

The Ecopolitics Podcast - S01E04: Environmental Racism and Justice in Canada
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Guests: Andil Gosine (York University) and Tzazná Miranda Leal (Justice For Migrant Workers)

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Racism and colonialism are deeply entrenched in the field of ecopolitics. In this episode, we talk with Dr. Andil Gosine, professor in the Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change at York University, and Tzazná Miranda Leal, Workers Rights Organizer and Community Artist with Justice For Migrant Workers about the ways in which racism is woven throughout Canadian environmental history and its impacts on Canadian environmental policy and research.

Episode 4: Environmental Racism and Justice in Canada

Tzazná Miranda Leal: In terms of environmental racism, once you start looking at what our three D jobs look like, meaning our dirty, dangerous, and difficult jobs in Ontario or in Canada, you'll see how many of those jobs are actually being carried out by racialized people and in farm work, it's no different in farm work and it's not a coincidence that it's the same racialized bodies that are being exposed to these risky jobs.

[00:00:36] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast. This podcast series tackle 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, and my cohost for the series is Dr. Peter Andrée from Carleton University, although he's not joining us for this episode.

[00:00:56] In this episode, I'll be talking with Dr Andil Gosine, professor in the faculty of environmental and urban change at York University and Tzazná Miranda Leal, a labour rights organizer with Justicia for Migrant Workers and a visual artist. In this episode, we will be talking about the theme of environmental racism and environmental justice in Canada. And these are two intertwined themes, obviously, that are central to the study of eco politics. And we wanted to seek Andil and Tzazná's help in defining these terms. And we're also hoping that this discussion will help introduce the idea of positionality in the study of eco politics, namely the idea that each person's identity, background, and social context within which that is based will shape one's outlook and their understanding of the world. And I think this is important in critical reflections of eco politics, because it helps us to understand why the field has tended to be framed or interpreted in a particular way.

[00:02:00] And so in short, the history of environmental management and policy in Canada, and even the field of eco politics itself, how it's been studied, examined, and its very objectives can also be

analyzed in light of environmental racism, environmental justice. But I'm getting ahead of myself. So we're going to take a few steps back and start off with some basic definitions.

[00:02:22] Andil, you co-wrote a book titled Environmental Justice and Racism in Canada. And perhaps I can ask you to help us start things off by offering a working definition for the term environmental racism for our listeners. Is it a specific form of environmental injustice?

[00:02:42] **Andil Gosine:** So when Cheryl Teelucksingh and I wrote that book, we really relied on the definitions put forward by the originators of the term. The first person that's usually identified is a former assistant to Martin Luther King, named Dr. Benjamin Chavis. And in 1981, he talked about environmental racism as the intentional siting of hazardous waste sites, landfills, polluting industries in areas inhabited mainly by people of colour, Indigenous people, migrant farm workers and low income people.

[00:03:19] So at the beginning of this, it was really about kind of mapping the terrain of pollution and finding that there was a strong correspondence with exposure to pollution, the lack of regulation and where nonwhite people lived. So that's sort of the beginning of the term.

[00:03:39] And then in the 1990s, a scholar named Robert Bullard, really his definition, I think resonated the most broadly and was the one we took up. He sort of widened it to think about environmental racism as any policy practice or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages individuals, groups, or communities based on race or colour.

[00:04:08] And for him, a lot of the question was also about who pays and benefits from it. So where at the beginning, we think of environmental justice as, you know, who's not getting clean water, where are factories being located, Bullard, extends it to think about everything about environmental policy and politics. How did parks get formed, and so on, where are they located? And he broadens it. And so Cheryl Teelucksingh and I continue to build on this. And I think in part, because of my own training in Black cultural studies, I tended to foreground the question of representation. So in addition to thinking about those kinds of measurable differences, like where does a Black community live and where is a factory and you can measure it. I also wanted to ask about the narratives of race and difference that underpin policies and our very imagination of the natural world. So in that book, a lot of, I think about half of the chapters really deal with questions like, how do we, what do we mean by the environment? How do we imagine environmental history, how it's recorded, how do we presume? Cause there are lots

of kinds of presumptions about who, what kind of people, what kind of cultures are more polluting. So all of these things are kind of framed through this historical narrative of race and the sort of fact of colonization. So, it's to think quite broadly about how race alongside gender, class and sexuality really come to configure our environmental imaginations, and then subsequent to that, environmental policy and planning and so on.

