



Interview

Vani Bhardwaj



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Doctorante à l'[Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, Inde](#). Co-responsable du Cercle Genre et Justice Climatique de la [Society of Gender Professionals](#). Responsable Politique chez [Young Women In Sustainable Development](#). Chercheuse pour [The Pixel Project](#), en particulier sur des projets et campagnes sur les violences sexistes et sexuelles.

Autrice de [Queering Conflict Transformation and Peace-building](#) et de [Queering Disasters In Light Of the Climate Crisis](#) for the Gender in Geopolitics institute.

Notre Affaire à Tous a eu la chance d'apprendre de **Vani Bhardwaj**, qui a pris le temps de répondre à nos questions. Vani poursuit son doctorat sur les intersections entre le changement climatique et le genre, en se concentrant plus particulièrement sur la façon dont les femmes et les populations queer en Inde et au Bangladesh sont touchées par les politiques liées à l'eau. En plus d'être doctorante à temps plein, Vani participe également à différentes initiatives de volontariat axées sur le genre et le changement climatique, notamment avec des organisations féministes queer aussi bien mondiales que locales.

Vani a gentiment accepté de partager son expertise avec Notre Affaire à Tous, ainsi pour préserver l'authenticité académique de ses mots et de son travail, et pour maintenir l'intégrité des personnes à qui elle prête sa voix, cette interview sera rendue en anglais, avec seulement des points clés traduits en français.

Notre Affaire A Tous (NAAT) : How do you think the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people, queer individuals intersect with environmental concerns and climate change impacts?

(Traduction : Comment pensez-vous que les expériences des personnes LGBTQIA+ s'entrecroisent avec les préoccupations environnementales et les impacts du changement climatique ?)

Vani Bhardwaj (VB) : I believe environmental change is now known to have an exaggerated impact for women and girls, but what often gets omitted is that the queer population is also completely ostracized - there is a "queer blind narrative" around ecology and how we approach ecology. So in order to incorporate the queer population within our climate change narratives, we need to reframe the way we understand ecology itself. For instance, when we look at public

spaces that are somewhat “taboo” - which are ostracized, or at the outliers of a city or even a rural hinterland - that is very similar to the way the queer population is treated in India.

So when we look at, say, climate disasters, and we think of restabilizing the lives of the people afterwards, we never cater to the queer population. And there are particular intersectionalities that even the queer population is not really acknowledging themselves. I once talked to a queer person living in Delhi [capital of India] which observed a certain position of power compared to people living on the periphery of the country, like Guwahati [city in North-East India, between Bangladesh and Butan], the city I am located as we speak. Guwahati is home for Dalit people [i.e. lowest caste in India, “outcastes” and “underprivileged”) and when I addressed the conditions of life for Dalit queer people, the person living in Delhi completely denied the terms “Dalit queers” stating that the queer population itself is not “casteist”, it does not have caste-based discrimination. But that is not true, when we look not only at literature but also lived experiences of many Dalit scholars, they talk about how even the “Dalitality” (a concept attributed to Dr. Suraj Yengde - <https://scholar.harvard.edu/surajyengde/about>) actually matters in everyday lives: Dalits are ostracized, and discriminated against when it comes to their career just on the based off caste, so they are doubly marginalized if that individual is Dalit and queer.

There is some kind of a blind spot within the Queer community regarding that. So when this Dalit queer individual was embedded in such a society, faces displacement due to climate disasters, which are caused by climate change, they are doubly and triply marginalized. They are almost silenced in the mainstream narrative, and I think that is why it is very crucial to focus on the queer narratives within the climate change impacts, and not only impacts, but consequences as well. We really need to reframe how we approach ecology as such and I think the particular stance of queer feminist political ecology is the most inclusive frame.

