-binary people, and capitalism may require rethinking the current approaches to sustainability, coded as "sustainability transition", "capitalism_alternative", "transformative approach". As Gaard (2015, p.11) mentions "industrialized nations must pay our climate debts both to communities and to ecosystems and develop economic accounting practices that do not externalize the costs of a just transition onto the environment and communities facing the outcomes of climate change".

To pursue this agenda, in my coding material "transformative approach", Katja underlines the importance of taking a gender lens to sustainability:

> The gender transformative approach specifically, is looking at everything that they do from the perspective that we need to see that everyone in society has some role, and, as an agency, we need also to consider when we want to make a more sustainable change, you know, environmentally sustainable, but also economical, sustainable society.

Additionally, the current discourse around sustainability tends to also have its limitations. In fact, after COP26 last fall 2021, leaders from around the world agree on the necessity to go beyond the current measures to achieve long-term sustainability, and the importance is to avoid the focus on only one aspect of sustainability, e.g., carbon neutrality (INSET Editor, November 9, 2021) as emphasized in the following figure (3):

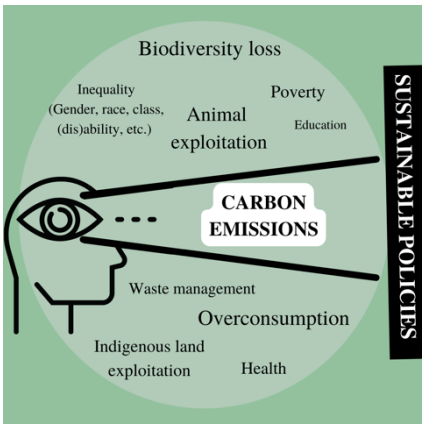


**Figure 3:** The narrowed vision of sustainable policies. The author on the basis of Jan Konietzko 2021.

Finally, the critics are also focusing on the fact that the current measures such as renewable energy are also causing some harm. For instance, Nordic countries also have a history of trespassing indigenous lands to build renewable energy structures such as wind power (Lawrence, 2014).

> I believe that like we can always want to make green, like electricity, but it is also always going to have impact on something. It's always going to need mining's it's always going to be on someone's backyard. So we really need to start thinking that not how we can make green electricity but how we can reduce the usage of energy and it like goes with anything like them. (Anni-Sofia)

### *4.2.1 Between Social Inequalities and Environmental Degradation*

I invited participants to reflect on the current economic system with an open question that generated laughs, deep sighs, and silences. Those very spontaneous reactions emphasize the complexity of the term "capitalism" and the many implications it involves. Eventually, each participant shared critics of capitalism that resonate with materialist ecofeminists' arguments. Capitalism includes wealth as a core element of the system by linking social status, political power, and influence with possession and accumulation of goods (Zou, 2001). This accumulation of wealth generates social inequalities and is one of the main challenges to equality as well as environmental degradation which Mai explains as follows:

> I would say that it's quite honest to say that it's *(Capitalism)* not working if it creates a situation where we … some people are well off, but then in somehow, that is the price of others well-being, which is happening now, and also the wealth is accumulating. I think that this is a huge problem, that even though we are increasing, our wealth is accumulating to certain people. I think it's morally wrong that we have like, millionaires, who are just like increasing by numbers. I think it's quite obvious that our current model is not working because we are heading to this huge, life-threatening environmental crisis.

Maggie's argument bridges patriarchy and capitalism as it links social inequalities with financial gain. The reasoning behind the accumulation of wealth is an individualistic and dualistic approach to the relations between beings. Materialist ecofeminist rejects both individualistic thinking and utilitarian economic practices, opening perspectives on alternative practices that involves care and collective action (Bauhardt, 2014; Cross, 2018; Gaard, 2015; Mellor, 2000; Mies and Shiva, 1993). Additionally, considering that capitalism is creating social and economic inequalities, it enhances an uneven impact of environmental damages. Mai explains that on the same logic as patriarchy, there are privileges associated with capitalism:

> I also want to highlight always that already now people are dying because of this crisis. So it's not only something that is like happening in the future, even though

> the future aspect is also very dangerous, but it's also already like something that kills people at the same time when some people are just so concerned about what to do with their money.

Moreover, it appears that the logic of wealth accumulation tightened to political power would also lead to environmental degradation as one participant mentions: “I think we haven't like, as a society or as, like, in the international community, we haven't realized really like that the effects of climate change are like, hit harder the people who can’t really do anything about it” (Anonymous). Therefore, according to participants the current capitalistic logic is preventing key stakeholders (e.g., marginalized communities) to access decision-making positions regarding the climate crisis. However, current decision-makers appear to on the one hand, not realize the emergency aspect of the crisis and on the other hand, be blinded by money.

> Why it's not working is only because of the focus on the profit part, which includes only getting more money or being richer, and it doesn't take sustainability in any consideration. Of course, that's something that hasn't been important to any of the big firms or companies that are really getting the profit. And we do have a chance to change that? So it doesn't mean that we have to give up capitalism in every meaning possible if that is something that people are into, you know, that we do not want to communism, or socialism, or any of the isms that there are. There is a possibility to continue with capitalism, but the thing is that we cannot keep doing it the way it has been done till today. (Merve)

Thus, all participants agree to some extent (Maggie, Saara-Sofia, and Anonymous would rather change some elements of it, not all of it) that the current economic system, capitalism, is not the one desired and is one of the main causes of the ecological crisis. Following scholars’ studies, the participants highlight the fact that capitalism justifies social inequalities and environmental degradation through the logic of growth (McKinnon et al., 2008; Marek Muller, 2020; Salleh, 2012). Indeed, participants problematize the fact that the current focus is on profit and how economic growth is leading to environmental harm. One of the participants is directly linking patriarchy and capitalism when discussing the ideal future:

> It's non-hierarchical for one, non-authoritative, non-violent obviously. And empathetic if I'm just using like, adjectives. But seeing things more broadly. Like, it's intersectional and it also takes into account that the power structures have been created by people and we can also change that, and also, it's anti-capitalist. (Anonymous)

However, transitioning to another economic system would imply having another model in perspective or having alternatives within capitalism. According to McKinnon et al. (2018), capitalocentrism is overshadowing alternative economies which prevents them to grow or get further consideration from leaders. However, as Raysa expresses her view on the economic future, it appears that feminist political leaders desire to develop those alternative economies: “I don't think that we are going to get this over with a revolution, but we need to try to engage in alternative economies and alternative ways of living and organizing our economies that it's not capitalism, growth, GDP”.

The following section will discuss those alternative economies from the perspective of the feminist political leaders.

### *4.2.2 From Capitalocentrism to Alternative Economies*

A transformative approach is discussed by the participants when it comes to making society more equal. This transformative and disruptive perspective applies to patriarchy as well as capitalism. A transformative vision would then problematize the dualistic logic of domination implemented by capitalist-patriarchal society and therefore, considers solutions in opposition to this dualism. Katja is stressing the need of avoiding applying the same logic that led to the climate crisis to solve it.