[00:05:48] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Hmm. So it's quite interesting how there was that broadening. And I want to get to that in a little bit more depth in a few minutes, and also ask you a little bit later about the ideas of narratives of race and how that fits into positionality.

[00:06:03] But before we get there, Tzazná you've worked with migrants to Canada and migrant workers. I'm wondering if you have a sense of how environmental racism in this country might differ from other countries. So, as Andil mentioned, a lot of the examples that we, you know, maybe some of the students are more familiar with in the textbooks, tend to be from the United States and tend to be focused on this idea of environmental pollution.

[00:06:31] So we, you know, learn about African American communities in the Detroit area having to deal with contaminated water or, you know the other example that often comes to mind is pollution from in the air and water from refineries in Louisiana and California communities predominantly made up by Latinx, African American and Asian communities. But these are all sort of cases in the U.S. What are some examples of environmental racism or injustice in Canada that students should know of?

[00:07:07] **Tzazná Miranda Leal:** I think because in Canada, in Canadian cities, we don't see the same kind of segregated community-specific neighbourhoods that you see in some cities in the States, that we tend to think we are not exposed in the same way to, for example, living around processing plants and things like that in the way that these case scenarios work. But so I think in Canada, a lot of the environmental justice tends to be - environmental racism tends to be invisibilized and hidden from the naked eye within a city context, although Indigenous communities have been living with improper housing and access to clean water since the creation of Canadian colonial state.

[00:08:00] But when it comes to migrant workers, I think COVID-19 has given us the perfect example where it's sort of blown open the way our society works by relying on racialized people to keep it going. And it's really pointed out how some people cannot afford or will not be afforded the same kind of precautions, in this case in a pandemic, but in reality, it's always been the case. We've seen, for

example, Filipina caregivers, nannies, PSWs, and nurses face a large number of infections across the globe because they hold a lot of those positions and those are exactly the kind of workers that are not able to take physical distancing measures at all in their job. Similarly, migrant farm workers will not be able to take physical distancing measures or any kind of break from production because food is so tied to seasonality in Canada. And so if we want to continue eating, we need to continue receiving fruits and vegetables from farms across Ontario, across Canada, into our supermarket so we can continue our lifestyle and continue to live, in the cities.

[00:09:28] But these workers simply cannot take the kinds of precautions that we would be taking in an office setting. So for example, right now I work for a union and we are quite simply not allowed to come into work. And that's something that's been done to protect those from, you know, creating an environment in an office setting where we could be getting COVID-19. That is not something that could, you know, even be discussed in a farm work setting, either out in the field, but also in greenhouses, which is where we produce a lot of Canada's tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and then, you know, in the fields there's a lot of other fruits and vegetables. And workers, not only that, but have been facing issues around inadequate, dangerous unhealthy housing for decades now, for more than 50 years in Canada, but now we look at how that is actually preventing farms and farm workers from taking any of the necessary precautions around COVID because you know, 20 to 50 guys will live in one bunk house, or women or people, will share accommodations in these specific ways that we are all freaking about right now with regard to COVID-19. So imagine those flights and planes that we're all freaked about taking right now, but, you know, that's where you live. You don't have anywhere else to go. And so I think COVID-19 has really sort of taken away some of those covers that we have as a Canadian society around the real ways in which we put racialized people in dirty, dangerous, difficult jobs where they are in harm's way and where they're having to sacrifice their own health to continue to provide us with the infrastructure that allows the society to go on.

[00:11:35] **Andil Gosine:** I mean, if I can add to that, I do think students might be more familiar with American examples. Not because they're less true in the Canadian context, but because in practical terms, the Canadian academia, I think has been quite averse to supporting anti-racist research. Cheryl Teelucksingh and I had to fight really hard to even use the word 'environmental racism' in the title of our book and in our workplaces, as professors at the university. I mean, as a PhD student, the course in my own institution called 'racism and environmental justice', when I introduce that as a PhD student, there

was a real reluctance by faculty, not just reluctance, there was just like active opposition to framing things around race because there's a story told that race applies in the United States, but not in Canada. But mostly that's because we don't have enough research done, there's not enough, not enough people doing the studies to provide the work, to demonstrate it. I mean, very little work.

