



VTT

# From ecological crises to a globally just sustainability transition? Feminist and postcolonial perspectives

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# Structure of the presentation

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00. Why a critical perspective? – The argument

01. **Feminist perspective** - whose vision and what knowledge?

02. **Post-colonial perspective** – winners and losers?

Few examples

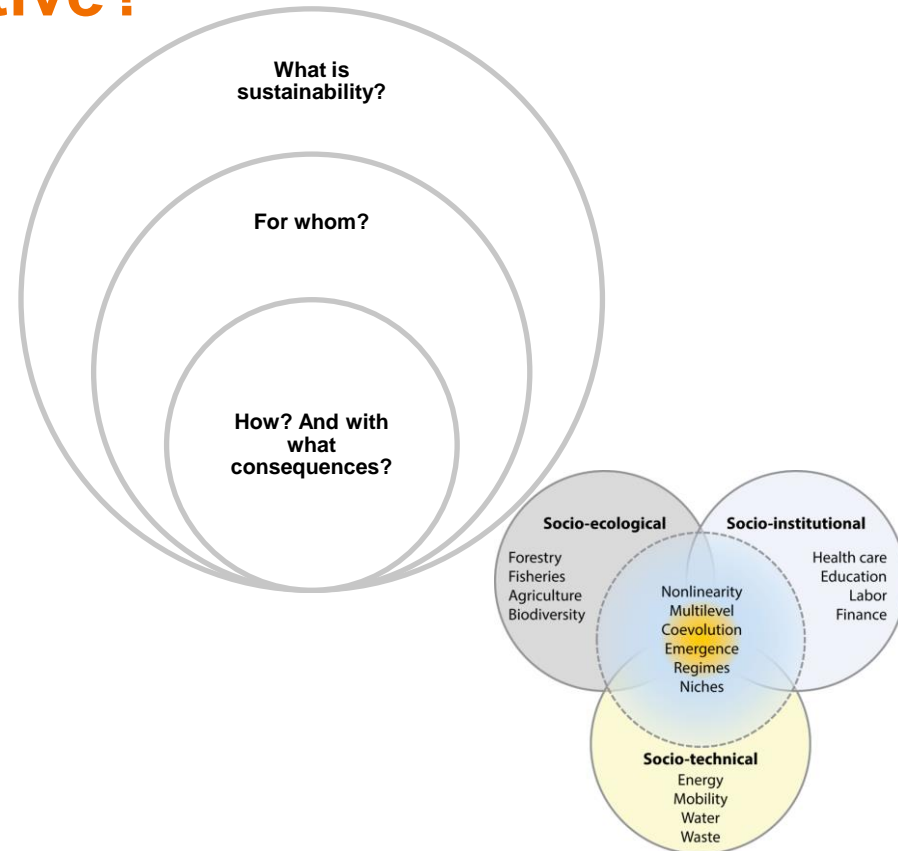
03. Implications of alternative pathways on ST research and application

**“For the master’s tool will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.”**

**Audre Lorde, 1984**

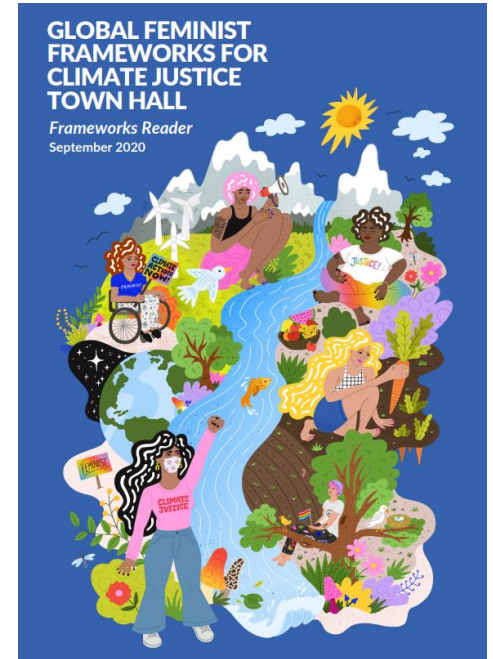
# 00. Why a critical perspective?

