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# Feminist critical discourse analysis of ecopreneurship as an instrument for sustainable development: grand narratives, local stories

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## Introduction

The ways in which social entrepreneurship travels globally as a concept and practice is riddled by problematic assumptions around ‘Third-World’ women’s abilities and roles in the global economy. By demarcating the space in which particular women are legitimate entrepreneurial actors to microenterprise and social ventures, the field continues to exclude along gender lines, even if unintentionally. Such assumptions and practices can reproduce the ways in which women remain economically marginalized because of their confined legitimacy as founders and managers of ‘less than’ lucrative enterprises. (Clark Muntean and Ozkazanc-Pan 2016: 223)

Sustainability studies, aiming to analyse potentially transformative models, have taken up the study of social enterprises operating in the ecology sector, known as ecopreneurship (Santini, 2017). The widely used definition of Kirkwood and Walton (2010) defines ecopreneurs as ‘entrepreneurs who start for-profit businesses with strong underlying green values and who sell green products and services’ (2014). Given that non-profit organizations have been obliged to reduce their expectations in terms of financing social activities through taxes and to generate more self-financing of their activities, social entrepreneurship – and herewith ecopreneurship – appear to provide a new framework for non-governmental development organizations and development ‘beyond aid’ (Fowler, 2000: 637). Neoliberal values of independent, financial individual are apparently encapsulated in this approach (Wrenn 2015), linked to hegemonic masculinity (Ashe 2015). Given the increasing emphasis on the private sector within the current policy context of the Sustainable Development Goals (Cummings, Seferiadis, and de Haan, 2019), social entrepreneurship is increasingly seen as a ‘magic bullet’ to solve development challenges by ‘defying the obstacles that have prevented businesses from providing services to the poor’ (Seelos and Mair, 2005, p. 242). In this context, ecopreneurship is perceived as a policy tool for solving the complex problems of the environmental and unemployment crisis (Isaak,

2016). Ecopreneurship is used by researchers concerning ecopreneurs in different contexts, including women living in poverty (see, for example, Thamizoli et al., 2008).

The practices of ecopreneurship have often been described as particularly relevant for not only being a manner of sustainable development, but also as potentially emancipatory trajectories (Toledo, 2018). However, around the world social entrepreneurship, including ecopreneurship, largely consists women, questioning whether it is not simply another social reproduction mechanism which socializes women to give to others (Folbre, 2007). Consequently, a number of authors are applying a gendered analysis to the study of the social economy (Verschuur, Guérin, and Hillenkamp, 2015). Simultaneously, certain academic discourses on entrepreneurship have been shown to reinforce gender stereotypes (Ahl, 2003). In order to provide insights into the capacity of ecopreneurship to contribute to the lives of women in the Global South, we question whether ecopreneurship is truly transformative women's lives and hereby emancipatory from gendered discriminations.

In this chapter, we use feminist critical discourse analysis to interrogate the 'grand narrative' of ecopreneurship and examine it based on local stories of women ecopreneurs from Bangladesh, India and Ghana. After presenting how we use feminist critical discourse analysis to analyse ecopreneurship, building on Dey and Steyaert's conceptions of 'grand narratives', 'counter-narratives' and 'little narratives' (2010), we present how the ecopreneurship literature is constructing a grand narrative but also counter-narratives in particular based upon feminist scholarship. Next, building upon qualitative data collected between 2008 and 2019 in Bangladesh, India and Ghana, we analyse the little narratives of local women from the Global South. ... Finally we discussed and conclude our analysis.

The practical value of this is dual. First, the approach highlights the hidden assumptions and tensions and their effect on praxis, in particular, as discourse analysis enables us to understand power relations and their effects (Foucault, 1969). Second, it contributes to the work of feminist analyses for transformative sustainable development. This chapter is therefore useful for policymakers and practitioners in development, providing insights into local stories and how to counter inequalities through alternative discourses.

## **Feminist critical discourse analysis**

Discourse analysis is the collective name for a range of scientific methodologies for analysing how meaning is created and communicated through semiosis, comprising written, vocal or sign language. Discourse analysis is used in many disciplines in the social sciences, each with its own methodologies and assumptions. CDA is one form of discourse analysis which aims to 'understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality' (van Dijk, 2005, p. 352). CDA focuses on the dialectical relationships between discourse and other elements of social practices. According to Fairclough (2012), networks of social practices constitute a social order and 'one aspect of this ordering is dominance: some ways of making meaning are dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse, others are marginal, or oppositional, or alternative' (Fairclough 2012, p. 2).

