

# Workshop: Men and Nature: Gender, Power, and Environmental Change

Rachel  
Carson  
Center

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**Sponsors:** LMU Munich, Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society (RCC)

**Conveners:** Sherilyn MacGregor (Manchester University, UK), Nicole Seymour (California State University, Fullerton, USA)

**Presenters:** Will Abberley (University of Sussex, UK), Alex Carr Johnson (Western Slope Conservation Center, Colorado, USA), Jody Chan (Columbia University, USA), Joe Curnow (University of Toronto, Canada), Jim Fleming (Colby College, USA), Noémi Gonda (Central European University, Hungary), Stefan Hübner (Bundeswehr University Munich, Germany), Martin Hultman (Linköping University, Sweden), Naoki Kambe (Rikkyo University, Japan), Susanne Leikam (University of Regensburg, Germany), Erik Loomis (University of Rhode Island, USA), Kathryn de Luna (Georgetown University, USA), Nicole von Thurn (GEDOK—Munich, Germany), Paula Villa (LMU Munich, Germany)

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“Gender,” in the environmental humanities and social sciences, has long been synonymous with “women.” Feminist and ecofeminist scholars have produced a great deal of work on the links between femininities and environments and on women’s involvement in environmental politics and practices. More recently, the emerging field of queer ecology has troubled the binary construction of gender that traditionally has informed (eco)feminist research. What remains under-addressed are the myriad ways in which masculinities and masculinized roles, identities, and practices shape human relationships with the more-than-human world. Indeed, the few available scholarly articles that do interrogate masculinity and environment begin with the recognition (and a lament) that there is so little research available.

Of course, men of all backgrounds figure prominently in local and global environmental (his)stories, and elite men hold the most cultural and economic power to shape the contemporary environmental problematique. But rarely is their gender itself an object of critical inquiry and analysis. It was the purpose of this RCC workshop to shine light on and perhaps start to redress

this curious lacuna in the environmental humanities and social sciences literature.

The workshop opened on the Friday evening with a public reception, introduced by **SHERILYN MACGREGOR** and **NICOLE SEYMOUR**. This was followed by **MARTIN HULTMAN**'s keynote, "Green Men? Exploring Masculinities in Environmental Politics"; a nonfiction reading, "The River Is a Song We Sing," by **ALEX CARR JOHNSON**; and a statement by artist **NICOLA VON THURN** on her exhibition "Boys Will Be Boys," which was displayed throughout the reception.

**JIM FLEMING** began the first session of the workshop, Theorizing Men and Nature, with "Climate Engineering: Barking Mad, WEIRD, and Male-Dominated." Pointing out that advocates of geoengineering are Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) males with superman complexes and short-sighted, dangerous, and "barking mad" (as per a recent *Slate* article) views, he came to two conclusions. Firstly, the silver iodide and computer models of the weather and climate interventionists do not work. Secondly, little is known about human nature other than through existing studies of WEIRD people, but it is known that climate intervention is heavily biased toward males. Concluding, he argued that we can wrest the future of the planet from the hands of ill-informed, even "barking mad," dangerous males by treating them as a marked category.

The panel was continued by **MARTIN HULTMAN** on "Green Men? Exploring Industrial, Ecological, and Ecomodern Masculinity." Analyzing situated forms of masculinities, understood as always-in-the-making and part of material semiotic antagonistic discourses, embodied nature of knowledge, materiality and meaning, Hultman introduced a decade of research in masculinity studies into three categories of climate change, environmental history, and energy politics. Highlighting white, middle-class, "middle-ageish," fairly rich men as being a significant environmental problem, he pointed out that these are the same persons participating in climate negotiations, as top managers in global companies, and designers of geoengineering. This brought about the possibility of "ecological masculinity" as another category.

**NAOKI KAMBE**, in "Nature and *Mujo* (Impermanence): The Ecological *Nihonjinron* after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011," discussed how the aesthetization of *mujo* (impermanence) after the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake reinforced Japanese cultural ideals of the male, and a perception of nature that relied on a convincing notion of continuity since the medieval period. Due to the human-made nuclear power-plant crisis, the discourse reminded people of their unique attitude toward nature (e.g., obeying) and consequences of conquering nature through human power such as nuclear energy. This, Kambe argued, begins a new aesthetic discourse reflecting and

justifying men's ambivalent reactions/emotions to the natural disaster (earthquake and tsunami) and the human-made disaster of Fukushima.

Discussion brought up several issues for further examination: How do we get past feelings of outrage to metanarratives and intersectionality? How do women help to produce hegemonic masculinities? Are we "fixing" masculinities by trying to define them? The necessity for international and younger voices in the discussion around geoengineering was also raised, as well as the need to be clear about the types of masculinities being discussed.

The second session, Histories of Men and Nature, began with **KATHRYN DE LUNA** on "Marksmen and the Bush: Masculinities and Techno-Environments in South Central Africa, c. 750–1350." Using the history of bushcraft—specifically Botatwe-speaking societies of south-central Africa—as a case study to explore the micropolitics of knowledge production, de Luna highlighted the special status given in many central, eastern, and southern African societies to practitioners of technologies undertaken in the bush. The invention of a new landscape category, *isokwe*, and the novel status of seasonal technicians marks the development of a virile, sexualized masculinity available to some men; but it was also a status with deeply sensuous, material, and social meanings for women.

