

Why Women Should be at the Forefront of Fighting Climate Change

Philosophical perspective on women's agency in the battle with the climate crisis

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Author

Ester Alda Hrafnhildar Bragadóttir

Supervisors

Dr. Élise Rouméas
Abe Hendriks

Abstract

Climate change is seen as one of the greatest contemporary challenges, with its effects severely affecting both the natural environment and human security. While all of humanity is expected to experience the challenges of the crisis, women, alongside other marginalized groups, will disproportionately face the consequences. Simultaneously, women show more promising pro-environmental behavior in combating the crisis. Yet, women's voices remain a minority in solution- and decision-making practices surrounding climate change, minimizing their wider influence. By engaging with philosophical arguments supported by empirical evidence, this paper debates if women should be at the forefront of the battle against climate change. Utilizing arguments from the field of ecofeminism, the interconnections between women and nature, are argued to connect the two, giving women better agency in nature's favor. Mutual oppression posed on both, and flourished by Western cultures, is argued to give women, and other oppressed groups, an insight that cannot be understood by others who do not share the same experiences. Therefore, while the issue endures highly intersectional, gender is presented as a starting point of analysis. Moreover, women in leadership worldwide have shown action in favor of those most affected by the crisis as well as the environment. This promising behavior is believed to portray caring traits imperative to tackle the crisis in a reasonable manner. Next, a discussion on structural injustices and the responsibility of the oppressed is provided. Lastly, the paper is concluded as well as limitations and ideas for further philosophical reflections on the matter are provided.

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Introduction

The current human-induced climate crisis, forecasted to have extreme consequences in the upcoming years, has been proven to lead to various multidisciplinary challenges (Aguilar, Granat, & Owren, 2015). The crisis, seen as one of the most pressing issues of our times, is caused by an increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations and other anthropogenic forcings, such as over-exploitation of natural resources, that change the climatic conditions (Hegerl et al., 2019; Bindoff et al., 2013; Lampert, 2019). Resulting in effects such as desertification, rising sea levels, and ocean acidification (Bindoff et al., 2013) climate change is expected to have a detrimental impact on environmental degradation (Warner, Hamza, Oliver-Smith, Renaud, & Julca, 2010). Overall global warming, extreme weather events, and massive biodiversity loss are all effects that can currently be seen as the consequences of a changing climate (Turner et al., 2010). Nature simply cannot keep up with the rapid climatic changes currently occurring. Therefore, the severity of the crisis is clear, as is the importance of avoiding actions that exacerbate the problem.

As much as the climate crisis is destructive for the natural environment, the impacts of the crisis affect the lives of millions of people worldwide, only expected to drastically increase in the upcoming years. In fact, climate change is an overall threat to human security (Denton, 2002). Creating an acute threat to food security, as well as causing hazardous heat stress and water scarcity, the crisis creates a global systemic risk (Mekonnen & Hoekstra, 2016; Wouters et al., 2017; Verschuuren, 2016). Due to all issues resulting from the crisis, and their social, political, and ethical significance climate change is seen as humanity's current greatest challenge (Osaka, 2018). However, not everyone is equally affected by the crisis. Even though it is expected to be felt by everyone one way or another, different geographies and groups unequally bear the brunt of the changing climatic conditions, the same way as not all are equally responsible (Gay-Antaki, 2020; Mies & Shiva, 1993). While the Global North is not expected to face the consequences as much or deeply, the effects of a changing climate are currently, and expectedly, most seen in the least economically developed parts of the world (Lampert, 2019). The countries discussed are generally less responsible for the cause of climate change, as they regularly live less impactful, more sustainable lifestyles (Gumede, 2018). This means that those least responsible, are disproportionately the victims of the crisis.

Elaborating on this, different social groups are and will be overly affected by the crisis. Women see the effects of climate change more than men do, as well as other marginalized groups (Gaard, 2015; Baird, 2008; Mies & Shiva, 1993). This, again, can be more prominently seen in the Global South (Gaard & Gruen 2005, 163). While the poorest demographics are the most vulnerable to the crisis (Hemmati & Röhr, 2009) it is worth noting that women are a majority of people living below the poverty line, or up to 70% (Aguilar, Granat & Owren, 2015). While women are the ones that foresee most domestic work, for instance by providing food and water as well as collecting firewood for cooking and heating, men more frequently work outside of the home (Aguilar, Granat & Owren, 2015). With greater heat stress and water scarcity, women's daily practices are hit harder than men's, for instance, due to their dependency on the water as a part of the household activities (Fitton, et al., 2019; Demetriades & Esplen, 2010). Additionally, women and children are up to fourteen times more likely to die during natural disasters (Aguilar, 2007), which are expected to increase drastically with climate change (Turner et al., 2010). Women were between 75% and 90% of the victims in both the Tsunami in Aceh Sumatra in 2004 and the flood in Bangladesh in 1991 (Gaard, 2015). Since women's role within households is often to care for the vulnerable, where they put more priority on the other's well-being, they often fail to care for themselves (Alston, 2011). Therefore, during extreme situations as such their focus is primarily on caring for children and the elderly, and possibly save them (Worku, 2018). Additionally, factors such as the inability to swim and the fear of sexual assaults prevent women from leaving their houses during extreme events (Gaard, 2015). Therefore, for a variety of reasons women are generally more vulnerable to climate change than men, yet has not been prominent in environmental policies until now (MacGregor, 2010). However, it is necessary to highlight that women's vulnerability to the climate crisis stems not from their innate weaknesses, but comes as a result of gender inequalities constructed by discrimination, gendered social roles, and poverty (Gaard, 2015). Therefore, as important as it is to underline and deal with the clear vulnerability women face due to climate change, the underlying inequalities that make them vulnerable in the first place must also be tackled at their roots (Terry, 2009).