Feminist CDA brings together CDA and feminist studies 'to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities' (Lazar 2007: 142). This is a very natural relationship as the establishment of CDA relied heavily on both gender studies and feminism, and as both are inherently critical of existing social structures. A feminist critical discourse analysis (re-)emphasizes a crucial aspect of analysing sustainable development, namely its potential for social transformation. While CDA has inherent affinity to emancipation, feminist theorizing underscores the need for all social

analyses to be about inducing change and thus sharpens CDA analyses. It demonstrates the need to go beyond critically analysing gendered inequalities and move towards prioritizing true transformation.

In this feminist CDA, we employ Dey and Steyaert's (2010) conceptions of 'grand narratives', 'counter-narratives' and 'little narratives' to analyse the literature and practice of ecopreneurship. The grand narrative represents the dominant narrative which reflects patriarchy and other hierarchies of domination. The counter narrative represents the critical, feminist narrative because feminism particularly lends itself to pluralism and diversity. While there has been much criticism of ways in which the term feminism has been employed, as a transformative analytical tool it is intersectional. At its core, feminism concerns itself with change that brings about gender equality and sees value, ownership and ability in women, all women. The only way this is possible is by including and deriving strength from the diversity that this includes: as women come from all backgrounds, all sexualities and gender identities, all classes, all ethnicities and races, all abilities and all opinions.

Dey and Steyaert (2010) employ the term 'little narratives' to consider the 'little narratives of social inventiveness' (p. 97), counteracting the grand narrative in three ways. First, little narratives make the social visible. Second, they represent communal experiments at the limit of the grand narratives where 'it becomes possible to imagine novel subject positions and new forms of being' (p. 97). Third, they demonstrate the 'prosaic, unfinalizable character' of narratives (Dey and Steyaert 2010: 98). Indeed, 'Little narratives hold potential because they can acknowledge that social endeavours "necessarily exceed our capacity to know them" (Law 2004:6)' (Dey and Steyaert 2010: 98). Although Dey and Steyaert (2010) were unable to go beyond some descriptions of potential little narratives, in the article we use descriptions of development projects in Bangladesh, India and Ghana, derived from field work undertaken by the first author since 2010. However, in order to move away from the exact binaries that feminist analyses attempt to destabilize, such as 'grand' vs 'little', we have chosen the term 'local stories'. This in the knowledge that there is nothing *grander* or more important to feminist analysis than the actual, local, lived experiences of actual women.

In this chapter, we employ transdisciplinary CDA (Fairclough 2012), amended by the authors in a series of earlier publications (Cummings et al 2018, 2019, De Haan et al 2020), amended again by incorporating Dey and Steyaert's (2010) grand narratives, counter-narratives and little narratives, and then further adapted to take a feminist perspective (see Table 1). We particularly rely on an earlier paper in which we describe the CDA research process for a non-academic audience (De Haan et al 2020). Transdisciplinary CDA traditionally comprises a four-phase research process, comprising selection of a social question that can be productively approached by a focus on semiosis; identification of obstacles to addressing the social question based on the analysis of dialectical relations between semiosis and other social elements in texts; consideration of whether the social order 'needs' the social question, namely whether it is inherent to the social order, whether it can be addressed within it or whether it can only be addressed by changing the social order; and identification of possible ways past the obstacles with a semiotic point of entry through the use of discourses, narratives and arguments. In this chapter, the methodology has been adapted to incorporate Dey and Steyaert's (2010) conceptions of grand narratives, counter narratives and local stories, making it more suited to analysis of the literature and concrete examples of ecopreneurship. Given that feminism is concerned with action and social transformation, the fourth phase is concerned with changes to practice, as well as changes to discourse, narratives and arguments, already intrinsic to CDA.