 Points clés en français :

- Dans le contexte du changement climatique, il est largement reconnu que les femmes et les filles subissent un impact disproportionné. Cependant, un aspect souvent négligé est la marginalisation des populations queer. Les discours sur l'écologie et l'approche des problèmes environnementaux perpétuent l'invisibilisation des populations queer. Pour intégrer pleinement ces populations dans nos récits sur le changement climatique, Vani suggère de reformuler notre compréhension de l'écologie elle-même.
- Il existe un parallèle significatif entre la marginalisation des personnes queer et celle d'espaces publics "tabous", en périphérie des zones urbaines et rurales. De même, lorsqu'il s'agit de catastrophes liées au climat et de l'aide post-catastrophe, les besoins et les expériences des populations queer sont souvent négligés. Ce manque de considération perpétue leur marginalisation au sein de la société.
- Même au sein de la communauté queer, les expériences intersectionnelles sont insuffisamment reconnues. Une conversation avec une personne queer vivant à Delhi a mis en évidence sa position de pouvoir relative par rapport à ceux qui résident en périphérie du pays, comme à Guwahati, où se concentrent les Dalits - la caste la plus basse de l'Inde, historiquement opprimée et marginalisée. Lorsqu'il est question des conditions de vie des queer Dalits, l'individu de Delhi nie l'existence de la "queer dalitude", affirmant que les personnes queer ne sont pas affectées par la discrimination basée sur la caste. Cependant, à la fois la littérature existante et les expériences vécues

des chercheur·euses queer Dalits démontrent que l'identité Dalit influence considérablement leur vie quotidienne. Ainsi, les personnes queer Dalits font face à une double marginalisation, non seulement en raison de leur orientation sexuelle, mais aussi en raison de leur caste.

- Face aux déplacements induits par le climat, les personnes queer Dalits se trouvent davantage marginalisé·es et réduites au silence. Leurs expériences et leurs voix sont souvent absentes des discours dominants. Il est crucial de se concentrer non seulement sur les impacts du changement climatique, mais aussi sur les conséquences auxquelles sont confrontées les communautés queer. Il devient donc impératif de reformuler notre approche écologique et d'adopter un cadre plus inclusif, tel que la perspective écologique politique queer féministe, qui offre une vision globale pour aborder ces questions.

NAAT : Are there any specific initiative, policy or advocacy efforts that have emerged from the collaboration between queer and ecological movements you can think of and how effective have they been in addressing the concerns and claims of both groups ?

(Traduction : Connaissez-vous des initiatives, des politiques ou des efforts de plaidoyer spécifiques qui ont émergé de la collaboration entre les mouvements queer et écologiques, et dans quelle mesure ont-ils été efficaces pour aborder les préoccupations et revendications des deux groupes ?)

VB : I would say that the convergence of climate change issues and the queer population is really not clear in India. Living and working in a place which itself is at the periphery in India, we are already trying to normalize the narrative that people are not to be ostracized, because the narrative against LGBTQIA+ population is very much prevalent in the peripheries. We are still working on normalizing the fact that we are also human you know. That's the kind of narrative that we need to normalize first.

I think the convergence between climate change issues and how it is exaggeratedly impacting LGBTQIA+ population has not really taken off in small Indian towns, it is much more prevalent in Mumbai or Delhi, which are the metro cities of the country. But in my own activism I have created a global and online community of practice approach in which we do invite grassroots scholars and academia together so people who are theoretically engaged in this space and who are practically on the ground, implementing and designing climate adaptation-related projects can come together and have these dialogue sessions. Many times when we talk about gender and climate justice frameworks, we have queer political activist from outside of the periphery who say that we need to go beyond these dialogue sessions but I think the ground realities are very different from the theory, particularly in Guwahati where the inclusion narrative has not really emerged. A local convergence of activism is not relevant and is almost ahead of its time in that sense.

 Points clés en français :

- Il y a encore peu de convergence des problématiques liées aux changements climatiques et au mouvement LGBTQIA+ en Inde, notamment dans les zones périurbaines et rurales. Ces convergences sont encore à créer dans ces régions, mais il

semble d'abord nécessaire de lutter contre les discriminations subies par les personnes LGBTQIA+ et de normaliser un discours d'inclusion et de reconnaissance de droits.



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NAAT : What are some of the challenges or barriers faced by people either from the Global South, from the periphery, or even more locally in Guwahati in engaging with climate justice movements, and how would you say these challenges differ from the ones from the Global North or “Centre”?

