

GENDERED ANALYTICS TO ENERGY INTERPRETATION IN THE GLOBAL NORTH

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Abstract

Energy transitions in the Global North are often construed as neutral technological progress. However, they are shown to be deeply constructed by gendered power relations that determine whose knowledge, labor, and interests are valued. This study examined how gender is programmed within energy interpretation in policy, discourse, and practice and how these influence global energy engagements that affect the Global South. How gender analytics can redefine the understanding of energy governance and equity became a major objective of the study. To achieve this, Feminist Political Ecology and Postcolonial Energy Studies, were the theoretical frameworks adopted. On the methodology angle, the study combined discourse analysis, policy review, and semi-structured expert interviews in selected Northern countries. Findings revealed that energy discourses often deploy masculinity in expertise and makes nonexistent, care-based or community-centered forms of energy interpretation. This gendered programming reintroduces inequalities, even within sustainability energy transitions. The study concluded that without gender-responsive frameworks, global energy systems may reproduce patriarchal and colonial mode of thinking. It therefore, recommended an integration of gendered analytics into energy policy to recognize relational knowledge, redistribute power, and promote equitable, inclusive transitions across global settings.

Keywords: Gendered energy systems, feminist political ecology, Global North, energy justice, postcolonial analysis.

Introduction

Energy is not merely a technical or economic matter but a social, political, and deeply gendered field of meaning. Across the Global North, energy transitions are celebrated as symbols of progress and innovation. But beneath this narrative lies a complex web of gendered power relations that informs how energy is interpreted, managed, and distributed. The discourse around renewable energy,

decarbonization, and sustainability often assumes neutrality, presenting transition as a universal good. However, such neutrality hides the patriarchal, racial, and colonial logics that continue to define energy systems and their global influence.

Feminist and postcolonial scholarship reveals that the Global North's energy postulates are not isolated policy framing but ideological constructions that define what counts as energy knowledge, whose labor is visible, and whose well-being matters. For instance, feminist political ecology has shown that the masculine posture of energy as control and mastery captures a technocratic worldview, while care-based and relational forms of energy work often performed by women are undervalued or ignored. Postcolonial energy studies also hold the view that Northern discourses of transition sustain global hierarchies by positioning the South as a site of resource extraction or policy imitation rather than epistemic contribution.

This study examines how gender is *programmed* into the interpretation of energy in the Global North and how these interpretations influence global energy inclinations that affect the Global South. It investigates how gendered assumptions are entrenched in energy discourses, technologies, and governance, drawing attention to the moral and epistemic vocabularies that define energy justice. This will objectively interrogate the idea that the Global North offers a universally just energy future. It shall also argue that without gendered and decolonial analytics, the global energy transition may become a new form of colonial and patriarchal dominance that is unchanged in essence.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives that the study seeks to achieve are to:

- i. **Identify** the gendered assumptions, values, and power relations that underpin energy interpretation and governance frameworks in the Global North.
- ii. **Analyze** the ways in which the Global North's energy narratives challenge existing patriarchal and colonial hierarchies.
- iii. **Investigate** how gendered and postcolonial energy interpretations circulate globally, shaping the design and direction of energy transition models in the Global South.

Research Questions

- i. In what ways do gendered assumptions and values shape how energy policies, institutions, and technologies are framed and implemented in the Global North?
- ii. What forms of energy knowledge and labor are rendered visible or invisible through gendered interpretations of energy governance?
- iii. How the gendered epistemologies do embedded in Northern energy frameworks influence or determine the energy narratives and policies adopted in the Global South?

Statement of the Problem

The discourse on energy transition in the Global North is often presented as technologically neutral and universally progressive. Despite the widespread rhetoric of inclusivity and sustainability, energy transition policies thrive by masculine narrative. As a result, the moral and political language of energy justice continues to benefit certain voices while silencing others, particularly those of women, indigenous communities, and marginalized groups both within and beyond the North. This epistemic marginalization is mirrored in policy design as Tornel and Dunlap (2025 p.3) argue that mainstream energy transitions, though framed as green and just, are “anchored in Euro-modernist

ideas of development” that exclude anti-colonial or gender-diverse imaginaries. This does not only reproduce economic dependency but also reasserts epistemic dominance, as the North remains the definer of what constitutes sustainable transition.

