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weathering, weather, bodies, people, concept, phenomena, scholar, climate change, environmental, understand, social, sexism, feminist, discourses, thinking, world, writing, environmental justice, activists, vulnerability

## SPEAKERS

Astrida Nemanis, Cassie Phoenix

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- C** Cassie Phoenix 00:03  
Okay, so I'm really happy to have Dr. Astrida Nemanis with me today. Astrida is a senior lecturer in the Department of gender and cultural studies, and the University of Sydney, Australia. Welcome.
- A** Astrida Nemanis 00:16  
Hi, it's my pleasure to be here.
- C** Cassie Phoenix 00:19  
So obviously I've invited you here this morning (for us) and evening (for you) to just have a little chat about the weather - because that's what we do! I've really enjoyed your work as I've been learning more about the weather and how it operates in people's lives. And I just wondered if you could tell me a little more about your research and how the weather features within it?
- A** Astrida Nemanis 00:41  
Sure, so it's probably a good idea to contextualise where I'm coming from. I am a gender studies scholar and primarily a feminist theorist. So I'm not an empirical researcher.

Primarily I deal with texts and ideas and imagine binaries, artworks, emotions, feelings, effects, and increasingly with environmental questions. So it could be, you know, a very reasonable question to ask what the heck someone like me is doing writing and thinking about weather. My approach to it came out of a deep interest in human bodies. When I was a PhD student some years ago, about a decade and a half now, I was writing my PhD thesis and I was trying to understand from a feminist perspective, what it would mean to be like ecologically embodied if our bodies as we know are mostly made up of water. If we you know, eat and drink things that are taken from our environments and incorporate them literally into our own flesh and bones and blood. You know, how does an deeper understanding of this Human Environmental like literal material connection, how might that prompt us to develop a different kind of environmental ethics, right? Like, the environment is no longer somewhere out there separate from us as humans, but is literally incorporated into our own our own flesh. And I write a lot about water. But weather has also been interesting to me as discourses of climate change, have, you know, really ramped up as they should, in the last couple of decades during my career? And so I've also started to think then how do we as human bodies, incorporate the weather so like, how are we the truly the weather around us? How are we weathered by the world, you know, such that the weather writes itself onto ourselves. But then also reciprocally, like how, you know, thinking again about environmental ethics and climate ethics specifically, how do our bodies also make The weather, you know, like, that's, you know, obviously, in a time of climate change, it's quite easy to think about that in Grand terms, you know, burning fossil fuels and digging up, you know, coal and driving cars, flying planes, blah, blah, blah. But I'm also interested in a very sort of intimate level as well, you know, what is the relationship between our human bodies in the weather world on an everyday mundane kind of scale as well? And how can paying attention to that teach us something about our ethical relationship with the environment and with other people?



Cassie Phoenix 03:38

That's a fantastic answer. Thank you. And so rich. You mentioned this concept of weathering, which is something I found interesting in your work and I just wondered if you could talk a little more around how you understand weathering.



Astrida Nemanis 03:53

I would love to and doing that, I really need to acknowledge particularly two co-authors there's that I've written with about this concept. So in 2014, I published an article called weathering with my colleague, Rachel Lowen Walker in a feminist philosophy journal. So that was when Rachel and I started trying to think about weather as something our bodies incorporate, you know, so the weather is written on to our bodies, it was quite a

philosophical exploration, where we were really, you know, trying to understand how our bodies archived the weather, like time is archived in our bodies by like heat, drought, flood, rain, seasons, etc. and but more recently, I've been working really in depth with my colleague, Jennifer Hamilton, who works at the University of New England here in Australia, not the British or American places that have that name. It's up north here of me about eight hours from Sydney. So we had published a short article a couple of years ago called weathering in the journal feminist review, and we actually wanted to take this concept and make it much more specific than I did with Rachel some years ago. So weathering for us is an action concept. We want to use it for people to think about two things. First, how we weather the world. So how the world in its meteorological and climatological, but also social, political, cultural weathers, you know, how that impinges on us and shapes who we are as bodies. Um, I'll say a bit more about that in a second. But then the second part of that, then again, is thinking about how we contribute to the weathers of the world, you know. Partly we wanted to be very clear that for us, this is then in Environmental Justice concept, we wanted to think about how issues of racism, class and economic marginalisation and these sorts of social constructs also create the weathers that we have to endure as bodies. We don't mean this metaphorically, I'm drawing on a deep literature of environmental racism, and environmental classism and sexism and that environmental justice literature more broadly, we already know that certain kinds of bodies bear the burden of environmental pollution, drought, famine, food shortages, etc. like those climate related phenomena. We already know that certain kinds of bodies bear that burden more heavily, right. So we wanted to use the concept of weathering to draw attention to that, that it's through the concept of weathering, something like that. Climate change and weather which is like an environmental phenomenon becomes very tightly tethered to those social and cultural phenomena of racism, you know, economic injustice, sexism, etc. So through the concept of weathering, we want to show how we cannot think about these different things as separate. Weathering climate change is about how we as different kinds of bodies, endure the world, and then how we contribute to building a world made up of different weathers as well.

