



The Ecopolitics Podcast – Episode 2.13: Resources, Population and the Global Environment: A Case Study in Water (TRANSCRIPT)

<https://www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca/episode-2-13-resources-population-and-the-global-environment-a-case-study-in-water/>

Host: Peter Andrée (Carleton University) and Ryan M. Katz-Rosene (University of Ottawa)

Guests: Dr. Farhana Sultana (Syracuse University)

Recorded: March 22, 2021

INTRO: Recorded on World Water Day, in this episode, we speak with Dr. Farhana Sultana, Associate Professor in the Department of Geography and the Environment and the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University to discuss all things water. Our conversation touches on the human right to water and sanitation, the ways in which water is a cross-cutting, multisectoral entity, and how governance of water, and further, privatization, is complicated, and can often be detrimental, to ensuring our rights to water.

[00:00:00] **Dr. Farhana Sultana:** When we think about water insecurity, it is related to issues around social inequities and not necessarily availability of just technology. If we think about, for instance, back to the Flint, Michigan case of poisoning of a predominantly racialized minority population with lead in water infrastructure, that was an issue around infrastructure and technology that could be resolved with changes in infrastructure and technology, but then it was also an institutional failure which has resulted in years of that problem persisting.

[00:00:37] **Peter Andrée:** Hello and welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast, season two, Global Ecopolitics. This is a podcast for university students tackling some of the big questions in the field of global environmental politics. I'm Peter Andrée from Carleton University, and I'm here with my cohost, Dr. Ryan Katz-Rosene from the University of Ottawa. Ryan, can you introduce Dr. Sultana to our guests today?

[00:01:03] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Sure. So on today's episode, we're delighted to be speaking with Dr. Farhana Sultana, who is an Associate Professor in geography and the environment at Syracuse University. Dr. Sultana is an expert in water governance with a specializations in political ecology, international development, and decolonization, among other fields.

[00:01:23] When we first arranged an interview, Farhana reminded us that today, the day we're scheduled to do our recording, March 22nd, is World Water Day, a day which asks us to consider closely how we can value water and safeguard it for everyone on the planet. So this is a theme that I think goes under appreciated in the part of the world where Peter and I teach that's the Ottawa Gatineau region.

[00:01:47] Yes, we're blessed with ample fresh water resources, but there's also some underlying stresses to the system as well: industrial activity, increasing shoreline development, wastewater treatment issues, agricultural runoff, and so on. And all of these place stresses on a pretty fragile and social ecological hydrological system.

[00:02:06] And that makes me think of the political relations of water in the land where I live, a land where the watershed is in fact been inseparable from the history of the Algonquin Nation. And the dark irony of a water crisis faced by many First Nations communities in Canada, which is one of the wealthiest and most developed countries in the world.

[00:02:27] So for Farhana, this was a bit long-winded of an intro, but I've reflected on some of the themes that come to my mind during World Water Day. What themes are front and center in your mind during this day?

[00:02:39] **Dr. Farhana Sultana:** Thank you so much for inviting me, Ryan and Peter, to the Global Ecopolitics Podcast. I'm really delighted to be here and happy World Water Day to you and to everyone who's listening in on this later. And so basically what World Water Day means to me is that it really forces everyone to recognize the importance and value of world fresh water, because water is absolutely essential for all living beings to survive, water is biologically necessary and non-substitutable.

[00:03:13] So World Water Day came out of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and the first World Water Day was held in 1993. So it's been some time that people are starting to pay attention to issues around water and its central role in the various aspects of our lives that we may take for granted, such as the ones that you alluded to, but primarily issues around food production, agricultural productivity, industrial production, urban planning, international development, and all economic and geopolitical issues, whether it's related to political strife and conflict, instability, or broader issues on ecological sustainability, people's cultural practices and their sense of self, and even their spiritual and religious practices.

[00:04:02] So water centrality in the way we organize our lives is really important for people to generally understand. And this day to me means that at least there's one day on the international calendar where there's a concerted effort for everyone to start to link water to issues around wellbeing, public health, poverty, flourishing, education, and so on.