> “For example, when we talk about now, the transition to low carbon economy or less zero, carbon, or carbon neutrality, it's very scary. I mean, that discussion is very reductionist. So if you're only trying to solve now the problem of greenhouse gas emissions, then we are going really wrong direction, because then that's like, you apply the same capitalist economic logic in solving the problem.” (Katja)

Thus, the participants were invited to reflect on this new logic and give concrete examples of the direction, we, as a society, should aim at, by allocating more human and financial resources to it. According to Merve, it is necessary to "switch the goals from product companies from making the most profit, to making the most profit within the sustainable levels. Furthermore, three main alternative economies were underlined: circular economy, solidarity economy, and the doughnut economy.

Saara-Sofia explains that she believes in a circular economy as it is already implemented in Finland but emphasizes the need for a structural change and as Katja mentioned previously, privileging a transformative approach.

> I believe in the concept of a circular economy. So we need to do everything in a new way. It means that we need to make a lot of changes, also in the structures or in the waste that we pursue. But I do believe that it's possible to have sustainable growth in a way that we will not do more harm to the environment. The concept will save us, and it's implemented already in Finland. To some extent, I can see some of it, but I mean, it's still small. We need to change our whole society into a circular economy. So it doesn't mean only recycling, recycling. It means everything.

Although Circular Economy is environmental oriented, it has economic growth at the heart of its mechanism (Bauhardt, 2014). On the other hand, Raysa discusses the solidarity economy approach that, questions the concept of private property core element of capitalism used to extend profit at the expense of others.

> So one example is solidarity economy that I'm more familiar with because it's very strong in Latin America. So, it means organizing the economy through cooperatives and through different types of exchange and to equal ownership of companies, and so on. And this is completely different. That every company would be a democracy and owned by the workers. (Raysa)

The problematization of ownership and individual property is a key element of materialist ecofeminist and post-Marxist theories. When discussing a more communal and democratic model, Raysa acknowledges the gender distribution of power and open perspective on how multi-species could re-

invent their practices, knowledge, and treatment of resources also discussed by materialist ecofeminist and post-Marxist scholars (Bauhardt, 2014; Mair (2020); McKinnon et al., 2018; Philipps, 2014; Ruder and Sanniti, 2019; Sato and Alarcón, 2019).

Finally, the recently conceptualized Doughnut economic model is challenging even further the current dynamics of capitalism. Anni-Sofia mentions that "we can't live the lives we do within our planetary boundaries" and that's what Kate Raworth who conceptualized doughnut economics advocates for. Anni-Sofia explained to me their understanding of this economy and emphasized that this alternative would respect the planet and social boundaries, therefore, protect indigenous people:

> In conclusion to what I just showed you, we actually look from the ecological and environmental point of view, and we don't look at the economy because now economic growth goes hand in hand with social interest, like social justice and ecological justice, this is really problematic. Because it is proven that this economic growth, it's not possible if we have to reduce climate changes impacts. It's not possible then to work together.

Therefore, the doughnut echoes ecofeminist and intersectionality claims regarding the need of dismantling the direct connection between people's economic gain and socio-political power. Moreover, by acknowledging the natural resources overexploitation and the pressure put on our planet, doughnut economics conceptualized answers to the urgent call from ecofeminists for a more just economy. Therefore, like feminism or intersectional feminism, Doughnut Economics is a compass for everyone (including current leaders but not limited to), to reach the balance of a fair, equal, and environmentally respectful society.

As a limit to those alternatives, Raysa highlights that "it's easier for us to imagine the world ending than imagining capitalism ending, somehow and these alternative economies, they are like it's possible" (Raysa). Hence, the need for a global effort both coming from the local level to global

initiatives which include intersectional feminist framework as well as ecofeminist approach of the economy.

> Alternatives are local but then it becomes also global somehow you establish solidarity between different movements. (Raysa)

> I think the short answer is that, which I actually like in Finland, we have this very strong like welfare state model, which is sometimes working against this like market-based model. So that the state or the country is something that, some standards are flowing to everyone, but probably, a long-term solution would be some kind of like World Government. (Mai)

According to the participants who are political leaders themselves, this systemic change is needed to tackle the ecological crisis and build a more just economy. This change will be achieved thanks to a new way of leading that is rooted in feminists' values and practices of care, empathy, and inclusion of minorities.

> So now, we just have to realize that, if we want to survive, we need to find a different way or different mode of working together. And that working together has to be something that empowers those that at the moment, are not part of the process of deciding or making decisions. I don't know the change is more in the margin. So that's why it's not only about changing the big organizations that now make the decisions, but it's about looking at somewhere outside that system, and then changing their kind of perception and the culture, because that will then put pressure on those organizations also to be valid in the world that we are. (Katja)

Materialist ecofeminists approach the ethics of care as an answer to the ecological crisis (Cross, 2018), therefore, it is relevant to analyze how the participants are discussing this key element.

### *4.3 Ethics of Care*

The analysis through coding revealed that many elements during the interview referred to the ethics of care. The ethics of care problematizes the dualistic logic of domination that includes gender but also other forms of oppression that created our "speciest" society (Cross, 2018). In my coding material, the ethics of care was identified for instance, under the codes "ecological crisis", "political agenda_ecology", "political agenda_gender", "leadership", "sustainability transition". The

participants mentioned multiple times the problem of “rationality”, “masculine versus feminine” values and wish to re-think human relations as well as human relations with their environment. One of the participants mentions an ethics of care in indigenous practices and beliefs:

> In the traditional knowledge and traditional beliefs, the Earth is a woman. The Sun is our father, and Earth is our mother. So, it's kind of interesting to the point of view of feminism and indigenous peoples’ leadership because we are protecting the woman when we are protecting the land. But like, the main value of our traditional belief is that we live on a woman’s and that we need to protect it. And it's really like empowering. From a spiritual point of view, it really gives the power to keep on and fight for equality and nature. (Anni-Sofia)

They share indigenous and traditional beliefs by emphasizing the fact that humans are not separated from nature. The dualism between men and women is not used as a tool of oppression as in a patriarchal society. It is rather used to personify nature and see it as an organic matter on an equal relationship with humans. Therefore, they highlight that the connection between the exploitation of nature and the unequal status of women lies in the materiality of the relationship between humanity and nature as Mellor (2000) discusses in the literature. After reflecting on their position as decision-makers, policy advisors, and their role as feminists, I invited them to think about the ecological crisis from a holistic point of view.

### *4.3.1 Implications of the Ecological Crisis: Synonyms, Definitions and Meanings*

Eventually, it became interesting to question feminist leaders about their understanding of the ecological crisis as it is a broad term, extensively used by a wide range of actors in society. In fact, the ecological crisis is a reality acknowledged in the political, scientific, economic, and activist spheres that only a few skeptics keep denying (Macgregor, 2014). According to Mueller (2009), the term “ecological crises” emphasizes an increasing awareness of the natural resource limitation and overall environmental degradation which is “caused in large part by human ignorance, greed, use of

destructive technologies and economic practices, population pressures, and a lack of knowledge of how to live in sustainable ways" (Mueller, 2009, p.2). Moreover, according to Gaard (2015), traditionally women are excluded from climate change solution making because of a ruling logic of domination, colonization, and exploitation rooted in scientific and technological arguments.

