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## FEMINISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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What defines a “feminist issue”? From Rachel Carson’s (1962) critique of pesticides and their effects on birds, water, and children, to Wangari Maathai’s (2004) analysis of the interconnections among deforestation, desertification, and women’s subsistence farming that prompted her to launch Kenya’s Green Belt Movement, a feminist standpoint places women’s lives in social and ecological contexts, augmenting the feminist slogan that “the personal is political” – and ecological too. Not merely an academic endeavour or “way of seeing,” both feminism and environmental justice (EJ) emerged from the lives of women who recognized their own experiences of injustice as fundamentally interconnected with the health and well-being of others.

The internal and international diversities of the twenty-first century climate justice movement make it difficult to imagine that the intersectionalities among gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ability, species and environment that have coalesced into a global movement are still being discovered by scholars and activists alike (see also Chapter 29). Women comprise an estimated 60–80 per cent of members in environmental organizations worldwide, and an estimated 90 per cent of members in US environmental justice organizations (Hallum-Montes 2012). Yet, environmental sociologists and environmental justice theorists focus on only one or two social markers (i.e., race and/or class) in studying the impact of toxic environments on individuals and communities (see also Chapter 4). At the same time, transnational feminist and gender studies scholars have largely neglected both environment and species as analytical categories for research, focusing their attentions on human issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, age, and to a lesser extent, ability. While the still-radical concept of *intersectionality* articulated by Black feminists (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1989) co-occurred with the rise of the environmental justice movement, it simultaneously excluded environments from its analysis. Frameworks that incorporate gender, sexuality, age and ability along with race and class are largely absent from environmental justice discourse, thereby obscuring the ways that gender and gendered labour shapes women, men, and trans\*<sup>1</sup> persons’ experiences of environments and environmental problems. While the concepts of environmental racism, and to a lesser extent, environmental classism are well known, the analytical categories of environmental sexism, environmental heterosexism, environmental ageism and ableism, not to mention environmental speciesism, are almost unthinkable.

One notable exception to this intersectional silence on gender and environment is ecofeminism, which has addressed the linked exploitation of women and nature since the

1980s, exploring the mutually reinforcing exploitations of race, class, gender, species, and sexualities. Initially an activist-based movement with a perspective articulated through multi-vocal anthologies (Caldecott & Leland 1983; Plant 1989; Diamond & Orenstein 1990), ecofeminist philosophy of the 1990s was critiqued for perpetuating an essentialist equation of women/nature, universalizing “woman” in ways that excluded racial differences (Gaard 2011). Ecofeminist scholars responded, developing intersectional analyses that centred race and gender along with species, sexuality, and colonialism, focusing on the material conditions of women’s lives and women’s marginalized participation in policy, government, and economic systems that affect their lives (Salleh 1997; Hawley 2015). Global ecofeminist alliances such as the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) were launched, bringing women of multiply diverse races and nationalities into leadership and visibility, advising the United Nations and foregrounding gender within international environmentalisms.

At the same time that both environmental justice and ecofeminist theories were being developed, women whose activism connects human and environmental health were facing harsh criticism and brutal violence. In Bali, for instance, Mardiana Deren, an Indonesian nurse campaigning against palm oil and mining companies, was run over by motorbikes and barely escaped a stabbing; in Brazil, the body of activist Nilce de Souza Magalhães was found below a hydroelectric dam she had publicly opposed, her hands and feet tied with ropes and attached to large rocks that had kept her submerged for six months. In Honduras, the 2015 Goldman Environmental Award-winner and Indigenous activist Berta Cáceres was shot dead in her home, less than a year after her successful campaign stopped a hydroelectric dam that would have flooded native lands and cut off water supplies. “As women,” said Cáceres in a 2014 interview, “we are exposed to violence from businesses, governments and repressive institutions – but also to patriarchal violence. It is three times worse for an indigenous woman” (Win 2015).

From the Euro-American social workers of the settlement house movement to the African- and Asian-American, Chicana/Latina and Indigenous women activists fighting toxic wastes and ecologically damaging industrialism and colonialism, women differently situated by race, ethnicity, or nation have framed their eco-justice activism as an extension of women’s gendered role as caregivers, or as a response to the linked devaluation of women, communities of colour, poor people and environments.