[00:04:27] So in other words, water is simultaneously economic, political, social, ecological, cultural, and spiritual, and those interconnections are what is really needed for people to really understand what's going on in the world. And so when you think about World Water Day, I think another issue that to me that is important is around the issue of power, the power to decide, to control, to allocate, to manage, to govern.

[00:04:57] So water is essentially about power because it affects how people's lives are lived and the livelihoods they have. But water is also intersectionally experienced by gender, class, race, indigeneity, and other axes of social difference. So therefore water affects different groups of people in different ways, in different locations.

[00:05:18] So I think some of those complexities are missed, but those are increasingly being talked about globally, especially on days like World Water Day, but also related to broader conversations. And I think those kinds of conversations and how water ties people together across ecologies and far-flung places through what they buy, what they eat, what they consume, how they live their lives, how they travel.

[00:05:45] Those are the issues that are really beginning to enter the public domain. So ultimately I think World Water Day helps increase that overall awareness and the public education and fosters conversations around these interconnected issues. And hopefully that means galvanizing action to tackle growing water crises globally, and the way that people take water for granted, as you alluded to.

[00:06:09] But then also the ways that many people cannot afford to do that and how water is such a precious thing that they are really struggling to obtain daily amounts of water for basic survival. So I think we need to have more concerted effort in terms of trying to think about the ways water is governed or exploited or controlled. And my hope is that World Water Day helps raise public attention to these complexities and across people from different age groups and social standings and different positionality so that we can all come to start to care more about water and its centrality in how we make life on Earth.

[00:06:48] **Peter Andr e:** Thank you, Farhana, for a very comprehensive answer to that question, really talking about the many meanings that water has force and values that people get from water, social, political, cultural, spiritual, and so on. You went to questions of power, the intersectionality of people's experience with water, and then you mentioned at one point the growing water crises globally. So I wonder if you can give us a bit of a one-on-one, a basic introduction to the state of the world's water systems today, and if you can maybe categorize the main types of what we might consider socioecological challenges facing the governance of water today?

[00:07:29] **Dr. Farhana Sultana:** Thank you for the question, Peter. To understand the challenges of world water governance today, I think some basic broad brush strokes of information may be helpful to listeners who may not be very familiar with these issues. So one of the things that I think folks generally understand is that there's really uneven distribution of water globally.

[00:07:50] So when you think about the fact that 70% of the Earth is covered with water, only 2.5% of the Earth's water is fresh water, which is what humans and plants and animals can use. And of that 2.5%, we use that for variety of needs, majority of the freshwater that humans access is for agriculture, that's about 70%.

[00:08:13] Then 20% goes into industry and the last 10% goes into municipal and domestic use, such as drinking water and sanitation. So what you can see is that they're competing demands over this precious amount of small quantities of fresh water that is accessible to us. And as a result, water becomes highly contested and fought over in different ways and at different scales.

[00:08:39] So what we're seeing is that water is becoming scarce, and this is not just about physical quantities, but issues around quality, accessibility, affordability, and reliability of water sources. So usually people tend to think about water only in terms of quantity, but we need to be aware of these other issues and then also the competing demands.

[00:09:00] So clean, safe water that is really vitally important affects everyone's ability to live full and healthy lives, engage in social progress to ensure ecological sustainability. And this speaks to wider concerns about the way water is therefore governed, whether it's damned, piped, polluted, contaminated, where some people gain while others lose out.

[00:09:24] So when you think about the global realities around the world regarding water, we need to start thinking of water as a cross cutting multi-sectoral entity, not just for like agriculture industry or domestic or municipal use, but the fact that water does many things at the same time and it connects across categories that we have created in an anthropocentric way and because water is rarely used for one specific or singular purpose, and what I mean by that is a water source, whether that's a naturally occurring one or a municipally derived one. And then also then therefore how that source is therefore treated.

[00:10:04] So right now we have over 2 billion people who do not have access to safe, reliable, clean drinking water daily, and then billions do not have access safe sanitation and hygiene, which also relies on water availability. And this has really been challenging this last year of the COVID-19 pandemic when people didn't have sufficient amounts of water for hand-washing to stay safe, even though that was immediate public health advisory from governments and international bodies.

