

The Ecopolitics Podcast - S01E09: Ecofeminism and Queer Ecology

<https://www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca/episode-9-ecofeminism-and-queer-ecology-2/>

Host: Peter Andrée (Carleton University)

Guests: Cate Sandilands (York University) and Sherilyn MacGregor (University of Manchester)

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Ecofeminism is a critical lens that focuses on the many ways that gender shapes how people see and treat nature as well as people's interactions with their environments. Queer ecology disrupts prevailing heterosexist understandings of gender, sexuality and nature. In this episode, Dr. Catriona Sandilands and Dr. Sherilyn MacGregor share with us the ways in which insights from these diverse fields serve to expand and deepen how we look at the policies and day-to-day practices of environmental politics.

Episode 9: Ecofeminism and Queer Ecology

Sherilyn MacGregor: At a time when humans must really radically change the way our needs are met or face extinction, it seems really important to incorporate ecofeminist insights about the politics of care into a transition to a post carbon future. And many ecofeminists are calling for the kind of fundamental restructuring of society that entails organizing social reproduction in the new way, in order to make the work of our daily survival less onerous and more enjoyable and democratic than we have seen under capitalism so far. And these are not new demands - they've been made repeatedly and have been made countless times over the decades, precisely because ecopolitical thinkers and activists don't bring an intersectional approach to thinking about environmental justice.

[00:00:55] **Peter Andrée:** Welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast. A podcast series that tackles some of the big questions in the field of environmental politics for university students in Canada. I'm Peter Andrée from Carleton University, cohost of the show, along with Dr Ryan Katz-Rosene from the University of Ottawa, though he's not joining us for this episode.

[00:01:15] Today's podcast is about pluralism, ecofeminism and queer ecology. To introduce this topic, I just want to talk a bit about my own path into ecopolitics. Towards the end of my undergrad in the early 1990s, I was really taken by the big question of How did we get into this environmental crisis in the first place? And what does that mean for the work we need to do to respond to it? As I wrestled with this question, I came to see that there are many different ways of answering it from different perspectives, each of which can carry some valuable insights. My own thesis work led me to engage with early ecofeminist writers, like Carolyn Merchant, who wrote an amazing book called The Death of Nature.

[00:01:57] I came to see that we can't make sense of the environmental crisis without understanding the power and impact of patriarchy in our lives. That is the values, relationships and institutional structures

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that have subordinated women to men, which have also placed the rest of nature in a subordinate position in relation to a very particular instrumental and exploitative rationality associated with patriarchy in Western history.

[00:02:22] I won't go too much more into that now because I'm hoping our guests can help unpack this a little bit over the course of this episode. I do want to say though, that I came to realize that we all, regardless of our gender and position, we've all paid a price for this patriarchal system we are part of.

[00:02:39] Though I fully recognize of course some pay a dearer price than others. A simple example can be found in what Laurie Adkin said in another episode in this series, in which she pointed out that there's a particular masculinity associated with focusing only on drawing raw bitumen out of the ground in Alberta, and which refuses to see as equal the potential economic and social benefits associated with jobs in the energy retrofitting industry.

[00:03:06] I believe we all have a lot to gain by getting clarity not only on how gender is connected to environmental exploitation, but also racism and heterosexism for example, how these things continue to shape the way that environment is understood and engaged with. So there's so much to learn and think through when taking these issues seriously, as we try to make sense of environmental politics.

[00:03:28] So I'm really excited about the conversation we're going to have it today in this podcast with Professor Catriona Sandilands and Dr Sherilyn MacGregor. Catriona, or Cate, Sandilands is a writer and scholar in the environmental humanities. She's professor of environmental arts and justice in the faculty of environmental and urban change at York University.

[00:03:49] Her research sits at the intersection of feminist and queer theory, multi-species studies, especially plant human relations and the interdisciplinary environmental humanities. She's written or edited several books, among them: *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, co-edited with Bruce Erickson.

[00:04:10] Sherilyn MacGregor is reader in environmental politics, jointly appointed to the sustainable consumption Institute and the politics department in the school of social sciences at the University of Manchester in the UK. The focus of her research is the relationship between feminist politics and environmental politics, particularly around issues of sustainability, justice, citizenship, and unpaid care work.

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[00:04:34] She has written or edited a number of books, including the 2017 Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment. So as I said, one of the things today's episode is about is taking pluralism seriously in ecopolitics, a topic Ryan and I first introduced in our opening episode. In that episode, we discussed the importance of recognizing that any narrative in environmental politics is inevitably grounded in both the positionality of the storyteller and an epistemology, a set of assumptions about what counts as legitimate knowledge.