Around the world, women are on the frontlines of climate justice crises as well as climate justice solutions. As one of the top two countries most responsible for climate change (Clark 2011; Ravillious 2014), the United States has also been a primary location for the growth of feminism and environmental justice, movements with roots in women’s urban activism as municipal housekeepers, as advocates for equal suffrage, and for civil and Indigenous rights.

### **Movement roots**

Through the colonization of Indigenous lands, the capture and importation of African slaves, and the conversion of ecological health into economic wealth, the United States’ history has deeply affected the shape of US women’s activism.

#### ***Women’s clubs and “social housekeeping”***

After the Civil War officially ended slavery, the African-American population shifted from the south to the north and west, and from rural agriculture to urban industrial centres. In these new urban centres, the Black Women’s Club movement was launched and grew to

prominence through the efforts of middle-class women such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Mary Church Terrill, both of whom spoke and wrote ardently for Black equality, woman suffrage, and the rights of working people (Olson 2001). This movement engaged in home and neighbourhood clean-up campaigns, working to reduce the diseases that arose from unsafe air and tuberculosis-contaminated water, inadequate sewerage, and garbage removal. Black women participated in the American Equal Rights Association, and later in both the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association.

Euro-American middle-class women also made advances in social reform and education that served the larger community. Chemist Ellen Swallow Richards created the new fields of “oekology” and home economics through her investigations of water pollution and water quality, sewage disposal, and her efforts in launching the first school lunch programmes. In 1889, Jane Addams and her paramour Ellen Gates Starr co-founded Hull House, a settlement house in Chicago, and mobilized the idea of “civic housekeeping,” encouraging educated women to extend their gendered caregiving to the larger society. The settlement movement addressed a range of social and environmental issues among immigrant and working class communities, from housing, midwifery, and health care to typhoid and sanitation, education and play, art and intercultural studies (Mann 2011).

Both African-American and Euro-American women worked to improve living and working conditions for women and their families, and both groups used women’s networks of neighbourhood, church, family and social circles as the basis for organizing. Yet, these activist women tended to operate separately, divided by racial differences even though the movement for women’s suffrage began when middle and upper class White women abolitionists were denied entry to an abolitionist meeting. After Black men were granted the vote in 1870, women’s exclusion from suffrage on the basis of gender could have unified these activist groups – but White women’s racism kept them divided.

### ***Civil rights***

From 42-year-old Rosa Parks, who was the third woman to refuse to give up her seat on the bus; to Jo Ann Robinson, who organized the Montgomery Bus Boycotts in 1955; Fannie Lou Hamer, who organized voter registrations and delivered inspirational speeches; Ella Baker, who organized both the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and later helped found the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, two key movement organizations; and Daisy Bates, who led and mentored the first nine African-American students enrolled in Little Rock Central High School in 1957: these and so many more grassroots Black women powered the Civil Rights movement (Olson 2001).

The visibility and control of Black men in the Civil Rights movement has been attributed to a strategic decision for winning a racial battle within a White patriarchal culture. But there were more compelling reasons as well. Black women had enormous empathy for the ways Black men had been emasculated by White racism and slavery: mocked, belittled, and beaten, Black men experienced racial oppression as did Black women. While Black women had suffered sexual slavery at the hands of White slave-owners, after the Civil War ended and Blacks were no longer valuable as “property,” the lynchings of Black men united the Black community against White racism. In the movement toward racial equality, reclaiming Black manhood seemed to include embracing male dominance and enforcing the sexist gender roles of the larger White culture. Like other Black ministers, Martin Luther King was known for his belief that women should be good wives and mothers, staying at home and not participating in the movement, yet his early rise to prominence was a result of these grassroots

women's efforts, for the male leaders often failed to capitalize on activist momentum or envision radical strategies like those initiated by women – i.e., the Montgomery bus boycott, or the Children's Crusade (Olson 2001).

On August 28, 1963, the diversity of the Black community was present at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, just as it was during the Harlem Renaissance (Garber 1991) – but only the heterosexual Black men were allowed to speak. Two gay Black men, Bayard Rustin and James Baldwin, were excluded from giving speeches of their own: although Rustin was a co-organizer of the march, he was relegated to reading the list of demands after King's speech, while Baldwin was excluded entirely on the grounds that his words would agitate the crowd. The grassroots women who had powered the movement were also silenced, given a "tribute" and a round of applause.