[00:12:40] Tzazná's research on migrants, for example you know, it does both things. It shows us ways in which immigration and labour policy are measurably, racist, how much people are paid, what kinds of work conditions are tolerated for people who are racialized in particular ways, but it goes even further to demonstrate how these policies have a long history of colonial racialized imagination, which reveals the Seasonal Agricultural Workers program, for example, as the inheritance of slavery and indentureship, like we don't like to - How could we in Ontario think of migrant farm workers as having some kind of relationship to indentureship and slavery, but really that's the model, this kind of keeping people - committed to the space they're working in, not making - not giving them any kind of status when they come to Canada and not providing any kind of social support. And of course, like making them do work that Canadian, they're doing this work because Canadians, won't do it for the same conditions. And you know, this is all around, I mean, these are all racialized communities, so, it's there. It's just that there's a real reluctance, I think, to raise questions around the framework of racism.

[00:14:02] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Hmm. That's quite interesting and there's a lot there and - I'm blown away by the idea that there would be, you know, reluctance from an academic sense, but I'm glad you mentioned it. So that's something I'm learning and becoming aware of. And it'd be really interesting. I do have a question later on about how that ties into it sort of contemporary consciousness around issues of race and injustice, particularly in the wake of the rise of Black Lives Matter protests that are happening right now in the United States and in Canada.

[00:14:37] But maybe I'll get back to that because there's another thing you guys both touched on which I think is a little bit more foundational to the discussion before we get to this, which is the sort of the colonial underpinnings of this theme in a Canadian context. And so, you know, we do have this historical pattern of colonialism and neocolonialism. I don't think - that shouldn't be a strange thing to say. And, you know, between the Canadian state and Indigenous peoples in particular in Canada. And I'm kind of curious to know whether that's a relationship that persists today in your mind. Is that, is it fair to say that the Canadian state has always been environmentally racist? Is this something that is the case?

[00:15:30] **Andil Gosine:** I mean, there's a couple of things in there. One is, you know, Canada never went through an official decolonization process. The head of our state, is still the queen of the United Kingdom. You know, she's on our money. When I became a Canadian citizen I had to declare an oath of allegiance to the queen. So, in fact, Canada has never gone through - I, as a Trinidadian who, you know, Britain colonized both Trinidad and Canada - Trinidad went through a decolonization process in which, you know, the queen no longer appears on the money. It's not the head of state, but in Canada officially, the queen remains head of state.

[00:16:09] And I think even as a symbolic value, it's kind of indicative of a kind of commitment to the colonial project. So I mean, that question, is Canada - I'm not sure, on the other hand, how productive it is to ask that question, because you know, the colonization of Indigenous people and this enslavement of Africans is foundational to the formation of the Americas.

[00:16:35] And it, that's sort of the beginning of what the Americas is, is it involves the displacement of the people who were here and it becomes built through the labour put forward primarily by African slaves. However, that said the danger in kind of reducing everything to kind of grant moral condemnation sometimes I think prohibits the kind of bits and pieces work that actually activates colonization. So for me, I'm less invested in saying Canada is racist or getting people to- that's not the goal for me. It's more to actually support research and activism work like Tzazná's, that challenges racism, that counters that colonial project, and begins - like I also think, like I went to high school in Canada. I did my undergrad in Canada. And by the end of that period, I know knew absolutely nothing about Indigenous peoples at that time, and this is not so long ago, you know, this is the 90s and it's incredible to me like that does not indicate any kind of commitment to the colonial project when you're not even learning about the First Peoples, you know, in your socials, in your high schools and your social science classes.

[00:17:54] So I think we're very much at the beginning point. I think it's an exciting point right now. I think, thanks to both Indigenous and Black movements in particular, in Canada and the United States and elsewhere, they've really put those questions at the fore and pushed us to really confront the fact that we haven't entered into a serious decolonization process.