[00:10:34] So even our collective efforts to deal with public health epidemics, to deal with issues around contamination or fear of contagion, really relies on our availability of water. So if we have 2 billion people who do not have that safe, reliable access to clean daily water, that really jeopardizes all those people's ability to not only live healthy, flourishing lives, but then also to basically survive.

[00:11:01] And one of the other things that's related to the way we can think about socioecological water crises is how water changes effectively climate change, because climate change is about too little, too much, wrong place, wrong time of water. So when we think about the way floods and droughts and sea level rise, all of these occur, which are the topics that are largely talked about in climate change, we recognize that these are essentially about the hydrosocial cycle in terms of how water appears or is located in any place, but then also therefore how it affects society, politics, the ecology, and the economy in that place. And I think the greater public knowledge about the ways that water comes to affect us wherever we are is how therefore we're able to then think through, in more complex ways, how we understand climate change or the pandemic, or how we deal with agriculture, or industrial production.

[00:12:01] So I think finally my point is that when we think about the socio-ecological challenges and fresh water governance, we need to be aware of the multitudinous ways and then the contextual matters, that I was just giving broad brush strokes on, and some of the challenges that arise can be from: structural barriers, it can be from institutional failures or

shortcomings, regulatory failures, lack of understanding or knowledge of the complex and interconnected issues involved, or sometimes even apathy and lack of political will, or lack of allocation of financial resources to address problems. So a lot of the challenges are not just naturally occurring, but then socio-politically derived.

[00:12:45] **Peter Andrée:** Farhana, I'd like to ask a follow-up question to that. And one of the words that you used as you began talking about the many different challenges related to water was, you mentioned that we often bring an anthropocentric lens to it, and I'm wondering as a political ecologist, what does it mean to think about water as a socioecological phenomenon?

[00:13:09] And I'm thinking about not only that the more than human world also needs water and is dependent on a water filled world, like the humans are, but also that sometimes I'm thinking there are times when water policy when it does take into account the environment, maybe thinks about it as separate from the ecological world, as separate from maybe human needs. So I just wonder, what's your perspective on the socio-ecological nature of water and how that figures or doesn't in water governance discussions?

[00:13:41] **Dr. Farhana Sultana:** Thank you for this follow-up question. So when we think about these kinds of socio-ecological challenges, so as a geographer and a political ecologist, the way I think about it is that interconnection between nature and society as a dialectic or as a relationship.

[00:13:56] So even when we're talking about what we consider a purely social or economic or political entities, such as global political economy or industrial production or public health, for somebody like me as a scholar who integrates those ecological and social understandings in much more complex ways, it means being mindful about those issues around ecosystems, other species, about different scales, about spatial organization, but also about temporal ways that things come to be.

[00:14:30] So for instance, one of the terms I used earlier was hydrosocial instead of hydrological, and what that means is recognizing that water basically is connected to the ways, not only the way it occurs naturally, like physical locations or physical occurrences of water such as lakes around water or the ocean, but in terms of how we as humans have structured water to literally flow almost uphill, in the way that water is very much infused with or our human understanding of water takes it beyond the hydrological context, which students are taught even in first or second grade, but to therefore infuse it with issues around social power.

[00:15:15] So when we think about socio-ecological, where parallel to that in the water sphere would be to advance our thinking beyond hydrology, but to think about hydrosocial and think about the way that we are concerned about other species and ecosystems and the planet as a whole. And then at the same time, recognizing the way that humans are very much embedded in those systems, whether we want to call them natural or ecological systems, and that we have intervened.

[00:15:45] So to loop back into the first part of your question about anthropocentric, a lot of the ways we have organized how we use any natural resource is to think about human society and human needs. And it does seem to often come across as we're abstracting it outside of its natural or ecological context, but that is not the way political ecologists would approach studying any natural resource.

[00:16:12] It's about being very mindful of the ways that these are incredibly interconnected and very much imbued with issues on social power, but then also around issues of the way nature organizes itself in terms of the materialities and ecological relationships between living and non-living nature.