Table 1: Methodology has been adapted from CDA and narrative analysis

Critical discourse analysis	Narrative analysis	Feminist perspective	Approach in this article
Fairclough (2012), De Haan et al 2020	Dey and Steyaert (2010)		Fairclough (2012), Dey and Steyaert (2010), De Haan et al 2020
<b>Phase 1: Identification of the social question</b>			
Step 1: Selection of research topic that can be approached by focusing on text			Literature and stories of ecopreneurship
Step 2: Genealogy of past discourses	Grand narratives and counter narratives	Dominant grand narratives and feminist counter narratives	Dominant grand narratives and feminist counter narratives
<b>Phase 2: Selection and analysis of tests</b>			
Step 1: Select appropriate texts	‘Little narratives’		Creation of local stories based on field work
Step 2: Analysis of the different texts			Analysis of the different texts
Step 3: Identify discourses in the text, based on past discourses identified in Phase 1.			Identify discourses in the text, based on past discourses identified in Phase 1.
<b>Phase 3: Describe how the text was created</b>			
Describe how the text was created			Describe how the local stories were created
<b>Phase 4: Possible solutions and way forward</b>			
Possible solutions or ways past the dominant discourse in terms of creating new discourses, narratives and arguments.			Possible solutions or ways past the dominant discourse in terms of creating new discourses, narratives and arguments.
Source: Authors			
		Possible solutions or ways past the dominant discourse in terms of creating new praxis	Possible solutions or ways past the dominant discourse in terms of creating new praxis

In the next sections, we consider the grand narratives and feminist counter-narratives of ecopreneurship. This is followed by the local stories of ecopreneurship. In the discussion, we reflect on the local stories through the lens of the grand and the counter-narratives, followed by a reflection of the adequacy of the methodology.

### Grand narrative of ecopreneurs: the dominant discourse

Analysis of the academic literature on ecopreneurship based on a literature review shows how a dominant discourse is being constructed.

Ecopreneurs, a term first coined by Isaak (1998), are also known as ‘sustainopreneurs’ (Petersen and Schaltegger 2000), ‘green entrepreneurs’ and ‘enviropreneurs’ (Walley and Taylor, 2002) ‘sustainable entrepreneurs’ (Santini, 2017) and ‘ecological entrepreneurs (Rodríguez-García et al 2019). They are characterized as demonstrating ‘individual, self-driven, independent, highly motivated, environmental behaviour’ (Pichel 2008: 144). Walley and Taylor (2002) have developed a typology of four categories of ecopreneurs: innovative opportunists such as a fridge recycler, visionary champions such as a producer of natural skin and hair care products, ethical mavericks such as a craft exchange founder; and ad hoc enviropreneurs producing, for example, organic pork. Ecopreneurs are often envisioned as being in tension between profit and environmental ideals. Linnanen (2005) identifies four categories of ecopreneurs based on this tension between profit and environmental ideals, namely self-employed, non-profit business, opportunists and successful idealists. Research has also investigated the links between ecopreneurship and profitability (Porter and van der Linde, 2005). Accordingly, venture capitalists and business angels are perceiving such competitive advantage which

has led to more access to funds (O'Rourke, 2010), which has accompanied an increased consumer demand for environmentally friendly products (Laroche et al, 2001), and enables environmental marketing hereby enhancing companies reputations (Miles and Covin, 2000).

Ecopreneurs are not only innovative in terms of the products and services they develop, but also their relationship to the market or the forms of enterprises adopted. Indeed, ecopreneurs are described as 'pioneers' (Lasner and Hamm, 2011), as being as able to recognize opportunities (Keogh and Polonsky, 1998) or as 'change drivers' (Walley and Taylor, 2002) who can shape companies (Schaltegger, 2002; Kirkwood and Walton, 2010). This demonstrates the dual role that ecopreneurs are seen as fulfilling: they are considered 'eco-conscious change agents' (Pastakia, 1998) defined by both their personal motivation and their 'authenticity' (Santini, 2017), with a 'less materialistic attitude' (Phillips, 2005), they have 'responsible' business and practices and values in opposition to traditional entrepreneurship (Schaper, 2002). Not only are ecopreneurs described as value-laden but also that it is their belief set and motivations which shape firms (Walley and Taylor, 2002).