[00:18:24] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Yeah, I guess I'm trying to locate some of these examples that I've become aware of in the last couple of years and trying to frame it within the lens of an environmental injustice or

a form of environmental racism or a form of environmental neocolonialism. So these are examples, like we hear about the lack of clean drinking water in many First Nations communities, the proximity of some of these Indigenous communities to forms of environmental pollution like uranium mining in Saskatchewan, oil sands production in Alberta, and even this question of the safety around ruptured pipelines. And so for me, that's a really, it's a very clear cut link to that early definition of environmental racism.

[00:19:12] **Andil Gosine:** Absolutely.

[00:19:14] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** But I also take the point that, you know, it isn't necessarily so overt and Tzazná's point about how this is often invisibilized or hidden in some other respects.

[00:19:28] **Tzazná Miranda Leal:** If I could add to what Andil was saying, something that's been very important for some of us doing migrant justice work is to - and I, myself immigrated to Canada at 18, and so first of all, was equally surprised to see the queen on official communications and realize that, you know, coming from a very different colonial state, still a colonial state, there was no discourse around independence or decolonization. Not that that actually, you know, accomplished what it was meant to.

[00:20:03] But here, I think there's a big role for us to play. When doing migrant justice work and being immigrants ourselves around not only learning the history of First Nations peoples in Canada, but also learning about Indigenous law in the regions and areas where we're working and trying to, in our work, respect law and traditional rules in the same breath as we do educational work around, for example, the Employment Standards act, which covers workers in Ontario and provides workers' rights. So, not to focus only on the pieces of the colonial state that on a day to day provide us with let's say our rights in this context, but you know, also doing the work of connecting with local Indigenous communities in, for example, the farming areas where we do our work and including that in our education and in our organizing so that we're not just replicating and furthering the colonial project that is Canada and its legislation, but also doing active work to redress that in our capacity.

[00:21:28] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Tzazná, can you tell us a little bit more about the nuts and bolts of your work with Justicia and migrant labourers in the farming sector, and maybe tie that into how that relates to questions of environmental justice across a sort of a range of identities, not just race, but gender and class inequality and so on and so forth?

[00:21:51] **Tzazná Miranda Leal:** Yeah, so I started working with Justice for Migrant Workers, maybe in 2007. So I had only been in Canada for a year or so. And Justicia does a lot of different kinds of work. It's a volunteer run political collective with a relatively small budget, but a very long standing historical presence in farm worker organizing in Ontario and in Canada. So Justicia's work involves outreach and education. So we've organized countless workshops and educational sessions for migrant farm workers in Spanish, English, but also Thai, Tagalog... for people in Southwestern Ontario mostly, around workers' rights in general, be it human rights, health and safety, employment standards, and other related issues such as immigration and employment insurance, parental benefits, special benefits, things like that. So things that, you know, workers require information about on a day to day basis. And so that's our sort of education work.

[00:23:04] And then in addition to that, who sees has undertaken a number of employer-specific campaigns that you may or may not hear so much about because they're very localized and they're meant to pressure employers to provide certain changes for workers, like for example, safety equipment or proper isolation measures right now or facilitate workers being able to get to the doctor.

[00:23:31] We have also undertaken broader political and policy based campaigns around status for all around open work permits, meaning, we think that farm workers should not be tied to one employer, which they currently are, but they should be able to switch jobs if they want. And we think that that would provide workers with a huge relief when it comes to avoiding abuse and exploitation.

[00:24:01] We've also engaged in sort of test litigation around human rights cases and health and safety cases, coroner's inquest, things like that, where we felt we could push the existing legislation to be a little bit less horrible, around the coverage that farm workers receive. I should note that farm workers in Ontario don't have access to minimum wage provisions. They don't have access to holiday pay. They don't have access to overtime pay. They also don't have collective bargaining rights, meaning they can't unionize or, they could try to form an association, but there's no law saying that the employer has to come to the table in good faith to negotiate with them.