Literature Review

Scholars like Sharma *et al.* (2025) disclose that inclusion and diversity policies in renewable energy organizations often function as rhetorical promises rather than transformative commitments. They argue that, while institutions adopt gender-mainstreaming language, they continue to operate within technocratic hierarchies that reproduce masculine norms of efficiency, expertise, and innovation; this show that gender is not just about representation but about the epistemic boundaries that define who counts as an energy actor. Caretta and Vela-Almeida (2025) conducted a systematic review of gender-focused research in energy transitions and found that most studies focus on women's participation rather than on the structures of domination that shape energy knowledge.

The argument aligns with feminist political ecology (FPE), which posits that environmental and technological systems are inherently political and gendered, not external to social relations. Kintzi (2025 p.45) extends this thinking through what she calls the “relational scales of power” in energy transitions. Her study in *Environment and Planning* shows that global energy policies often puts the male gender at an advantage, particularly in the Global North, where technical and financial narratives dominate. These narratives marginalize community-based and care-oriented energy practices activities typically feminized or considered informal. These studies challenge the assumption that gender equality can be achieved merely by counting women in the workforce or in policy boards. Instead, they demand a rethinking of what constitutes energy knowledge itself.

Kalaskar and Haldar (2024p.82) added that global energy scholarship tends to “co-opt justice frameworks into existing systems rather than reimagining them”. Their longitudinal analysis shows that the language of “just transition” is often diluted when translated into policy, an outcome that reflects the dynamics of feminism in development discourse. Oguz and Goodale (2024 p.209) puts it that, the transition is framed as a moral project that “constructs a world where control over energy becomes synonymous with moral virtue”. This moral vocabulary naturalizes hierarchies of expertise and marginalizes relational ethics like care and reciprocity. It also frames the Global North as a moral leader in the global energy future, making clear the idea that others must follow its path, thinking with distinctly colonial undertones.

Recent feminist interventions in energy studies have sought to redefine *justice* in energy transitions through ethics of care, social reproduction, and relational interdependence. Götzmann and Dicalou (2025) advance a *feminist energy justice framework* that expands the concept of justice beyond fairness in resource distribution. They argue that a truly equitable energy transition must recognize the unpaid, affective, and relational labour that sustains energy life. This focus on care directly challenges the dominant economic models of energy governance, which treat energy as a commodity rather than a social relation. This perspective is particularly significant for the Global North, where energy policy is typically framed in abstract, technical, or economic terms, leaving out its human and emotional dimensions.

Chipango (2025), faulted Western feminist frameworks for failing to account for African epistemologies proposing that “Ubuntu feminism” as an alternative lens for understanding energy transitions, emphasizes interdependence, community, and relational ethics. This argument is crucial not just for African contexts but also for critiquing how Northern gender analytics are universalized

globally. Tornel (2023) also argues that energy justice cannot be achieved without addressing its ontological assumptions. His political ecology approach shows that the energy transition discourse is deeply entangled with colonial rationalities that attribute mastery over nature. Tornel's notion of ontological pluralism which means acknowledging multiple ways of knowing and being in relation to energy provides a philosophical anchor for feminist political ecology.

Madureira Teles (2024) also analyzes Brazil's energy transition through a gender-based lens, finding that policies still marginalize women's lived experiences. She argues that achieving gender-just transitions requires integrating recognition, procedural, and distributional forms of justice. Her work bridges North-South dynamics by showing that even in the Global South, energy policies often imitate Northern technocratic models that overlook gendered realities. Nair (2025 p.578) in the same vein offers one of the clearest examples of this synthesis. Her analysis of the International Labour Organisation's *Just Transition* framework shows that its concept of justice is grounded in Eurocentric, masculinized notions of work and progress. To her, "Justice cannot be achieved when its epistemic foundations remain colonial,".