A part of my analysis focused on exploring whether the interviewees define the ecological crisis through the loss of natural resources or if other dimensions such as social and economics are mentioned. As part of this analysis, the codes "ecological crisis" and "natural resource exploitation" prevailed. Maggie gives us a quite similar definition as Mueller: "The ecological crisis encompasses the climate change and global warming but also the diminishing diversity of nature, losing species, amount of nature and forest to the industrial purpose." However, she underlines, as well as Saara, the important role of our economy in the crisis: "But also in the way we are consuming, in different countries, how do we consume energy in the west for instance, how do we produce and feed ourselves, very wide concept." (Maggie); "The problem is that the economic growth that we built is not among the limitations of our world. So, the climates, nature, and the environment. So, we are destroying our own home." (Saara). Thus, to the question "what is the ecological crisis for you?" feminist leaders highlight the environmental degradation caused by the current exploitative and dominant relations humans have with their ecosystem. Additionally, Raysa , Mai and Anni-Sofia paint a bleak picture of the situation. For Raysa, the ecological crisis includes all species and could be almost a synonym of the end of the world:

> The ecological crisis means having no place to hide if something shitty happens. It's this lack of refugees and I don't mean just for humans. I mean, also, for other species. I also mean like animals and plants, they will not have anywhere to migrate. this distribution of environmental risks and harm is not happening the same way everywhere but it means that we will not have a safe place.

Furthermore, Anni-Sofia expresses their worries which had been the worries of their indigenous community for a long time, however, unheard by the main leaders or as they say “the main population”:

> For indigenous peoples, it means death and it means that the whole culture is going to be destroyed. And everybody, like the main population, is speaking that we need to stop climate change and, like, lower the impacts of climate change. But when we talk about indigenous peoples, there's no stopping it's so far in our community. It's really sad that we've been talking about this for years and no one has heard, and it has to be like the main population has to be impacted before we get help. Because our culture is strictly connected to nature and we live from nature and it's where everything happens and of course, when we talk about Arctic indigenous, the climate like warms up 3% faster than anywhere else. So we Arctic indigenous peoples are going to be the first ones to go.

Through those definitions, the feminist leaders questioned draw parallels with the ethics of care. The weakness of the code “natural resource exploitation” over the code “ecological crisis” during the analysis, shows that the respondents understand the ecological crisis as a complex issue that needs an ethics of care. For instance, Raysa and Anni-Sofia both discuss the ecological crisis as a “whole”, they do not separate humans from non-humans, and they, therefore include them in the potential solution design. By dismantling the hierarchies established between humans and beings, the logic of domination is also put aside, opening perspectives for an interconnected approach to beings that resonates with indigenous practices.

Although indigenous people announce a no coming back or no solutions to the climate crisis, sustainability and environmental measures are heavily discussed by leaders. It appears interesting for this study to question the importance of the ecological crisis to feminist political leaders and which items are prioritized on their agendas.

### *4.3.2 How can Sustainability Measures Apply to an Ethics of Care?*

Materialist ecofeminists discuss how the burden of care is put on women within the patriarchal system. They advocate for the ethics of care to apply to all so that every being would be responsible for sharing knowledge, culture, practices, and caring for each other (McKinnon et al., 2018; Mellor, 2000). The authors also emphasize the unbalanced duty of care in the current society. The material construct of the "ideal rational man" has put "the other" in the duty of emotional and environmental labor. In the interview material, the respondents refers to the following codes of "political agenda_ecology", "ecological crisis", "problem solving", and "feminist_leadership". Raysa, for example, reflects on the gendered construct of environmental solutions:

> So this is also a bit of like a weird in a way that it's like straight male people, don't they care about the environment? Why? Because the jobs are so low paid? men, they can get more money, doing something else. Or is it low paid because we are women and queer working in this field?
> So it's this kind of like what came first but it's a fact that always in this type of thing, it was always women. And if they were getting a lot of money, they were in this kind of like technical roles like engineers for example, but this more like social work is low paid.

This reflection explores materialist ecofeminists' analysis on the exploitation of care work whether it is in the public sphere (as a paid job) or in the private one (household/unpaid work) (Macgregor, 2006, p.57-59). According to the Gender Equality Index report (2020), Finland is leading in terms of gender parity in the political sphere. Thus, it is relevant to analyze how gender equality affects decision-making concerning the ethics of care.

On December 3rd, 2019, Finland elected a new Prime Minister, Sanna Marin, the world's youngest female state leader. Marin has both gender equality (parental leave and pay gaps) and the ecological crisis (carbon neutrality by 2035) as the pillars of her agenda (Abend, 2020). All interviewees seem to share the same perspective regarding the importance of the ecological crisis in their everyday work

both in the Finnish parliament or other organizations operating in Finland. In fact, Mai mentions: "We have many laws, which we are now implementing or creating or making, updating. And this autumn, two examples would be the climate law and the nature conservation law." Those laws are elaborated to pursue the main goal of carbon neutrality for Finland both on a national and local level. This goal is a long-term strategy, "it will put our target to be Climate Neutral by 2035. So afterward the coming governments have to also apply that we have as a nation, we have an aim to be Climate Neutral, and also climate negative after that." (Mai); "You can see in the mayor's program, in the strategy of next year. Tampere aims to be carbon neutral by 2030 and a lot of resources are allocated to this goal." (Maggie). From the participants' answers, it appears that the current focus of the political agenda remains on carbon neutrality. A parallel can be drawn with Katja's argument on the impact of structural barriers and application of the same logic of domination when making environmental policies. However, Mai emphasizes the sense of emergency from the current parliamentarians and government as they wish to take measures that will structurally oblige the next leaders in acting sustainably.

In addition, Maggie emphasizes the difference between the structural and individual perspectives on the ecological crisis solutions:

> How can we encourage companies to invest and become more environmentally friendly. And of course, how to encourage citizens to be more environmentally friendly. It is a really wide issue for us. From a governmental perspective which is different from the individual perspective is that we have the possibility to look at it from a structural point of view and we can shape actually large structures and the society that can have then a bigger influence on the big picture.

Following Maggie's arguments, it can be highlighted that a collective effort needs to be conducted in order to tackle the ecological crisis. By reaching out to citizens and establishing the dialogue between multiple stakeholders, feminist leaders like Maggie, advocate for an ethics of care that dismantle the boundaries established by hierarchies. Mai also draws this linear perspective when discussing the

environment, the non-humans, and humans: “so basically like the climate and the biodiversity and consumption, or this, like, how much our consumption is consuming on the planet, those are our biggest challenges”. Thus, a transformative approach of care can emerge from feminist leaders’ discussion of the ecological crisis but structural barriers from the capitalist-patriarchal system prevent some radical change.