[00:24:51] Really huge disparities that exist within the legislation we've tried to work on, through political campaigns, as well as legislative processes. You know, farming together with mining and construction have been declared some of the most dangerous occupations in Canada and yet mining and construction have industry-specific protections that don't exist for farm work, partly because those

workers can unionize and have very powerful unions that have pushed for systemic coverage for them in different ways that doesn't exist in farm work, but that's not a coincidence and it hasn't happened by mistake. These programs were created to imitate, as Andil said, plantation models and indentureship models, because they knew they worked in the sense that they were able to provide growers with huge amounts of profit. They were able to make workers very vulnerable and very exploitable and create a large exploitable workforce that can be turned around within a few days, of people that would come up from Mexico and the Caribbean to do this work. But now also Thailand, Asian countries, central American countries. And it's just, you know, has boomed. And it now includes so many other countries than the original few, and we see those farm workers getting in accidents and losing their lives in much, much higher rates than you would see in mining and construction work.

[00:26:36] **Andil Gosine:** I'm really glad you pointed out how COVID amplified the ways in which race and class were working - racism and class were working to make some people more vulnerable. there was a kind of spate of coverage when there were these outbreaks at farms. But in addition to that, while people aren't flying anymore, Canada was still bringing in planes of people from the Caribbean and I think, I'm not sure if it was also Mexico, Tzazná? But I'm guessing if they were coming from the Caribbean. So even while things were shut down for, quote, "normal people", people who were vulnerable, who didn't have economic opportunities, we took advantage of that to continue to allow conditions that would, would and did, expose a large number of farm workers to COVID-19. I mean, it really amplified, COVID-19 tended to amplify those things that are, that are widespread in other ways. The people listening to the podcast are politics students. I'm sure one of the things they learn in political science is that politics is everywhere. So you're always trying to think about what are the politics of the situation. Well, the question of race is so much at the core of the existence of the Americas, it is also something that tends to inform all kinds of relationships.

[00:28:10] So, there's on the one hand, these very specific ways that are tied to the kind of first measurable ways in which we saw environmental racism, but it's a really expansive field in which we see how particular investments in racial hierarchy organize our relationships to each other and our conditions of life.

[00:28:32] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Hmm. So Andil, is that another way of saying, talking about racism and environmental racism and environmental injustice and as a systemic or structural problem? The thing that comes to mind in recent weeks, we saw a lot of discussion in the popular media about this question

of systemic racism in Canada. We heard political leaders like the premier of Ontario and premier Quebec and even the chief of the RCMP saying that, the institutions that the law is not racist, claiming that the law is blind to race, to gender and class differences. I have a sense of what you, I have a sense that you share my skepticism, but curious to hear you elaborate a little bit more, and I know it ties into what Tzazná was talking about about the hidden nature of this.

[00:29:31] **Andil Gosine:** Yeah. You know, when you asked earlier about Is Canada a racist country. One of the reasons I find it a challenge - not a super interesting answer to find is that it sets people up to feel that is about kind of one's personality or one's behaviour. So I think when sometimes when we have a discussion of racism, if we talk about systemic race, we're talking about systemic racism and then the chief of the RCMP takes it on as a kind of personal attack. So then we're stuck with a conversation that doesn't move forward because you have analysts providing, clear evidence of systemic racism. And then you find that the people you want to engage only see it through kind of a moral conversation about who they are. So, I found that happens so much. I've been studying race my whole life. Well, all of my life as a scholar. And that always seems to be a big challenge. At the same time, for instance, if you're going to ask me about cancer, I would have very little to say, I'm not a specialist in the field. I would leave it to the people who study cancer to talk about and maybe take their analysis to heart.

[00:30:59] So for instance, Doug Ford, the people you've just named, as far as I know are not people who have carefully studied what systemic racism is, how it works, what is the history of it, what are the ways in which it activates itself, how continuous it is through different kinds of institutional processes and so on. So I think partly like when we have to, we just have to be kind of attentive and careful researchers when we're trying to weigh this. Okay. What happens when we study it, rather than a kind of quick trigger denunciation. Because I think often when you talk about, you want to have a conversation about racism, there's a sense for some people to feel, Oh, that's an attack on me, so I have to immediately not listen, and jump to say, we're not racist. But it's really not about saying, you are racist. It's really about documenting and then unpacking and resisting the racism that does fundamentally organize how we function as a society.