Ecopreneurs are linked to a system of incubators, accelerators, investors, non-profit organizations, NGOs (non-governmental organisations), professional associations, higher education programmes (within business schools in particular), research institutions, forums and networks. Trainings and networking opportunities are provided. Competitions enable publicity and are accompanied with prize money. Successful role models are featured in websites, invited to testify at conferences, in embassies. During 'pitch days' ecopreneurs are given the opportunity to 'sell' their idea to private companies, intermediary organizations or international institutions. Funding is provided through grants, action funds, loans. Intermediary actors promote ecopreneurship specifically or via social entrepreneurship, supported by actors from the private sector or international institutions. Such a system aims to stimulate ecopreneurship because it has ostensibly potential to solve complex problems, such as environmental problems, poverty and women's empowerment, while not requiring explicit state intervention and funding.

Ecopreneurs are also envisioned as contributing to changing the economic paradigm towards a green and sustainable economy (Pastakia, 1998). As analysed by Santini (2017) the World Business Council for Sustainable Development describes ecopreneurs as change drivers who can foster a change from business as based on resource exploitation to resource preservation (page 6). The 'visionary champion type of ecopreneur, described by Walley and Taylor (2002), is 'a champion of sustainability [who]sets out to change the world, operates at the leading edge, and has a vision of a sustainable future which has a hard, structural edge' (p. 38). In this way, the ecopreneur is portrayed as a hero (Johnsen and Sørensen, 2017). John Ogbor (2000) who applies discourse analysis to entrepreneurship shows that entrepreneurship discourse and praxis 'reinforces an expression of patriarchy by producing and reproducing entrepreneurial ideas' which gives "primacy" to values considered masculine and therefore seen as belonging to men' (page 626). The discourses develop the myth of the heroic entrepreneur, celebrating male concepts of control; competition, rationality or dominance. A study of discourses around female social entrepreneurship from a communications campaign in France shows this supposedly creates the 'superwoman', an exemplary version of individualized entrepreneurial femininity (Byrne et al, 2019):the female version of the hero.

As mentioned above, ecopreneurship is increasingly seen as a path out of poverty. For example, 'ecopreneurship is on the rise in Africa, creating local solutions to alleviate poverty and various environmental problems ailing the different countries on the continent' (Dickens 2019, unpaginated). Ecopreneurship is seen as a way of simultaneously reducing the growing waste problem, providing employment to local people, and supporting transition to a more energy intensive lifestyle without the use of fossil fuels (Dickens, 2019). Other authors demonstrate that ecopreneurship can play a role in women's empowerment in developing countries (Maas et al, 2014).

### **The feminist counter-narrative**

Discussions of ecopreneurship often describe how women are more inclined towards ecopreneurship than men (Braun, 2010). In fact, Rodgers (2008) coined the specific name 'shecopreneurship' to describe women ecopreneurs. Researchers have given many different reasons for this supposed affinity, namely that women are close to nature and social inclined, the gendered division of labour, lack of a business mindset, and super woman as the new *homo economicus*. This section analyses counter-narratives from feminist scholarship.

#### *Close to nature*

First, some have concluded that women express higher levels of concern towards the environment (Zelezny et al, 2000; Davidson and Freudenberg, 1996). Braun (2010) links it with women having a 'stronger ethics of care' (using the concept of Chodorow, 1974). Another study on women and ecopreneurship states that women's roles come from 'their intimacy with nature' and that they have a 'natural inclination towards the environment' (Potluri and Phani, 2019), with the authors drawing from previous research which showed that women are 'spiritually close to nature' (Tollefsen, 2011). However, these results are based upon discourses, without data on practices.

We can here see discourses which essentialise women's role in ecopreneurship build on the nature-culture dichotomy associated with femininity and masculinity. This can be linked to how ecofeminist thinkers and activists relate the domination and oppression of women with the domination and oppression of nature and link environment degradation with patriarchy (Mies et Shiva, 1993). It should be noted, however, that because of the underlining ideas linking women with nature, ecofeminism can still be perceived as a form of essentialism. Critics stress that ecofeminism can restrict women to the natural world, reinforcing patriarchy's dichotomy of men and culture as opposed to women and nature (Davion, 1994).