[00:16:37] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Thanks Farhana. I find that nature society dialectic framing really useful. And I remember when I first learned about the hydrosocial cycle, I found that concept quite useful as well in explaining that linkage, so I appreciate your explanation there. I want to turn to a phrase which comes up a lot in the titles of some of the books you've written and that is the 'right to water' and I'm just curious, what does the human right to water entail?

[00:17:06] **Dr. Farhana Sultana:** Thank you Ryan for the question. So you are correct, many of my publications, including two of my three books have the phrase a 'right to water.' So the background to that is that clean drinking water is a massive concern globally, but clean drinking water is considered a human right and in 2010, the United Nations Resolution on the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation was passed. And basically what this means is that it is up to countries to implement and ensure that poor communities have access to adequate, safe, affordable, physically accessible, and acceptable types of water and sanitation for domestic use.

[00:17:50] And what the Resolution that was approved both by the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Human Rights Council, states and quote: "The right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation is a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights". End quote.

[00:18:12] So what this means is if we think about global structuring around human rights or how we think about governance of water, to even think about having human rights to survival, the right to live, is very much predicated on our ability to replenish and reproduce our species, our very human bodies. Because again, water is biologically necessary and non-substitutable - you cannot drink oil, you cannot find another thing to substitute water with.

[00:18:45] So when we think about the right to water and why it had so much support from countries around the world 11 years ago is because the Resolution gives governments something to work with in terms of the fact that the right to water is recognized as universal, finally, it came a bit late, but it still came. And that governments therefore need to ensure this for their populations. It's a legal obligations of states to fulfill. However, this does not happen overnight and does not happen everywhere.

[00:19:16] So guidelines were developed for what is known as the 'progressive realization of the right to water', which includes paying attention to a range of important things, such as

quality or safety, quantity, reliability, affordability, accessibility, availability, and acceptability. So these are not prescriptive but they need to be figured out in each context by each government with their citizens and their peoples through what is known as 'principles of non-discrimination participation and accountability'. So these are the overall international guidelines.

[00:19:51] And why this becomes important is because they link up to wider issues around equity and also around sustainability, especially the sustainable development goals or the SDGs. And they speak to a much broader, but pre-existing concerns around fairness, democratic processes, rights and accountability.

[00:20:11] So what we're seeing is that ultimately discourses around the right to water can thus open up and foster wider conversations around democracy, around laws, around citizenship, and development. And it has definitely become a set of discourses and tools that have galvanized often very poor and disenfranchised communities to demand greater water democracy and citizen participation in water governance in their own countries.

[00:20:41] So what the right to water and sanitation does is it addresses wider concerns around water justice and water insecurity. And this rights discourse also therefore opens up the potential to challenge and address various related inequities, whether they are by gender, class, race, or other unjust dynamics that are being compounded because there is a lack of water and sanitation. And it gives us a way to address wider concerns about racial capitalism or patriarchy or indigenous rights violations, because you can link up those violations to wider processes that are often hidden or ignored and water justice and rights to water therefore becomes an important tool to strive for this wider equity and justice concerns.

[00:21:32] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Thanks Farhana. It's quite interesting to hear about the formalization of the right to water within the UN structure and the legal obligation of states to fulfill these rights in multiple dimensions as you express, as you also pointed out, it's not to say that water justice has been achieved or water injustice has been fully confronted.

[00:21:53] But that kind of gets to my next question, which is surrounding the governance and property rights in the political economy of water governance. And so I'm curious to know about the privatization of water and how that factors into discussions around the right to water?

[00:22:11] **Dr. Farhana Sultana:** So privatization of water sources and then the institutional arrangements of water delivery have been critiqued by scholars, activists, and communities for some time and this is not to say that, privatization sets up the opposite spectrum of human rights, and I'll mention why. When we think about the commodification of water, or institutional responsibilities for managing water systems, such as a city's water utility and when that is privatized, there have been numerous instances of price hikes, leading to large numbers of poor communities being unable to afford water. And this can also lead to infrastructures that become inaccessible or controlled in different ways.