[00:05:08] Sometimes positionality and epistemological assumptions are foregrounded in the story, but often they're cleverly hidden within relations to power that seemed to predetermined whose voice has more authority than others. So for the first question, I'm going to turn to Cate Sandilands.

[00:05:26] Cate, in one version of your faculty profile at York University you stated that your primary task as a teacher, writer, and researcher is the cultivation of plurality. What do you mean by the cultivation of plurality? Why do you think it's so important when it comes to efforts to address environmental issues like climate change, for example?

[00:05:46] **Catriona Sandilands:** Thank you very much for the question, Peter. The idea of the cultivation of plurality begins in the assumption not only that we all have different relationships to environmental issues such as climate change or indeed issues such as COVID, but that there is a real merit to discussing those issues in common in ways that acknowledge, respect and proceed from our very particular positionalities or situated knowledges in the world as Donna Haraway would say.

[00:06:19] Plurality is not the same thing as Everyone has the right to their own opinion, which is in my opinion, not a very sensible phrase. An opinion is not something that one has a right to. An opinion is something that is grounded in experience of the world, everyday experience of the world. So I have a particular situation in relationship to climate change. I see particular things. I experience different particular things. I'm affected in particular ways. That's not the be all and end all of environmental knowledge. As opposed to a model in which we are presented with climate change as a fact, or a process or in particular, the idea that we are all somehow in the same boat.

[00:07:07] The idea of the cultivation of plurality means that we start from our individual understandings and bring them to the table in common, so that we are able to hold our different knowledges of the world accountable to one another. So in a way, the idea of the cultivation of plurality is the idea that we bring our situations to the table and discuss their relationships rather, than assume

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that we all proceed to understand or act in relationship to environmental issues from some kind of position of sameness.

[00:07:42] **Peter André**: Sherilyn, much of your scholarship focuses on gender and the environment. For example, you've written a book grounded in an ecofeminist analysis entitled *Beyond Mothering Earth: Ecological Citizenship and the Politics of Care*. What does ecofeminism mean to academics studying the relationship among people, and between people in the environments they live and work in/ and what has adopting an ecofeminist position come to mean in your own work?

[00:08:09] **Sherilyn MacGregor**: Thank you, Peter. It's great to be with you in this podcast. By way of introduction, I'd start by saying that ecofeminism is a body of environmental political theory that has been developing over the past 40 years or so, first in environmental philosophy and ethics, and then expanded and elaborated in various ways by scholars in different disciplines, sometimes using different labels, such as feminist political ecology and feminist ecological economics. and I think it's important to point out that ecofeminist work in the environmental social sciences is probably somewhat more relevant to students of environmental politics, and it's also where I locate my work. But I'd also want to know that there's a lot of important ecofeminist work being done in the environmental humanities in English and literary criticism, cultural studies, post humanist philosophy, and so forth. so that being said I think also I think I want to say that I'm going to talk about academic ecofeminism. And it's important to say here that academic ecofeminism is very diverse and transdisciplinary. And what I'm presenting here is a view from the global North. And I'd want to stress that many - that there are many different interpretations and practices of ecofeminism around the world. So Indian ecofeminism as articulated in Vandana Shiva's work for example, or the ecofeminisms being practiced by anti mining activist women in South Africa have very specific histories and features that I can't cover here, but I think that listeners should definitely be aware of.

[00:09:56] That said, I would explain ecofeminism as a critical theoretical lens that focuses on the many ways that gender, as a construct, shapes how people see and treat nature as well as people's interactions with their environments. ecofeminism takes as a starting point the fact that humans are embodied beings embedded in relationships who survival depends on other humans, other species, and the more-than-human world. It's very critical of the Enlightenment ontologies and epistemologies that you spoke about in the introductory podcast, peter, when you referred to the Cartesian move of treating mind and body as separate or as hierarchically ordered.

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[00:10:46] And ecofeminist thinkers see these binary structures of thought, mind and body, as well as the dualisms of culture/nature and male/female as root causes of the ecological failings of Western culture. In a very early essay from around 1990, I think Ynestra King set out some of the foundational claims of ecofeminist political theory and wanted really to define it as neither antisocial nor anti natural, but fundamentally anti-dualistic. So it's a perspective that understands humans as a species that emerged from, and being embedded in the material world. And it calls for, in King's words, treating this ontology as a ground for ethics. And this leads not only to a radically different view of humans, but also leads ecofeminists to advocate an interspecies politics that recognizes nature as having agency.