By the same token as women's vulnerability to climate change is generated by already established social disadvantages, this vulnerability is not solely associated with gender. Race, class, sexual orientation, gender identification, and other marginalizing factors all add to vulnerability to the climate crisis. (Versey, 2021; Hathaway, 2020; Sellers, 2016). Therefore, to

better understand climate change, a focus must be put on the intersections of all existing structural inequalities and climate-related pressures (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014, MacGregor, 2017). These intersections of all social categorizations that create overlapping and interdependent systems of discriminations are covered by the term intersectionality and is used throughout this paper. Nevertheless, this essay focuses predominantly on gender differences. This is both due to the complexity and intersectionality of the issue, that the scope of this paper can not comprehensively cover. Furthermore, this way the philosophical argumentation is kept in line with the one of ecofeminism, which is presented as one of the fundamental philosophical strands this paper builds on.

Notwithstanding the indication that the climate crisis tends to impact women more and worse than men, women simultaneously show more promising behavior in terms of environmental sustainability. Firstly, women's lifestyles worldwide have the commonality of being more environmentally friendly than those of men. While in the Global North, the difference is seen mainly with a comparison of the genders, where women live less polluting lifestyles with less traveling and more sustainable consumption habits (Pease, 2016), women in the Global South tend to be the social group with lifestyles the closest to pollution and waste-free (Gumede, 2018). Moreover, women seem to be more prepared for behavioral changes in favor of the environment. Practices of zero-waste are more common among women (Badowska, & Delińska, 2019), as well as dietary changes. Veganism or vegetarianism has been proven to have less impact on the environment than the consumption of animal-derived products (Chai et al., 2019), and women are more likely to adopt an alternative diet as such (Allès, et al., 2017; Modlinska et al., 2020). Thus, by viewing the various possibilities to change individual behavior in favor of the climate through an interdisciplinary lens, women seem overall more keen to take action in favor of climate.

Additionally, women are more likely to take the environment into account in their political behavior. The female share of voters voting for green parties is generally larger than the male share, and women are also a larger share of the electoral candidates for green parties (Carter, 2013). Women have likewise shown to be more likely to support drastic politics and measures on climate change (Demetriades and Esplen, 2009). Furthermore, women have been a larger share of the voices stating their disapproval of the political action for the current climate crisis. In major climate strikes and protests around Europe young women have been a substantial

majority, or over 66% (Wahlström, et al., 2019). Those protests include strikes held by Fridays For Future, with the climate activist Greta Thunberg as the initiator, and protests under the aegis of Extinction Rebellion. Lastly, women, commonly, report greater concern for the environment and environmental issues, with higher awareness and knowledge on the matter (McCright and Xiao, 2014; Grasswick 2014). Thus, not only are women more likely to change individual behavior in favor of decreased contribution to climate change but are also more likely to take collective action in favor of the same cause.

With the above evidence, a clear paradox can be seen in women's association to the climate crisis. While on one hand, women alongside other marginalized groups face the risks and consequences of the crisis more severely, they too show more encouraging behavior to combat it. Yet, this evidence is not reflected in current climate action and solution making. Up until now, proposed solutions to climate change have been dominantly dependent on male-dominated fields (Baird, 2018; MacGregor, 2010). To a large extent, this includes technologies minimizing the effects on climate change, for example, the energy transition from fossil fuels, and other efficiency measures (Nwankwo, Ukhurebor, & Aigbe, 2020). The focus has been on changing the behavior without any loss of current living standards or minimized economic growth, by for instance substituting electronics for more energy-efficient ones instead of minimizing energy consumption altogether (Shove, 2018). Moreover, technological solutions to decrease atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions are favored, such as carbon capture and storage, which better allows for continued polluting practices (Hemmati & Röhr, 2009; Zehr, 2015). Therefore, up until now, little focus has been put on more transformational actions, or generally actions involving more diverse solutions involving diverse groups of people. Since technological fields remain male-dominated, this limits women's involvement in the solution-making process.

Overall, the impacts and current actions around the climate crisis are not in women's favor. Yet, with their sustainable lifestyles and orientation, they have a lot to offer, which is not greatly endorsed. Therefore, using this evidence as a basis, this paper aims to answer the philosophical question: *should women be at the forefront of the battle against the climate crisis?* To do so, a close look is taken at the philosophical underpinnings of women's connection to nature, based on philosophical fields such as ecofeminism, in addition to the previous and further empirical evidence. The debate centers around if women, who have for years fought for gender equality in the sense of obtaining and sharing equal rights and opportunities as men (Rolleri,

2013), have better abilities to fight the oppression of nature which led to and is caused by climate change. While the gender inequalities, and the anthropogenic culture of superiority over nature, have led to similar oppression of both nature and women (Plumwood, 2004), nature does not have its own voice. Hence, agents of nature are needed. In the following philosophical arguments, the similarities and interconnection of the named oppressions, are argued to be reasons for why women should be at the forefront in the battle with the climate crisis. In addition, women's traits and qualities, such as caring and compassion, as well as empirical proof of women's performance in power, are used to support this debate. The sections of the essay are presented in the following order. Starting with the paper's methodology, an overview of the working process for the argumentative and writing procedure is provided. Thereafter, a comprehensive normative argumentation of the claim at hand is presented. This section, which covers the majority of the paper, is divided into subsections based on the demonstrated claims, and counterclaims. Eventually, a conclusion is presented, uniting all argued evidence supporting the original claim. This is followed by the paper's limitations as well as ideas for further philosophical reflections.

Methodology

This paper is largely of philosophical nature, with critical engagement with feminist, specifically ecofeminist, and other philosophical literature. A conceptual analysis was conducted in order to get a substantial understanding of the existing literature, which provides a comprehensive overview in order to answer the posed philosophical question. This engagement with the literature allowed for a competent interpretation and the possibility to build normative claims to do the subject justice. The literature review was done in an interdisciplinary manner, exploring various applicable disciplines that research the interrelationship between women and nature, and specifically climate change. The broad spectrum of information found surely confirms the paper's interdisciplinary relevance. As stated in the introduction, the tangible evidence shows the paradox of women's vulnerability and virtue to change their behavior in favor of the environment. Simultaneously, this evidence shows the complexity of the interconnection between women and nature, which gives the research environmental, social, economic, political, and lastly, philosophical relevance. Thereby, the interdisciplinary indication of the topic is vivid.