- **Argument:** mainstream sustainability transitions are based on and threat to deepen existing gender and colonial inequalities
- There is a need to engage with more feminist and post-colonial perspectives to avoid this
- *Inherently political* - shaped by desirable visions of the future, and include winners and losers (Stirling, 2014)
- Knowledge and different positionalities determining visions for sustainability transitions.
- Traditionally, sustainability transitions research focuses on socio-technical change from a capitalist perspective (Feola, 2020), lacking gendered and post-colonial applications.
- Technological innovations a key component of both sustainability transition and economic growth
- Yet both have serious (socio-)ecological implications (e.g., emissions and biodiversity loss & social displacement) (Moore, 2015)
- There is a rising debate of the *directionality* - between green growth vs. post-growth (degrowth, a-growth)? (Hickel and Kallis, 2020) -> Alternative economic models & innovations for sustainability
- Here, the synergy of feminist and post-colonial perspectives offer pathways to both ecologically sound and socially just transition beyond growth



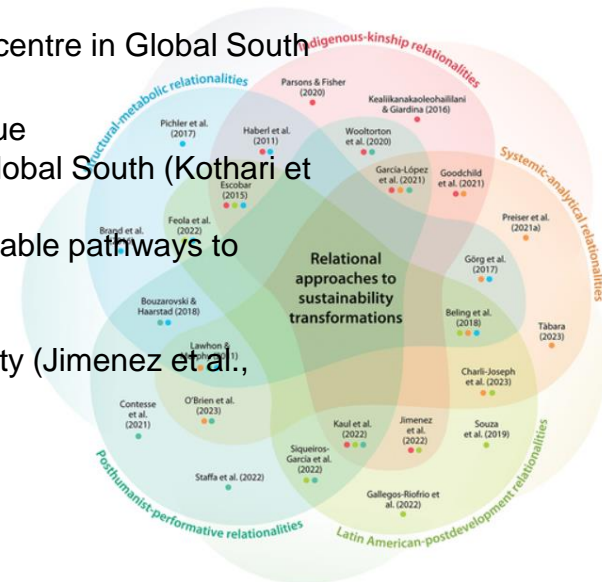
# 01. Feminist perspective

- Focus on **gender relations in transition dynamics** and their sustainability orientation (Wolfram and Kienesberger, 2023)
  - *Structural* (un-/paid labour), *symbolic* (norms and values) and *behavioural* (social practice) dimensions of gender
- **Masculinities in transitions**
  - Manifests in centrality of technological innovations vs social change (Kronsell, 2013)
  - E.g. Swedish sociotechnical imaginaries structured in gendered ways (Kronsell, 2013)
- **Gendered impacts and epistemological (in) justice**
  - Masculine knowledges, norms, and sectors play central role in transitions (Lieu et al., 2023)
  - E.g. In Finland, transition policies are primarily viewed from a technology and industry perspective (Järvensivu et al., 2023) -> losers and winners in masculine industries
- **Behavioural analysis as how (un)sustainable social practices are gendered**
  - E.g. Petromasculinity and ecomodernity as expressions of masculinity (Hultman, 2013)
- But, between 2010-2020 only 17 contributions to the field show theoretical engagement with gender as an analytical category (Wolfram and Kienesberger, 2023)



## 02. Post-colonial perspective

- **Colonialism as root cause for ecological destruction** and hence the need for ST (Sultana, 2022)
- **Global inequalities, experiences on unequal exchange and extractivism** drive both climate change and responses to it
  - "Energy transition in the North drives extractivism in the South" (Bolger et al., 2021; Acosta, 2013)
  - Deepens existing and drives new forms of gendered inequalities e.g. through landgrabbing and environmental justice (Sovacool ym. 2023).
  - Environmental Justice Atlas – distribution of global environmental conflicts centre in Global South & indigenous lands in the North
- **Knowledge(s)** – what is a desired path? Development as modernization critique
  - Decolonising calls for alternative visions and knowledge in transition from Global South (Kothari et al., 2019; Ghosh et al., 2021)
    - Post-development discourses and pluriverse → seeking alternative sustainable pathways to economic development arising from both Global North and South
    - Alternative visions from the 'below' - bottom-up - grassroots perspectives
    - Decolonizing innovation - engaging indigenous knowledges for sustainability (Jimenez et al., 2022; Velasco-Herrejón et al., 2022)



## 01+02. Theoretical synergy of feminist and decolonial research in STR (Bhatia and Lamberg, 2024)

Addresses systematic inequalities in global economy and transitions from both gendered and colonial perspective

- **Systemic inequalities in global economy drive ST in the North and impedes it in the South**
- **Gendered and racial experience of impacts of climate change and extractivism**

**Theoretical implications:** Whose vision is the sustainability transition based on, who benefits, and how are the harms distributed globally and in gendered ways?