### ***Woman of colour feminisms***

As second-wave feminism evolved through the social movements of the 1960s, queer and women-of-colour feminisms emerged as departures from both White feminism and other 1960s social movements such as Gay Rights, Black Power, Chicano Movimiento, and the American Indian Movement (AIM). Attempting "to bridge the contradictions" of experience, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1981) wrote:

We are the colored in a white feminist movement.  
We are the feminists among the people of our culture.  
We are often the lesbians among the straight.  
We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words.

For Anzaldúa's Chicana feminism, identity was a nexus of indigeneity and Spanish conquest, a location on the borderlands producing the intersections of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and place. Her work laid the groundwork for Chicano environmental justice.

At Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota, a similar nexus and emergence through place and history produced the Indigenous women's movement. In July 1968, the American Indian Movement (AIM) formed to address Indigenous sovereignty and treaty rights as well as issues of police harassment and racism, the deplorable conditions of Indigenous people in urban centres, and the corporate exploitation of tribal lands through uranium and coal mining. When events at Wounded Knee made it too dangerous to continue activism as affiliates with AIM, women such as Madonna Thunder Hawk and Lorelei DeCora organized Women of All Red Nations (WARN) in 1974, addressing not only treaty rights and the elimination of Indian mascots from sports teams, but also the health of American Indian women, the frequency of forced sterilizations and non-Indian adoptions of Indian children as forms of eugenics. These and many other environmental health issues inspired the Indigenous Women's Network to continue this work in 1985, with activism that laid the foundation for the Indigenous Environmental Network.

Black feminism took shape through the 1973 formation of the National Black Feminist Organization, the 1977 Combahee River Collective Statement, the founding of Kitchen Table Women of Color Press in 1981, and the first volume of Black Women's Studies, *But Some of Us Are Brave* (Hull et al. 1982). Alice Walker (1983) coined the term "womanist" to describe woman-of-colour-feminism, listing its multiple meanings as "a black feminist or feminist of colour" as well as "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually" and concluding "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender." Activist-theorists such as

Audre Lorde (1984) articulated Black feminism in pointed and accessible language, influencing White women's liberal and cultural feminisms to replace the single-focus analysis of sexism with a tripartite analysis of gender, race, and class as indissolubly linked in feminist perspectives. In the 1990s black feminist scholars Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990) advanced the concept of intersectionality, emphasizing not just Lorde's inseparability of race, class, gender and other aspects of human identity, but also their simultaneity.

### ***Feminist anti-toxics and health care movements***

The feminist health care movement grew out of early twentieth century women's social work, settlement houses, and the battles for urban sanitation and reproductive rights. Women have often critiqued Western medicine's end-of-the-pipeline "disease" approach to health and wellness for its failure to address disease prevention in ways that women need – as caregivers of children, as workers, and as health consumers. Feminist approaches to health and wellbeing affirmed a belief in women's authority, and the view that women themselves can become their own health experts and serve as catalysts for social change.

In 1978, a young mother of two children in the working-class community of Love Canal, Lois Gibbs, read the newspaper reports describing the toxic waste dump beneath her community, the chemical contaminants found in their air and water, and the dump's suspected links to her community's high rates of miscarriage, birth defects, and childhood illnesses. Her community organizing, research and activism eventually forced a complete buyout of all homes in Love Canal at fair market value, a relocation of these families, and the launch of the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund Program.

Feminists soon made the connection between reproductive cancers and environmental health, and by the mid-1990s a raft of research was published to document this connection. In 1994, activists from the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition who had noted elevated breast cancer rates throughout Cape Cod called for an investigation of their causes, and, inspired by Rachel Carson's work, founded the Silent Spring Institute (SSI). Breast cancer activists uncovered a list of environmental toxins linked with breast cancer, and launched campaigns such as "think before you pink" to challenge the privatization of breast cancer that blamed women for their cancers, rather than the corporations polluting their environments. The widely-read volume *Our Stolen Future* (Colburn et al. 1996) pointed to the role of pesticides, endocrine-disruptors, phthalates, PCBs, dioxins, and other toxic chemicals in affecting cancers and reproductive health for humans and animals alike. Sandra Steingraber's *Living Downstream* (1997) offered the first study to bring together data on toxic releases with newly released data from US cancer registries, presenting these environmental links to cancer as a human rights issue.