[00:11:55] Now you might want to say that a lot of branches of ecopolitical theory are critical of Enlightenment dualisms and the structures that they make possible like capitalism, Technoscience, and colonialism. Ecofeminism is certainly not alone in seeking more just inter-species politics, but what makes ecofeminism specifically feminist and what ecofeminism brings to ecopolitics that no other approach brings. I think, or perhaps queer ecology also brings, is that it makes visible the gender norms, relations and asymmetries that shape human experiences of environmental processes and change. It says that dominant gender norms of masculinity and femininity, and the structure of patriarchy are intertwined and entangled with capitalism and colonialism, and they must be treated as such and they must be analyzed as such, not least because we won't be able to adequately tackle the root causes of the current crisis, unless we understand how these crises are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. And here, of course, I'm thinking of the crises of capitalism, climate, care, and now COVID-19.

[00:13:18] **Peter Andréé:** Thank you, Sherilyn, I recognize that was a really big question I asked you and I think you've done a really nice job of sketching out the broad contours of this field of ecofeminist political thought. And then also positioning the particularities of it as a sort of a feminist environmental political theory. I want to turn back to Cate now. Cate, my understanding is that in your own scholarly development, the notion of queer ecology built on your engagement with ecofeminism in the collection *Keywords for Environmental Studies*.

[00:13:56] You begin your introduction to *Queer Ecologies* by stating that this term refers to a loose interdisciplinary constellation of practices that aim in different ways to disrupt prevailing heterosexist, discursive, and institutional articulations of sexuality in nature, and also to reimagine evolutionary processes, ecological interactions and environmental politics in light of queer theory.

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[00:14:21] So there's a lot to unpack in that one sentence. That's why I put it out there for us to think about. For listeners, just hearing this term for the first time, how would you describe the core threads of queer ecology, especially as they relate to what we broadly think about in this series as ecopolitics?

[00:14:39] **Catriona Sandilands:** The central tenets of queer ecology are that experiences of sexuality and gender identity are also influential in shaping one's relationship to the natural world. In the introduction to Bruce Erickson's and my edited book, *Queer Ecologies*, we thought about that in three ways in particular.

[00:15:02] The first is that ideas of nature are very strongly influenced by heterosexist and homophobic formulations. So for example, although this is now beginning to change, and there are many evolutionary and other biologists who are speaking about sexual diversity in the more-than-human world, there was for a very long time an assumption that the natural form of, mammalian at least, sexuality is heterosexual and anything other than that must be some kind of deviation or that the display of non-heterosexual behavior or homosocial behavior must somehow be part of the larger practice of heterosexuality in a given species. So in bonobos, for example, a species of primate, there was a reading of female homosocial behavior as, this must be a way of cultivating cooperation among the females so that they could choose which male they were going to mate with. That sort of overwhelming assumption of the fundamental heterosexuality, the importance of heterosexuality, completely overlooked the fact that these Bonobos might actually be having fun with one another. So the first key tenet of queer ecology is that heterosexuality and homophobia have been profoundly important in shaping the ways that we think about nature.

[00:16:36] The second is that heterosexuality and homophobia have been incredibly important in shaping the institutions through which we experience nature. One of the most obvious is the park. Central Park was actually designed in a very particular way in order for appropriate rituals of heterosexual courtship to occur. And then what happened in the other parts of the park, which might not have been so respectable at the time, for example, places for sexual contact, were actually criminalized. The parks were specifically organized to develop heterosexual behavior and discourage homosexual behavior, which was then criminalized.

[00:17:16] The third tenet of queer ecology is that LGBTQ2+ writers are actually able to not only get us to challenge those heterosexual mindsets and institutions through which we understand and experience

nature, but also that queer writers might be able to show us of thinking and behaving that are not so tightly tied to these heterosexist ideas and specifically institutions around family and inheritance and consumption that go along with dominant models of the middle class, particularly middle class nuclear family.

[00:18:02] Although this is a very complex topic and I don't mean to suggest that queer ecology is somehow anti-family. The idea that that futurity might not be tied to inheritance, the idea that consumption and amassing of wealth in the nuclear family might not be the best way of thinking about property, about cooperation and thinking about family is actually what - is actually a very key insight that queer ecology has brought to the world. What does it mean to have intimate, deeply connected relationships with a family that includes not just other human beings, particularly not just biologically related human beings, but also the more-than-human world.

[00:18:53] **Peter Andréé:** Thank you, Cate. I realized that was also a very big question for you and thank you for really laying out some of the key insights that have been emerging from, by queer ecology, particularly around how heterosexism and homophobia has shaped our understanding of nature, has shaped the way we build our cities and institutions and parks as an example. And then some of the insights that you were getting at in the end, I think are really interesting as we think about the future and the insights that queer ecology can bring to Who we are and who we need to be moving forward, hopefully as a more inclusive society.

[00:19:38] I'm going to turn back to Sherilyn. Sherilyn, in a chapter you published in the 2018 Routledge Companion to Environmental Studies, you noted that just as the environment did not enter popular discourse until the late 1960s, the importance of gender in human societies was popularized in the global North only as recently as the 1970s. Notably both terms relate to movements for social change, environmentalism and feminism, respectively. Was there a larger cultural shift in perspective that these terms are part of in your view?