[00:32:05] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** That kind of links into an earlier comment you made about this sort of stereotypical Canadian aversion to being tied in with a quote unquote "U.S. problem" - I'm using air quotes here - I wonder if some of these examples of environmental racism, maybe the more overt examples might kind of be a way for us to talk about this, the quote unquote "systemic structure" or

systemic nature of environment- of racism in a country like Canada, when it is in a more overt case, like this can serve as an example of like, Okay, this is a problem that is evident, we can see here in this example, that this community is being treated or has a different experience merely because of where they happen to be and -

[00:33:02] **Andil Gosine:** [Andil] who they are,

[00:33:03] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** - who they are. And that is an example of systemic racism. That's an example of structural racism, right?

[00:33:10] **Tzazná Miranda Leal:** Frankly, after you've done work with farm workers, I think the only logical conclusion is that there is deeply entrenched systemic racism in Canada and that law and the legal system is, has often been in fact, a mere formalization of violent colonial practices and of prejudice and of racist beliefs, which, you know, is actually how the, one of the ways which racist beliefs have become systematized is through legislation. So if you take the farm worker program - even though a majority of program workers today are from Mexico, the program was created for Jamaican men in 1966 to mirror a similar program that existed in the States where Jamaican workers cut sugarcane. And in the transcripts of elected Canadian elected officials at the time discussing whether or not this was a good idea, they openly talked about how they thought Black men were more apt to do harsh work, or work under hot and harsh conditions. And it's a prime example in which you see prejudice and racist ideals become policy, become legislation, and in this case become one of the features of our immigration system. And similarly, live-in caregivers or the live-in caregiver program, there was a specific move to recruit Filipina women and people into the program because they were seen as more "subdued" and less problematic than Black Caribbean women who had been coming to Canada to do the work, taking care of children, elderly and sick and disabled people. Because those women were organizing in Canada that were demanding better rights. And so the notion that Asian women were less problematic or were less likely to demand better working conditions, it's actually what shaped what the live-in care giver program looked like - now called the caregiver program.

[00:35:30] And, you know, it's another huge permanent feature of our immigration system. And so if you look far back enough, you actually see how law is merely a formalization of some of those systems. And then in Ontario, they copied labour legislation from the United States when they first created workers' rights laws to cover people here. And that legislation was formed around a slavery and plantation

model. And so workers, like domestic workers, meaning those caregivers that I'm talking about, and farm workers, had been excluded from US-based legislation because previously those people had been slaves. And so in Ontario, we imported a legislative system that excludes the same categories of people through their occupation and the system that was built around slavery and has never redressed that, through decades of Liberal and Conservative governments, because it's too big a cash cow.

[00:36:36] **Andil Gosine:** Yeah. Like that's what systemic means, right? Systemic means it's been put in place in law and institutions. And I think, that's the conversation that needs to have rather than Are you personally racist?

[00:36:51] Like, I mean, that's important too, but the bigger conversation, the conversation we need to get to is to examine the long legacy of institutionalizing racialized hierarchies of power through governance and all of its institutions.

[00:37:08] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Hmm. So maybe this is an opportunity to talk about the institutionalization of, if not environmental, environmental racism, environmental injustice, or maybe a lack of even just a lack of attention to diversity in the field of eco politics. And this is a theme that you had mentioned and at the beginning of the show. But I wanted to use that as a way to talk about the idea of positionality more broadly, and how it might shape epistemology in the study of eco politics.

[00:37:41] So just as a bit of context, when we had first planned this show, it was part of like many other themes, a standalone week in the series, and it was planned for later on in the series and we decided to move it up part because we felt, quite frankly, that environmental justice and unfortunately environmental racism is perhaps a more foundational theme in the history of environmental politics in Canada, not just in practice and the material of it, but also as an object of study. Right. So I say this because both Peter, my cohost, Peter and I are white, we are both male, and it was not lost on us that the guests that we are interviewing to help us guide us through a brief history of environmental politics in Canada. as a field is also a white and male and all three of us are, you know, have a certain positionality, we're all professors, albeit at different stages in our career.