Childhood asthma also became a feminist health concern when mothers initiated asthma activism. As with breast cancer, the asthma-environment connection was difficult to prove, despite the fact that asthma is statistically documented as being most severe among urban, lower-income, and minority children (Sze 2004). In 2011, the asthma attack prevalence rate in Blacks was 36.9 per cent higher than the rate in Whites, as 13.4 per cent of Black children experience asthma at a rate almost double that of White children's rate of 7.6 per cent (CDC 2016). While environmental justice organizations like West Harlem Environmental Action, South Bronx Clean Air Coalition, or Mothers of East Los Angeles all formed to evict polluting industries from their neighbourhoods, they still had to battle the inexact science of risk assessment, used by corporations and government officials to blame the victims and protect the polluters. Responding to these activists' concerns, feminist and environmental

justice activists, lawyers and scientists developed the Precautionary Principle, which reverses the onus of proof, requiring that “those who seek to introduce chemicals into our environment first show that what they propose to do is almost certainly not going to hurt anyone” (Steingraber 1997: 270).

Together, the Civil Rights activism of the 1950s and 1960s and the feminist environmental health movements of the 1980s laid the foundation for the environmental justice standpoint that healthy environments are integral to civil rights.

### ***Environmental justice and ecofeminism***

The 1990s was a decade of renewed environmental activism, making the environmental racism of mainstream environmentalism a matter of public discussion (see, e.g., Chapters 2 and 3).

Two organizations responsible for bringing environmental justice to the attention of the largely White environmental movement – the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) and the Southwest Network for Economic and Environmental Justice (SNEEJ) – both had Mestiza women in critical leadership roles (Peña 1998). In a coordinated effort, SWOP sent a letter to the “Group of Ten”<sup>2</sup> mainstream environmental organizations, calling them out for continuing to “support and promote policies which emphasize the clean-up and preservation of the environment on the backs of working people in general and people of colour in particular.” Dated March 15, 1990, the letter was signed by a wide range of environmental justice scholars, activists and organizations, notable among them two Mestizo LGBT organizations, and the Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste representative, Penny Newman. Two months later, SNEEJ sent out a similar letter to environmental justice allies, enclosing the letter to the Group of Ten, and inviting these ally organizations to confront their own institutionalized racism and to bring people of colour into their Board of Directors, programme structure, and activities. Lois Gibbs, founder of the Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste, may have been surprised to be among the nine recipients of this letter: but within the year, her organization was renamed the Center for Health, Environment, and Justice, its staff diversified, and its resources helped build the base for the First National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991, where the Principles of Environmental Justice were first articulated.

In 2002, the Second National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit offered another four-day event that attracted over 1400 participants, expanding and extending the environmental and economic justice paradigm to address globalization and international issues (Stein 2004). As Robert Bullard (2012) acknowledged, the summit wouldn’t have happened if not for the efforts of women EJ leaders:

the women solidified their leadership role in Summit II by default—when many of the men who had been in leadership roles walked away. The women probably would not have been able to achieve this level of visibility and power in an otherwise sexist, male-dominated society—which also extends to the environmental justice movement and Summit II planning—had the men stayed.

At Beverly Wright’s insistence, there was a “Crowning Women” awards dinner honouring thirteen women leaders.

Although African-American and Latinx activism may seem most prominent, environmental justice organizations have been developed in all communities of colour. The Indigenous

Environmental Movement has fought the targeting of reservation lands for hazardous waste sites and for nuclear, coal, oil, and hydropower generation (LaDuke 1999). Mexican farm workers organized by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta formed the United Farm Workers to reform hazardous working conditions – being sprayed and breathing in hazardous pesticides while working, denied toilets and water in the fields, receiving substandard housing and sanitation, and working alongside their own children and infants, who are at increased vulnerability to toxic chemicals. Asian American activists formed the Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) to organize workplace health activism in the garment and semiconductor manufacturing industries, to address urban redevelopment (i.e., housing and gentrification), and to promote food safety in Asian diets, particularly in the consumption of contaminated fish (Sze 2004).