(Traduction: Quels sont les défis et/ou obstacles auxquels sont confrontées les personnes queers issues de la Périphérie ou plus localement à Guwahati lorsqu'elles s'engagent dans les mouvements pour la justice climatique? Comment diriez-vous que ces défis diffèrent de ceux des populations du Nord Global ou du "Centre" ?)

VB : So first of all, if we look at it from a scholarly and theoretical manner, I always find it difficult to find any kind of literature regarding climate justice, queer population and their intersectionalities being explored in the “majority world’s academia”. Most, if not all the research available, usually comes from scholars from South Africa or Australia exploring the intersectional relations between the Global South and the queer population(s) getting impacted by climate change and climate disasters. In addition to being scholarly and theoretically limited, in a practical approach and real ground realities, when you do your ethnographic research and when you go to different households, you can’t expect a closeted person who has not come out yet to just be vulnerable to you outright for the sake of research. There is an inherent and prevalent patriarchy, transphobia and homophobia on ground realities within rural Bangladesh or India.

Picture this, the Brahmaputra river is flooding year after year, and we want to talk about disaster relief efforts with locals. What we see is that there is no sex disaggregation or gender disaggregation based data and there is a high degree of chance that people who have not

revealed their sexual or gendered identities, and are part of a minority, may again be at a disadvantage because the shelter camps and post-disaster recovery efforts are completely blind to gender. They are blind when it comes to women and girls so they are also completely blind about queer populations.

For queer communities, there's a concept of housing, and then there's a concept of home, right? Where exactly is "home" is a question many queer people problematize and wonder their entire lives. If they do not have the support within their families, which without the intention to do a generalization is very often the case in hegemonic heteronormative families in India and Bangladesh, and that creates settings that are transphobic and homophobic, it is very difficult for them to come out to their own family. The entire concept of home becomes irrelevant, they feel alienated inside their so called home, and so they try to find community and networks outside of their bloodline. That is to say that in situations of climate disaster, it is not automatically their home being taken away, it is more their housing if they have one.

Lots of queer people in India will battle the trauma and this protracted conflict of what really is "home" their entire lives and I think that wound reopens when climate disasters keep striking again and again. It is kind of a double or a triple displacement, a displacement at the social, economic, psychological and psychosocial level. I think the government has particularly been very much blind up until 2-3 years ago to the fact that queer population even existed when climate disasters happened because there is a very apparent transphobic and homophobic attitude within disaster relief volunteers themselves which participates in ostracizing the queer community with disaster relief efforts.

So in this part of the country, when climate disaster strikes, not only does hegemonic masculinity and femininity get affected, but we also observe that indigenous masculinity and indigenous femininity get swept away in the disaster too. They get swept away in the disaster, in the sense that for example indigenous masculinity gets challenged as they no longer are the breadwinner of the household because of the climate disaster. So amongst all of these complex notions for a queer individual to even come out, and, you know, reveal "I am part of the queer community and I have exaggerated impacts due to the climate disasters" is quite difficult. In addition, asking the government for measures or policies, or to simply have queer activists sitting on the round table for policy making is even more of a challenge.

The Indian civil society is trying to eliminate transphobia and homophobia through pride marches and push for community networking spaces like open libraries for queer community-members to come, sit and read together. More of these initiatives are emerging but intersectionality with climate change still hasn't been mainstreamed because queer people are missing in the public policy-making spaces dedicated to disaster management policies.

Frankly, heteronormative people are not going to sit there and you know, be so much as sensitive regarding the queer population's relation to climate disasters while they're transphobic and homophobic in their private sphere. We really need the queer population to actually be part of that policy circle which decides disaster management policies. And I think because the indigenous masculinity and indigenous femininity also get challenged by climate disasters, and within that, we need to find this queer narrative to challenge these multidimensional marginalities in relief efforts.