[00:22:56] So this is where the critiques of privatization have historically been. It's been about the unaffordability and inaccessibility. But then also there've been wider concerns around natural monopolies of services and power imbalances. So this is why the United Nations special repertoire on the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation in late 2020 issued a report that we need to talk about process, because process matters when we think about water governance and fulfilling the human rights to water and sanitation because risks - there are risks involved if we do not pay attention to process, if you only think about the outcome. However, private corporations are also using the language of the human right to water. So the question is what is the logic driving water management in any situation? Is it about equity and justice or is it about profit margins?

[00:23:51] And this is where a lot of water justice activists, students, scholars, and community members have been raising concerns that it is not just about using the terms or meeting delivery of certain quantities or quality of water, but it is about the process, it is about participation in water governance. So what we need to do is therefore recognize the importance of the rhetorical invocation of the human right to water and what they do and whether they mean equitable, affordable, fair, or just water governance, or do they not?

[00:24:25] So what we're seeing is that globally, there are a few large water corporations that are invested in privatizing water, they are largely out of Europe, but they have subsidiaries around the world and profit motives tend to drive corporations, not necessarily issues around justice or equity. So privatization can result in a lack of transparency, a lack of accountability, increased corruption, reduce inclusive planning, which therefore undermines the ultimate goals of what human rights to water and sanitation are meant to achieve.

[00:24:58] So when we think about marketization of water utilities, commodification of water as a public or private good, or a wholesale privatization of a water provisioning system or a water source, we need to therefore think about those concerns about equity and justice and the lived experiences of people in any locality.

[00:25:21] **Peter André:** So Farhana, I'm trying to think about the dynamics. I think you've made a really good case of why privatization is potentially problematic and thus questions of process and of participation in water governance become really critical and all of this is premised on the idea of the UN Resolution on the Right to Water and Sanitation.

[00:25:47] And so I'm wondering, how does the legal framework work in countries or in situations where communities do not experience the access to safe, acceptable, affordable water? I don't think I have all the words in there, but you've articulated them a couple of times. How do communities who see that this is not manifest in their situation use an international framework and resolution to help them achieve water justice?

[00:26:15] **Dr. Farhana Sultana:** Excellent question, Peter. So the caveat is that there is actually no international legal framework or apparatus that can enforce the human rights to water and sanitation. It is a Resolution and a policy guideline, but it is entirely up to countries to implement them within their own sovereign structures.

[00:26:37] However, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the OHCHR, does provide independent human rights experts who can investigate complaints that are filed by communities or cities and they can undertake country visits and provide advice to those governments.

[00:26:57] But these do not necessarily result in legally binding or economically sanctionable outcomes, to my knowledge. In lieu of a legally binding international framework, what we're seeing is that citizens of countries are suing their governments if they have adopted the Resolution and what they're doing is also mobilizing internationally to hold various governments and institutions accountable.

[00:27:23] And these are often social mobilizations that can and have resulted in policy or legal change, but they're not necessarily arbitrated or adjudicated by any extra state entities, such as the UN. However, in Europe with the EU, a wider right to water social movement galvanized enough people over a sustained period of time that resulted in country level policies in many instances under oversight of the EU. However, I'm not entirely sure if there is that legally binding sanctionable attempts that even the EU can take within its member states.

[00:28:03] So one of the things that has arisen out of all of this is that in light of these complex issues around international resolutions, constitutionalizations, or lack thereof, legal frameworks, or lack thereof, is that what we're seeing is a lot of citizen mobilization to push government accountability for both adopting the Resolution more formally, changing legal frameworks or regulatory frameworks to deliver on those processual issues.

[00:28:32] And one of them that's increasingly occurring, especially in Europe and elsewhere, is the increasing re-municipalization of water utilities that are bringing water back into being a public good instead of being a private one that is controlled by a corporation. So citizen mobilizations can result in changes in their own government or interconnected governmental changes. You have what's called 'leapfrogging' citizens groups and activist groups and social movements are learning from each other and they're coalescing together.

[00:29:09] And one of the outcomes has been changes in legal frameworks and financial structures and regulatory mechanisms, but in also in terms of just basic re-municipalization of water utilities in cities, and to therefore enable greater public control over what water equity looks like or have processes in place for the democratic participation and also recognizing those wider issues around water being very central to functioning of democracies and realizing issues around accountability and fairness and justice.