Like the environmental justice movement, ecofeminism's roots come from earlier movements – 19th and 20th century feminisms, the anti-nuclear movement of the 1970s, the women's spirituality movement, the animal rights movement, the women's anti-toxics and environmental health movements – and ecofeminism's first manifestations also occurred in the 1980s. In England, the women's peace camp at Greenham Common (1981–2000) developed as a form of nonviolent direct action intended to embody the resistance to the presence of cruise and Pershing II missiles, and the possibility of a "limited nuclear war" in Europe. In the US, the links between feminism and ecology were forged at the "Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the 1980s" conference, and were soon followed by the Women's Pentagon Actions (WPA) of 1980 and 1981, where large numbers of women demonstrated against militarism and its violence against women, children, people of colour, poor people and the earth. Launched in 1985, WomanEarth Feminist Peace Institute was a direct outgrowth of these anti-militarist actions, founded with the intention of creating an ecofeminist educational centre producing theory, conducting research, and supporting political activities that would confront racism head-on (Sturgeon 1997).

Feminist environmentalists were active in other areas exposing intersections of gender, race and species. In 1982, Marti Kheel and Tina Frisco founded Feminists for Animal Rights (FAR), inspired by Aviva Cantor's work linking racism and speciesism, and by Constantia Salamone's activism foregrounding the linked oppressions of women with animals. Recognizing that domestic violence affects not only women and children but also their animal companions, but that women often stayed in battering relationships to protect their animals, FAR worked to establish coordination between battered women's shelters and animal rescue organizations (Adams 1995).

Activists from FAR and from WomanEarth, along with ecofeminists active in the women's spirituality movement, participated as founders of the US Green Movement during the 1980s, and many remained active through the mid-1990s. In the German Greens, ecofeminist Petra Kelly became well known for her work advancing a women's political agenda of peace and gender equality, and in the US Greens, Charlene Spretnak was a founding member and co-author of the Ten Key Values. In India, ecofeminist physicist Vandana Shiva addressed biotechnology, water, forestry, and oil for the ways these issues affect women's livelihoods and environments. Bringing together women from around the world to take action in the United Nations and other international policymaking forums, the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) was formed in 1991 by former US Congresswoman Bella Abzug and feminist activist and journalist Mim Kelber. WEDO's primary events in the 1990s included the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet in 1991, and a number of Women's Caucuses at key UN conferences.

### **What defines a feminist issue?**

When women and those they care about are disproportionately affected, or are the majority of those affected – whether through breast cancer, toxic exposures during pregnancy and lactation, toxic and gendered workplaces, or the siting of polluting industries – these matters become feminist issues. Women’s gendered work as caregivers, housekeepers, sanitation engineers, food-preparers and food providers have made matters of environmental health, toxic waste, and healthy food into feminist issues. The predominance of women in an activity, location, or occupation can also help define a feminist issue: i.e., the “pink collar ghettos” of child care centres and clerical work, or the carcinogenic chemicals in menstrual products (Spector 2013).

Water is a feminist issue. Women’s gendered associations with water have lent authority to women’s activism on behalf of water preservation, water purity, and the integrity of wetlands: Indigenous women have engaged in multiple “water walks” to call attention to Alberta’s tar sands or the degradation of water quality in the Great Lakes. Asian women have been active in the fights to stop hydroelectric dams, from Dai Qing’s (1998) critiques of the Three Gorges Dam on China’s Yangtze River, to Arundhati Roy’s (2001) resistance against the dams on the Narmada River. These are all environmental justice struggles because large hydropower dams destroy the subsistence livelihoods of Indigenous and peasant communities and harm fish, wildlife, and ecosystems – all “sacrificed” to divert water and energy to elite urban communities.

In the US, the nail salon industry is a feminist issue, illustrating the intersection of environmental justice, economic justice, immigrant rights and reproductive justice, as Vietnamese and Korean women comprise over 40 per cent of the workforce (NAPAWF 2011), and women are the majority of its patrons. Wages are low, hours are long, and exposure to toxic nail salon products linked to respiratory, cognitive, and reproductive illnesses poses serious health hazards to workers. Workers experience numerous job-related ailments – from skin rashes and nose bleeds to cancer and miscarriages, as a majority of workers are of reproductive age. A large proportion of nail salon workers are undocumented and have limited English proficiency, which increases their vulnerability to exploitation and makes organizing for better conditions especially challenging. In response to these issues, the National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum has created a National Healthy Nail Salon Alliance, and produced a report documenting the workplace hazards and safety precautions needed to protect workers and consumers alike.