#### *Socially minded*

Second, others, such as Huysentruyt (2014), consider that there is a smaller gender gap in social entrepreneurship when compared to traditional commercial entrepreneurship because women have a higher level of altruism and stronger preference for redistribution, concluding that women are more socially-minded and more averse to competition. These traits, identified by Huysentruyt (2014), are consistent with 'symbolic maternity' (Muel-Dreyfus, 1996) which characterizes women's work across cultures and throughout history, reinforcing gender subordination. Other commentators have likewise argued that women 'have a natural inclination to create organizations with social goals and intentions in mind' (Lortie et al, 2017, page ). Lortie and colleagues (2017) collected survey data collected from 150 enterprises, showing that gender positively influences social salience which is measured as: establishment of social goals, fulfilment of social needs, helping people other than customers, and using resources for socially-oriented purposes. Indeed, it appears that women are overrepresented in all forms of the social economy, possibly sending women back to the realms of social reproduction or sacrifice for the well-being of their family.

This demonstrates what Susan Clark Muntean and Banu Ozkazanc-Pan (2016) detailed when analysing social entrepreneurship through several feminist perspectives, namely that the term social entrepreneurship is subject to complex gender connotations: if the term 'entrepreneur' is associated with the masculine (heroic, ambitious, courageous, strong, enterprising), the term 'social' denotes a female commitment (concerns related to exclusion, marginalization, suffering, and creative activities, related to empathy). Eleanor Hamilton (2014) applies discourse and gender analysis to entrepreneurship and shows that despite a dominant discourse on male entrepreneurship, identities are 'are more fractured, open and contested than a categorization into masculine or feminine does not allow it' (page 707), identities are indeed both contested and legitimized. Eleanor Hamilton explains

that ‘individuals define themselves in relation to each other and to the broader discourses available to them’ (Hamilton, 2014, page 707). As others have put forward, this shows how discourses produced by researchers reinforce gender stereotypes whereas it could be expected for researchers not to reproduce the domination of women through the production of knowledge, but to show diversity (Clark Muntean and Ozkazanc-Pan, 2016).

#### *Gendered division of labour*

Helene Ahl (2002) also shows that research discourses on entrepreneurship reinforce gender stereotypes regarding masculine forms of work and feminine forms of work. Not only is the concept of the entrepreneur constructed in a masculine way, but it also involves gender discrimination and, in particular, a gendered division of labour. In this division of labour, the entrepreneur is described as voluntary, determined, persistent, resolute, detached and self-centred, supposing that a woman performs unpaid and reproductive work associated with the private sphere.

This also raises questions of the appropriate indicators to measure social entrepreneurship and/or ecopreneurship. Indeed, as we have mentioned earlier, most tools use a monetarization approach to attribute value to social or environmental impact. Taking the example of domestic work, Jany-Catrice and Meda (2013) also point out that monetarization does not automatically make it possible to improve women’s condition by giving value to their domestic activities, that the source of value is not in the work value but in the process of exchange, and that the approach neglects the affective and relational character.

In addition to reproducing gender stereotypes on types of work, Janice Byrne, Salma Fattoum and Maria Cristina Diaz Garcia (2019) show that the ‘role models’ of women entrepreneurs mask racial, social class and gender barriers, and standardize discriminatory treatment in the workplace. From this perspective, entrepreneurship is described as an appropriate alternative for working mothers as it allows them more apparent flexibility. As Susan Clark Muntean and Banu Ozkazanc-Pan (2016) explain, the flexibility of self-employment provided with social entrepreneurship, in contrast to paid employment, can create an additional burden for women who will earn less money and assume a larger share of traditional family responsibilities, thus reinforcing the sexual division of domestic work. Social entrepreneurship thus seems to constitute spaces where gender roles are reproduced rather than spaces of celebration where individuals engage in social innovations that change the world. In addition, in the social entrepreneurship sector, women are engaging in their business for their community. As the works of Blandine Destremau (2013) show, it is thus an additional exploitation of women that takes place through their involvement in development projects.

#### *Not business-minded*

Researchers also explain the connection between ecopreneurship and women by suggesting that women lack self-confidence, start small and stay small, or avoid innovation. As Helene Ahl’s work shows (2015) discourses on social entrepreneurship can limit women to ‘entrepreneurial ghettos’, to use the term of Donald Bowen and Robert Hisrich (1986). This ghettoization of women can also be linked to the ‘threat of stereotype’ (Steel and Aronson, 1995): stereotypes can be sources of anxiety which weakens performance. Women remain economically marginalized because of their confined legitimacy as founders and managers of ‘less than’ lucrative businesses (Clark Muntean and Ozkazanc-Pan, 2016, page 223).