[00:29:49] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** I wanted to get in a question about scarcity. And I think as you'll be familiar, global environmental politics as a field is often framed around this challenge of dealing with scarcity of natural resources. So as someone who's an expert in water governance, what do you think about the way that water scarcity is typically framed? And what kind of lessons might we be able to draw from this discussion around water scarcity for a broader conversation about natural resource scarcity in the field at large?

[00:30:24] **Dr. Farhana Sultana:** Thank you Ryan for this question. So water scarcity is predominantly framed as an issue of insufficient quantity, but this often overlooks water security issues at the personal level, that is more than just about quantity, but issues around quality, affordability, availability, reliability, and so on. So the narratives of scarcity are sometimes problematic in that they don't necessarily really look into issues around manufactured scarcity or socially constructed scarcity, you know, which you can have through issues around inaccessibility or unavailability.

[00:31:02] So if a dam, for instance, diverts water from one region to another, you have a manufacturer scarcity in the first region. Similarly, pricing can produce artificial scarcities that push people out of the market of being able to afford sufficient amounts of water for their daily survival. So when we think about water scarcity, we really need to think about issues beyond total amounts, but how scarcity narratives are produced and how they travel and what they mean? And therefore we need to talk about wider issues around distribution, allocation, and equity.

[00:31:36] So when we focus only on total quantities, we obscure a range of things and the framing can actually cause harm to marginalized communities. So ultimately the concern is that scarcity narratives are a framing issue that then influences how solutions are imagined or offered and this is entirely about power and inequitable power relations globally.

[00:32:01] So for - I'll give you an example - so for instance, and you'll be familiar with this in the wider ecopolitics and natural resource conversations, is that there's often assumptions that are made that water crises or any natural resource scarcity arises only from overall population growth. This narrative completely overlooks the ways that smaller numbers of the global population and high consumption countries are the biggest water users and water consumers. And therefore there's a vast difference in the overall water consumption by all the people on the planet. While their communities use massive amounts of water via their food, clothes, infrastructure, travel, everyday life, but these issues become obscured when we focus on just overall population narratives because then that therefore becomes a tool with which poor people are blamed for their meager water consumption.

[00:33:00] So it almost deflects attention away from maldistribution and inequities, or more widely, to concerns about water misuse and bad management in agriculture and industry. So remember at the very beginning, how I mentioned 90% of the small amount of fresh water we have access to goes into agricultural industry, so if those are not used in ethical, fair or proper ways, they can also therefore lend into creating various scarcities and yet the conversations often end up not really focusing on the ways those arise.

[00:33:40] And we therefore need to be a little bit careful in looking at scarcity framings. And this therefore brings me to just some final thoughts on this, in that context matters. So we need to think about that there's no one-size-fits-all solution, but how does context matter in how we think about scarcity, insecurity, all of these issues? And then recognize that these complex issues are interlinked. So scarcity in one place is interlinked to others, places it's interlinked across different sectors. But then there are structural issues that we need to also think about, in terms of what are the structural barriers to addressing some of these crises or inequities that we're seeing and what are the multiple issues?

[00:34:22] So therefore what we're seeing globally is a shift that is occurring, but more is needed in terms of the conscientization around policy and practice. And this basically means we therefore need greater education and accountability and advocacy and activism, because if we cannot think about issues around equity and justice and fairness, then we're not going to be able to address wider concerns about how institutions function democratically? How can we think about strengthening public sectors? How can we think about transparency? But largely thinking about what it means to have the good life.

[00:35:02] What does wellbeing mean in any context and recognize the way that scarcity in one place plays out in multiple ways intersectionally in that location, but it is tied to other wider issues of distribution, allocation, consumption, and so on. So when we think about scarcity narratives and especially water scarcity, I always ask people to think about and learn about and self-educate, if you do not have access to formal education on this, but to therefore become more cognizant and conscientious about each of our places in the kind of hydrosocial cycle globally and locally, and the way we're connected and therefore what are all of our individual responsibilities, but then also what kinds of power we hold in terms of holding institutions and frameworks more accountable so that we can therefore ensure water for all.