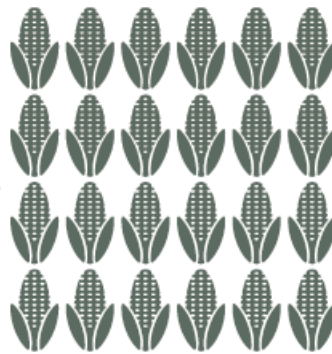
Connect with critiques of capitalism by connecting climate crisis causes to colonial and gender-based inequalities, and how technocratic and technologically oriented sustainability transitions depend, drive and deepen existing global gendered inequalities (Sultana, 2022).

# Example from the 'field' – Ecuador case study fulfilment of basic needs (social provisioning) in non-capitalist non-exploitative system

*Food is produced for subsistence and some parts sold in internal markets.*



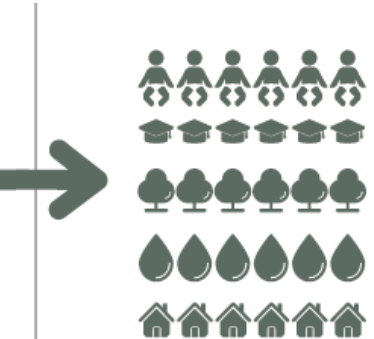
*Communities comprise of families, who take part in farming, communal labour. Members maintain a high biodiversity of seeds through storing and sharing.*



*Relationship and access to land is crucial. Provider of food, water, identity. Agricultural practices form basis of identity and culture.*



*Part of food is exported through community enterprise for economic revenues. Income is shared / distributed with communities that take part in production.*



*Income generation and food production aims to ensure healthy lands for future generations, revival and maintaining of ancestral knowledge ensure access to clean water and healthy land, and communal wellbeing.*

**More than technology focus**  
**Local knowledges, materials and practices**  
**Needs –basedness**  
**Enhancing autonomy and agency of local communities vs technocracy and top-down**



	Transformative innovation policy	Post-growth perspective
<b>Agency (who innovates)</b>	Business, universities, public sector, civil society	+ Households, local communities, co-operatives (pluriversal epistemology)
<b>Why is innovation needed</b>	Green and inclusive economic growth + social & ecological challenges	Locally defined needs, post-capitalist & diverse economies, plural value-creation & regenerative economic models
<b>What types of innovations</b>	Technological, social, organisational, frugal	Convivial, social, grassroots, frugal, low- & medium-tech
<b>Ownership models</b>	Private (?)	Commons, open source, co-operative
<b>Organisational models</b>	Large scale, profit-driven, public organization	Co-operatives, local communities, commons, not-for-profit
<b>Principles</b>	Social and ecological challenges, inclusive, transformative, profit- and market-basedness	Reciprocity and interconnectedness, more-than-human relationships, place-basedness, inclusivity, ecological sustainability, non-profit-driven, non-market based

Bhatia, R. (Accepted/In press). Radical sustainability from Global South. In *Encyclopedia of Innovation Management* Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

## 03. Conclusion

- **Landscapes and capitalism**
  - Feola 2020 critique on sustainability transitions: sustainability transitions research focuses on socio-technical change from a capitalist perspective
  - Green growth vs degrowth – need to explore alternative pathways that are not based on capitalistic economies
  - Move toward social solidarity economies, commons & "real utopias".
- **Beyond technological focus & ecomodernism**
  - Technology focus as masculine, and neutrality hides global inequalities of extraction and distribution of harms and benefits (Sultana, 2022)
  - Alternative pathways – adapting local, traditional and ancestral knowledges and practices
  - Grassroots actors, frugal and social innovations
  - Emphasize of care and conviviality in transitions
- **Diversity of knowledges and agencies, recognition of unequal distribution of harms and benefits**
  - Politics of transitions – participatory methods
  - Knowledge and different positionalities determining visions for sustainability transitions.
  - Alternative visions and knowledge in transition from Global South – Pluriverse for development (Kothari et al., 2019), embedded on contextual socio-cultural-ecological practices and pluralistic worldviews.
- As an alternative to mainstream sustainability transitions, feminist and postcolonial research emphasizes not only sociotechnical change but also sociocultural transformation. This approach advocates shifting from high-consumption and high-production economies to more sustainable economies that reduce both emissions and resource consumption in a socially just manner (Köhler et al., 2019).

Questions, comments?