## **Local stories**

Based upon field research conducted by the first author between 2008 and 2019 in Bangladesh (18 months field work), India (3 weeks field work) and Ghana (6 weeks field work), are analysed to provide local stories of women.

### *Seeds exchange in rural Bangladesh*

The first story concerns the NGO, Pride, based in Jessore, Bangladesh. Pride is a local NGO that aims to empower farmers in rural areas through sustainable development practices. It is an NGO that describes itself as a learning organization that has institutionalized the participatory methodologies of action research, thus making it possible to involve local populations (Chambers, 1994). The research focused on a project involving income generating activities which targets isolated villages that are not connected to the main roads, that are not accessible by bus, without shops in the villages, and where no other NGO is active. These villages are also selected by the NGO according to criteria of poverty. Thus, the villages included have more than 70% of the inhabitants who live with an average daily wage of 80 Takas (about 1 Euro per day). These villages are also characterized by a high population density (more than 650 inhabitants per square kilometre) and thus subject to strong pressure on natural resources. Gradually, the project focused on ways to alleviate women's poverty as women expressed an interest to participate, unlike men who said that they did not have free time to start something new.

Based on participatory processes, trainings organized by the NGO aimed to facilitate exchange and co-creation of knowledge, while also raising awareness on various issues holding women in poverty. The women in the project have progressively engaged in different income-generating activities, managing with what is at hand according to the “bricolage” principle of entrepreneurs, using untapped or underutilized resources. Thus, their activities include market gardening and fruit growing by exploiting (small) free spaces (constructing pergolas above ponds for example), rearing poultry in the backyard, fish farming in small ponds, or embroidery and sewing. Women entrepreneurs benefit not only on their own behalf (producing goods or earning money) but are also training their neighbours in these income-generating activities, sharing their knowledge and skills, as well as stimulating spaces for participatory learning between women. In addition, these women help each other in their respective activities. For example, they help each other to prepare the soil of their garden. These women entrepreneurs have developed a mode of economic action corresponding to social entrepreneurship.

Women reported they have access to more resources, especially that their families eat better in quantity and diversity. Not only are goods now produced for self-consumption (for example, vegetables, eggs and fish), but also the sale of products increases the money available at the household level (the average income of these activities is multiplied by 10 after one year in the project, according to a longitudinal study of 26 women). The women also report being now empowered, with increased participation in decision-making in their family. Each trained woman (social entrepreneur) has an average of about 100 beneficiaries (according to NGO figures). By 2013, PRIDE had trained a total of 136 women in 136 different villages.

Women's describe their exchanges as “gifts”, gifts which are then returned. They clearly express that they invest in their social fabric: if they help, they will be helped, reciprocity will be enacted. Women also express a duty to help others, a responsibility. They have gained the capacity to help their community, so they must be doing so. They also are talking about gains in status, a strengthened recognition from their community, which result into more support and more access to resources, including to justice as women are now invited in the *Shalish* meetings, namely a semi-formal conflict resolution structure at the village level which generally excludes the poorest and women.

### *Solar engineers trained in India*

The second story considers the Barefoot College, based in Tilonia, Rajasthan, India. One of its projects is the Solar Mamma project which supports women to bring sustainable electricity to remote, inaccessible villages. As it says on their website, ‘solar energy provides electricity and reduces carbon emissions, but we also see it as a catalyst to create employment, boost income and provide self-reliant solutions for village communities.’

Illiterate or semi-literate women are selected from developing countries in Asia, Africa, America and the Pacific Island, together with a partner organization at the grassroots. They are trained in rural Rajasthan for six months to be able to build, install, maintain and repair solar panels and other solar technologies. In doing so, the technology is demystified according to Solar Barefoot staff. The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation, a division of the Ministry of External Affairs, funds training in Rajasthan. The equipment is paid for by the trainee’s community, its government but also grassroot partners. Before women embark in this six months’ training, they reach an agreement with their communities that the community will provide the so-called ‘Solar Mama’ with a small salary for maintenance of the solar technologies when they return home.