C

Cassie Phoenix 07:36

I mean, each time I read that paper and have had to read it more than once. Yeah, I just really feel I've taken something from it. So thank you for developing that. And even just you talking through it there has also been really helpful.

A

Astrida Nemanis 07:50

Perhaps I could say one more thing about it. Jennifer, and I've been thinking about this in

a bit more detail lately. And we're writing another paper right now, where we're trying to develop this. We also think about weathering as an alternative to other kinds of concepts that are circulating right now. One of them is resilience, right? Like we're a bit critical of the idea of resilience because it assumes that we can just, you know, pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and get on with things. Like it's kind of like a personal failing or a personal problem. If we are unable to weather the world, you know, like it doesn't, resilience does not take into account sufficiently structural injustices that make it impossible, and at least difficult for many kinds of bodies to weather the world. Right? So weathering wants to draw attention to those structural injustices in a way that resilience we don't think does. On the other hand, we also really like the word you know, vulnerability, but oftentimes when we hear that word, it sort of paints certain populations or groups of people as like inherently damaged or victims or, you know, constantly at the whim of climate change, you know, and you see, like, you know, the certain kinds of populations that are struggling in the flood waters or you know, barely surviving famines and then it's this real kind of White Saviourism that's attached to that vulnerability discourse. And almost as though this is people's lot in life, you know, really racist and really problematic. So we kind of wanted a different concept that could understand that there is like this place where we are vulnerable and also empowered, you know, sort of building new futures in the weather world all the time, right. So, weathering like pays attention to our vulnerabilities as physical bodies. We need to, you know, who needs shelter and need clean water and unpolluted environments, but it also doesn't want to sort of just slip into that resilience talk where we're just gonna, like pull ourselves out of it. We also want to address structural injustice as a necessary part of the climate change discussion.



Cassie Phoenix 10:13

Yeah, sure. Well, I look forward to that paper coming out. So, you've been on quite a journey, I think, in developing this concept. What for you have been some of the challenges around that? What's perhaps surprised you as you delved into some of the literatures to help shape these ideas?



10:31



10:31



Astrida Nemanis 10:36

It's a great question because sometimes, you know, scholars are assumed to have, you know, like, just invented these great concepts out of the thin air and of course, that's not true. We read and learn and talk and discuss and make mistakes and correct ourselves. And I would like to say that one thing that I have certainly learned, you know, a great amount while on this journey is from black feminist scholarship. So when I was thinking with Rachel Lowan Walker about weathering about you know, six years ago, we were quite steeped in European philosophical tradition and thinking with, you know, philosophers whether or not your listeners know them doesn't matter but big names like Deleuze and Guattari, you know, some of these New Materialists as they're called, Post-Humanists, and it's quite a White scholarship, and it's quite a male scholarship. And we were playing with that in interesting ways, but still sort of stuck to that. And once we brought it, you know, with Jennifer, we brought this work more into the environmental justice, terrain. Um, it should have come as no surprise that of course, Black feminist scholars, scholars and activists have been working on similar concepts for a long time. So there's somebody named for example, Arline Geronimus who is in the field of nursing in the US, who has been developing the weathering concept for decades, looking at the ways that, you know, black women in particular, are particularly, particularly at risk of certain kinds of environmental factors in a way that get - I've not articulated that well. What I mean to say is, that work has tracked the way that racism, systemic racism, and sexism as well - it's an intersectional phenomena, particularly for black women - the way that their health indicators show the effects of that systemic racism, sexism, in terms of all kinds of health indicators, right, so it's not my field and I mean, of course, I'm not across everything that happens in nursing. But you know, like, black women scholars, activists have been thinking about this for decades. They've been living it and writing about it. So I was really learning quite a lot from them. My more recent work therefore has turned to read more carefully the work of people like Christina Sharpe, whose book 'In the Wake' it's a it's a work of cultural theory, but also writes about the weather as the total climate of anti blackness. You know, I'm looking to people like Audre Lorde, who, you know, was writing in the 80s and 90s. Another black lesbian feminist poet activist, who spoke about you know, having to weather the world in ways that imprinted on her body. Claudia Rankine, the acclaimed US poet recently wrote a poem called Weather, you know, that was again, about systemic racism, and the way that bodies are made to injure it. So it's been quite interesting to me. Um, and I mean, not surprised. It's more like I should have known that. But, like, just really exciting and important to me that this work is now connecting up with those other discourses who have long been struggling with how to connect questions of environment. And, you know, racism, sexism, and other kinds of oppression. I mean, not struggling in the sense that they could see and live, you know, they live the fact that these things were connected, but struggling to get that noticed in mainstream discourses, which I'm hoping is now becoming less of a hard sell. Like we we are more and more increasingly recognising the ways that weather and climate change are also social, cultural, economic