Identified from the ways that women investigate matters of concern, feminist methodologies abound in women’s ecofeminist and environmental justice. The 1960s feminist slogan that “the personal is the political” can be seen in women’s activism for children’s and community health: reasoning from individual experience, women investigate their communities to determine if theirs is also a collective experience, and on that basis they move forward to political action. Women’s relational skills at networking and community-building enhance their effectiveness as environmental justice researchers and organizers. While dominant male gender socialization leads men (and others seeking recognition as “authorities”) to value working independently, women tend to value working collaboratively, recognizing that the strongest position on an issue can be developed when the widest diversity of those affected are brought together.

Whereas traditional Euro-American conservation and preservation both defined “nature” as a place without humans (i.e., “out in nature,” “wilderness”), ecofeminism and environmental justice have contested this definition (see also Chapter 39). Just as feminism redefined the

personal in terms of the political, environmental justice redefines “environment” as the places where we “live, work, play, and pray.” Ecofeminists and Indigenous women define women’s own bodies as environments during pregnancy, and define breast milk as both bodily matter and food whose quality can be diminished via the accumulation and concentration of environmental toxins (LaDuke 1999; Steingraber 2001). Both ecofeminists and environmental justice activists have defined social culture as an environment that can be toxic in its expression of sexism, racism, classism and other oppressions (Adamson et al. 2002; Stein 2004). The environments where elders or disabled persons live can also be contexts of environmental injustice, as many elders, largely women, as well as disabled people may live in substandard housing, receive poor or limited nursing care and health care, and even face physical, sexual, or economic abuse (Day 2010; Ray 2013). In all these ways, redefining “environment” utilizes the feminist rejection of culture/nature dualisms that place humans outside of nature: repositioning humans within nature reframes “saving nature” from traditional environmentalism’s altruism to the environmental justice recognition that environmental concerns are simultaneously concerns about human well-being.

### **Convergence: feminist climate justice**

By the end of the 1990s, women eco-activists recognized that a wider movement for environmental justice needs alliances between ecofeminists and environmental justice activists (Kirk 1997), making explicit the feminism within environmental justice and the intersectionality articulated within ecofeminism. Collaborations across these woman-powered movements emerged as activists and scholars within each movement listened to one another, utilizing one another’s insights and critiques while responding to the escalating problems of climate change. International organizations bringing a feminist environmental justice perspective to climate change now include not only the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) but the Global Gender and Climate Alliance; GenderCC: Women for Climate Justice; WoMin: an African Ecofeminist Organization; the Indigenous Environmental Network; and the Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN).

Across the spectrum of race, class, nation, and sexuality, women have founded organizations and been active in the struggle for climate justice. Four Indigenous women founded the Idle No More movement in 2012, and Indigenous women such as Crystal Lameman (Beaver Lake Cree) and Eriel Tchekwie Deranger (Diné) have been prominent and vocal leaders in the resistance against Alberta’s tar sands mining. Other women such as Winona LaDuke from White Earth Reservation and Casey Camp-Horinek of the Ponca Nation have served as bridge-builders, working with both the Indigenous Environmental Network and broader climate justice organizations such as Nebraska’s Cowboy and Indian Alliance (CIA), 350.Org, WECAN, and the United Nations.

Queer and trans\* climate activists, while participating in many ecofeminist and environmental justice organizations, have also launched grassroots movements such as the Trans and Women’s Action Camp (TWAC), Out4Sustainability, VINE Sanctuary for factory-farmed animals, the Lesbian Rangers, queer food movements in urban spaces, and queer farmer communities across the United States. Reclaiming the erotic – an imperative famously articulated by Audre Lorde (1984) – influenced social ecofeminist Chaia Heller in her formation of the “socio-erotic” (1999) and later activists’ articulations of ecosexuality (Stephens & Sprinkle 2016). Founded by an Arab-American and a White working class lesbian couple in 2000, VINE Sanctuary embraces an ecofeminist perspective and is run by five queer or trans\*-identified activists, providing a haven for animals who have escaped or been rescued