Moreover, Finland has a long history with Sámi people and indigenous beliefs are an important topic of ecofeminism. Indeed, materialist ecofeminists emphasize the role of white colonizers on occupied lands and insist on the importance of including indigenous beliefs/practices in the climate crisis discourse as they are nature-focused (Norgrove, 2021). In addition, Aph Ko and Syl Ko (2017) argue that white-centered narratives prevent society to problematize centuries of racism and therefore, reproducing colonization practices when making environmental-friendly decisions. According to Anni-Sofia, an ongoing effort is made by Marin’s government to include marginalized communities, who are the first ones impacted by the ecological crisis, in the solution-making process:

> Now that the climate law is being prepared, there is a good mention about Sámis. There is going to be a climate parliament for Sámi people in Finland, and actually for the first time, we will have our own organization that will talk about how climate change is impacting us and how we can integrate and reduce the impact. So, I see that has the most impact on Sámi people. Because what people don't understand that we drive with snowmobiles they go with, like gasoline, we need solution for that so that we can take care of our reindeers sustainably but who is going to understand that but indigenous peoples no one so it's like.

Based on Anni-Sofia’s perspective, it is necessary to go beyond listening to the marginalized communities’ struggles, by giving them structural power and ways to be involved in the decision-making process. Unfortunately, the climate parliament for Sámi people will continue to act from “an advisory” position, therefore a deeper transformative change needs to be done so that marginalized communities feel like accessing and integrating the organizations in place. A small parallel can be

drawn upon Marin's government and Anna-Kaisa's cabinet (Mayor of Tampere) that are both women-led and have gender equality and the environment has priorities in their agenda. Nevertheless, as materialist ecofeminists argue, women's link to nature doesn't come from their bodily affinity. Therefore, it is important to not draw conclusions based on their "woman" abilities but rather to investigate their way of acting in relation to others.

## *4.4 Leadership*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the sampling of the participants was done through certain criteria, one of them referring to the leadership status. I identified women and non-binary people who are affiliated with a political party in Finland, and/or influence somehow on the political landscape and decision making directly or indirectly. The interview material was coded so that leadership was one of the codes: "leadership" "leadership_by title", "leadership_impostor syndrome", "leadership_refraiming" and "feminist leadership".

### *4.4.1 Traditional Leadership: A Patriarchal Influence*

As part of the analysis, it was interesting for the research to explore participants on their self-assessment of their leadership status. Codes such as "leadership_impostor syndrome" or "leadership_by title" helped understand how the respondents perceive the term leadership, what value and definition they give to it. It appeared relevant to emphasize when a participant was not comfortable being qualified as a leader during the coding process.

The theory chapter showed that in the ecofeminist literature, the idea of leadership is built in opposition to the traditional binary and stereotyped theorization of leadership (Cross, 2018). Scholars like Cross (2018), Pullen and Vachhani (2018), and Kark et al. (2016) discuss the ethics of care applied to the practice of leadership. The authors argue that it is important to go beyond the individualistic approach to leadership and rather think the concept through a relational approach.

They emphasize that gendered stereotypes and the dominance of rationality can be tackled by rejecting the hierarchical and self-centered approach of leadership.

In the interview material being associated with a leader became a surprise. Those reflections on the term “leader” refer to the following code “leadership_refraiming”. For instance, Katariina expressed her surprise at being qualified a leader: “I was a bit like, wow, Meredith thinks that I'm a leader when you asked me to do this interview”; for other interviewees, the hesitation for being called a leader was tied to the word itself. Merve, for example, preferred rephrasing the term, and defining it as something to aim for rather than something already achieved: “I'm not sure if I do consider myself as a leader, maybe, more of a wish to be considered of a role model”. Finally, Mai and Anni-Sofia rather rejected the idea of being called a leader but emphasized the need of “others” to label them as such. “I wouldn't like to call myself leader, but I see that people tend to call me a leader.” (Anni-Sofia)

This need was complemented by the fact that the label of a leader is not something they would not necessarily want or need, but it would not be fair to deny it as it is tied to responsibilities and obligations that they cannot escape from. Thus, Mai highlighted the inevitable relation between the term leadership and the responsibilities one can have:

> Well, I don't very often think that hey, now I'm a leader because I have a hierarchy. I think it's fair that if you are the leader in a position that you are you have certain responsibilities. Then I think you have to also be able to say it out loud. I think it's not fair to be a leader, and then pretend that you're not because you have also their obligations, what comes from that position? So that you have to be like, you know, acknowledge that you have them.

Thus, the status of leadership was revealed to not be something the participants aspire to when pursuing their careers. Furthermore, the analysis can emphasize rather the “non-acknowledgement” from the interviewee of their own status and position in the society. Multiple hypotheses can be

investigated; however, the first hypothesis refers to the concept of impostor syndrome which is present mostly among the female gender (Clance and Imes, 1978). Reflecting on the discussion of materialist ecofeminism in the previous chapter and analyzing this phenomenon through the lens of ecofeminism, the interviewees' words call to mind the question of domination and the historical exclusion of women from political power. This exclusion seems to influence women and non-binary leaders. In fact, by legitimizing the male domination, the patriarchal system, prevents the "other" (women and non-binary), to access any position of power (Salleh, 1997). Thus, it can be emphasized that women and non-binary people are socially constructed as subaltern elements of society, and therefore, are not feeling legitimate of being called leaders.

According to studies, the impact of gender stereotypes and gender roles in the perception of leadership prevails as women are more likely to underestimate their leadership potential and skills than men (Díaz, 2018). Moreover, the lack of representativity of another gender than the male gender, as well as the age factor in the political landscape, occurs to be influencing the answers of the participants. Indeed, the participants who mentioned hesitation regarding their leadership status are aged between twenty-two and thirty-eight years old, with most of them falling under thirty years old.

> But of course, someone has to take the leadership role. And when I look at my generation when I started, there was this older generation were ten years older than me, and they were the bigger group. I was the only one of my age. And even to this day, I am one of the only of my age from Sámi youth who are doing this, putting themselves out there. Of course, there are people who work beside me, but don't want to be public […] Of course, when we talk about youth, it might be sometimes difficult to have them participate so that it's not only me who is speaking." (Anni-Sofia)

Anni-Sofia mentions the problem of having a leadership status in terms of dominating the speech over other participants in a group. Their words call to mind the way in which ecofeminist authors problematize ideas of hierarchical domination. From top-down to bottom-up or even flat leadership,

feminist critics emphasize the need to deconstruct the egoistic, self-center, and heavily charismatic leadership stereotypes based on male narratives (Kark and Eagly, 2009). Moreover, Anni-Sofia's arguments emphasize how gender norms and practices matter and interfere in leadership. Indeed, a masculine leadership style will privilege hierarchy between participants leading to undemocratic and unaccountable ways of leading (Kantola & Miller, 2022). The next section helps us understand how the gendered norms and stereotypes usually viewed as an obstacle in the career achievement of women and non-binary people is here discussed as a window of opportunity to rethink the traditional vision of leadership.