The composition of a variety of empirical evidence allows the output of this paper to be presented as empirically-informed philosophy (Johnson, 1995). As such, the philosophical argumentation is based on and informed by, the engagement with empirical evidence as has been demonstrated in the introduction, and will be continuous throughout the paper. This way normative claims are built on real-life concerns. This is, for instance, demonstrated with the argumentation on the global trend of women in power, taking more decisions in favor of marginalized groups, which can prove vastly beneficial in the battle against climate change.

As demonstrated, the evidence presented covers an interdisciplinary field, where natural, social, and economic factors all play a role. For instance, while women are generally more vulnerable to climatic changes, social and economic status, as well as race and any other intersectional factors, all play a significant role (Versey 2021; Kaijser, & Kronsell, 2014). Therefore, as the issue of climate change and its interconnectedness with women is wicked by nature due to its interdisciplinary and intersectional concerns, it is even more interesting to analyze from a non-empirical perspective. Hence, by providing quantitative evidence of the situation I believe the philosophical argumentation starts from a strong ground and has great depth and contemporary relevance.

Although the intersectionality of the topic at hand is clear, the scope of this paper does not allow for a fully intersectional analysis of climate change. As this paper demonstrates ecofeminist arguments, the starting point of analysis remains gender. Since it was first theorized ecofeminism has received criticism for its essentialist nature and simplified approach to the intertwine of different oppressed groups (Merchant, 2005). In recent years the field has, however, moved towards an intersectional argumentation, yet built around gender as a starting category of analysis (Kings, 2017). In line with this development, this paper concentrates on gender division and differences in approaches to components and circumstances in relation to climate change. Yet, this does not translate to a prioritization of one oppressed group over another. The intersectionality of the matter is endorsed, although the analysis needs to have a starting point. For instance, in the following sections, nature's and women's oppression is highlighted arguing in favor of women's interrelation to nature, hence their agency to act in nature's favor. This does not, however, diminish the interrelationship between women's or nature's oppression and the oppression of other minorities such as people of color, members of the LGBTQA+ community, or other groups. This, nevertheless, remains a limitation of this paper, due to its scope and timeframe. Giving opportunities for further research, this essay's argumentations could be elaborated highlighting other oppressed groups or even a combination of all. Moreover, during the writing of this essay, it became apparent that most literature used is written by Western writers, limiting the perspectives of individuals worldwide. While the author tried to account for a Western bias in the writing, the proportionate literature to be found remains of Western origin, which highlights the opportunities for expanding the arguments to other areas and authors.

As the main method of the paper is philosophical argumentation, it is structured accordingly.¹ A logical structure of a philosophical essay was believed to be a main body consisting of comprehensive philosophical argumentation. This is expected to provide the reader with an optimal understanding and compelling build-up of arguments. The argumentation naturally evolves around statements, argued for with empirical, and non-empirical literature, followed by answers to possible objections and scepticism about said statement. Lastly, the arguments were summarized in the conclusion, where ideas for further studies on the matter were presented as well as realized limitations of this argumentation.

¹ Empirical papers are structured around literature review, results, discussion and conclusion. Philosophical papers blur this distinction because the discussion and literature review happens throughout the argumentation (Oliver, 2013).

Ecofeminism: Values and Oppression

After the explorations of the empirical evidence of climate change's consequences on women, as well as their behavior in favor of the environment, a deeper philosophical understanding must be gained to reach an answer to the posed philosophical question. In order to grasp the gender differences in relation to climate change, one can start by looking into feminist theory.

Background of feminist theory

The fundamental idea of the feminist movement is to reach true gender equality and eliminate sexism and male privilege (Warren, 1997). Starting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, first-wave feminists fought for rights that are widely taken for granted today (Lorber, 2001). Suffrage, ownership of properties, and capital, to borrow money, divorce, and retain custody of children, were all rights that came from the feminists' fight through liberal political philosophy arguing for equality under the law. Since much has changed and women have gained more rights than ever in history. Yet, worldwide complete equality is far from reach. Even so, the newest report from the World Economic Forum (2021) assumes it will take over 135 years to close the gender gap. The inequality can be seen in various forms, such as in the long-lasting gender pay gap. Moreover, inequality can be seen in access to education, healthcare, sexual and domestic violence, as well as power positions worldwide are still predominantly occupied by men. The list of inequalities is continuous, and while they can sometimes be readily solved, they are more often structurally ingrained and sometimes socially and culturally touchy (Lorber, 2001). The feminist theory discusses how these inequalities should be overcome.

Contemporary, opinions on how gender equality should be reached, and which factors are surely feminist concerns, vary between strands of feminism. In recent years, a more central approach of the movement has been focused on different patterns of oppression women face, where it is argued that equality will not be achieved until all women are liberated from the different oppressions they face, whether it is racism, heterosexism, ageism, ethnocentrism, or any other form of injustice (Warren, 1997). This has made the movement more inclusive and means that any form of oppression or subordination women face is a feminist issue. The field of ecofeminism takes the movement even one step further and argues that the natural environment, including water, animals, plants, is a feminist issue as well, and should be treated as such

(Warren, 1997). This makes ecofeminism a unique strand of feminism since no other feminist field makes a connection to nonhuman nature.

Ecofeminism: A connection between the feminist and environmental movements

First coined by the French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne (Badoux, 1974), ecofeminism emerged along with feminism's second wave and is based on the claim that there is a connection between the exploitation of women, on one hand, and the degradation of the natural world, on the other. The establishment of ecofeminism, was a way to feminize the ecological movements, and green the feminist movements, as this connection was believed to go unnoticed. The fact that women, and other oppressed groups, are the primary sufferers of environmental degradation, makes nature a feminist issue (Warren, 1997). While a consensus prevails among most ecofeminists about this fundamental concept of ecofeminism, the connectedness between women and nature, the understanding of how this comes about varies between scholars. As the field develops, the dialogue has been enriched with more notions and different ideas. In the following paragraphs, a brief exploration of the different strands of ecofeminism is presented alongside discussions on the topic at hand.