from the meat, dairy and egg industries or other abusive circumstances, such as cockfights or pigeon-shoots. VINE activists recognize that today's racial and economic injustices perpetuate both environmental racism and the continued exploitation of animals, exacerbate climate change (Springmann et al. 2016), and rely on exploiting the reproductive capacities of female animals (Jones 2011). Dangerous and environmentally destructive factory farms and processing plants are often located in communities of colour, and local citizens must live with the pollution while working at dangerous and degrading jobs. Black feminist vegans have also recognized these connections (Harper 2010), demonstrating the convergences of diverse eco-justice movements arriving at similar insights through their activism, research, conversations and collaborations (Pellow 2014).

### **Feminist climate intersectionalities**

At the Seattle meeting of the World Trade Organization in November 1999, the anti-globalization movement that had been building for years finally took shape, as activists from around the world marched together to oppose the corporate conquest of workers, the environment, food production, women's bodies, animals, Indigenous and Third World people alike. Their activism built unprecedented alliances among labour, environmental, and social justice movements, and changed the shape of environmental justice organizing. Today, the climate justice movement affords similar opportunities for activism and coalition-building, as seen in the activist analyses of severe climate-change weather events such as Hurricane Katrina.

In its approach, landing and aftermath in August 2005 and beyond, Hurricane Katrina galvanized national discourse on the intersections of race, class, and climate justice. Juxtaposed against news footage of freeways jammed with SUVs and other outwardly mobile families fleeing the city as directed, images of people stranded on rooftop islands or wading through floodwaters with children in tow pervaded the public media. While all aspects of climate justice were present in this environmental tragedy, only some were captured on the news media. To create a more inclusive praxis, one that shapes the work of first responders as well as that of activists and scholars, these climate justice intersectionalities still need to be named and recognized.

### ***Environmental sexism***

Women and children are more likely to die during and immediately after ecological disasters than men (Seager 2006). In the 1991 cyclone and flood in Bangladesh, 90 per cent of victims were women, for reasons that characterize the gendered effects of disaster at large: warning information is broadcast in urban centres and workplaces, while women are often confined at home. When disaster struck, women waited for male relatives to return for them, as women are culturally prohibited from travelling alone due to risk of sexual assault. Women are not often taught to swim, and could not navigate the rising waters; moreover, while men often escaped alone, women's caregiving responsibilities meant women were trying to flee while pregnant or post-partum, carrying infants and children, with elderly parents in tow. In the 2004 tsunami in Aceh, Sumatra, more than 75 per cent of those who died were women (Gaard 2015). The death of so many mothers had a cascading effect on increased rates of infant mortality, the early marriage of girls, the neglect of girls' education, increased sexual assaults on unprotected girls, and increased trafficking of women and girls in prostitution.

In New Orleans, the fact of gendered wage inequities combined with race had already placed 41 per cent of female-headed households with children below the poverty line, and

economic resources affect one's chances for escape and survival (Henrici et al. 2010); thus, the majority of those left behind were women with children, the poor and the elderly. In the immediate aftermath of Katrina, domestic violence and sexual assaults spiked, though as usual both were under-reported and ignored by law enforcement (Burnett 2005).

### ***Environmental ageism***

The very elderly and the very young are more at risk in climate crises and in areas of ongoing toxicity, and the majority of elderly populations are women (IWPR 2010). During and immediately after Hurricane Katrina, the majority of deaths occurred disproportionately among the elderly. In the European heat waves of 2003, 2006, and 2015, more elderly persons went without air conditioning but also without food and even water, as extreme heat takes a heavy toll on mobility. Children of all ages, but particularly those under the age of five are at greater risk from exposure to toxics via air, water, food and environments, and climate change exacerbates these risks by releasing and heating these toxics. Children who lose the protection of mothers in climate disasters then face additional assaults in the aftermath.

### ***Environmental ableism***

After Hurricane Katrina, horror stories emerged of people in hospitals and nursing homes being left to drown (Ross 2005). While age and ability often co-occur, impairments of hearing, vision, cognition, speech, and mobility can affect people of all ages, making it difficult for them to seek protection in climate crises; for elderly people, these impairments are more likely and more challenging. Young people are at greater risk as well: given the disproportionate racial impact of asthma among urban and lower-income children of colour, the ability of children to breathe while fleeing or surviving climate disasters is a feminist environmental justice issue. Over two decades ago, environmental justice research confirmed that “toxic time bombs” are concentrated in communities with a high percentage of “poor, elderly, young, and minority residents” (Bullard 1994), and while both age and ability are feminist concerns, these factors have yet to shape climate justice research and response.