Mejía-Montero (2025) explores how Latin American energy movements integrate feminist and decolonial perspectives to resist the replication of Northern models. He shows that energy justice in the region is increasingly being defined around lived experience, affective relations, and environmental care rather than abstract distributive principles. This shift represents a growing Southern contribution to rethinking energy ethics, aligning with Tornel's call for ontological diversity. Kintzi (2025) and Kalaskar and Haldar (2024) offer complementary perspectives by examining how Northern discourses maintain epistemic dominance. Kintzi's analysis of "relational scales" reveals that Northern institutions construct global transitions through expertise and control, whereas local and feminist knowledge are construed as "contextual" or "non-scientific". Kalaskar and Haldar's meta-analysis confirms that this asymmetry is reproduced in academic research itself with feminist and postcolonial voices remaining underrepresented in major energy journals. Their observation underscores why the integration of gendered analytics is not only a political but also a scholarly imperative.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) and Postcolonial Energy Studies (PES). These frameworks illuminate how energy transitions, often celebrated as universally beneficial, are in fact grounded within historical structures of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalist modernity. Feminist Political Ecology emerged in the 1990s as an expansion of political ecology, introducing gender as a key dimension in the analysis of environmental and resource systems. It explores how gender, class, and power influence access to and control over environmental resources, knowledge, and decision-making. Recent developments, however, extend beyond participation to examine how *gendered epistemologies* underpin environmental governance. In this sense, FPE moves from a focus on women's inclusion to a critique of the very ways in which nature, labor, and expertise are gendered within capitalist and technocratic systems.

Postcolonial Energy Studies, though a more recent development, builds upon postcolonial theory and critical political ecology to interrogate the global inequalities seen in energy production, distribution, and interpretation. It challenges the dominant assumption that the Global North leads the world toward sustainable futures while the Global South lags behind. Instead, PES reveals how Northern models of "clean energy" are often sustained through the extraction of materials, data, and labor from the South a continuation of colonial dependency under a new, green guise. Tornel (2023 p.46) captures this dynamic when he describes the North's energy discourse as "a moral geography

that justifies its dominance through claims of sustainability”.

Methodology

Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretivist research design, reflecting its concern with understanding how gender is situated and programmed within energy interpretation in the Global North. The interpretiveist model assumes that knowledge is socially constructed, situated, and context-dependent rather than objective or universal (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This aligns with the study's theoretical grounding in Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) and Postcolonial Energy Studies (PES). The qualitative approach allows for a distinct exploration of language, meaning, and interpretation within energy discourses. It is particularly suitable for examining how gender and coloniality operate through symbolic and institutional processes rather than through quantifiable variables.

Interpretivism, as employed in this study, is also linked to a decolonial commitment which acknowledges that knowledge production itself is a political act that must question whose experiences and epistemologies are centered. Tuhiwai Smith (2021) emphasizes that, research in postcolonial contexts requires constant reflection on how inquiry may reproduce or resist existing hierarchies of power and knowledge. This awareness underpins the study's approach to interpreting energy narratives in the Global North while remaining attentive to their global implications.

Methodological Framework

The study employs a **qualitative strategy** combining three primary approaches:

- 1. Critical Discourse Analysis,**
- 2. Policy Review, and**
- 3. Semi-Structured Expert Interviews.**

Each method contributes to uncovering the relational and gendered structures embedded in energy interpretation and policy frameworks.

1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): This was used to examine how energy transition narratives are linguistically and ideologically constructed. It focuses on the underlying power relations, metaphors, and silences in policy texts and institutional documents. Energy discourse in the Global North often presents itself as neutral and technocratic, but CDA reveal how such language encodes gendered hierarchies and colonial moralities. Policies, speeches, and official reports forms the primary discourse corpus. Analysis will pay particular attention to recurring terms such as “innovation,” “leadership,” “justice,” and “efficiency,” as these are often used to legitimize Northern moral authority in energy transitions.

2. Policy Review: The policy review complements discourse analysis by examining how institutions translate gender and justice rhetoric into practice. It involves analyzing the gender dimensions of major energy and climate policies, identifying whether gender is treated as a participatory concern or as a transformative category that challenges structural inequality.