[00:36:02] **Peter André:** Time flies with these podcasts Farhana and we're down to our last question. Before I go there though, I just wanted to thank you and say I've learned so much from this conversation today.

[00:36:13] It is World Water Day, the day that we're recording, and you began by telling us in a fair amount of detail how water is this cross-cutting, multi-sectorial entity that means so much to us in so many different ways and to people around the world, as well as the more than human world. And you talked about how politically ecology, very deliberately, tries to bring the socioecological relationships of those worlds into its gaze. And then we spent a fair amount of time talking about the universal human right to water and sanitation. And I really liked the phrase that you said: institutionally this is about righting the wrongs of water insecurity. And you gave us some really interesting examples, particularly in relation to the conversation of privatization and how that can be problematic. About how the international tools, although not legally binding on forcing states to do anything, but when states adopt these resolutions, they can be used by their citizens to push for change. And even when states don't necessarily adopt the resolutions, they can still be used through various channels that citizens can mobilize to push for water as a public good. And then this final conversation about water scarcity, I think you responded with a really interesting answer to Ryan that really brought the framing of scarcity to the foreground.

[00:37:38] And this for me relates to the last question we want to ask you because the way that these conversations are expressed globally is it's not like everyone does equally participate in these conversations. And even that the expert level certain voices are more dominant than others and certain voices - I'm thinking expert voices often from the global North, often men, often white men - are louder in conversations about water governance and allocation than voices from the global South. I wonder how you perceive how the deeper structures of racism and sexism in the knowledge sector keep women and BIPOC

scholars in particular, out of the discussion when it comes to global environmental governance?

[00:38:22] **Dr. Farhana Sultana:** Thank you, Peter, for a really important topic and an interesting question, which definitely merits sustained conversation. So I'll just make maybe some quick relevant points or points that I think are important. So I don't think people always recognize a wide disparity in knowledge production or the valuation or different types of expertise in and outside of academia. So whether it's an academia, policy sector, or decision-making, and these are influenced by historical, structural and systemic barriers of racism and sexism, as you identified, also white, other intersectional axes of oppression. So when we think about why does this exist, and you just have to literally visualize who hold the top positions in academia, governments, corporations, nonprofits, and so on.

[00:39:11] Historically these institutions are products of colonial and neo-colonial processes that have largely left out BIPOC scholars. So, BIPOC stands for 'black, indigenous and people of color'. So when you think about global environmental governance, whether it's an academic knowledge production, or in policy-making forums, we have lacked consistently a range of BIPOC voices across the board. And this is not just BIPOC folks in the global North, but entire communities of scholars and experts from countries in the global South whose voices or expert opinions are often left out of international forums, like for instance, on climate change. And this therefore impacts what policies and decisions are made, what is given priority, how funds are allocated, so this has real implications on the ground.

[00:39:59] Now, of course you may be thinking these things are changing, yes they are, which is great, but it's still very slow moving. Majority of people in positions of power are still, as you rightly identified, are largely white men or people from North America and Europe. And these are folks who have historically benefited from access to education, to networks, to have social capital, have access to different spaces of privileges and power. So when you think about how global environmental governance therefore is framed, who is doing the framing, who is setting the goals and objectives and the decision-making on allocations of funds, hiring of personnel, timelines of project completion, and so on, are therefore arising out of the lived experiences and local knowledges of the people who are at the top, and this is radically often different from the majority world or the majority population around the globe. If we do not diversify these voices, we do there for hamstringing certain ways we frame and imagine what we know as the world.

[00:41:05] Now, one of the barriers that BIPOC folks face are the things that I talked about in terms of access to education, scholarships, privileges of social capital and networking, connections, job security, and so on. So these do limit our abilities to not only diversify, but decolonize what we know, how we understand what we know, and what we come to value, and what we offer as solutions to global environmental problems. And these massive gaps in recruitment, retention, promotion and celebration of BIPOC scholars and experts in and outside of academia or beyond academia, really hinders the global desires right now to not just diversify, but to decolonize what we do and how we do it.