[00:38:46] And so what that means, I think is that the narrative that we present is particular to a particular positionality. And I think it's fair to say that that is a form of a limitation. So I'm curious to know, Andil as a professor, who's studied, as you said, you've been examining this throughout your career. Can you touch on the challenge of teaching and learning and knowledge transfer in the field

environmental politics when there is a disparity of voices or a lack of diversity from the narrative point of view, from the storyteller's point of view. And maybe you can link this into your project on narratives of race.

[00:39:31] **Andil Gosine:** Right. I mean, you know, in terms of telling the story of the history of environmental politics in Canada, for instance, I think you can recognize there's not a great variation in the kinds of voices that are telling that story. And when I think about positionality, I don't think of it so much as the body itself, like there's something about you being white, me being Brown, that then produces a different knowledge. But what it does is it comes out of different historical relationships. Right.

[00:40:09] So for instance, if you are telling the story from the position of a privileged position in which you don't have to think about how your racial identity might limit your access to things. Maybe if you're talking about being a student in the class, maybe it's you get mentored by, What kind of, which people you're learning about. So there are all these things in which you maybe don't think about it and therefore it doesn't come up in the work that you do in the storytelling. And then often, for people who have gone through a different experience than that, well, that will come out if they face different struggles and so on.

[00:40:56] I mean, right now we are only talking about systemic racism in Canada because of the work of Idle No More and Black Lives Matter chiefly. I think it's really only through mass organizing that's forced universities, for example, and those of us who are scholars in different fields to really take it seriously. Like, the story, the book Cheryl and I did, I mean, it's a decade old now, but it's also only a decade ago that we had to fight to use the word racism. That course remains the only one in the faculty with that word in the title, you know? So this is really recent and this is, I would say, in spite of the kind of scholarly commitment to not push the conversation, it hasn't -

[00:41:43] So I think of positionality in terms of the position of power, rather than positionality as it's sometimes explained as in, speaking as a person of colour or speaking as a woman, there's nothing innately about being anything that's going to produce an analysis, but it's in your relationship and through that kind of history of power that's going to produce maybe a different perspective. So things are working to benefit you, you might not want to challenge those things. I think it's probably innately human to want to continue to do things that privilege you, so you might not want to challenge that. But

if you are working from a position where you are coming from a history of exploitation, you might want to challenge that because things aren't fair. So you might want to have varied voices in the room. And so, you know, that's the main challenge I think. I can't think of any of the, at least in the social science disciplines in Canada, that I would characterize as representative of the Canadian population. Like it certainly isn't at my university.

[00:42:55] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** So I think it's fair to say that, and correct me if I'm wrong, but that we benefit, we have a richer conversation if we have a more a diverse set of voices that are contributing to that narrative, that storyline.

[00:43:10] **Andil Gosine:** Well I think we have better research. Because if you're only looking at this story from one point of view, it's not very good research. Like I think that, you know, that becomes for me the ultimate question. Like the interest in racism is not simply a kind of moral question, for me the ultimate question is like, I'm just trying to respond to the material. I want to be as thorough researcher as I can be to represent the situation. So race is such a key component of organizing life in a part of the world that has been colonized for 500 years. And among those countries in the Americas, very few of them have been independent for even a few decades. I mean, not to go back to the queen, but we're still in the beginning of this process, so we really have to kind of just do - doing good research means you have to ask questions about race.

[00:44:15] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** That's a really good way to encapsulate it. And I want to turn to Tzazná and ask a similar type of question in the context of your own work. Maybe a way to ask this is what do we miss if the effort to regulate labour rights or even the efforts to organize labour rights failed to incorporate you know, a diversity of voices, a diversity of positionalities.

[00:44:41] **Tzazná Miranda Leal:** Well, I mean, I think you're asking the underlying question for all of Justicia's work. We are primarily a group of racialized women, queer, trans people, immigrant people who are doing this work, engaging with farm workers and undocumented workers. And what we've seen is that environmental racism for example, gets completely missed in a labour-based analysis because, simply put, labour spaces are very white traditionally and historically. And I'm talking for example, unions, labour councils, Canadian Labour Congress. And that's changed a lot throughout the years, but traditionally these issues of gender and race get missed completely.