3. Semi-Structured Expert Interviews: To supplement textual and policy data, approximately fifteen semi-structured interviews conducted with experts across the Global North were extracted.

Participants included policymakers, gender and energy researchers, and advocates from international organizations. The interviews explored participants' perceptions of how gender is integrated into energy transition narratives and how these ideas circulate globally.

Sampling and Data Sources

The study uses **purposive sampling** to ensure that selected documents and participants are directly relevant to the research questions.

- i. **Policy documents** are chosen from 2018–2025 to capture recent developments in energy transition policy.
- ii. **Interview participants** are selected based on professional involvement with energy policy, gender advocacy, or research on justice and transition.

This non-random, purposive strategy is justified by the study's interpretive and critical orientation, which seeks depth of understanding rather than generalizability. Creswell and Poth (2018) note that, purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative research where the aim is to select information-rich cases” that illuminate the phenomenon under study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in three iterative stages:

1. **Textual and Discursive Coding:** Identifying recurring concepts, phrases, and rhetorical structures in policy and discourse materials.
2. **Thematic Clustering:** Grouping patterns into themes such as *technocratic masculinities*, *care and invisibility*, and *epistemic authority*.
3. **Interpretive Synthesis:** Integrating textual findings with interview insights to understand how gendered narratives shape broader moral and epistemic orders in energy interpretation.

Throughout the analysis, reflexivity and interpretive transparency were maintained, as emphasized by Olmos-Vega *et al.* (2022). This means continuously reflecting on how the researcher's assumptions, values, and positionality influence interpretation.

Reflexivity and Positionality

Reflexivity is a central ethical and methodological principle in this study. England (1994 p.82) argues that, the researcher is “a part of, not apart from, the world” they study. This awareness guides how findings are interpreted and presented. The researcher's position as a scholar from the Global South studying the Global North is acknowledged not as a bias but as a standpoint that provides critical distance from Eurocentric assumptions. Reflexivity also requires awareness of power relations between researcher and participants. Interviews are conducted respectfully and collaboratively, with participants given the opportunity to review and clarify their contributions where necessary. This process helps to balance authority in knowledge production and ensures that the analysis remains dialogical rather than extractive.

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to institutional ethical guidelines for qualitative research. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants before interviews. They will be informed of the purpose of the study, how data will be used, and their right to withdraw at any point. Data will be anonymized and stored securely. Beyond procedural ethics, the research also observes epistemic ethics, as

emphasized by Tuhiwai Smith (2021), which calls for accountability in how knowledge is represented and whose voices are amplified. The analysis avoids portraying the Global South as a passive subject of Northern energy influence and instead situates the South as a site of epistemic resistance and insight.

Findings and Discussions

The findings from the discourse analysis, policy review, and interviews reveal that gendered and colonial logics remain deeply rooted in how energy transitions are conceptualized, governed, and morally justified in the Global North. Although inclusivity and justice appear prominently in official narratives, closer examination exposes persistent hierarchies in both language and institutional practice. Three key themes that emerge are for discussion: (1) gendered epistemics in Northern energy transitions, (2) colonial continuities in the moral language of green justice, and (3) the emergence of feminist and decolonial alternatives that challenge mainstream frameworks.

Gendered Epistemics in Northern Energy Transitions

Major energy policy documents analyzed such as the European Green Deal, Canada's *2030 Emissions Reduction Plan*, and the UK's *Net Zero Strategy* holds gender as a question of representation rather than a question of epistemic transformation. The discourse projects a masculinity of expertise centered on efficiency, technological mastery, and leadership. Women are included as actors who “participate” in the transition but not as epistemic agents whose experiences or relational understandings might redefine the transition itself.

This position co-relates with Caretta and Vela-Almeida (2025), who found that gender studies in energy transitions emphasize participation metrics, while neglecting power asymmetries and structural exclusion. Their work shows that the majority of gender-focused energy studies in the Global North reduce justice to equality of access which rarely engages with how gendered norms shape what counts as legitimate energy knowledge. The present study's findings corroborate this, showing that “gender inclusion” is often instrumentalized to projecting technocratic legitimacy rather than to challenge it.