Women's natural connection with nature

The first strand of ecofeminism discussed here is cultural ecofeminism. Cultural ecofeminists believe that mutual traits between women and nature create a connection between the two. The association between women and the environment is therefore encouraged. The feminine traits in question can either come biologically, or through affinity which has been described as a feminine trait, and their physiological functions such as birth-giving and their menstrual cycles (Mellor, 2007). Those connections between women and nature are then a part of reproduction, which can be understood as both women's labor and the non-human conditions needed for production (Merchant 1980). As a result, women are believed to be more sensitive to environmental degradation. This would give women more agency to speak on nature's behalf, due to their natural connection. Similarly, others believe that this connection is derived from elements in women's personality traits or gender roles such as their nourishing and caring values. In that case, the virtue of women's insights and qualities gives them the qualifications to speak on nature's behalf (Spretnak 1989). Cultural ecofeminists also argue that the evolution of patriarchal

culture has led to both devaluations of women and nature, and therefore praise and celebrate the relationship between women and nature as it is perceived as a source of women's empowerment (Merchant, 2005: 371-372).

In line with this argument, women's connection to nature should provide a direct way for women at the leading edge against climate change. If a large part of humanity has an innate connection to the natural world it must be evident that this group has exceeding abilities to work in its favor. Moreover, whereas women's empowerment is sourced in the sphere of nature, pursuing nature's evaluation by the act of fighting climate change ought to embrace empowerment. Women would, therefore, not only act as agents of nature but as well for their own good.

This line of argumentation, has, however, like the whole strand of cultural ecofeminism been widely questioned for an essentialist approach, and for romanticizing the relationship between women and nature (Plumwood, 2004). Furthermore, arguing in favor of an essentialist natural connection between the two, the argument can easily move towards the implications that all women do for nature is good and all men do is bad (Kings, 2017; Merchant, 2005: 373). Moreover, the strand has been criticized for presenting women as a homogenous group, due to its traits, when women's reality evidently differs substantially depending on a variety of factors. Furthermore, by highlighting a natural connection between women and nature, the focus on the oppression of both is minimized, distancing the two from other minority groups that similarly face oppression (Kings, 2017).

Mutual oppression of women and nature

A strand that has gained great momentum among scholars, either referred to as social or radical ecofeminism, argues that the mutual oppression that women share with nature is what ties the two together. This strand analyzes the relationship between women and nature through social constructivism, based on the aforementioned oppression (Kings, 2017). Therefore, unlike cultural ecofeminism, the interconnection of women and nature is not seen as a positive one but is rooted deeper in the destructive relationship between humanity and the natural world (Mellor, 2007). Gender equality and environmental degradation come as results of a common oppressor embodied in masculinity and patriarchal culture. Therefore, the root of environmental degradation and climate change is as well the root of women's oppression.

This culture created the narrative that puts individual self-interest above collective interest which causes human beings to portray themselves as more important than other natural elements (Plumwood, 2004). This has led to an over-utilization of natural resources and comes at the expense of women, as well as people of color, the underclass, and evidently the natural environment (Warren, 1997). An example of this can be found in deforestation. When forests are cut, in order to grow globally demanded crops, local communities that depend on trees for their livelihoods are left behind. This more often than not, affects rural households in the Global South, generally governed by women, who then must travel longer distances for firewood for cooking and heating, diminishing their quality of life and well-being (Plumwood, 2004). This demonstrates that with further environmental degradation, those facing the biggest burden, are often of more than one oppressed group. For this reason, this strand of ecofeminism is a response to this interconnection and is believed to bridge the gap and provide a combined critique of all forms of oppression (Plumwood, 2004).

The importance of intersectional analysis

Since the discussed oppression is not limited to women and nature only but is interlinked with oppressions such as racism, classism, and homophobias, an intersectional approach is required. Critical ecofeminists argue that in order to reach the liberation of women and nature, the gap between all other forms of oppression must be bridged, and they tackled simultaneously (Merchant, 2005). Thereby, they believe that ecofeminists must realize that the relationship between women and nature is neither fully cultural nor natural, but the main goal is to overcome the oppressing power (Merchant, 2005). People who are a part of one or more of the minority groups are proportionately more vulnerable to the climate crisis. Therefore, the intersectionality of ecofeminism must be embraced in the battle with the climate crisis (Kings, 2017)

In recent years ecofeminists have moved towards a more intersectional analysis, and ecofeminism has officially been labeled intersectional (Kings, 2017). This has allowed for a much more comprehensive overview of the differences different women face and has allowed the field to overcome some of its former criticism of exclusion. The intersectional approach has further allowed the ecofeminist field to move away from the mainstream's feminisms inability to recognize its privileged position and has helped to aid critical thinking on ecofeminist debates (Kings, 2017). Maintaining this intersectional lens throughout, the following argumentation

applies central themes from certain strands of ecofeminism, mainly the mutual oppression and women's trait of care in practice.

Western dualism flourishes the mutual oppression

A cause of the mutual oppression of all mentioned marginalized groups, including women and nature, one widely discussed within radical ecofeminism, is the dualism flourished by Western cultures (Mellor, 2007; Plumwood, 1993). In fact, the dualist way of thinking is seen as the cause of problematic power relations which has resulted in the said oppression (Irving and Helin, 2018; Plumwood, 1993). First proposed by Plato, a separation of the human and nature has been around since, where the thinking being and the mindless nature have been seen as opposing components of human existence (Mellor, 2007). Moreover, Western culture is gendered, where men and masculinity are associated with culture, while women and femininity are associated with nature (Gaard, 2010). The consciousness of the mind is seen as one with the rational male, while women are identified with the wild nature (Mellor, 2007). Therefore, since culture is valued whereas nature is devalued, this leads to a hierarchy that justifies domination. In this patriarchal culture, women are naturalized or animalized, by being called, for example, chicks, bitches, and pussycats, and since animals are seen as inferior this reinforces the inferior status of women (Warren, 1997). In the same way, nature is womanized where Mother Nature is in the service of men (Warren, 1997). Yet another dualism in respect to women is the association of women and the notion of the body, which again highlights the link between women and other oppressed groups. Animals, slaves, and those who labor with their bodies (Plumwood, 1993) are all correlated with the body, which puts them in a subordinated position to men and their connection to the mind (Mellor, 2007).