[00:20:16] **Sherilyn MacGregor:** Yes, I think it's good to think of about a kind of cultural shift and that these movements are part of a cultural shift and their key words, gender and environment are part of this kind of discursive and cultural kinds of shift. You know, thinking about it through what Ulrich Beck has called reflexive modernization which is a process or that he's certainly theorized is a process that

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took place in the time around the second part of the 20th century, where citizens started to question and to doubt the idea of progress and the promised benefits of modern science and technology.

[00:20:59] It became sort of, I mean, it became increasingly apparent that human wellbeing and conditions of ecosystem integrity, were under threat from some of the very things that were meant to be the improvements in people's lives. So like synthetic chemicals, pharmaceuticals, nuclear technologies, and so on and so on. So movements started to form to start to challenge the authority of hitherto trusted institutions and to call them to account. So people wanted to question the accumulation of chemical herbicides and pesticides in the ecosystem for example. They wanted to question the prescribing of drugs to healthy women by a largely male medical profession with almost no understanding of women's bodies. And it all started to make sense through social movements, through politicizing these industries is professions and connections were made right to profit, to power and ideology. Of course these political movements mobilized to try to foreground these connections and to make them something that needed to be challenged and eventually changed.

[00:22:12] Of course it seems rather odd to look back and celebrate people questioning scientific expertise in the current context. But I've always thought that this reflexive modernization narrative is quite helpful in thinking about the cultural shift that gave rise to feminism and environmentalism in the sixties and seventies in North America and Western Europe. And it's certainly I think better one than the standard, and sometimes we think of quite flawed, post materialism thesis.

[00:22:49] **Peter Andréé:** Cate, I wonder if you want to add something to what Sherilyn's just been saying.

[00:22:54] **Catriona Sandilands:** Thank you. This idea of reflexive modernization actually is possibly a useful way of distinguishing queer ecology what our many listeners might understand as the primary orientation of a lot of recent gay and lesbian politics advocating for example, for marriage equality. On the one hand, we see what some call a move toward homonormativity in which a rights-based agenda for LGBTQ people is that we can have all the same rights as heterosexuals. So that we can have the right to marry.

[00:23:36] We can have the right to be the beneficiary on one another's life insurance policies. And while I don't want to negate the importance of those basic rights, queer ecology is not necessarily interested in having the same rights, the same institutions, the same practices as heterosexual nuclear

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families as heterosexual institutions. Rather queer ecologies seeks to critique those institutions for their environmental impact.

[00:24:06] So queer here is deployed as a critical term rather than a term that demands kinds of rights-based equality.

[00:24:17] **Peter Andrée:** Thanks, Cate that's really helpful. And Sherilyn too. I found it was really interesting, you know, to bring in reflexive modernization. And then, and then this point that Cate was bringing up about the distinct positionality of queer ecologies in perhaps bringing a stronger critique of the, the assumptions one might hold about simply wanting to make - open up the heterosexist institutions and perhaps make them not just heteronormative, but also homonormative. And you know, that queer ecology is really fundamentally wanting to challenge the assumptions about what it means to open up and be a more inclusive society. And so Sherilyn, I wanted to ask you, I mean, maybe you want to respond to what Cate just said, but also just to reflect on how these social movements have interacted over the almost a 50 years since. And particularly do you think environmentalists and the environmental movement and maybe environmental policies makers have taken gender more seriously over the years in their response to environmental issues. And similarly has the feminist movement become more environmentalist as these movements have connected?

[00:25:38] **Sherilyn MacGregor:** If you don't mind, I want to start by making my answer a little bit closer to home, to what I, where I work, which is looking at academic environmental politics circles, and then say something about the movements and policymakers. The two have a pretty odd relationship. And I actually wrote an article, I don't know, probably about 10 years ago now, in which I call them natural allies and perennial foes. And you know, you would work quite well together, or at least I do because I work in a way that brings them together. But in reality, there is a lack of engagement and a level of misrecognition that I've found quite frustrating and baffling over the years.

[00:26:28] If you take environmental studies as an academic field, there's a well-documented lack of attention to gender and feminism in environmental social science - certainly with, with environmental politics as a discipline that probably fares worst of all. And you can actually look at journals citations or sort of do a search of journal citations to sort of find evidence for my claim. There was a study in 2007, by Banerjee and Bell who presented results of a citation index search where they looked for references to gender, sex, or feminism in the top five environmental social science journals from 1980 to 2005. And

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they found just 3.9% of citations in these journals had any references to these key terms of gender, sex, or feminism. And an exact rerun of their study was done by one of my PhD students Joanna Flavell last year. And she found that that figure could be updated to a whopping 4.4%. So that's a pretty shocking lack of attention to feminist insights, feminist theorizing, feminist research within the environmental social sciences.

