

The Ecopolitics Podcast - S01E01: Introducing the EcoPolitics Podcast

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Hosts: Peter Andrée (Carleton University) and Ryan Katz-Rosene (University of Ottawa)

Recorded July 31, 2020

In this episode, co-hosts Peter and Ryan share how they got involved in ecopolitics, what inspired them to create the EcoPolitics Podcast, and themes they're excited to explore in the coming episodes.

Episode 1: Introducing the Ecopolitics Podcast

Peter Andrée: Environmental politics is a different kind of political study and a different kind of political science, because it's not just about the ethical and political relationships between people, but it's also between people and what you might call the more than human, the many other species, within which—and not just species, but biophysical systems that have collectively allowed life to exist on this little blue marble floating through space and that to which we owe a responsibility, if we want to see life continue into the future. And you know, that raises interesting questions in terms of how we think ethically but also ontologically and epistemologically.

[00:00:52] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast, a series tackling some of the big questions in the field of environmental politics for university students in Canada. I'm Ryan Katz-Rosene from the University of Ottawa, co-host of the show, along with Dr. Peter Andrée from Carleton University and this is a short introduction to our podcast series which is available at [ecopoliticspodcast.ca](https://www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca). How's it going Peter?

[00:01:17] **Peter Andrée:** I'm doing well, Ryan and looking forward to this series.

[00:01:20] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Fantastic. Peter, I wanted to start off by talking about a land acknowledgement and what that might look like for a podcast series. So I read a tweet by Waubgeshig Rice, who is a former CBC broadcaster in the Ottawa area and he's an Anishinabeg Canadian from Wasauksing First Nation and he wrote this and he said, "Zoom meetings are awkward enough. Let's not make them even more awkward by trying to do land acknowledgements for them." And I know this is not a Zoom meeting this is a podcast, but it got me thinking a little bit about how do you acknowledge these types of things in a digital space. So I, you know, I thought it'd be important to let listeners know that we are both dialing in, so to speak, from the Gatineau region, which is unceded territory of the Algonquin peoples.

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[00:02:19] And we both happen to live very close to the Gatineau river which played a very important role and has played a very important role in the culture of the Algonquin people and you know, this is something I actually think about a lot as someone who owns land near the river. And I think about this a lot in an ecological context as well as social terms, but yeah, maybe I'll turn it over to you. What do you think about how to do a land acknowledgement on a podcast?

[00:02:50] **Peter André:** Well, I think it's a great question and I think Waubgeshig's suggestion is right on, and I think one of the implications is that we won't necessarily do a land acknowledgement in every podcast episode.

[00:03:03] Nonetheless, I think it's important that we're talking about it now. to do land acknowledgements was one of the calls to action of the truth and reconciliation commission. And it's been widely picked up. there's some critique of it because sometimes it's done rather in a cursory fashion and not with much thinking about what it means.

[00:03:24] And my understanding of the point of a land acknowledgement is that as we begin a meeting a process, a discussion, a negotiation, we recognize that we are certainly people in Canada today, Canada's only been around for a little over 150 years, and yet the territories that we've been on and have had indigenous people on them for much, much longer than that.

[00:03:48] And many of those indigenous people have and continue today to see themselves as the stewards of those lands and the colonial relationship has been a disastrous in many cases for indigenous people in terms of taking away their lands, their language, their culture, diminishing it in the larger Canadian fabric.

[00:04:09] And I think we're at a time in history where I'm glad that we're really thinking carefully about that. And land acknowledgements are meant to be a way to bring that into the awareness of this history and the ongoing legacy of colonialism into all of our conversations and actions.

[00:04:27] And one of the ways that I see it quite relevant to this podcast that we're launching into this podcast series is that indigenous people have, and still today have a lot to tell us. And I'm like you a white settler on these lands. My, I'm a first generation immigrant here. And they have a lot to tell us about what sustainability means, both in the past and today.

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[00:04:57] And we will in some of the future episodes, and we'll get to that in a second, I expect that we'll be talking with Indigenous people and entering into some of those discussions about their worldviews and their understandings of the environment and environmental politics and what we, as students of environmental politics need to be thinking about from that, as we try and address what is clearly a huge crisis that we're all in these days around the environment.