By sharing a perception of being the lesser of two, in a dualist relationship, women have an understanding and association to nature that men cannot, and will not relate to. The devaluing created by the dualist culture has left women in a situation of being seen as less human, which exemplifies the connection felt to nature. The crisis nature currently faces is caused by this subordination, where its resources have been overexploited and its natural structure destroyed (Bindoff et al., 2013). As the situation has gotten seemingly worse over a short period of time, women must feel for the oppressed. Although the climate crisis is a trend that will eventually affect everyone (Denton, 2002), and should therefore be in everyone's favor to tackle, women

can more easily see themselves in nature as the one on the receiving end of an oppressing dualist relationship. Yet, on top of sharing an understanding, women themselves have more at stake, with the acceleration of the climate crisis. Women are commonly more affected, which creates a greater risk. Moreover, as demonstrated in the introduction, their vulnerability to the crisis stems from their pre-established oppression posed by the patriarchal culture (Gaard, 2015). Hence, by fighting for the climate, they do not only fight for the overcome of environmental degradation, but their own liberation is at stake. As Mallory (2010) states nature and women will not be liberated unless simultaneously. Since the root of the issue is the oppression of both nature and women, men's understanding is only limited to the vision of a changing climate. Women at the forefront in the battle with a changing climate is a fight for their own liberation as well.

Can women focus first on their own liberation and then the one of nature?

Yet, the question arises of why both battles, women's and nature's liberation, must be fought simultaneously. Liberal ecofeminists, for instance, argue that by first focusing on freeing the woman from its biological destiny as reproducers, and overcoming gender differences, women can join men in environmental conservation afterward (Merchant, 2005: 368-370). This way, the responsibility of the environment lies more on the shoulders of men, until women have been liberated. Furthermore, women would not be responsible for battling for the climate as the agents of change but focus primarily on their own struggles until capable of otherwise. However, freeing the woman from what differentiates her from men, is not a true liberation but an idealization of the man as the rightful or dominant form. As such, the man remains the standard. This cannot be seen as a realistic argument, since women will never become "just like men" (Mol, 2008). Liberal ecofeminism has been greatly criticized for leaving the androcentric ideal unquestioned in its suggestions toward equality (Plumwood, 2004). Women's qualities should be embraced, as well as nature's. Expecting women to suppress their traits to become like men further leaves the dichotomy between the genders unquestioned, as women are meant to strive towards the dominant gender in the hierarchy. This approach also leaves nature's oppression unquestioned given that environmental conservation is not liberation. Therefore, the root of the problem, the mutual oppression, remains unsolved.

Overcoming dualism: Is posing women at the forefront enforcing separation?

On the other hand, one could wonder, if prioritizing women in the battle against the oppressing power is not also enforcing the separation of women and men, and thereby dualism. Plumwood emphasizes that “hyper-separation” of both women and men and nature and culture is not seen to be helpful as both women and men are a part of both nature and culture, and must be overcome (Plumwood, 1993). To overcome this she saw the need for “ecological identity,” to increase the connection of all human beings to nature. But by focusing on women’s capabilities to solve the issue, there remains a separation between the two genders.

However, staying on the current path has not led us closer to overcoming dualism, it is not the direction the masculinist culture is headed (Mallory, 2010). The “externalization” of nature from the economic sphere is still an issue and does not seem to be coming to an end. The dualist culture/nature conception seeks to maintain the human superiority over nature and the cultural superiority of men over women (Mallory, 2010). Therefore, although avoiding the separation of the dualist culture remains the ideal goal, the realistic obtaining of that goal will not be achieved without a transformational change. Giving a voice to those who historically have lacked one, could be one step in overcoming the separation since the status quo flourishes the separation.

Women Bring About Change: Care and Fairness

Women's qualities remain an unused resource

As demonstrated in the introduction, the current response to the climate crisis remains very male-dominated. With mostly suggested technology-based solutions, women remain more excluded from the discussion (Baird, 2018). Even in a wider context, women still play a small role in most decision-making processes, being a minority in most leadership positions, whether in politics and policymaking, or high positions within companies and organizations (World Economic Forum, 2021). Evidently, this results in a lack of women's perspective in decision-making. Therefore, the value of gendered diversity endures as an unused resource. However, where women are in power, they do show to have qualities that will prove crucial in the battle with the climate crisis.

Women care for the oppressed and marginalized

Although women's representation in politics has increased substantially over the last century, women remain a small minority within most parliaments worldwide (Paxton, Hughes & Barnes, 2020). However, where women occupy governmental positions, their actions differ from those of men. Not only have they shown more interest and action in favor of the environment (McCright and Xiao, 2014) but do so too in favor of other oppressed groups, including themselves. For instance, women raise their voices more for women's issues and interests than men (Paxton, et al., 2020). In Latin American countries, women are more likely to introduce bills regarding children and family, education, and health (Schwindt-Bayer, 2006), and to advocate for policies regarding minority, and women's rights (Piscopo, 2011). Studies in Sweden give the same results (Wängnerud, 2009). Similarly, female legislators in Hong Kong are significantly more likely to advance women's rights (Tam, 2017), as do female ministers in the United Kingdom (UK) (Catalano, 2009). Additionally, female ministers in the UK showed to be significantly more responsive than their male counterparts to the speeches of female backbenchers (Blumenau, 2021).

Demonstrably, representation in power matters in practice. Women cannot be fully represented by men that do not share their interests. With different experiences and socialization, women do bring different values and expertise to the table resulting in different emphases

(Paxton, et al., 2020). However, this does not mean that all women share an essential identity with all the same interests and concerns. On the contrary, it shows that women have common interests due to their social, historically marginalized position. The shared experiences of this marginalization and oppression create common interests that are expressly represented by women in power. Climate change is likely to be one of those interests.

Why do women care?