[00:27:57] I've recently done my own search within Environmental Politics, which is the, you know, one of the top journals in our field of ecopolitics. And I've tried to look at, you know, what the situation is there. And actually Environmental Politics journal is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. And if you look back over 30 years ecofeminism was first introduced in the journal in its first - in volume one issue two, back in 1992. A few years later, it was praised by John Barry in an essay where he called it a materialist theory that suggests nothing less than a fundamental rethink of green politics.

[00:28:45] And yet since then, since about the late nineties, it has really faded into the margins. And I did a search about a year ago through the back issues of Environmental Politics and found a total of 11 articles where ecofeminism is central and about five where it is only mentioned in a kind of superficial way. So the evidence of lack of engagement is pretty overwhelming.

[00:29:14] Explaining why there's a lack of engagement is not something I'm able to do. I can speculate, but I'd rather do a bit more research to be able to explain, but it's definitely worth pondering. So that's the academic situation. There might be a better level of productive interaction and engagement between feminism and environmentalism within social movement and policy circles. But I would venture to say that a lot of a lot of work by feminists has gone into putting gender and intersectional analysis on the green agenda and that not a lot of effort has been made on the part of environments to go along to feminist conferences and protests and say, you know, Hey, what about the climate crisis?

[00:30:04] Women's movement organizations have tended not to focus a lot on environment and climate, often because they've had more pressing strategic priorities and a good idea example of this, just to illustrate this, is a couple of months ago, I was invited to give a talk on the gender dimensions of the climate emergency to a South African feminist NGO network. And a few, like a day after I was invited, they said, Oh, sorry, no, we're going to cancel that because we actually want to have a talk on male violence during the pandemic lockdown because this is far more urgent for our members and for our practitioners and the different NGOs in the network.

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[00:30:53] So that puts, you know, that puts the politics of this into bold relief, doesn't it? I mean, women are being killed in their homes every day while vast swathes of the planet are on fire. You know, how do you prioritize? so, you know, in the world of academic feminism there has tended to be a lack of attention to environmental issues in part due to choices to focus on different sorts of gender related questions like violence.

[00:31:23] But also in part, perhaps due to almost outright avoidance of environment, out of fear of being seen as essentialist or uncritically aligned with biological nature. And there's a whole critique of the feminist flight from nature that Stacy Alaimo has written about, which I think is still worth understanding and appreciating, even though we might want to be extremely critical of it.

[00:31:51] And then there's a third part, I think of why feminists have tended to not engage so much with environmental issues, and that is possibly due to the domination in some disciplines and fields by a brand of liberal feminism that advances the narrow interests of elite women in ways that just sustain capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy, and other isms.

[00:32:15] And just very quickly on the policy piece of this, cause you asked about the extent to which feminism and environmentalism speak to each other in the policy terrain. And I often think that that policy often seems farthest - further ahead on gender and environment than movements, and certainly than academia tends to be, and here much of this as the result of feminist activists who have fought really hard for some small gains along the bumpy road towards transformative structural change.

[00:32:51] And we could look at the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal, for example, goal number five on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. We can look at the UNFCCC, which has recently adopted a gender action plan. And various NGOs and governments that are engaging in what they call 'gender mainstreaming' or the mainstreaming of gender as a concept into environmental and climate policies. So we can see some gains in that, those respects.

[00:33:29] But that comes with two really important caveats, however, and the first is that these policies can be very instrumental. They can treat women's empowerment as a useful tool for system sustaining responses to climate change. And the second is that they really almost exclusively equate gender with women to the complete neglect of men in most cases and probably all cases. I'm yet to find many examples where, where gender is treated as the way that feminists would want to treat it, as an intersectional idea, that is a spectrum that includes masculinities as well as femininities.

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[00:34:15] **Peter Andréé:** Thanks Sherilyn. That was, I have to say, somewhat sobering to hear that the field of environmental politics has engaged so little with these very important questions of gender. And we heard a similar analysis in a previous podcast looking at environmental racism where the field of environmental studies was not open to these questions of race until only very recently. And yet, I mean, I just have to say, I'm so glad that we're including these episodes in this particular series and that students, you know, hopefully the future will have more of this type of work taken seriously in environmental politics, because it certainly is for all the reasons that we're talking about today, so important to making sense of the environmental crisis and how we may respond to it.