During their stay in India, they build together the material to electrify 80 houses, material that will be shipped when they return from India. While the women are in Rajasthan, the opportunity is taken to also complement their training with the Enriche Programme which as mentioned on their website which ‘supports women’s aspiration to transform themselves and their communities. It provides them with the opportunity to embark on an empowerment journey; a journey to gain the confidence, skills and knowledge they need to reach their full potential as agents of sustainable change and to support their entrepreneurial aspirations.’ Through discussions, but also making use of several tools such as drawing, women can discuss together gender-related topics.

In this project, women can be described as ecopreneurs. Unlike Pride where women were the ones developing an innovative manner of performing their exchanges, here women follow a path. The entrepreneurial idea of the Solar Mamas does not come from them, but they do engage in innovative paths. Such a path is taking them abroad to learning about a technology normally associated with lengthy education and more associated with male skills. In addition, when they return home, they are provided with a small allowance.

In this story, women talked about sacrifice; the sacrifice to be far away from their families for six months in a country where neither the food, language or climate are familiar, although the sacrifice is worth it. As one woman explained: “It is like they put us in a very narrow pipeline so we can learn, but when we get out, we will learn something that is worth it” because they will then be able to provide their community with most needed electricity. I talked to these women while they were still in Rajasthan, being trained for over four months, and they did not talk to about earning an income from this activity when they get back to their village, although a small salary has been negotiated in advance with each community. Instead, what was prevalent in their narratives was their “responsibility” towards their community.

### *Winners of a social entrepreneurship programme in Ghana*

The third story concerns ecopreneurs who participated in a social entrepreneurship competition in Ghana. These enterprises are led by young, university educated Ghanaians. They have won a prize, are featured in websites, have been interviewed by the press, and have been invited to present their enterprise at conferences in schools and in embassies. The women’s enterprises are very different: some are about using abundant and underutilized resources that can be picked, it is innovative economic exchanges such as barter, or building upon other economic programmes such as rotating credit schemes, it can include technologies such as solar panels but in partnerships with companies.

The women interviewed explained how they discovered untapped opportunities, but also how difficult it is to make profits. Some enterprises have never started, others are 'on hold' with many ecopreneurs employed in companies or in the development sector to earn an income. The women were also worried about engaging in partnership, to sell their idea, and have the beneficiaries not protected, the 'vision not understood', the 'impact not a priority'. It is also women who express they want to change the narratives on women in development in Africa. For example, one interviewee said: 'I work with women in rural areas. It sounds cliché, as if every woman works with the empowerment of women. And people put you aside'. She, therefore, explains that she is being restricted to a certain area where her activities have a perceived legitimacy.

## Discussion

The grand narratives illustrate ecopreneurship to be a development strategy whose objectives and considerations fit the neoliberal understanding of the world perfectly. They see the global economy as a meritocracy where all you require is to be *homo economicus*. Helene Ahl (2002) shows that the discourses of entrepreneurship, which construct the concept as something positive, associated with innovation, growth and development, are part of the great narrative of modernity where development is 'progress'. Development, thus, becomes the process where a person goes through an incubator, becomes economically awakened, can suddenly reap the benefits of the system while simultaneously receiving the responsibility to maintain it and, finally, is asked to either demonstrate this or at least affirm it. Dey and Steyaert (2010) show how such narratives on social entrepreneurship have in common utopian rhetoric and an emphasis on novelty. These narratives often contain a founding plot which legitimizes a necessary break with the past, as well as a discourse on performativity, rationalism, progress, individualism; all terms which are associated with masculinity. This not only generates a depoliticization of social change, the exact opposite of feminist transformations, but also either disregards gender or sees 'superwomen' as masculinized women who take on neoliberal, male characteristics to succeed in the global economy.