### *4.4.2 Beyond the Traditional Leadership Model*

As discussed in the theoretical chapter, ecofeminism centers on the ethics of care. It highlights how relevant it is for society to reconsider the socially constructed gender roles in leadership which highlight techno-science and rationality at the expense of caring relations (Gaard, 2015). During the interviews, the participants were asked to share their thoughts on leadership by expressing which values and/or practices they think are needed in a society. In my coding, it was reflected with "feminist_leadership", "leadership_refraiming", "leadership_impostor syndrome". For instance, Raysa brings up the necessity for care in leadership practices:

> I think I practice feminist leadership in a way that I try to be caring. And I think this is also when we talk about feminism as being liberating, we also talk about valuing care in all spheres of society, and I think this also has to do with leadership. So, for me caring leadership, is the leadership that is worried if people are burning out. It is the leadership that is trying to understand how we can be in people's shoes and also again, with the environment. So, caring leadership will not try to achieve things at any cost. But we also consider, what are the things that need to be taken care of?

Besides the idea of care as a biological burden materialized to women in the ecofeminist literature (Gaard, 2015; Mellor, 2000; Salleh, 1997, p.37), Raysa discusses empowering skills traditionally

opposed to the so-called “masculinity”. Therefore, Raysa discussed the definition of leadership present in the literature as one that worship “feminine” values (Kark et al., 2016; Pullen and Vachhani, 2020; Smit, 2013). Moreover, following Ropo’s (2019, p.345) arguments, most participants emphasize the rejection of a formal leader and linear structure over a flat hierarchy and multiple leaders.

> If leader or leadership is being associated with only one person you know… being that party leader or a minister. The thing is that leader /leadership to me is more of a thing that you take in your everyday life so by doing such actions that people can also look up to or take after you. I'm not sure that I like hierarchical leadership, which is you know, the basic one that we usually have everywhere even in the city of Tampere. I do prefer maybe the horizontal approach a bit more, I believe that it gives people a little more room to truly affect the leadership position and not just be affected by it so you can kind of be a part of it. (Merve)

Therefore, the traditional hierarchical leadership with a formal leader figure is not something the participants (feminist leaders) aim at or advocate for. In my coding, “leadership_refraiming” highlights participants’ different approaches to the concept of leadership. For example, Merve’s definition of leadership would refer to the relational approach or leadership of influence discussed by Kark et al. (2016). The participants rather share a common will of sharing the leadership and choose a flat or horizontal approach.

> I think the world is going toward a flat leadership or even a bottom-up leadership organization, because of globalization and those big megatrends and the complex issues that we have to deal with in government and in the private sector. We are forced to look at leadership through networks. You can look at it in a hierarchical way, like a leader of an organization or a leadership status but actually, when we want to lead change, we have to look at it from a networking point of view. From the mayor’s office, this is what we deal with every day basically, because we work with partners, and we believe the city is a platform and that’s why we need other people to do it with and that’s why we can’t just stick to the top-down. (Maggie)

In addition to the concept of horizontal governance and the need for collaborative and multidimensional leadership, values such as altruism, egoless, trust, and kindness are implicitly found in their answers. Through an ecofeminist lens, this refers to the importance "to challenge the ways in which nature and bodies, emotion and femininity are constructed and marginalized by a masculinist logic predicated on instrumental rationality" (Phillips, 2014, p.13). Katariina insists on values such as trust and a non-authoritarian way of practicing leadership: "I mean, I have met such great leaders at work. They're kind of not rising above, but just overlooking everything and letting just like trusting people. The non-authoritative leader leadership is something that I'm really rooting for". A materialist ecofeminist approach on leadership (Pullen and Vachhani, 2020; Smit, 2013) resonates with the participants' answers when referring to the ideal values and practices a leader should have (e.g., ethics of care, collaboration, trust, responsibility).

Another participant brings attention to the concept of value-based leadership that, as the terminology emphasizes, prioritizes "values" over other elements in leadership. This concept drives leadership by trust, trust toward common values and beliefs set between people. Moreover, it offers a window of opportunity to question the so-called universal ethics/beliefs, founded in rational/scientific/male criticized by ecofeminists, and thus, create a new understanding of ethical behavior, decisions, and policies that would be more considerate of nature and minorities.

> One approach, which has been very important to me is this value-based leadership approach that I would like when I highlight leadership. It should be based on values that guide your life, in so many other ways than only leadership. And that's something that we should discuss more in the society also, and in politics, which are the main values we want to, push forward or work on or, and be open about it? (Anonymous)

According to Llewellyn E. Piper (2013), value-based leadership moves away from the concept of leaders as unique humans with rare abilities towards leaders defined through their actions and behaviors. This approach of leadership involves ethical accountability and social responsibility as

drivers of transformational change including all actors who have the same ethics and values (Piper, 2013). Therefore, value-based leadership corresponds to ecofeminists' claims and can bring a practical aspect to it. According to the ecofeminist approach, the materialized identity of women as open to change, adaptability, and flexibility regarding new situations portray them as more likely to be drivers of environmentally friendly social innovation for tackling the ecological crisis (Odrowaz-Coates, 2021).

### *4.4.3 Feminist Leadership: A Practical Approach to an Ethics of Care*

The analysis of the patriarchal influence on leaders emphasized the participants' discomfort around the term "leader" and self-identification as one. From the analysis of the preceding extracts, the patriarchal ideas of leadership are also related to the fact that the interviewed "feminists" do not relate with the established gendered bias around the term leader. Along with the discussion, the participants were invited, then, to reflect on "new" characteristics that could be assigned to leaders. It was observed that all participants answered with enthusiasm. The self-identification appeared to be easier as adding the term "feminist" along with leadership would automatically generate inclusivity and space for a broader understanding of leadership.

Q: How about feminist leadership? What would it be? Do you practice it somehow?

Firstly, Raysa helped redefine the qualifications a leader could have. Mentioning the value given to some skills such as "kindness", is relevant to this research as our current ecological crisis is profoundly linked to how we value our environment. This argument resonates with the idea of an ethics of care discussed in the theoretical chapter. The ecofeminist literature emphasizes that an ethics of care is necessary to change the materiality of relationships (Cross, 2018; Mellor, 2000; Merchant, 2020). The authors emphasize that by moving from a dualistic, linear, and hierarchical approach to relationships, to an interconnected, equal approach where rationality is problematized and "feminine" values are embraced, nature can be repaired. When underlining the imaginaries representation of the

body politic founded in the dualism between body and mind, rationality, and emotion; ecofeminists criticize the consequences of silencing the "other" who does not fit with the definition of reasonable and rational man (Phillips, 2014). Moreover, the interviewees also reflect on how the concept of leadership had been defined and practiced through gender norms that can be associated with toxic masculinity (see also Tickner and Sjoberg, 2013).