[00:05:28] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** You know, I'm glad we talked about it and it did also, you know, it does also offer a window into, you know, raising our own positionality as hosts, co-hosts for this podcast series.

[00:05:39] So maybe that's a way of getting you to tell us a little bit more about yourself, and how you ended up as a professor of environmental studies and how you ended up doing this podcast.

[00:05:52] **Peter Andr e:** Sure. First thing I should say is I'm in the department of political science at Carleton, though I also do teach of courses in environmental studies and geography and political economy at Carleton. But my home department is political science. As I mentioned before, I'm my family are first generation immigrants to Canada. I came here from the Netherlands when I was very young and one of the things that my family brought here, maybe coming from, I sometimes call the Netherlands the country the size of a postage stamp, it's a pretty small place for probably about 20 million people these days. And it is a highly managed environment. And one of the things that might dad in particular loved about Canada was the openness of the spaces and the fact that there's still so many wild places and beautiful rivers that you can go camping on, and so on, like the Gatineau river where I spend a lot of my time camping. And that kind of awareness of the preciousness of wild nature and the need to be very careful about how we think about it and care for that going into the future because many places in the world like the Netherlands have lost so much of that kind of those kinds of spaces very much shaped my upbringing as a young child and really influenced my eventual interest in studying environmental issues, mostly from sort of a biology side, environmental sciences side, and then eventually more of sort of a philosophy angle and, it's funny, when I was doing my studies, even in university, I stayed away from courses that had the word policy cause I just found that rather boring, I have to say. And yet here we are with an eco politics podcast that's going to talk a lot about policy in it. And I think that's, I really learned how actually my philosophical and biological interests are, you know, that we need to then think about policy in order to protect these protect the environment.

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[00:08:09] So that's a bit about me, Ryan. How about you? How do you become, how did you come to this place to becoming a professor of eco politics?

[00:08:17] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Sure. So I should maybe mention a couple core themes that I think would be useful for listeners to know about my own background. The first is that I, you know, I too am an immigrant to Canada, I moved here when I was about eight years old.

[00:08:35] However, my parents were from North America. My mom was Canadian, my dad was American and we were living, I was born in Costa Rica and I mention that because Costa Rica has a sort of renown, has a sort of identity national identity as being a very environmentally friendly state. And so there's all kinds of, you know, the entire economy is oriented around ecotourism. And there's all kinds of really innovative policies happening, really, you know, ambitious policies for climate mitigation and also like a huge chunk of the territory, like a quarter of land or more is essentially reserved for nature, it's a wildlife reserve. So that kind of national identity instilled in me and interest in nature and also environmental protection from a young age.

[00:09:36] I should also say, I, as mentioned earlier, I live here on a farm in the Outaouais region. And so my wife is a farmer, I'm the academic, but I help out when I can. And we're trying to farm in a sustainable way, but you know, on a daily basis, I am thinking about, you know, how our management decisions on this piece of land influence the environment. We do have animals and there's all kinds of interesting questions about the role of livestock in the environment, which has kind of filtered into my research, and hopefully we'll be talking about during the show, but that's something that's a big part of my life, or it has been for a good chunk of my life.

[00:10:20] And so that's informed my understanding of environment and environmental policy. And then finally after my undergrad, I went and spent some time living in Alberta. And this was at a time when Alberta was facing a little bit of a mini oil boom. And I started to get involved with a professor at the University of Alberta Gordon Laxer, who was working on questions around energy security in Canada. And we started thinking a little bit more about the environmental aspects of, impacts of oil sands production, and that really kickstarted an academic interest in environment, which led to a master's degree, which I did with you. If you don't recall, Peter, you were my supervisor for my masters, at Carleton University.

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[00:11:14] And ever since I've been, I've been wholeheartedly, you know, I've had my foot in sort of the environmental studies camp and the political science camp, or political studies as we call it at the University of Ottawa. So that's a little bit about me and I think that's useful for our listeners to hear about both of our backgrounds. Maybe that's a good opportunity to switch to I'm thinking a little bit about our motivations for this show and what we're hoping to get out of it. So if I were to ask you, you know, like what are some of the key themes in environmental politics or eco politics that come to mind, key themes that you would want to cover in a podcast series like this, what would those be?