The definition of ecopreneurship in the grand narrative, focusing on individual, self-driven, independent, highly motivated, environmental behaviours, does not appear to be consistent with the experience of female ecopreneurs in the local stories. Indeed, our local stories show women innovating more in the types of exchanges or seizing opportunities rather than innovating novel sustainability ideas. The women are not heroic in terms of the *homo economicus* but rather in their struggles to improve their own and their communities' lives. Indeed, this community aspect, mentioned in the Bangladeshi and India stories, appears to be largely missing in the grand narratives which are very much focused on the role of the individual entrepreneur. Feminist counter-discourses resist gender stereotyping which describe women as close to nature, socially inclined, assigned to a specific division of labour, not business minded, or as 'superwoman' who adopt the *homo economicus* stereotypes. And although feminist discourses provide criticism, this does not prevent women from being restricted to entrepreneurial ghettos without profits, which correspond to our local stories which show women making little or no profit and, instead, putting forward their own ideas of responsibility.

The local stories show how women carefully re-craft social relations, how these social relations contribute by conferring a higher status and hence symbolic capital to activities of care, both social care and environmental care. As these stories show, women are not heroes who break from the dominant pattern, instead they act within social frames and norms to strengthen interdependent ties within communities and with the environment. Feminist research needs to evaluate how responsibility towards the social and the environment can be enacted upon as a shared and emancipatory responsibility so that neither women nor nature are exploited.

Dey and Steyaert (2010) highlight the need to break free from the grand narratives and to focus on the 'little narratives' to explore the ambivalences and paradoxes of ecopreneurship. These little narratives, which we labelled local stories, helped us to make visible the power games and social hierarchies behind ecopreneurship. For Fowler (2000), social entrepreneurs - and implicitly ecopreneurs - are located within the market. For this reason, he questions whether 'civic innovators', actors emphasizing popular engagement rather than business, can be successful within the market because they are not necessarily looking for market-led solutions and are looking for social solutions. For this reason, if promoted, feminist counter discourses and the discourses evident in the local stories could be used to find different types of solutions for sustainability.

## **Conclusions**

In the context of the trinity of women, the environment and sustainable development, it is necessary to engage with hierarchical and dominating structures, including patriarchy, capitalism, racism and classism. As we have shown, ecopreneurship cannot be considered an approach to development which confronts these power relations. The easy equation of women and nature, the small scale, the reliance on neoliberal conceptions of people, and the focus on caring all reify these structures. That, however, is not to say that the women in the local stories we have shared do this. In fact, in the face of all the remaking that ecopreneurship does, they have found, created and broken open spaces for themselves. Thus, if any approach to sustainable development, focused on women and/or the environment, is to be truly transformative in the way that feminism intends, it will need to learn from the tactics, skills and originality women have had to develop to create these spaces. It is here where we can identify transformative, feminist action and it is with these stories and approaches in mind that the grand narrative needs to be addressed. Feminism is always wholly active and wholly theoretical, making it the perfect example of praxis. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the most perfect example of an alternative feminist discourse we can locate within ecopreneurship of feminism, is in the way individual women conduct themselves in their situations.

This chapter sheds light upon examples of 'little narratives' by analyzing stories of local women in the Global South. However, this work remains limited and does not account for the plurality of how women across contexts innovate. To further an understanding of how ecopreneurship can be a transformative mode of action, it is therefore more data as well as context-based analysis of local women appropriation stories are needed.

Despite the manner in which the individualisation of ecopreneurship feeds the existing discourses in structures, it does allow space for the local feminist interventions of women by countering the 'one-size-fits-all' rhetoric. Ecopreneurship, though largely based on non-feminist rationales, does act as a counter weight to more macro-economic approaches to women's economic engagements. By focusing on this aspect of ecopreneurship, it is possible to see how localized, alternative discourses are given space to be enacted. This still requires women to innovate these forms of resistance and still places the larger care burden on women, but the lack of strict mould mean there is at least some room for manoeuvre. In these different spaces, a myriad of different approaches has been developed and it is this plurality that needs to be fostered to provide space for alternative, feminist discourses; an example of the plurality that feminism is inherently comfortable with.

For ecopreneurship, as a novel mode of economic action, to generate transformative change that breaks from the exploitation of nature and of women and to become an example of ecofeminism (Agarwal, 2007), there needs to be critical analysis the centrality of caring ties and non-hierarchical relations. If the social economy field can give value and primacy to reciprocal exchanges (Guérin, 2003), it is these types of ties that need to be analysed with a non-compromising feminist perspective.

If there is to be value in caring for one another and nature, this ought to be conceived in a non-hierarchical manner to transform power relations.

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