🔑 Points clés en français :

- Il existe un manque de littérature académique sur la justice climatique et les intersections avec la population queer. La plupart des recherches existantes provient de chercheur·euses en Afrique du Sud ou en Australie, se concentrant sur l'impact du changement climatique et des catastrophes sur les populations queer du Sud Global. En termes pratiques, mener des recherches ethnographiques dans ces régions présente des défis, car les personnes qui ne sont pas encore "out" peuvent ne pas révéler ouvertement leur identité en raison du patriarcat, de la transphobie et/ou de l'homophobie prévalentes dans les zones rurales du Bangladesh et de l'Inde.
- L'absence de données par sexe et genre dans les efforts de secours en cas de catastrophe désavantage encore plus les individu·es qui n'ont pas révélé leur identité sexuelle ou de genre. Les camps d'hébergement et les efforts de reconstruction post-catastrophe naturelle ne sont que peu sensibilisés autour des questions de genre, notamment auprès des femmes et filles, mais aussi auprès de la communauté LGBTQIA+.
- Pour les communautés queer, le concept de "foyer" est complexe, car beaucoup font face à des environnements familiaux hostiles et hétéronormés en Inde et au Bangladesh. Ils se sentent souvent marginalisé·es au sein de leur propre foyer et cherchent des communautés et des réseaux en dehors de leur famille. Lors de catastrophes climatiques, ce n'est pas nécessairement leur foyer physique qui est emporté, mais plutôt leur sentiment d'appartenance à un lieu et/ou logement.
- Les personnes queer en Inde luttent fréquemment contre les traumatismes et les conflits liés au concept de "foyer" tout au long de leur vie. Les catastrophes climatiques exacerbent cette blessure, entraînant des déplacements multiples à des niveaux sociaux, économiques, psychologiques et psychosociaux. Le gouvernement a historiquement fermé les yeux sur l'existence de la population queer lors des catastrophes climatiques, perpétuant ainsi une attitude transphobe et homophobe parmi les secouristes et les efforts de secours en cas de catastrophe, marginalisant davantage la communauté queer.

NAAT : What role do you think this intersection plays in the relationship between the climate justice movement and the LGBTQIA+ movement, and how does it change the experiences and priorities of individuals who identify as part of both groups?

(Traduction: Quel(s) rôle(s) attribuez vous à la convergence des luttes dans la relation entre le mouvement pour la justice climatique et le mouvement LGBTQIA+, et comment cela modifie-t-il les expériences et priorités des personnes qui s'identifient à ces deux groupes ?)

VB : First, let me make it clear that the LGBTQIA+ community is not homogeneous so we need to recognize the heterogeneity of the community. Then secondly, we need to ensure that the spaces in which the community is embedded are comfortable so that it becomes comfortable for individuals to reveal their place on the entire sexual and genital spectrum, which is still very much of a struggle, at least in India, as I can't speak for the entire Global South.

For instance in India, there's a great difference and disparity between how much the lesbians and the gays get discussed in mainstream queer narratives, and how much the [asexuals*](#) are completely marginalized. They are basically the “plus” in LGBTQ+. So obviously there are always differentiations but no categorization, because the moment you categorize anything, then you are endangering the entire community to exclusion. The moment you start categorizing, you are essentially trying to exclude somebody. So the moment you're trying to set boundaries by categorizing by putting a nomenclature, you are bound to exclude somebody or the other.

And I think that is how climate justice narratives and activism need to incorporate everybody within the LGBTQs if you really want to have a separate networking or like a separate community or civil society organization focusing only on lesbians then another organization focusing only on transgenders, those can be separate, because they don't have these separate differentiated demands , although they do have a common thread of getting ostracized multidimensionally. So it is very much essential for LGBTQ population because.

When a climate disaster strikes, what happens is that whatever landscape that has been established completely gets dismantled and you have to rebuild it once again. So in that same way, when we're talking about gender and sexuality spectrum, I think we can completely dismantle the way we have been heteronormative in discussing it and we can rebuild all of that. Climate disaster recovery and recovering and gender narratives are very much closely linked together.