Again, Elmhirst and Resurrección (2025) capture what they call the “coloniality of gender expertise” which is the tendency of global energy and development institutions to universalize Northern feminist logics as globally valid. This was reflected in several interview responses from Northern policy professionals who described gender mainstreaming as a “technical toolkit” rather than a relational or political process. Their language of “empowering women through participation” reproduces a managerial discourse that situates gender equity within productivity and innovation rather than systemic.

Interestingly, feminist and intersectional discourses are being cited in official Northern models, but their integration often depoliticizes the concept of justice. For instance, terms such as “inclusive innovation” or “gender-responsive transition” appear frequently, with the underlying structures of authority remaining unchanged. One European respondent observed that, “It is easier to add gender indicators than to question who sets the energy agenda.” This reflects an epistemic asymmetry of inclusion without transformation which is central to the gendered programming of energy interpretation in the Global North.

Colonial Continuities in the Moral Language of Green Justice

A second major finding concerns the colonial undertones of Northern energy narratives. Despite claims of global solidarity and sustainable cooperation, the discourse of the “just transition” is often

entangled with geopolitical self-positioning, where the Global North is portrayed as a moral leader guiding others toward sustainable futures. Küçük and Türkeş-Kılıç (2025) argue that the European Green Deal embodies this posture by casting Europe as “the leader, the competitor, and the protector” with roles that perpetuate neo-colonial hierarchies under the guise of environmental stewardship.

The European Union's situating of its climate leadership repeatedly emphasizes its responsibility to “export” good practices and “assist” developing regions, while ignoring the structural inequalities that enable its energy transition including the extraction of lithium, cobalt, and nickel from the Global South. In the interviews, one respondent from a Northern think tank remarked that, “We must help others reach our level of green innovation,” revealing the paternalism that underpins Northern environmental morality.

Franz (2025) argues against how global discourses of transition rely on the same colonial infrastructures they claim to replace. His analysis of decolonial feminist practices in Colombia shows that Northern energy interventions continue to raise economic growth over ecological and social repair. This mirrors findings from Ramirez, Vélez-Zapata, and Maher (2024), who describe “green colonialism” in Latin America, where women's local resistances reveal the contradictions of imported energy models that claim to be just but remain extractive in practice.

The same thinking manifests discursively in Northern energy documents, where the moral vocabulary of justice (“leadership,” “responsibility,” “innovation”) serves to maintain Northern epistemic dominance. Tornel (2023) describes this as the “moral geography” of energy transition, a discursive geography that positions the North as the ethical center of global sustainability. Evidence from this study supports his claim: by examining the narratives of responsibility in policy texts, as it becomes clear that moral superiority, not reciprocity, defines North–South energy relations. Thus, colonial continuities persist not through overt exploitation but through the value-based approach of sustainability, which enables the North to claim global virtue while benefiting from asymmetrical flows of resources, data, and legitimacy.

Emergent Feminist and Decolonial Alternatives

In the face of these deep-rooted hierarchies, the data also reveal emerging frameworks that challenge the dominant logics of gendered and colonial energy interpretation. These alternatives appear in both policy discourse and activist scholarship, emphasizing care, relationality, and epistemic justice over efficiency and growth. Götzmann and Dicalou (2025) proposed a “feminist energy justice framework” that integrates recognition, redistribution, and representation within energy governance. Their approach resonates with findings from several interviewees, especially gender experts working in Scandinavian contexts, who argued that energy justice must be redefined through ethics of care and interdependence. Such perspectives move beyond inclusion to question the moral foundations of transition narratives, centering empathy, reciprocity, and environmental healing as energy principles.

Franz (2025) and Tornel (2023) both emphasize community-led transitions rooted in local ecological knowledge, showing that just transitions are only possible when communities reclaim the right to define what “energy” means. This was echoed in interview data from two policy advocates working with Indigenous groups in Canada, who described relational energy as “a process of coexistence, not control.” These emerging perspectives suggest a shift toward what some scholars term a “pluriversal transition” which is one that accommodates multiple ontologies of

energy, rather than a single Eurocentric model.