[00:45:32] So for example, my research in my master's thesis with Andil was around a group of women, cisgender and trans women in the Leamington area who were migrant workers who were sexually harassed and assaulted by the employer, but also controlled, monitored, surveilled in their comings and goings in their daily lives and also faced all the other issues that migrant workers face, precarity, recruitment fees, harassment from the recruiter, lower wages, dangerous, really dangerous working conditions. And there, it was clear to me how, the way that the women started a legal case around what had happened to them. And the folks who came to work with them from unions and from law firms that were actually exclusively white, just missed so much of what these women were going through, were missing the gender lens, to even know how to say speak to someone who was a survivor of gendered violence, or what to do with the fact that, you know, some of these were queer and trans people and were experiencing all kinds of harassment in the community. And it was just completely ineffectual. And so in academic work analyzing that, but also in our organizing work, if you don't bring those perspectives, you will miss things that are crucial and that may be the whole underlying crux for how this issue came to be, which was certainly the case for this group of workers.

[00:47:14] So, I found, as you mentioned that the academic work on migrant workers was mostly carried out by white folks, but that was not even my main problem. My main problem was that all of it was very... victimizing. It approached workers still as this sort of racialized Other, you know, poor folks being subjects of violence and abuse who didn't have seemingly a choice in the matter. And so what I tried to do was focus on actually how much agency those people had in fighting back despite all of the barriers and everything being stacked against them. And you know, recognizing all of that complicated, intricate dynamics that go on in people's lives, that isn't just, you know, all of these poor people are sort of coming from that charity or that white saviour model that actually filters into academia all too commonly.

[00:48:15] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Yeah, no, absolutely. And I hate to cut the conversation short cause it's a fascinating discussion. But before I do take us out, maybe just really quickly, Tzazná you were just talking about some of your work, particularly during your, I think you were alluding to your graduate studies. You, I had an understand that you kind of turned that graduate work into a comic book and that that might be coming out soon. Is that somewhere, is there a place that listeners can kind of keep their eye on to see where that might come out?

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[00:48:52] **Tzazná Miranda Leal:** Yeah, I think keep an eye on Justice for Migrant Workers' social media, and I'm trying to do a second edit on it so that it's the best it can be, so that's why it's not out yet, but I do hope to release it soon.

[00:49:11] **Andil Gosine:** It's a really brilliant project because here is Tzazná telling the story in two dimensional form and has brought much more complexity and respect for the human dignity of the characters than you mostly see in research. You know, we see a kind of blank figure often, as Tzazná just mentioned, in the way that people might talk about the farm worker and instead what they do with their project is really give us a sense that this is a complex human being with agency, with limitations with authority and knowledge and which is neither all about kind of a shortsighted celebration nor condemnation, but just kind of the full complexity of their characters. - And it's also like, it speaks volumes about how much, how many different ways in which we can activate work in this moment to document, challenge, question, fight against racism, like for Tzazná's Master's thesis they produced this wonderful comic book.

[00:50:20] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Well, make sure you do share that with us, Tzazná, when it does come out and we'll be sure to put that on the website, but for the meantime, people can keep an eye out to Justicia for Migrant Workers and hopefully that comic will be up there. And it's just an example to students listening out there that, you know, research and scholarly works can take many different forms.

[00:50:47] I hate to end things so early when we have, it seems like we could keep it going and discuss a number of important themes here just really wanting to reflect on a couple of quick things. That construct about the three D framework that you mentioned, Tzazná, and linking that into worker's rights and questions of environmental justice was I think really useful. This idea of using COVID-19 and the pandemic to reflect on this myth of the great equalizer - I found that really interesting because we've seen a lot of discussion around climate change as this great equalizer, which also is a deeply problematic mythology. And I think you guys really tied that in very nicely. And then this discussion about positionality and perspective. So how a diversity of voices really enriches our perspective and enriches our work in whatever field that may be including ecopolitics itself.

[00:51:47] So, yeah, that wraps up this episode of the Ecopolitics Podcast. And for listeners out there, don't forget to check out other episodes in this series at ecopoliticspodcast.ca. And thanks once again, we'll chat soon.