> I think that with gender norms and gender roles we are taught as women to behave in a way that it's kind and nice and empathetic. While men, they're not taught to behave that way. And this is seen as a weakness. So, whenever you have this model of leaders of CEOs or whatever presidents, they don't have this type of kindness that usually women are told to have. […] I think that feminist leadership is empowering. I don't need to speak loudly. I don't need to be rude to people. I don't need to come to the environment and act like a wolf, it's fine to act with kindness. […] what if the masculine thing is not good? So why do I need to behave that way? I think that if anything ever mentioned being sensitive and sensible and kind and careful. (Raysa)

Therefore, Raysa emphasized that the characteristics of leadership were developed hand in hand with the development of "masculinity" and "femininity"; while strength, independence, the public sphere are associated with masculinity, femininity was addressed through adjectives such as emotional, relational, weakness, private (see also Tickner and Sjoberg, 2013). The following relevant element, rising from the participants' answers to feminist leadership, concerns the collective implications of leadership. What comes to the materialist ecofeminism framework and its interpretations, one aspect refers to the materiality of women to carry the biological burden of "caring" (Armbruster, 2000; Mellor, 2000). This element was self-reflected by the participants Merve and Mai, and presented as follows:

> To me, feminist leadership is about not making everything about yourself. (Merve)

> I would say that feminist leadership ought to be a way of trying to share power and share the possibilities for different people to shine or to be in charge of things and feminist leadership would have their somehow their goal. (Mai)

Thus, caring, sharing the spotlight, involving others, and sharing power structures and decision-making are synonyms of feminist leadership according to the interviewees. Therefore, what Mellor (2000) refers to be the "biological" burden will be shared among all beings. Analyzed through the lens of materialist ecofeminism, this element refers to the importance of an ethics of care in the transformative change needed for our society (Cross, 2018; Mellor, 2000; Phillips, 2014). Salleh (1997, p.14) highlights the importance of the re-valuation of "feminine" skills such as care, to build a just and environmental-friendly society. Moreover, what is explored in this section is the potential relationship between the leadership practices implemented by feminists and the ecological crisis. As the traditional leadership practices lead to the ecological crisis (Gaard, 2015) "feminist leadership", arguably, has – in its characteristics and meanings – the potential to bring sustainable solutions to the ecological crisis.

Finally, feminist leaders go beyond the mainstream gender discourse that is, for instance, related by big organizations such as UN Women (e.g., the need of putting more women in a decision-making position). This need is acknowledged by all participants and goes beyond the binarity, it is emphasized by the necessity of having diverse representativity in all working fields and all positions.

> Women are starting to make a full-time job of reindeer herding. So, there's been a shift and I hope that my children can, if they are girls, or if they feel like they are girls, so they can continue with the reindeer herder and despite their gender. That's one of the reasons why I do what I do so that my children and my friends' children don't have to make the choice between render herding, which is the whole life, or identity and doing something else and maybe feel left out. (Anni-Sofia)

Thus, this diversity in representativity will help future generations to access positions and working environments they, to this day, would not or could not reach. However, another interviewee, Katja, stresses the need to avoid drawing hasty conclusions that can be misleading. Indeed, she emphasizes the fact that having women/diversity in power is not, *de facto*, leading to sustainable policies. Those

persons influencing policymaking must acknowledge the power structures and actively act to dismantle them:

> So, it doesn't mean only when we talk about feminist leadership, that the women have to be in the decision-making positions but recognize that there are inequalities which come with gender and with other things, like, you know, your economic status, or your sexual orientation, or race and so on. So, it's broader than only, the question about the sex and the question about the quotas and things like that. Then the whole idea that the current system that is based on the idea that you can extract the economic benefit from people and from nature, has led to us into this problem. (Katja)

# Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

This chapter answers the research questions by comparing the answers of feminist leaders to the four main categories deducted from the materialist ecofeminist theoretical framework. First, it is relevant to restate the research questions of this thesis:

The main research question was **How do (self-identified) feminist political leaders in Finland take into consideration the resolution of ecological crisis in their agenda?** This question was complemented by three sub-questions: To what extent is the ecological crisis gender-oriented (according to the respondents)? To what extent do (self-identified) feminist leaders in Finland consider alternatives to the capitalist economic order? How do (self-identified) feminists define and practice leadership?

The following table presents the findings in a table format to improve clarity to the reader. The following sections then discuss the findings in more detail: The section 5.1 discusses an intersectional approach to the ecological crisis. Then, Section 5.2 explores the critics of capitalism in relation to the crisis. Section 5.3 analyzes the concept of feminist leadership as a solution to the ecological crisis. Finally, section 5.4 is discussing the limitations of the research through feminist ethics.

| SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS | |
|---|---|
| **PATRIARCHY** | 1. Oppression and hierarchies affect the professional orientation towards social and environmental careers.<br>2. Patriarchy is a gender oppression linked to other forms of oppression<br>3. There is no feminism without intersectionality, it includes humans and non-humans. |
| **CRITICS OF CAPITALISM** | 1. The accumulation of wealth generates social inequalities. Capitalism like patriarchy applies the logic of privileges.<br>2. The limits of the logic of growth at all costs, including environmentally.<br>3. A transformative approach is advocated for including alternative economies such as CE, solidarity economy, and doughnut economics. |
| **ETHICS OF CARE** | 1. The ecological crisis concerns us all, humans and non-humans.<br>2. Minorities and marginalized communities are the first impacted and the least to have access to decision-making.<br>3. Environmental solutions are currently following the same dualistic logic and are gendered.<br>4. The exploitation of care work is linked to nature's degradation. |
| **LEADERSHIP** | 1. Leadership is traditionally associated with male skills and patriarchal practices (e.g., hierarchies, linear, and individualistic).<br>2. An ethics of care is necessary for feminist leadership.<br>3. Feminist leadership is relational, caring, diverse, and environmentally friendly. It problematizes power as a tool of oppression. It rejects dualism and gender stereotypes; it is not a woman leadership but a feminist leadership. |

***Table 5:*** *Key findings from the Data Analysis*

### *5.1 Intersectionality: Understanding gender oppression within the spectrum of otherness*

As previously discussed in the theoretical chapter, ecofeminism theorizes the connection between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. Moreover, it was also argued that materialist ecofeminism is grounded in more than one theory. Materialist ecofeminists are influenced but not

limited to intersectional feminism, feminist green politics, post-Marxism, post-colonialism, animal rights. When analyzing the data produced through the lens of materialist ecofeminism, several elements emerge that give answers to the ecological crisis. Indeed, feminist leaders use intersectionality as a framework and tool when making decisions in their everyday work. The data suggests that understanding the power relation through an intersectional perspective helps the participants fight for equality and tackle climate change. The participants reflected on the importance of gender in their career and how this oppression is linked to other forms of oppression such as but not limited to racism, ageism, LGBTQA+ discrimination, animal and environmental exploitation.