[00:12:02] **Peter André:** Yeah, great question. You know, I think the first place to start is to say that we are in an environmental crisis, certainly the climate change issue is, first and foremost, on a lot of people's minds as a crisis that needs resolution as the intergovernmental panel on climate change tells us we need to take serious action on this issue very quickly.

[00:12:28] and the kind of action that we're talking about, you know, it's so interesting to think that we're making this series in the time of, COVID-19 as we've all just sort of come out of lockdown. And this is the summer when things are starting to open up, but we really don't know where it's all going to go in the coming months.

[00:12:45] And, it's been an interesting time because we've seen how rapidly governments could react to this, and society as a whole can change patterns of behavior and living and thinking about how they're connecting and shaking or not shaking hands and all of that stuff. We've also seen you know, a lot of, dissonance, we've seen some governments get on top of this issue very quickly and in a real concerted way and able to try and protect those most marginalized and most affected by both the disease, as well as the economic implications of the shutdowns. And then we've had other governments and jurisdictions where, you know, it's kind of fallen apart a little bit and we see some real cracks in the systems. And I'm raising that because I think it's good context for thinking about what needs to be done around climate specifically, but also the larger environmental crisis, you know where, say on the biodiversity front species extinctions are at a rate never seen before in terms of how many species are being lost, you know, animals, plants, microorganisms, and this, yeah, we really collectively need to have a massive think about where have we come from, what is at the root cause of all of these issues and how do we go about trying to shift our society? And COVID in a way, it gives me some hope by seeing that it's amazing how when you get a concerted effort within a country and with the government and industry and civil society working together, you can make some big changes.

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[00:14:37] And yet the kind of changes we've seen around COVID are uh - I'm going to say it pale in comparison to the sort of larger structural changes that need to happen in the coming decades to respond to the environmental crisis. Right? So the first thing I'd say is that I think we need to really wrap our heads around what is the nature of this crisis and what does it mean politically. I also think there's a big theme and I sort of touched on it right there cause we also see with COVID around distributional justice, you know, who pays the price of what's wrong right now in terms of other species, but certainly in terms of other people and people around the planet who are disproportionately affected, often by, you know, there's a racial dimension, there's a gender dimension, to, say climate change, you know, who's affected, there's a North-South aspect to that.

[00:15:40] So there's a distributional question of who is affected and then who was also going to pay the price, you know, how are we going to ensure that the institutions and say the businesses that are, have done well by, in an era when we've been rather, let's say fair about how the environment has been treated, how some of the wealth that was generated from those times can help to steer us down a path that's more sustainable and more equitable.

[00:16:10] So I think those are some big questions, as we move down that path, I think there's the policy questions and understanding the political realm. For example, in the Canadian context, we're in a federal system where each of the provinces have a considerable power over environmental and resource related issues.

[00:16:35] And so we need to understand if there's a good idea, like say there should be a tax on carbon, you know, how do we do that within the political systems that we have. By the way, I shouldn't say that I necessarily am the advocate for a carbon tax, cause there's a whole debate about that, which I expect we might get into in these courses.

[00:16:57] And I guess the final thing that I would say, an important thing for me, and it relates to, you know, the land acknowledgement off the beginning is that, you know, I think that there's a very real conversation in eco politics about the rights and the responsibilities of other species and about other processes on this planet, and how do we bring sort of an ethical responsibility into political processes so that we're actively thinking about the interests of not just people and, you know, the rationales for that, as well as the practical ways of doing that I think there's some really interesting questions there. Many indigenous people in Canada, and I'm thinking of a Ojibwe and the Iroquoian nations as well, talk about