[00:41:52] And what we're seeing across the board is that there is unfortunately a reinforcement of whiteness and expertise from the perceived superiority of white experts,

whereas BIPOC expertise is often discounted or ignored, even if those voices exist. And these often arise out of institutional racism, structural barriers to participation, or just plain lack of recognition, or in terms of how we value different voices.

[00:42:20] Another way that this arises is not just having seat at the table, as the saying goes, but in terms of subtler ways that people often don't think about, for instance, the gender gap in citations of different scholars, including the press and media outlets. So there's systemic ways that women of color scholars and experts are often just left out of people's bibliographies or mentions in media outlets or on press clippings, and their knowledge and expertise are therefore again, devalued or discounted.

[00:42:52] And this is intersectionally so, so this is not just about women in general or black indigenous or people of color, but thinking across different intersectionalities. So for instance, women of color are subjected to both racism and sexism simultaneously because they sit at the intersection of two forms of oppression. So you do see fewer women of color who are cited or celebrated or perceived as experts or promoted to full professors in universities, or have their publications included in syllabi or they're just cited less. And therefore the wider world, policy-making, decision-making, and the press and media do not learn to view them and see them or value them as experts either.

[00:43:38] So when we think about these processes that is a continuation about who is almost doing twice the work to get half the credit, we need to therefore systematically address and challenge these issues because it does influence how we come to understand global environmental governance and how we can there for redress systemic injustices that permeate everyday life in how we come to know the world, what we read, what we teach, what we cite, what we share with others.

[00:44:07] And beyond this, and to my last point, is that other spaces whereby BIPOC scholars face barriers is for instance, social media, where people share their expertise too. But social media is often a space of hostility, harassment, and hate and violence against BIPOC scholars, and especially women who are BIPOC scholars. So even if their expertise exists and they share it on their own, it faces those different kinds of barriers and harassment which therefore discourages people from engaging. And these are tactics of silencing or erasing our collective experience, expertise and knowledge and voice.

[00:44:47] So when you're told to therefore look at how different spaces, whether it's in global negotiations or in the social media space or in the classroom, and so these overall systemic issues of exclusion, therefore impoverishes overall public discourse. And this overall impoverishment of global knowledge production therefore impacts policy-making, project design, and so on.

[00:45:14] And we need to really start having these wider conversations about that expertise and knowledge production is not some neutral or equitable thing, it is a process of historical, structural, systemic issues and we need to recognize the various types of barriers that exist that people may not be actively paying attention to, but should because ultimately this impacts everyone and it should therefore matter to everyone.

[00:45:43] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Well thank you so much, Farhana, this is a super important discussion and I'm really glad we got that last part in - it's really important to hear your take on that. And you did mention social media and that's a place where I found your analysis really insightful and where I first encountered your work. Where can people follow you on social media?

[00:46:03] **Dr. Farhana Sultana:** Thanks, Ryan. I appreciate you following me on social media. So I do a lot of public engagement and public education through my Twitter handle @ 'prof' underscore 'F' as in Frank or rather my first name 'Farhana' and then Sultana, 'S U L T A N A', so it's @Prof_FSultana. And you can also find me on LinkedIn, although I'm not really very engaged over there. You can find about my research, my scholarship, my publications, public and media engagement, on my website which is literally my name it's FarhanaSultana.com.

[00:46:40] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Excellent. Well, we will make sure to follow you and people can follow us on Twitter @EcoPoliticsP, that's ecopolitics with a capital 'P'. We do have to leave it there, but once again, just a big thank you Farhana for sharing your expertise with our listeners and us. It's been great to have you.

[00:46:57] **Dr. Farhana Sultana:** Thank you so much for having me. It's been an absolutely lovely conversation and I was delighted to be invited. So thank you again, both Ryan and Peter.

[00:47:05] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Well, thank you. And I'll roll the credits. The podcast is made available under a Creative Commons License, so please use it share it, enjoy it, we just ask that you provide appropriate attribution. And don't forget to get in touch, our website is ecopoliticspodcast.ca.

[00:47:22] The Global Ecopolitics Podcast is produced by Nicole Bedford, support with transcription and captioning is provided by Kika Mueller, and Adam Gibbard helps us with artistic design and digital support. Thanks again for listening. Stay tuned for the next episode.