phenomena.



Cassie Phoenix 14:45

Mm hmm. Some great signpost there to go away and follow up. So thank you for that as well. That's really interesting, obviously, connecting it with racism and other social injustices. So it I think my final question makes it even more interesting. What for you, does living well with weather involve?



Astrida Nemanis 15:08

Yeah, that's a really another great question. In the article that you referred to by Jennifer and myself. We talked about, you know, learning to weather better. And we often ask yourselves, what do we mean by that? You know, like it's a provocation. And I hope that it's a rich question that, you know, people can actually really ask themselves, like, What might that mean? Does that mean just turning down the air con, you know, to sort of use less fossil fuels? Does it mean taking the bus instead of my private car? Does it mean voting in politicians who have better climate policies? Well, yes, it means all of those things, but if we take whether in its capacious sense, then it also means you know, committing to struggles to anti racism, you know, for anti racism and feminist climate justice movements as well. You know, it means understanding that I am a weather maker, not only in, you know, burning fossil fuels or throwing plastic in the garbage. I'm also a weather maker in how I address or don't questions of social, racial, gender injustice, right? I'm also always creating the weathers for others in the way I speak, talk, what I read what I assign to my students, what causes I put myself on the line for, who I'm an ally with, you know, whose back I have, you know, these sorts of things are also part of weather. So, weathering better, I think can happen all the time in all sorts of small and big ways. And the more fulsomely we understand weather, as not just something that's environmental, but also something that's personal, and embodied, and then also something that's relational and social. To look at all three of those levels, environmental, embodied personal and social relational, then weathering better can happen in all sorts of ways all the time.



Cassie Phoenix 17:17

So in a way, and that's a great response, by the way, I feel that points to the final question about some reflective thoughts on the future of this area of inquiry. The idea of weathering better, I suppose, is something so important to take forward?

A

Astrida Nemanis 17:36

I think, you know, as somebody who works across fields, you know, I'm a gender studies scholar who insists on bringing in environmental questions. I'm an environmental sort of study scholar who insists on bringing in gender and racial justice questions. You know, I'm a scholar who insists on you know, working with artists and activists and communities. I think what all of that means is that the future of this work has to make more of those connections across different domains, which is, you know, what our conversation is too, which is so amazing. Like the environmental engineers and scientists have to understand the social impacts of what they're doing. You know, climatologists have to think also about weather as a social phenomenon. But you know, like feminists and cultural studies scholars and philosophers, like, they also have to think about the world is not just made up of humans, but of, you know, as being this broader weather world that, you know, we're all both weathering and weather making, you know, so, I think like, I don't want it to sound like an easy answer, but like real deep, difficult interdisciplinarity I see happening. And then I think that's really exciting. And the more we can get on I think our people in charge, like in education institutions in schools, but also in Parliament and governments and in business, like to really understand the climate change phenomenon cannot be fixed by better machines or better algorithms. It cannot be changed by just putting up some techno solutions. But it requires a really deep reckoning with social cultural patterns of relations between people. That's when we'll really start to move this debate forward, I think.

C

Cassie Phoenix 19:38

Fantastic. Astrida, thank you so much for your wisdom and your insight into this topic. Just as I've gone back and re-read your papers, I know that I'm going to be listening to this recording time and again, so thank you so much for your time, and I'll I'll just end the recording here. Thank you.

A

Astrida Nemanis 19:57

Thank you.