[00:35:11] On this question of gender and environment and how it's picked up, I'll just turn back to Cate. Sherilyn you've also written about this, that there's a substantial body of literature, maybe not in environmental politics, but beyond that, on women and environment, but much less on men and environment. And that this imbalance has also led to a rather simplified assumption that when scholars and activists talk about gender and environment, we're basically referring to women and the environment. And one consequence of this simplification is that queer and two-spirited, LGBTQ+ people and their experiences and perspectives on the intersection between gender, sexuality, and environment get very little attention.

[00:35:57] Cate, for a number of years, you've been teaching a course called Sex, Gender, Nature to undergraduate environmental studies students at York University. What are the core ideas that you hope students take away from this course about sex, gender, and nature, maybe building on the ideas from the book that you talked about earlier, and how do these ideas matter for how, why do these ideas matter for how we address the environmental challenges of our time?

[00:36:25] **Catriona Sandilands:** First I need to say that my perspective, my work is currently very strongly grounded in the environmental humanities rather than the environmental social sciences. However I still write about politics. I think it's very important to, to understand and emphasize that politics is not limited to policy and that there are multiple sites for the enactment of politics and engagement with political work. And the humanities and the arts are actually deeply invested in thinking about the cultivation of plurality that is necessary to the development of a real environmental political consciousness.

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[00:37:17] So I'm also sobered by the fact that we're still only 4% of articles on ecofeminism, but I would point to the proliferation of work in the arts and in literature that very strongly articulate to gender and environment. One example that I can think of off the top of my head is Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy - Oryx and Crake, The Year of the Flood and MaddAddam. Throughout these three novels, which are incredibly popular, there's a very, very strong and deeply political analysis of the relationship between patriarchy and oppressive gender relations, sexual violence, and the destruction of the natural environment. It's not framed in terms of policy it's framed in terms of getting the reader to understand between those two very large and violent sets of processes through their experience of a fictional world.

[00:38:21] So in response to your specific question about the sex gender nature class. Although I do teach an interdisciplinary array of works including policy, including social science and my fundamental orientation is getting students, male and female and other, to understand through reading works of literature to see, to be able to see the world around them in terms of these dense knots of gender and environment.

[00:38:54] So gender and environment is not just a relationship that is articulated in a particular set of places. One cannot have a relationship to the environment without being gendered in some way. Gender and the environment is an every day relationship.

[00:39:11] So how, how to see that? How to understand that? How to be able to recognize an everyday moment in which gender is shaping one's relationship to the environment in a way that might lead to - in a moment that might actually act as a moment of transformation.

[00:39:30] For example, Chris Cooper and his experiences of racism in relationship to a white woman in Central Park. You might remember that he is the birder who filmed a woman accusing him of something that he didn't do simply because he asked the woman to leash her dog. And it blew up and it became a very powerful moment to think about how Black men, in this case, a queer Black man, how their experience of space is so heavily organized by experiences of race. I would also argue in that particular moment that you can see the operations of gender going on. This is a moment in which it's very clear that racial politics were going on, that racism was going on, but you can also see very clearly that that racialized interaction was also deeply gendered. It's very important to speak about masculinity. It's very

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important to speak about Black masculinity as an intersectional relationship that clearly shaped perceptions of and relationships to natural environments.

[00:40:43] My goal is to help us create the analytical tools to show these very deeply political moments in which it becomes absolutely obvious that these are having an effect on the way that people are interacting with one another in and about the natural world.

[00:41:03] **Peter Andrée:** Thank you, Cate. First off, I really just want to say thank you for opening up our conversation about what is politics. And I completely agree with you that art, literature, films, and the everyday is the political as well. And I'm glad you're kind of opening that up for our listeners in this ecopolitics podcast. And I think your example of Chris Cooper in the end and talking about the intersectionality to help analyze his experience and for us all to see that - yeah, it's a great example. And with that, I just want to turn to Sherilyn because you were using the word intersectionality earlier on as well.

[00:41:44] And I wonder if you could maybe just talk a little bit about how you understand intersectionality and what it means to bring an intersectional approach to your environmental policy or activist work. I think our listeners would be really interested in hearing about your recent work on the proposed green new deal for the UK and at the international level, through the Women's Environment and Development Organization.

[00:42:10] This idea of a green new deal as a package of policies and programs designed to address both the climate crisis and economic inequality is a topic we've discussed previously in the podcast series with Bob Paelhke, but with a focus on the United States and Canada. What does it mean for you to take an intersectional approach to conceptualizing something like a green new deal?

[00:42:34] **Sherilyn MacGregor:** Well, maybe I can start like briefly trying to explain what an ecofeminist approach to intersectional analysis looks like before going on to talk about how we've tried to use it in our work, on the green new deal and the feminist green new deal. I guess I'd say that feminism is a praxis that is striving for social justice for gender justice. And it understands power relations and injustices as having material, structural, normative, discursive dimensions, and as operating on multiple levels and as being lived expressed and reproduced through all sorts of social practices. So it's very complex, right.