After this overview of the overarching trends presented by women in power, consideration of what causes these differences rises. Why do women care more, both about the environment and about other marginalized groups? Various scholars have given their input and understanding of why women tend to show more care. While some derive explanations from biology, claiming females are the caring sex while males focus on mating (Queller, 1997) gender socialization is more commonly believed to be a primary explanation (Zelezny et al., 2000; Xiao & McCright 2012; Strapko, Hempel, MacIlroy, & Smith, 2016). Gender socialization is the process by which girls and boys learn how to accept and develop particular values and orientations that are often referred to as masculinity and femininity, and are encouraged to do so (Dietz 1998). This process, which influences individuals' internalization creating gendered social roles, is believed to shape environmental concerns. Women or girls are socialized towards caregiving roles while men are socialized into breadwinner roles (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, and Schroeder, 2005). This is believed to have created a greater value orientation toward an ethic of care for others in women while men remain more individualistic. For this reason, care and compassion persist as a theme in women's behavior, where children's upbringing and caring of the weak and elderly has historically been a part of domestic duties undertaken by women (Whittle, 2019). Moreover, most occupational roles that involve caring tasks, such as nursing, teaching within educational institutions on lower levels, and working with the elderly, are dominated by women (Friedman and Bolte, 2007). Those women are additionally often people of color and low socioeconomic status, proving the interdisciplinary relevance once again (Friedman and Bolte, 2007).

Women's care: An important trait to combat climate change and its effects

While women's socialization to care likely comes as a result of aforementioned dualisms, where women's mindless body is predominantly meant for caregiving, in the case of the climate crisis it

might be a valuable trait. Carrying this trait women are better suited to have compassion with those affected by climate change. Moreover, given that those affected by the crisis are more likely marginalized groups and children, care for the affected, not only becomes important but a necessity. While women have unjustly been obligated to care for children, that virtue is now certainly relevant. As such, women's relevance at the forefront of the battle is clear. Since women themselves are a disproportionately affected group of the climate crisis, women at the forefront will more likely account for those differences in decision making, prioritizing those most affected. Since women acknowledge minority issues, they will accordingly acknowledge the need and urgency of those most affected by the crisis. Women at the forefront will correspondingly translate in decisions taken in favor of the disproportionate victims of the crisis, and thereby a humane action.

After discussing women's care for the crisis' victims, how about women's specific care for nature? As argued by the cultural ecofeminists, values such as caring are the elements that connect women and nature. Although this argument is based on socialized caring traits, the connection to nature remains. In fact, women's nurturing expressive roles have been shown to create environmental concern (Strapko et al., 2016). Hence, the caring traits women have developed, translate to caring for the environment. In addition, women show more environmental concern, due to the involved risk they perceive from factors such as climate change (Xiao & McCright 2012; Bord & O'Connor, 1997). Therefore, women have all means to be exemplary leaders to combat climate change. With the ability to care about the environment, as well as the victims of environmental destruction, women have the motivation to act in favor of the environment. Without care, there is no incentive to act.

Women have different leadership styles

Additionally, women show to have leadership styles that can prove beneficial in the crisis. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), women's leadership is characterized by a more democratic participative manner and asks more frequently for other's opinions before decision-making. Moreover, they are more likely to engage with visionary leadership styles, with a greater connection with the followers, which creates better motivation and hope for both the leader and the follower (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Northouse, 2016). In the urgency and devastation of the climate crisis hope and motivation among people is of high importance.

What is even more demanding regarding a wicked issue like the climate crisis, no one can hold all necessary information for a critically correct decision. Thereby, having people in power that consult others and consider all perspectives will not only be beneficial but demanded.

Is climate change a women's issue?

Yet, with all this emphasis on women's vulnerability and women's advantage in handling women's issues, one might wonder if the climate crisis will only become known as a gendered issue. After all, the crisis will affect everyone one way or another, and viewing it as predominantly related to only one gender might decrease the urgency. Scholars, such as MacGregor (2017) have raised this concern arguing that women's victimization has become too much. She argues that this prominence of women's vulnerability has made the crisis a gendered problem, which is not in women's favor. This has the effect of disempowering stereotypes of women as victims, hindering the progress of both matters, women's and nature's liberation (MacGregor, 2017). This has even created yet another binarity posing women up against men as victims and victors. Vulnerability is repeatedly attributed to femininity and weaknesses, making it problematically a feminized concept (Cunniff Gilson, 2016). Arora-Jonsson (2011) argues similarly, where she states that the gendered discussion is a concerning way to simplify the climate change effects. However, she rightly states that the inequalities in power exemplify this effect, where more women involved on the higher levels could minimize this effect (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). Adding on to previous benefits of women's inclusion in power and its benefits for women, she mentions that the efficiency of environmental management increases with more women involved (Arora-Jonsson, 2011; Buckingham, 2010; Agarwal, 2010).

Therefore, women show numerous qualities that can be argued to be of the greatest importance in the resolution of the crisis. Yet, they are still primarily victimized (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). The cause is likely to be the lack of attention to gender in the analysis of climate change overall (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). The gender differences in relation to the crisis are apparent, but they have been disregarded from the discussion, and when finally acknowledged the focus has been limited to women's vulnerability only. Therefore, the issue at hand is not the fact that women are more vulnerable to the crisis, but that their vulnerability is highlighted to the extent that it is simplified to be their only connection to the climate crisis. Climate change is, thereby not only a women's issue, but women's issues have been highlighted, while their traits and

qualities in combating the crisis have gone unacknowledged. Since women in power would be in favor of women and vulnerable groups, as previously demonstrated, it will be in everyone's favor. Given that the motivation for solutions for this major crisis is women's welfare and survival, those same solutions will be in everyone's favor. If suitable solutions are to be found that accommodate the vulnerable groups, it can be argued easier to adopt those measures to those less affected, some even currently not affected at all. Moreover, as the discussion is as simplified as reality shows, women's and minorities' issues are not as prominent. Therefore, women at the forefront would not only advantage the solution-making for the issues in place but even help to identify what difficulties are present in the first place. Women could help eliminate the simplified approaches to the crisis that one currently sees, and give a comprehensive, holistic overview of the situation.