The integration of feminist political ecology and postcolonial perspectives also reveals new conceptual bridges between care ethics and decolonial argument. Sharma *et al.* (2025) point out that diversity and inclusion in energy governance are often treated as compliance mechanisms rather than transformative ethics. Their call for reflexive, justice-centered transitions aligns with the findings of this study; It is that, a truly inclusive transition must disrupt both gendered and colonial power structures simultaneously. These alternative visions stresses that feminist and decolonial frameworks are not peripheral resistance but active deconstruction of energy justice. They redefine energy not as a commodity or infrastructure but as a social relationship grounded in reciprocity, care, and planetary responsibility.

While the language of justice and inclusion multiplies, the underlying epistemic and moral hierarchies remain largely intact. Gender is programmed as participation, not transformation as coloniality persists under the guise of leadership; and justice is articulated as managerial fairness rather than relational ethics. However, within these contradictions, feminist and decolonial currents are gaining strength, signaling the possibility of an epistemic reorientation that might one day unsettle the foundations of Northern energy dominance.

Conclusion

This study set out to interrogate how gender is programmed within the interpretation of energy in the Global North and how these gendered frameworks shape global imaginaries that influence the Global South. Drawing from Feminist Political Ecology and Postcolonial Energy Studies, the study has demonstrated that energy transitions in the North are far from neutral processes of technological progress or environmental responsibility. Rather, they are deeply cultural and political acts structured by epistemic hierarchies, gendered moralities, and colonial continuities that define who speaks for justice and who remains spoken for.

At the same time, the study has shown that the Global North's moral authority in energy transitions is maintained through a discourse of sustainability that often conceals colonial continuities. The language of leadership and responsibility, evident in documents such as the European Green Deal, recasts historical asymmetries as ethical stewardship. This way, the North legitimizes its dominance not through explicit extraction but through the moralization of justice.

The study concludes that achieving a truly just and sustainable energy future requires more than technological innovation or representational inclusion. It requires an epistemic transformation, openness to feminist and decolonial ethics of care, interdependence, and humility. Justice in energy needs to be reconceptualized not as a destination led by the North but as a multiple, co-created journey informed by multiple communities and knowledge. Thus, the future of energy interpretation would depend on the ability to unlearn the hierarchies we have normalized. Only then can the global energy transition become a genuinely transformative project which is one that not only redistributes power but also redefines what it means.

Recommendations

Policymakers in the Global North need to move beyond gender participation metrics toward a framework that interrogate how gendered assumptions influence decision-making, expertise, and

policy design. Gender should be understood not simply as representation but as a relational category that structures how energy systems are imagined and managed. Policies therefore, must seek *how power operates through knowledge*.

Energy policy should adopt *care-centered metrics* that value maintenance, repair, and community well-being alongside technological innovation. This could include funding for community energy initiatives that prioritize social cohesion and ecological restoration rather than economic competition. The Global North's self-positioning as a "leader" in sustainability must be replaced with a discourse of partnership and reciprocity. Development and climate cooperation programs should be restructured to emphasize *mutual learning* rather than "capacity building."

Furthermore, institutions such as the European Commission, national energy agencies, and multilateral donors should establish accountability mechanisms that measure not only gender inclusion but also epistemic justice. Regular audits should evaluate whether policy processes reproduce Northern moral superiority or enable diverse voices to shape meaning and direction. This is so that transparency reports should explicitly document how Southern and marginalized perspectives influence policy outcomes.

Finally, governments and institutions should promote a multiple approach that allows several pathways to coexist. Rather than imposing universal solutions, transitions should be locally defined, culturally grounded, and ecologically sensitive. This could involve supporting Indigenous energy sovereignty or cooperative ownership models that challenge corporate monopolies. Intersectional approaches that account for race, class, gender, and geography should also be institutionalized in energy governance. This way, policies that address only gender or class separately will fail to capture how multiple array of power intersect in the lived realities of energy transition.

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