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[00:43:29] And intersectionality is a kind of way of naming and working with this complexity. It's an analytical tool, really, that that's the way I think of it, as an analytical tool that shows how structures of power emerge and interact and feminists theorists of many different persuasions and approaches use intersectionality as a way of analyzing specifically the interactions between gender, race, class, sexuality, age and other categories of difference in people's lives and their social practices and institutional relationships and arrangements in cultural ideologies as well as sort of the outcomes of these things and how in terms of how power is distributed socially.

[00:44:27] Of course, this concept has origins in Black feminist theory needs to be always attributed to the legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw and shown that it builds on work by theorists, such as Angela Davis, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and all of us, including ecofeminists who work in feminist theory, acknowledge the importance of this work and showing that gender is always raced and always classed. It always intersects with other axes of difference. So intersectionality is needed analytically and politically in order to avoid simplistic and single axes understandings of gender.

[00:45:11] But at the same time, I want to also say that it should, it can and should be used to understand the way axes of power and privilege intersect to position some people as if they are completely unmarked by these categories. So white, cisgender male, straight, affluent. You know, this sort of intersection of certain axes can actually be more relevant to thinking about environmental problems and the causes of environmental problems than thinking about the socially marginalized, you know. So I think it's wrong. It would be wrong to think about intersectionality is only about the intersections of different forms of oppression. It's also about the intersection of different forms of power and privilege.

[00:46:02] I would also add that while ecofeminist political theory analyzes the intersections of identities and positionalities of humans in the pursuit of social and environmental justice. It also seeks to bring species, matter, culture, climate to the analysis and that kind of intersectional analysis and intersectionality has not necessarily been as normalized in mainstream feminism or ecopolitics, it's still kind of very much under development. And I mean, I think that's what ecofeminism has always tried to do, but actually using the term intersectionality and using it as an analytical lens hasn't been developed as clearly.

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[00:46:53] And that's actually a really excellent article that recommend. One of the few articles on gender and ecofeminism that was published in Environmental politics, by Anna Kaijser and Annica Kronsell that looks at climate change through the lens of intersectionality. And I think, you know, your listeners and students should definitely have a look at that article to see how intersectionality can be applied environmental political issues more broadly.

[00:47:21] Your other part of your question, right, is Okay, how do you bring intersectional approach to thinking about this topic du jour, green new deal? So for the sake of time, maybe I could just flip that question on its head and talk about what happens when green new deal plans and proposals are developed *without* an intersectional analysis. And that's where my colleague Maeve Cohen and I started when we wrote our paper on the green new deal in the UK, which people can read online and maybe it'll have a link to it. But we started looking at the range of plans for a green new deal that have been made by different political parties and think tanks and just started asking questions. What's missing here? What assumptions underpin these policies?

[00:48:15] And then we started to look at what's missing, ask those questions and then start to craft it about what a feminist green new deal would look like. And we wanted to really show how key analytical insights into intersectional power relations and questions about distribution of money, time, work, and responsibility are rarely if ever addressed in green new deal proposals. And as a result, there's every chance that these green new deal proposals will result in a smaller number of - a small number of winners but a great many losers. So asking who wins, who loses, who pays, who profits, who does what work and for whom.

[00:49:01] And what axes of oppression and privilege intersect to create these winners and losers is really part of an intersectional approach. The interlocking crisis of our time, right, climate, and now COVID, have shown us how capitalism utterly fails in times of crisis. And it fails because it is really great at commoditizing and exploiting life, and the work that sustains life, and really bad at valuing and protecting life, and the work and the workers who sustain life.

[00:49:37] So this is important to make that point because in recent months, the green new deal is being rebooted to be all about a just recovery, right, 'building back better' after COVID. And there are many feminists in ecofeminists, especially in the UK right now who are really United in their argument that a just recovery has to be a care-led recovery and making those arguments. We really want to shift the

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focus of green, new deal, policymaking away from its narrow obsession with energy and you know, and the transition via green technologies and jobs in these rather select construction and engineering sectors, which by the way, happened to be dominated by white men.

[00:50:23] The arguments that are being put forward by ecofeminists and feminists working in this, and that what we try to put across in our policy document is that care work is green work, care jobs, jobs in the care sectors are green jobs. And that this work is already being done disproportionately by women, racialized women and racialized men, and is poorly paid and unpaid. At the same time, it is absolutely essential for the economy, for a good quality of life and for the decarbonization agenda. And the fact that care work has tended to be ignored in mainstream green, new deal visions is a result of a lack of an intersectional analysis, and that means that they just really aren't very good.