**STEFAN HÜBNER** focused on the Gulf of Mexico and the North Sea in "No Women, No Liquor: Offshore Oil Drilling, the Oceanic Environment, and Concepts of Manliness." Offshore drilling in the American South had long been considered a male domain—with self-control, discipline, hard labor, and temperance considered the masculine features needed to withstand the harsh conditions. When offshore drilling expanded to the North Sea during the 1970s, these images transferred across the Atlantic Ocean. Nature-induced disasters, such as hurricanes, and human-induced accidents, such as fires, also contributed to discourses that women joining their male colleagues offshore would have to adjust to a "male" set of norms and values to withstand the harsh environment.

**ERIK LOOMIS** discussed the production of working-class masculinity in "Masculinity, Work, and the Industrial Forest in the US Pacific Northwest," highlighting the need to reinstate working people within environmental history rather than focusing on policymakers and environmentalists. Working-class people, such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and Four-L (Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen), Loomis argued, had very complex relationships with the natural world, and terminology such as "raping the forest" was very gendered. Different ideas of manhood exist in the production of nature; women are often demonized; and the notion of workers "saving" the

forest for their sons can be made from their desire to seize the forest from its owners because they did not believe that it would be taken for in a sustainable way. These themes take on a masculine stance.

In discussion, participants spoke about the importance of architecture in these histories (such as the design of living quarters on the oil rigs), the centrality of the body to environmental history, and the importance of values around domesticity and home in histories of men and nature.

**JOE CURNOW** and **JODY CHAN** began session three, Politicizing Men and Nature, with “Doing Expertise: Racialized and Gendered Participation in an Environmental Campaign.” Drawing on theorizations of doing gender and difference and analyzing positioning dynamics through video, they highlighted how “doing” expertise relies on white masculine modes of engagement, creating a dynamic where white men’s participation is co-constructed by all participants as more valuable than that of women and people of color. The conflation of hegemonic white masculinity with expertise drives the perception that environmental campaigns are a white male “default space,” with little room for expertise and engagement from people of color and women.

The session continued with **NOÉMI GONDA** on “Men and Climate Change: Bad Men Deforest, Good Men Convert to Cocoa Producer: A Study from Rural Nicaragua.” Building on the theoretical perspective of governmentality coined by Michel Foucault, Gonda explored how the figure of the masculine cattle-rancher, which is susceptible to being converted into cocoa-producer, plays a role in local explorations of climate change adaptation. She discussed why some refuse to implement projects when these jeopardize their gendered subjectivities, and explored the process through which knowledge on climate change is transformed by climate change practitioners into problems that are materially and culturally relevant “on the ground” and which, in contemporary Nicaragua, involves blaming smallholder (mostly male) farmers for environmental degradation.

Discussion questions included: (for Gonda) why cattle-raising is considered a masculine ideal and why it confers status on men only; (for Chan and Curnow) how participants in their study performed expertise in non-verbal ways; and (for Chan and Curnow) why they chose not to use something like Judith Butler’s notion of gender performativity as a theoretical framework.

Session four, Reading Men and Nature, started with **WILL ABBERLEY**’s “ ‘The Love of the Chase is an Inherent Delight in Man’: Hunting, Nature, and Masculine Emotions in the Victorian History Memoir.” Abberley offered close readings of well-known naturalists’ memoirs, Charles Darwin’s *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839) and Alfred Russel Wallace’s *The Malay Archipelago* (1869). He described how these memoirs evidence a struggle between two different emotional registers: the

rational detachment associated with the man of science, and the instinctive passions of the hunter. Abberley concluded that these memoirs demonstrate the contradictions in Victorian attitudes around masculinity, nature, and emotion.

**SUSANNE LEIKAM** finished the session with “Extreme Weather and Masculinity/ies in Contemporary American Popular Cultures.” She examined the masculinities performed in Barbara Kingsolver’s novel *Flight Behavior* (2012) and the disaster film parody *Sharknado* (2013), claiming that these texts speak to an overarching pattern in contemporary American pop cultural representations: extreme weather, often in the form of natural disaster, suspends established physical and social structures until a typically male hero can reassert order. *Sharknado* provided the starting point for inquiry since parody draws exaggerated attention to heroic masculine agency. In *Flight Behavior*, male heroism aligns with intellectual dominance over the effects of climate change. Both texts demonstrate how extreme weather reinforces gendered ideologies and normative assumptions around heroic male behavior.

In discussion after this panel, participants raised points and questions about the importance of not collapsing “male” and “masculinity” into each other, the relationship of power and masculinity, and the rise of “cli-fi” (climate change fiction) and its various implications.

A final commentary was given by **PAULA VILLA**. Villa summarized the workshop, noting common themes and identifying opportunities for further discussion. For example, she observed that, with the exception of Carr Johnson, the participants’ work did not touch on sexuality. She also reiterated the idea, found in multiple participants’ work, that masculinities are not monolithic but always specific, dependent on space, time, and context. Villa then offered a specifically EU perspective, describing the current “anti-genderism” agenda of right-wing parties in Europe.

The workshop concluded with a wrap-up discussion centered on common themes, including the notion of unmarked categories, the production and co-production of masculinities, the importance of geography in such production, the relationship between colonialism and masculinities, and the difference between identities and practices.

-- Stephanie Hood, with Emily Robles and Nicole Seymour