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"All my relations", and they include within that, you know, the beavers and the moose and the salmon, and the trout, and also the rocks and the trees as all part of their relations and that's sort of an ethical positionality, but it's also a way of understanding how all of this stuff fits together. And coming from a Western scientific viewpoint that has been very much shaped by thinkers like Rene Descartes and this sort of the enlightenment tradition. The enlightenment tradition puts a lot of emphasis on the brain and on the separation of the brain from the body, and on the separation of the human from the rest of the world, you know. It puts the human in an ethical position and priority something that we can call anthropocentrism. And it also it creates a bit of a hierarchy and says that's more important than everything else. And I think this is all this ontological understanding is then also part of the problem when it comes to the environment. because even the word environment, that which surrounds, you know, there's a trend in eco politics to talk about the more-than-human to recognize that the other stuff around us is actually part of us. It feeds us. We feed it when we decompose and die. We're all part of these larger bio and geochemical cycles of nitrogen and carbon and water. and we are, you know, the earth, human beings are the earth in a self conscious form. And there are other self-conscious forms, other living beings that have this form and that kind of a different ontological perspective is I think, and the discussions about that I think is quite relevant to eco politics.

[00:19:50] Which then comes to the last point around epistemology and epistemology is our understanding of what knowledge is and what constitutes knowledge. and again, within our Western tradition, we have tended to come down to a very interesting but narrow epistemology based on scientific method and sort of observation and testing and experimentation as a way to generate knowledge that is universally applicable and it, you know, there's a fantastic and interesting history there of how how we think we know the world around us, but it's also a very reductionist way of thinking that tends to isolate and take something out of its context and look at it as a unique thing, without understanding that larger relational, contextual fabric that enables it to come into being and to which it is related.

[00:20:52] And so there are other ways of thinking about how the world is and how we should even understand how we know it. Which then brings me back to, you know, there's a variety of cultural traditions. Certainly indigenous people have much more epistemologies that are much more grounded in a relational sense of being with the more-than-human.

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[00:21:16] and I think those are all fundamentally eco political questions that mean that the study of eco politics is a lot bigger, I would say, you know, some would say some in political science would say, Oh, environmental politics is this little subtheme where we just think about how political processes affect the environment and to them, I would say actually it's eco politics and environmental politics is about the bigger picture and you know, the human institutional questions are this small set, subset of these much bigger relational questions that I think we need to get into in this field. Hmm. So that's some of what I think is exciting actually about eco politics. We're in an era of crisis. And yet it's causing this rethink across all these different levels.

[00:22:07] We need to start doing things very differently. And in that sense, I see it as an area of huge opportunity. And I actually looking forward to some of the people that we're going to talk to. I won't name them now, but people can see the list on the website and get a sense of what's coming. There's a lot of people doing some really exciting and innovative stuff to think through and address some of what, I've just been talking about.

[00:22:35] For your part, Ryan, I'm really curious to hear what you are excited about and what are some of the big themes of eco politics that you think this series should get into.

[00:22:46] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Sure. Well, I mean, you mentioned a whole bunch of themes that I would echo and maybe just briefly, to get into some of these things, you know, you talked about epistemology and ways of knowing, and that's also an entry point for me into eco politics. The way I usually teach a course in eco politics and most of our listeners I think will be students, is I really want to challenge my students to think to challenge the idea of universal epistemologies, to challenge the idea that there is a singular version of sustainability.

[00:23:26] And one of the ways I do that is get my students to debate, and I think you do this as well, debate, you know, common environmental policy questions. And one of the things that comes out of that is just seeing how things that might seem like, you know, there's a common sense pathway to sustainability are much more complex. There's usually more to it than just, you know, one way of thinking about things. And so, and so that's important to me to think about and that leads into, as you said, you know, the importance of thinking about other types of worldviews and ontologies and we will be getting into, as you said, talking about indigenous environmental politics and traditional ecological knowledge, which is one part of that big theme.

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[00:24:18] And that's an important thing I think, because this podcast and, you know, the theme of this eco politics podcast does have a bit of a Canadian bent to it, a Canadian focus. I think it's absolutely essential, as you mentioned to spend time, and not just a cursory, you know, week on this, but like to actually spend some time really thinking about the historical context of the Canadian state. not just in terms of its relationship with indigenous people, but, with all types of people who have, and immigrants and settlers from coming from different parts of the world and also contemporary relations between the Canadian state and other states and other peoples around the world.