### ***Environmental heterosexism***

Climate change homophobia is evident in the media blackout of LGBTQ people in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, which occurred just days before the annual queer festival in New Orleans, “Southern Decadence,” a celebration that drew 125,000 revellers in 2003. The religious right quickly declared Hurricane Katrina an example of God’s wrath against homosexuals, waving signs with “Thank God for Katrina” and publishing detailed connections between the sin of homosexuality and the destruction of New Orleans. It is hard to imagine LGBTQ people – mostly people of colour – not facing harassment, discrimination, and violence during and after the events of Katrina, given the fact that Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi lack any legal protections for LGBTQ persons and would have been unsympathetic to such reports. Environmental heterosexism also masks the presence of LGBTQ activists already present in the climate justice movement, yet their vulnerability as queers remains. Responding to the shooting at Pulse nightclub on Latinx night in June 2016, eleven queer and trans\* activists of colour in the internationally known climate justice organization, 350.Org, sent out a collectively authored message of grief and hope, affirming “our fights are connected,” and disclosing that “many of us who are shoulder to shoulder

with you in the streets are LGBTQ+,” and “as LGBTQ+ climate activists, we need to bring our whole selves to this work.” As Suzanne Pharr (1988) has argued, homophobia is rooted in cultural misogyny, and the liberation of women, people of colour, and queers are inextricably interconnected.

### ***Environmental speciesism***

When marginalized communities are situated in toxic environments or are hit with climate crises, animals suffer too. Environmental and climate justice analyses are still largely humanist in the ways they address environmental inequities across human diversity and habitats while failing to consider other species. Occasional news footage showed humane rescue operations saving companion animals (Katrina’s effects on wildlife were only estimated), but these efforts earned a mixed reception, with some arguing that rescuers were prioritizing animals over Black people. Speciesism obscures the ways that people’s lives are lived in relationship with other animals as well as environments, and limits the scope of feminist analysis: nearly half of those who stayed behind during Katrina refused rescue helicopters and boats that offered safety only to humans, and stayed because of their companion animals, a commitment mirrored by battered women, who refuse the safety of domestic violence shelters, knowing that their absence would leave their animals unprotected at home with the batterer. In disasters of both domestic violence and Hurricane Katrina, many died. But the efforts of animal rescue groups and the intensity of the bond between Katrina’s multispecies climate refugees prompted the US Congress to pass the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS) in 2006, requiring rescue agencies to save both people and their companion animals in disasters (Grimm 2015).

### **Conclusion**

In summer 2016, another revolutionary moment appeared, as the multiple assaults on the queer and trans\* Latinx community at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, the almost weekly shootings of Black men and Black women (#SayHerName) by US police, the killings of Indigenous eco-activists around the world, and the increasingly frequent terrorist assaults ongoing in the Middle East and throughout Europe bring the structural oppression of women, people of colour, animals, queers, environments and economies to the fore. These global events demonstrate the feminist intersections of climate, economic, and environmental justice.

Will feminist climate justice activists be able to seize this moment and mobilize across our diverse communities? If reports in the popular press are any indication (Acha 2016; Awadalla et al. 2015), movement is already underway.

### **Notes**

- 1 I use “trans\*” as Hayward and Weinstein (2015) suggest: trans\* marks “the *with, through, of, in* and *across* that make life possible” (196); trans\* is “‘always already’ relational” (198). I am aware of the debate on this usage, best articulated via Trans Student Educational Resources (see [www.transstudent.org/asterisk](http://www.transstudent.org/asterisk)). I remain committed to using the terms that people use to describe their own identities. When a term is contested, writers must reference the diverse viewpoints, with the understanding that whatever usage we choose may later be replaced.
- 2 The ten organizations include the National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club, National Audubon Society, Environmental Defense Fund, Environmental Policy Institute, Friends of the Earth, Izaak Walton League, The Wilderness Society, National Parks and Conservation Association, and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

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