[00:51:09] **Peter André:** Thank you, Sherilyn. Your examples really show how an ecofeminist intersectional lens. The value it brings to policy work in the same way that Cate's example previously showed how this intersectional approach can really the politics of the day-to-day to become apparent to our eyes.

[00:51:30] Cate, before we close, I'd also like to ask you a question about some of the implications of what we're talking about today, bringing us back to our opening, but pluralism, what does it mean to take the insights of ecofeminism and queer ecology seriously? And how we imagine and operate public spaces like Canada's national parks.

[00:51:51] **Catriona Sandilands:** I'm interested in thinking about public spaces and public institutions and public practices as sites in which to highlight questions of intersectionality from, from my perspective, intersectionality is, is more of a way of describing the complex embodiments of our daily lives than it is an analytical that, that it is sort of an abstract analytical construct.

[00:52:19] How is it that public texts, public like institutions, public spaces, such as, but not only national parks. How, how is it that we can actually understand the specific relations that we bring to those to those publics, to those institutions? And how is it that we can think about for forming alternate public that might enact, perform, expose, rebuild sites of environmental conversation that are not dominated by a cis white male perspective, which of course never appears as a cis white male perspective. It appears as a universal.

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[00:53:02] Oh, national parks in Canada, at least, and probably in other settler colonial states as well are institutions that again, in which certain kinds of public gets performed. So in parks, you're supposed to do particular things you're supposed to behave in particular ways, you're supposed to learn certain kinds of things. It's about the history of the city or the nation you're supposed to learn certain kinds of things about nature. And these things are presented as universal forms of knowledge, often, very nationalist forms of knowledge. So that the story that gets told about the nation in the national park is actually designed to give people a certain idea of their citizenship.

[00:53:53] But art and literature and performance can politicize those institutions and can show in the case of national parks, for example, the relationships of racism and colonialism as well as heterosexism and sexism on which they're built. The current recognition that national parks are actually nature institutions that are built on the active exclusion of First Nations, of Indigenous folks in Canada is actually highlighted by many recent works of art by Indigenous artists.

[00:54:31] But just to bring it very specifically back to queer ecology I wanted to just talk very briefly about a performance piece by Shawna Dempsey and Laurie Milan in Banff national park called Lesbian National Parks and Services, which I encourage readers to Google because there are bits of the performance available online.

[00:54:53] Dempsey and Milan dressed in wardens uniforms and they created a mock interpretive experience that used the grammar of park interpretive guides as a way of highlighting the invisibility of queer history and the park space. So they were handing out maps that would show people the invisible lesbian house and the unmarked site of a particular sexual encounter.

[00:55:17] They mocked and therefore politicized and opened up and made visible the discourses around sex, gender, nature, race in which the national parks are steeped. So again, back to the point about politics does not only happen at the level of policy, the vast majority of politics doesn't get codified in normative prescriptive documents politics also critically and crucially happens in everyday experiences in everyday encounters. And that's the kind of queer ecological work that I have tended to focus on. And that many queer ecological writers working in the humanities have also focused on.

[00:56:05] **Peter André:** I want to thank you both for what's been a really stimulating conversation for me. And I'm trying to think about some of the key takeaways that I'm taking from here. One, you know, I really appreciate Cate, the multiple ways in which you encourage us to really open up our conception of

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the political. And yes, it includes art and literature and parks and the day to day encounters that we have in our lives. And you've really brought some great examples forward to bring those points home.

[00:56:40] Secondly, this notion of pluralism as a critical. To a fulsome democratic discussion. There are so many points of view that need to be given credence and allowed to have their voices participate in thinking through where we are at at this historical moment in our catastrophe with the earth and how we need to come out of this and how we need to see ourselves and this planet as we move forward. And the viewpoints that came forward today and there are so many more are, are so important to those discussions.

[00:57:21] And so, finally, what I take from both of you, but in particular Sherilyn, is this a call to action within-- by scholars and students of environmental politics that we haven't taken gender and intersectionality, as that relates to gender, race, class, sexuality, we haven't taken it seriously enough yet in understanding. The environmental crisis and thus in thinking through how we are going to and how we are responding to it through public policy through the economy.

[00:58:06] And I think you've brought that point home very clearly for me. And I hope that listeners take heed and that the next generation of environmental political work is going to look different from what, some of what you've described as the last-- what's been coming out in the last 20 years in this field.

[00:58:23] I want to thank you both so much for being with us today. And this wraps up another episode of the ecopolitics podcast. Don't forget to check out other episodes in the series at [ecopoliticspodcasts.ca](https://www.ecopoliticspodcasts.ca). And like us on social media, we're on twitter at [@ecopoliticsP](https://twitter.com/ecopoliticsP). You can also share your feedback with us through contact form on the website. Thanks once again to our guests. And we'll talk to you in our next episode.