[00:25:08] Ultimately because you know, one part of politics is thinking about, as you mentioned, who benefits, who loses and the sort of distribution of power and access and wealth in our society. And, you know, the Canadian state was founded upon an unequal relationship and, you know, an oppressive system of colonialism, which has impacted that question of distributional justice, until present day, and that's really important for the ecological context.

[00:25:45] Right. So I'm excited to talk about those themes. And then that kind of leads for me into another theme, which is the Canadian state's relationship historically and contemporarily with resource extraction. This was a state, and this is closely tied into that question of how the Canadian settler state was set up, but this was a state that was founded upon the extraction of resources in an Imperial relationship with great Britain and to an extent France, and then that locus of power later shifted in the post war years towards the United States. when the United States took on a sort of a hegemonic role internationally, and Canada has always been you know, it's always had an uncomfortable place in that world and in, fomenting global imperialism or at least, you know, keeping, you know, keeping global imperialism afloat and that in turn has been founded on the extraction of resources. You know, everything from, beaver pelts to cod, to wheat, to so on and so forth to today, bitumen right, coming out of Alberta.

[00:27:06] But anyway, I think that's really important for students of eco politics to think about. And that leads into my final thematic, you know, focus, which I really want to make sure we get across in eco politics, which is about contemporary capitalism. And we often hear in eco politics about, you know, either there's sort of this cursory level blaming capitalism for everything, which I think we want to, we want to dig a little bit deeper into these kinds of claims about capitalism.

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[00:27:40] And on the flip side, something you hear this sort of, this overarching acceptance of capitalism that it's, we need to make this about, you know, how to make capitalism more sustainable. And I think what we're aiming for is to have more nuanced discussions about what exactly is it about contemporary capitalism that, you know, shapes the environment in one way or another. And what are the prospects for actually making capitalism more sustainable or is that a lost cause? Do we need to start thinking about other ways of organizing our political economic structure for the sake of dealing with this ecological crisis, which you talked about. And those are, I know those are discussions that students are having and many of our listeners will be thinking about. But I'm really excited to spend some time digging into that a little bit more.

[00:28:35] **Peter Andrée:** Yeah. We have big hopes for this podcast and series. And we've created a list of amazing people that we're talking to across the country and at least in one or two cases internationally on some of these issues.

[00:28:49] I guess because we've named colonialism and we've named capitalism, I also think it's important to name patriarchy and that there's a gender dimension dimension to environmental politics. And you know, earlier on, I talked about the, sort of the Descartes and the, sort of the rationalist way of thinking that places, mind above body. and there's, there's been a lot of great feminist analysis of how this also privileged, in the history of patriarchy, the male over the female with the female then associated with the body as have indigenous people been associated with the body. There's also been a race dimension. And then basically you know, that we have a Western way of thinking that that creates that dualism and then says one is better than the other than the other.

[00:29:46] So, and there's a lot of thinkers in environmental politics, and I'm thinking of the ecofeminist activist, Vandana Shiva, for example, from India who really sees that it's not anthropocentrism that is the problem, but it's androcentrism, this male centered, way of thinking about the world and what matters. and she argues, you know, in part because women have been associated with them body in sort of a social construction that our history, that women's knowledge is often also then perhaps a knowledge that should be given more acceptance and recognition for in the same way that we talk about indigenous traditional ecological knowledge, for example, as ways of knowing that can help to counter some of the various negative, very negative trends of this androcentric way of thinking. So just to put one more big ism in there, I really hope that we're also going to be talking about racism in the context of eco politics.

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[00:30:50] Because again, there's a big story there about what environmental racism looks like and what environmental justice might mean in that context, but that's all to come. So, I, you know, there's some big issues that we want to get into, and I'm really looking forward to going there with you, Ryan, in the coming weeks.

[00:31:11] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Thank you for your thoughts, sharing your thoughts. I hope the listeners have enjoyed this introductory episode of the ecopolitics podcast. Of course don't forget to check out some of the other episodes. We do have a whole series coming up and that is available at [ecopoliticspodcast.ca](https://www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca). Don't forget to like us on social media and share your thoughts with us. Get in touch. We'd love to hear feedback on the show. So thanks once again. Thank you, Peter. And thank you to the listener and we look forward to chatting with you in future episodes.