Structural injustices keep women from reaching the forefront

Now after exploring women's qualities and advantages in the position of change and power, one might ask if women are so qualified as the agents of change, why are the gender differences and inequality in power still so visible. Why have the advantages not outweigh the oppression women face? As Iris M. Young (2009) has argued, structural injustices of all marginalized groups are conspicuous and difficult to tackle. She discusses that structural injustices take place all around, in our everyday lives, where social groups are categorically distinct among people of high status or with some privileges (Young, 2009). Not all people in subordinated groups are badly off nor are all privileged groups well off. Nevertheless, people categorized in subordinate positions are likely to face more obstacles while pursuing their ambitions or have been handed opportunities. To resist the structural injustices the group differences must be recognized and special steps are taken to allow them to meet their needs and are empowered (Young, 2009).

Women are a group that suffers from structural injustices, even though being a group that has gained more rights and power in the last century (Young, 2009). Nevertheless, institutions still fail to accommodate the needs of women, such as menstruation and pregnancy. The lack of consideration impacts women, sometimes discouraging participation. Moreover, women continue to take main responsibilities for household and children caretaking in the family lives, and the socialization of girls is still oriented toward helping and caring. Therefore, women, like other social groups that suffer structural injustices, suffer the assumptions about the genders. Women

do not only have to prove themselves but also overcome structural norms that work against them (Young, 2009). Relating these considerations of structural injustices to the discussion on dualism (Mellor, 2007), the divisive cultures of women and men and their different traits and values, has created a distorted worldview. The world structure created by this vision has been understood as normalized, which is what women face on their path to equality and liberation (Barca, 2020). Still, different identities are interwoven, which must also be identified to overcome women's differences and dualism as a whole. While a Western woman faces injustice due to her gender, she is a part of the oppressor group in for instance the relationship between white people and people of color (Plumwood, 1993). Therefore, women must overcome their structural injustices but must do so by tackling the core of the issue, the dualism flourishing the master model of the human. This can not be done by individuals who do not identify with any dominated group, as the oppressive culture does not affect them.

Is it fair to put the responsibility on the oppressed?

After this overview, a question one might ask is if already oppressed groups have a responsibility to solve the issue. Women, people of color, members of the LGBTQA+ community, and all other marginalized groups face oppression that they are not responsible for, so why should they be responsible for fighting this oppression and solving it. Should the responsibility not lie with the oppressors?

Building on the argument from Jugov and Ypi (2019) where they discuss structural injustices and the responsibilities of the oppressed, it can be argued that women's, and other marginalized groups' awareness of the oppression plays a role. They argue that it depends on if the oppressed realize that they are oppressed, and at what stage their awareness is (Jugov and Ypi, 2019). While many oppressed individuals are unaware of the structural oppression in place, others do not realize that the injustices are structural and not only personal. Lastly, some people are fully aware of the injustices but believe they are exceptionally not affected by them. For those fully aware of the link between their individual experiences and the structural injustices in place, the responsibility to voice their dissatisfaction is clear, the authors claim (Jugov and Ypi, 2019). However, those partially aware, are not as aware of the connection between the presence of injustice and the association to a larger context. Therefore, their responsibility lies first in associating their injustice to those of others in a similar situation (Jugov and Ypi, 2019). Those

who feel unjustly treated without the realization of its connection to structural oppression are believed to realize the larger issue if they voice their dissatisfaction. As structural injustices do affect every one of a certain group, those oppressed will encounter the similarities in other stories. Similarly, those who believe in their own exceptionalism, are encouraged to compare with others from the same group, to understand one's personal position (Jugov and Ypi, 2019).

Now, this logic of awareness can be fully applied to the context of women and their structural injustices. Women who are aware of the injustices in place can be expected to speak up. However, when it comes to climate change, it becomes more complicated to compare the oppressed, namely the environment and nature, to other oppressed groups. Nature does not have a voice on its own and must thereby rely on agents to speak up for it. Building on previous argumentation, women have a common experience with nature and can, thereby, work as its agents towards a solution to climate change. In this case, women should not only be aware of their own oppression but the oppression of nature, as well as its interconnection. With this knowledge in their baggage, women do have the responsibility to act, if they have the capacity to do so (Jugov and Ypi, 2019).

Still one could wonder if it is not unfair to pose the responsibility on those who are already oppressed, with a task of solving the oppression. This could be seen as doubly burdensome, that is, to both face the oppression and have the responsibility to solve it. This too is acknowledged by Jugov and Ypi (2019). This, they argue, does depend on the context of each case, as some lengths are indeed too great to go. Nevertheless, structural oppression can only be understood by those experiencing it. Those non-affected will not realize the nature of the oppression and can, therefore, not be the agents of change. The question then becomes: if the oppressed will not take on the responsibility of change, will anybody else? Without recognition, oppression can not be understood. Still, it is important to acknowledge that support by non-affected allies is crucial in the battle against oppression, yet the initiation must come from an affected agent.

Having argued for why women are responsible for fighting structural oppression, one might still be skeptical if the logic of women's responsibility can be fully applied to nature's oppression. Even with the mutual oppression unquestioned, it can still be argued that women have not lived through the exact same consequences as nature has, and can not fully embody nature's experiences themselves. This, however, is irrelevant in line with the current

argumentation. Although the outcome of the oppression remains somewhat unrelated, the similarities lie in the nature of the oppression, not the results. The commonality lies in the experience of the burden of an oppressor, whether the outcome presents itself as a lack of freedom or rights on one hand or environmental degradation on the other. Women can, and should, be the agents of change, overcoming their own natures, and all other oppression faced by marginalized groups all around the world.

Conclusion

Facing oppression and structural injustices themselves, women have all means to take the lead and represent nature in the battle with the current climate crisis. Through empirically informed philosophical argumentation, this paper has argued in favor of women's qualities and mutuality with the oppression of the environment, enhancing their ability to be nature's voice in the battle. While women are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis (Gaard, 2015), they simultaneously show greater practices in favor of the environment, by engaging in pro-environmental political behavior as well as having more sustainable lifestyles (e.g. Carter, 2013; Wahlström, et al., 2019; Pease, 2016). Despite this paradoxical relationship to the crisis, their voices are not amplified, as most solutions and decision-making endures male-dominated (Baird, 2018; MacGregor, 2010). Structural injustices further prevent women from entering a number of leadership positions, which overall limits their capacity of influence (Young, 2009). This leaves women's input under-acknowledged in the battle against climate change.