The main criticism toward ecofeminism is its essentialism in its discussion of women and nature. However, materialist ecofeminism and other contemporary feminist green politics (Macgregor, 2014, p.6) focus on the economic, social, and political relations that place "women" in particular relations to nature, therefore discussing their material relationship. By bringing feminism and environmentalism together, ecofeminists give a theoretical and analytical framework that problematize the material relations of "women" (also discussed as sex/gender) and nature in a capitalocentric system (Cross, 2018; MacGregor, 2014; McKinnon et al., 2018; Mellor, 2000; Phillips, 2014). In the interviews, feminist leaders emphasize through personal narratives, how patriarchy and capitalism are both outlined as responsible for social inequalities and environmental degradation. Participants acknowledge the relationship between gender and the environment through their career orientation, as they all followed a career where they could advocate for equality and better care of the environment. Moreover, some of the participants even recognized career change as "a duty" of care they had to fulfill. Thus, from the data analysis, women and non-binary people are not essentially connected to nature, however, their material condition as a marginalized group influences them in making inclusive decisions and being considerate of "others". The dualistic and stereotyped construction of otherness affects political leaders in their relationships. Finally, they also emphasize

that feminism and an ethics of care should be universal. They highlight that beyond the oppression of "women", it is relevant to discuss the concept of "toxic masculinity" that affects everyone, to different degrees. Even though I intentionally chose women and non-binary people for this study to bring them visibility since they remain marginal in climate politics (cf. MacGregor, 2014), the participants were invited to reflect from a feminist perspective rather than a "woman" perspective. As underlined by the participants, women and non-binary people are more likely to be part of feminist political groups, however, within the Finnish parliament, there is an ongoing effort to also include men. Collectively they also agreed that women and marginalized communities (e.g., indigenous people) are more likely to be affected by the environmental crisis but less likely to have the means to act upon it. This element is reflected as a direct consequence of the different forms of oppression a patriarchal system allows.

## *5.2 Capitalism: A Gendered and Environmentally Destructive Economy*

Following a post-Marxist and ecofeminist perspective on capitalism, similar critics to capitalism and patriarchy are discussed. The literature of the past two decades on the critics of capitalism argue that both reproductive works of women and nature had been exploited as a free good by the "western rational economic man" (McKinnon et al., 2018; Peterson, 2005; Phillips, 2014; Ruder and Sanniti, 2019). Moreover, scholars discuss capitalism as working hand in hand with patriarchy, as it empowers the toxic masculinity in the economy (Elias and Roberts, 2018, pp. 336-343). The concept of unlimited progress is also problematized in opposition to alternative economies promoting a social and environmental-based economy. The analysis of the data through this approach emphasizes that the logic of wealth accumulation is rejected by most of the participants as not morally right. In addition, the main problem of capitalism is the logic of growth at all costs. This argument resonates the problematization of the unlimited progress discussed among ecofeminist scholars. Beyond the logic of growth, the unquestioned relationships sustainable policies have with scientific innovations

are also mentioned. Among the participants, the parliamentarians adopt a positive view opinion on the current environmental and social policies while the environmental and gender activists criticized the current political narrowed vision adopted toward sustainability measures. While political structures remain deeply affected by gender norms and stereotypes (Kantola and Miller, 2022), it can be explored that political institutions affect the ability of feminist leaders to make transformative changes. This argument was also discussed in particular by Katja when she explained that by putting "diversity" in decision-making will not automatically enhance sustainable and just decision-making but a transformative feminist change of society (e.g., institutions, relationships, economy) will.

Therefore, all participants suggested adopting alternative economies such as circular economy, solidarity economy, and doughnut economies. Those alternative economies offer a new approach to resource treatments and question the separation between humans and nature discussed in the literature as the need for the "rational man" to transcend nature (Mellor, 2000). Also, discussing those alternative economies it was mentioned that social inequalities and environmental degradation are interconnected. Key elements of solidarity economy or doughnut economies were referring to the relevance moving from a capitalist/individualistic/dominant economy to a communal economy that respect social and environmental boundaries. For the participants, all humans, animals, beings should be treated equally. Applying an ethics of care to the economy is necessary as it ensures first, that nature is reinstated as an organic element with rights and second, that paid and unpaid "care work", emphasized by participants through gender equality laws or career path, is equally shared. Those claims are supported by the literature, for instance through the diverse economy of Childcare (see Table 2).

### *5.3 Feminist Leadership: A transformative Approach to Society*

This thesis has enquired into feminist leadership in the context of the ecological crisis. In the theoretical chapter, the opposition between traditional leadership and feminist leadership was argued for around the material constructs of "masculine" versus "feminine" skills. The traditional leadership approach reflects a capitalocentric vision of society as it is individualistic, rational, hierarchical, and authoritarian. In opposition, a feminist leadership approach is developed and problematizes gender stereotypes in leadership/management positions. In the literature, the critics of traditional leadership highlight that it focuses on individual attributes, use power as a tool of oppression, and limits "the other" to whoever does not fit in the idealized "masculinity" (Cross, 2018; Pullen and Vachhani, 2020; Smit, 2013).

The research participants also define leadership through the "traditional leadership" definition. In fact, most of them did not identify with the term as they do not associate themselves with the "ideal masculine" leadership style. It was suggested that the Finnish working culture is advocating for non-hierarchical relationships, thus, offering a fertile ground to feminist leadership. The interviewed feminist leaders do not practice hierarchical, linear, rational, and individualistic leadership. Instead, they advocate for a caring leadership that worships the constructed "feminine" values such as emotions, trust, kindness, and shares power. The participants do not share a strong attachment to power and invite us to rethink our relationship with it. Leadership is understood by participants and ecofeminist scholars as a collective concept that should be practiced by multiple actors based on relationships (Cross, 2018; Pullen and Vachhani, 2020; Smit, 2013). Therefore, by rejecting a traditional practice of domination, control, and strict division of labor, feminist leaders advocate for the distribution of power in a flattened organizational structure.

Moreover, the participants' perspective on feminist leadership seems to suggest that today's world is dealing with wicked problems (e.g., the ecological crisis), that is why it is necessary to collaborate with different actors in an intersectional way to solve them. Finally, feminist leadership is not related to gender binarity according to the participants as it is not tight to "womaness". Thus, feminist leadership is a practice everyone can have if and only if, they wish to reject the dualistic logic of the materiality of relationships with all beings (e.g., masculine/feminine, rational/emotional, human/nature…).

## *5.4 Contributions and limitations of the research*

The purpose of this study was to analyze the relationship between feminist leaders and the ecological crisis in Finland, by resorting to the ecofeminist framework. The research undertaken in this thesis has contributed to ecofeminist research by giving a practical approach to it through the study of feminist leadership. It is relevant for further feminist research to research both the environmental concerns and gender oppression through different case studies as they remain understudied. This study intended to bring gender diversity by going beyond the binary vision of sex/gender in ecofeminist studies. However, future research should consider expanding such practice by including queer people and trans people for instance. Moreover, this thesis contributes to developing English-speaking feminist research with Finland as a case study.