By digging deeper into the relationship between women and nature, their interconnectedness becomes even more apparent. Ecofeminism provides a detailed analysis of this association between the two. While cultural ecofeminists focus on the commonalities of traits and values between the two resulting in women's close connection to nature, radical or social ecofeminists believe their interconnection lies in the common oppression the two face (Mellor, 2007). Although the former has been critiqued for an essentialist view (Plumwood, 2004), both administer reasons in favor of women's qualities as the agents of nature. Women's insight into being the repressed in a Western dualist relationship allows for an understanding of nature's oppressive power-relationship to humans, where the latter have over-exploited environmental resources resulting in the current climate crisis (Plumwood, 1993). With a mutual oppressing power it stays in women's favor to liberate nature from this development, while simultaneously liberating themselves. This, furthermore, is also applicable to all other oppressed groups within society, elevating the intersectional relevance of the issue (Kings, 2017). Therefore, women's advocacy change would result in shifts at the issues' roots rather than adaptations to a changing climate, and its effects.

Until now, women's qualities caused by socialization have enabled them a more caring and compassionate approach to power (Xiao & McCright 2012). Although still few, women in leadership positions have frequently acted in favor of vulnerable groups, including other women

(Paxton, et al., 2020). Since marginalized groups are seemingly worse affected by the climate crisis, this trend can be justified to be of major importance. These caring traits are also reflected in women's approach to the environment itself. In fact, this could plausibly be a part of the reason why women already show more encouraging behavior in the environment's favor.

Yet, acknowledging women's issues without highlighting their weakness persists of vivid concern. Women's vulnerability to the crisis stems from already established inequalities which are heightened by the occurrence of the climate crisis (Gaard, 2015). Therefore, without simply categorizing climate change as a "women's issue" the differences should be acknowledged and dealt with (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). With women's interconnection and relation to nature, as well as their own stake of liberation, women should have a pivotal role to bring about change. Oppression can only be fully understood by those who experience it, creating greater pressure on the oppressed groups to act. While this can rightfully be seen as doubly burdensome, facing and fighting oppression, change cannot be expected to happen without the voices of the oppressed (Jugov & Ypi, 2019). Therefore, with their epistemic advantage women should be urged to take on this additional burden. While this is unfair, compensation in some shape or form could be accustomed to make up for this unfairness. How that can be done will be left up to other philosophers to theorize about.

Overall, women's advantage to bring about change is clear, where their knowledge and experiences are an essential insight to fight the roots of environmental oppression. Therefore, women should be at the forefront of the battle with the climate crisis.

Limitations and further philosophical reflections

Although this paper touches upon various aspects of the philosophical connection between women and nature and how a change could come about, certain limitations to this paper must be mentioned. Firstly, this essay refers to the genders in a binary form, which does not reflect the genders of society, since non-binary or genderqueer people are not explicitly mentioned. Those individuals do neither simply identify as female nor male, but in some cases both or different at different times, some do not identify as a gender at all or dispute the idea of only two genders (Richards et al., 2016). Although nonbinary people are a marginalized group (Richards et al., 2016), the lack of discussion around this group specifically is a limitation and emphasizes the social idea of gender binary. This remains in line with most literature that analyzes gender

differences, which adds a barrier to include other genders. However, it can be encouraged to be more inclusive of all genders when gender differences are discussed. It can still be speculated that people of other genders relate more with the argumentation of women since they have not been a dominant or oppressing gender. Yet, this will not be further elaborated on here.

Secondly, a limitation that must be mentioned is that the literature on ecofeminism and the other philosophical strands presented in this paper remain quite Western. Most literature engaged within this paper is written by white women, which limits the intersectional experiences of the writers. The same can be said about the author of this paper. Although the author tried to include literature and presented examples from different parts of the world, the available literature on the topic from other countries is more limited. Similarly, due to the scope of this paper arguments had to be strategically chosen, while potentially critical factors of the argumentation had to be left out. There the economic factors of current societies must be highlighted. Certain ecofeminists' argumentation (e.g. Oksala, 2018; Mellor, 1992; Leeb, 2007) is centered around capitalism as the main driver of both women's and nature's oppression. While these propositions could not be engaged within this paper, this allows for further philosophical reflection on the effects of economic factors related to the demonstrated discussions.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the opposite side of this essay's arguments has not been mentioned, namely men's responsibility. It has been argued that women have better capacity and understanding to represent nature in the fight against climate change. This does still not translate to that men should simply be freed of responsibility. On the contrary, this could rather signify men's responsibility to give women the floor, and encourage them to act in nature's favor, as well as their own. This will not be amplified here but is a necessary factor to mention. Climate change is, after all, a threat to all of nature, all human beings included. The severity cannot be highlighted enough, and thereby all gender's actions in the battle against it are crucial to overcome the crisis. Therefore, men's responsibility cannot be diminished or discouraged. Further philosophical reflections, as well as empirical research, could be conducted to explore the potential gender dynamic, if women were to take the floor for the climate. Social dynamics between the genders would be worth investigating in such a setting. Dismally, studies (e.g. Pease, 2016; Brough, Wilkie, Ma, Isaac, & Gal, 2016) show that men are discouraged to act or shift their behavior toward actions or fields considered feminine. Therefore, exploring this in relation to nature and climate change would be insightful for future developments.

Lastly, due to the lack of in-depth intersectional analysis of the argumentation in this paper, this gives great opportunities for future reflections. As has been demonstrated, oppressions of different marginalized groups can be seen as interrelated, such as of women and nature. Highlighting another group and its connection to nature, environmental degradation and climate change would be fascinating to look into as well. Correspondingly, analyzing if people who identify themselves with several marginalized groups have stronger interconnections to climate change. Could it be argued that a woman of color that is also a part of the LGBTQA+ community, should have more agency in nature's favor than white, straight, women? Can the same be said about a disabled man from a lower social class? Considerations as such could show alluring conclusions and can prove beneficial to reach a better understanding of the relationship between different human beings and a changing climate.

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