Another theoretical contribution is that the research also confirms some insights from the literature, for example, that feminist leadership is grounded in an ethics of care. Therefore, this research confirmed that by applying a gender lens to leadership, the relationship between beings is improved which includes human-nature relations.

In addition, this research has intended to connect the ecological crisis further to critical political economy debates, contributing to the disruptive long-term and systemically transformative strategies that feminist theories have highlighted. This thesis was able to demonstrate that the studied feminist political leaders aim at a deep transformative change of society including its economy.

When it comes to methodological contributions, this thesis contributed to feminist research methods by giving voices to the traditionally unheard, for instance, in leadership studies (Jogulu and Wood, 2006) as it was an opportunity for women and non-binary people to share their personal experiences for scientific research. However, it is crucial for a feminist researcher to be considerate of the danger of silencing other voices (Ackerly and True), that is why this thesis does not pretend to generalize. The research cannot be generalized to all feminist leaders who identify as women and non-binary. Instead, it intended to bring some diversity to the traditional masculine narratives. Future research could explore , for example, the relevance of the affiliation to political parties in Finland ast it was beyond the scope of this study to analyze the data in-depth in relation to party political influence (e.g., Left alliance-Vasemmisto versus National Coalition Party-Kokoomus).

# Chapter 6: Conclusion

The aim of this study was to bring gender into the debate on sustainability transitions through the case of feminist leadership in Finland. In order to achieve this, the following question was formulated, "How do (self-identified) feminist political leaders in Finland take into consideration the resolution of ecological crisis in their agenda?" Throughout the research process, I have been able to respond to this question by employing feminist qualitative research methods which involve, a directed approach to content analysis. This process began with conducting interviews, followed by inductive and deductive coding, categorizing, and thematizing of data according to the theoretical structure. Since my research includes feminist methods and ethics (Ackerly and True, 2020, p.170), I noticed that my epistemological biases have affected the ways in which I privileged certain kinds of data in my analysis. For instance, such biases can include the fact that I am a white woman from the western world who had been influenced by western philosophies considered as universal. The literature read and the choice of participants remain western-centered in their majority. As underlined by Ackerly and True (2020, p.10) the conceptual legacies I have regarding, for instance, gender, economy, race, animals etc. are filled with binaries and hierarchies, thus, while intending to undo some hierarchies and binarities in my research I might have expressed other ones.

Based on the data analysis, a conclusion can be drawn between the theoretical claims of materialist ecofeminist and feminist political leaders' practices and beliefs. Based on this small-scale study findings show that feminist political leaders consider the ecological crisis resolution as a priority in their political agenda. Beyond the scope of the ecological crisis as a single and separated item of the agenda, it had been discussed that the ecological crisis is considered in every decision made. The results indicate that feminist political leaders in Finland invite for a transformative change that includes intersectionality as a key element to it. Moreover, feminist leadership is capturing the main

characteristics of materialist ecofeminism as it problematizes the dualistic vision of relationships through the practices of an ethics of care. The findings also suggest that the political approach to the ecological crisis should involve new economies that are putting the social and environmental aspects as a priority. This thesis also proved what has already been mentioned by literature: that the ecological crisis is gendered.

The case study of this research does not allow for the generalization of the findings. However, the unique data collected allows current/future leaders to reflect upon their leadership attributes and practices and based on the conclusion and findings suggesting that the gendered nature of society should be taken into consideration. It can also be recommended that political leaders adopt a feminist approach to leadership including an ethics of care in order to tackle the ecological crisis.

Although this study has important limitations, the data generated by this study is relevant in the context of the ecological crisis. Further research can explore the ecofeminist framework through a more diverse case study (e.g., including "other" gender, and more diversity in general). Finally, further consideration could be given to developing non-western perspectives on ecofeminism as it would help develop post-colonial and black feminist approaches to it.

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# Appendix

**Appendix 1: Interview questions**

*Do you wish to appear anonymously or with your name?*

- Could you briefly introduce yourself? For instance, name, profession, gender, age, and maybe how would you describe yourself in general?

A brief explanation of leadership: Different approaches to leadership are discussed in the literature and implemented also in practice or organizations such as hierarchical leadership, horizontal/flat leadership. A broad vision of leadership is often discussed as we are in a way all leaders of our lives. I choose you as I considered you as a Leader, but your self-identification and vision of Leadership is interesting me.

- What do you think about those different concepts of leadership? Do you consider yourself as a leader/ in a leadership position? and why?
- How would you describe feminism? What does it mean for you personally or in society more broadly (it can mean also the same)?
    - How would you describe yourself as a feminist?
    - Name some values and/or actions in your professional environment that would be qualified as feminist
- How about feminist leadership? What would it be? Do you practice it somehow?
- How is feminism implemented in your organization? Through what kinds of practices, for example.
    - Is your team gender diverse or gender-equal? If not, what is the dominant gender?
    - Do you consider gender as an important factor in the work environment? Why?
- Do you think your gender affected your career choice? Why?

The second part of the interview will focus more on **the Ecological crisis.**

- Sorry for asking a bit of a stupid question, but could you tell me for you what is the ecological crisis?
- How important is the ecological crisis in your professional life? How about in your personal life? Or how do you see the ecological crisis impacting society more broadly?
    - Could you describe some tasks/projects or perspectives (in your work) that take the ecological crisis into consideration?
- What is sustainability for you?
    - Do you know about the Agenda 2030? .... Or is there some other framework that you are more aware of?
    - If so, do you use this framework in your workplace?
    - Which SDGs are the most relevant for your work? Why?
    - How achievable do you think those goals are?
    -

Some feminist theories such as ecofeminism or feminist political economy understand gender oppression and environmental oppression in an interlinked way. Thus, it is interesting for me to understand feminist leaders' thoughts on the current economic system.

- What are your thoughts on the current economic model/system?
    - Would you consider an alternative model? Why?

## Appendix 2: Interview Call

Tampere University

# Interview Call

*Participate in scientific research*

Hello, Hei,

My name is Meredith, and I am a master's student in Leadership for Change, European and Global Politics at Tampere University.

Currently in the process of writing my master's thesis, I am reaching out to you **because of your leadership career in Finland** and your contribution/involvement to policy making. This is an opportunity for you to contribute to meaningful research on **Feminist Leadership.**

Climate Change/The Ecological Crisis is one of the most important topics on the political agenda and this master's thesis investigates how Feminist Leaders are dealing with it. It will be insightful and valuable to have your contribution to this research.

## About the research

This research[1] aims to **bring gender into the debate on sustainability transitions** through a case of feminist leadership. In addition, this research aims to connect this debate further to critical political economy debates, contributing to the disruptive long term and systemically transformative strategies that feminist theories have highlighted.

## How could you contribute?

In order for me to proceed I would like to invite you to an interview, that would last **between 30min and 1h.** We could discuss **face to face or via Zoom** depending on your preference.
My calendar being flexible, I will let you suggest a date/time so that we could meet **in the next few weeks.** In the case of unavailability but willingness to contribute, feel free to suggest someone from your cabinet and/or assistant.