There is this entire strand of queer feminist political ecology that talks about how the so called “unkempt and the pristine” forests that have not been touched, that are at the outskirts of the city, or the towns which are basically the embodiment of the ostracized - where nobody is living. Those are places which the local queer community can completely relate to, because of a shared sense of ostracization. Queer political ecology is how ecology is being understood by the queer population, how the queer community experiences the environment, how they experience ecology, how they experience, you know, the flow and flood of the river within the city or the polluted air around them? You know we only have cis-heteronormative and capitalistic narratives about our understanding of the environment. I remember like in primary school we were taught that there are biotic and abiotic components and so there are always binaries, there is the normal life and then there is the disrupted life due to climate disaster so that's again a binary. But if you really look at the queer activists and how they will see a climate disaster or even climate change, maybe it won't be that much in a binary context, it won't be so dualistic in classification and categorization and that is why would benefit from more trans and queer scholars to understand environment itself; we need to reframe how we understand the concept of environment itself. We need to go to the basics and unpack those to really dovetail queer activism with climate change and climate justice.

 Points clés en français :

- Tout d'abord, il est important de souligner que la communauté LGBTQIA+ n'est pas homogène, et il est donc nécessaire de reconnaître cette hétérogénéité. Deuxièmement, il est primordial de veiller à ce que les espaces dans lesquels la communauté évolue soient confortables, de manière à ce que les individu-es puissent se sentir à l'aise pour exprimer leur place sur l'ensemble du spectre sexuel et de genre. Cela reste encore un défi, du moins en Inde. Vani note également

l'hétérogénéité du "Sud Global" et l'importance d'éviter les généralisations pour des régions/pays si disparates.

- Par exemple, en Inde, il existe une grande différence et disparité entre la visibilité accordée aux lesbiennes et aux gays dans les récits queer dominants, et la marginalisation complète des personnes asexuel·les, qui constituent en quelque sorte le "plus" dans LGBTQ+. Il y a toujours des différenciations, mais pas de catégorisation, car dès lors que l'on catégorise quelque chose, on exclut potentiellement toute une partie de la communauté. Le fait de poser des catégories et des limites de démarcation peut entraîner l'exclusion de certaines personnes.
- Dans le cadre de la justice climatique, il est essentiel d'inclure tout le monde au sein de la communauté LGBTQIA+. Il est possible d'avoir des organisations spécifiques se concentrant sur des sous-groupes particuliers, comme les lesbiennes ou les personnes transgenres, tout en reconnaissant le fil conducteur commun de l'ostracisation multidimensionnelle. Lorsque des catastrophes climatiques surviennent, le paysage établi est démantelé, nécessitant une reconstruction. De même, les discussions sur le genre et la sexualité peuvent être déconstruites depuis une perspective hétéronormative pour être reconstruites de manière plus inclusive. La récupération après les catastrophes climatiques et les récits de genre sont étroitement liés.
- La politique écologique queer féministe met en évidence le lien entre les espaces marginalisés, tels que les forêts préservées à la périphérie des villes, et les expériences de la communauté queer locale. Elle offre un cadre pour comprendre comment la population queer perçoit l'environnement, y compris l'impact de facteurs tels que le débit des rivières ou la pollution de l'air. En dépassant les récits cis-hétéronormatifs et capitalistes, une compréhension plus nuancée de l'environnement peut être développée. Cela nécessite une plus grande implication de chercheurs trans et queer afin repenser notre compréhension de l'environnement et de concilier l'activisme queer avec la lutte contre le changement climatique et la justice climatique.

NAAT : Climate movement(s) in France have lacked the perspective of the periphery in both academic circles and mainstream narratives. Would you have any recommendations for "Global North" countries and organizations to 1) better include the "Global South", or rather the situated knowledge(s) and local experiences within international climate justice movements, and how can the Global North better include LGBTQIA+ people in their climate justice initiatives?

(Traduction: Le(s) mouvement(s) de justice climatique en France omettent majoritairement la/les perspective(s) de la Périphérie - à la fois dans les cercles académiques et dans les discours dit "mainstream". Auriez-vous des recommandations à l'intention des pays et organisations du Centre, pour 1) mieux inclure la Périphérie, ses expertises et ses expériences au sein du mouvement du justice climatique internationale, 2) mieux inclure les personnes LGBTQIA+ dans ses initiatives de justice climatique ?)

VB : Thank you for that wonderful question. I think it has many parts to it. So let me just talk about this classification of Global North and Global South and the moment you say Global

North and South, they're juxtaposed into binaries and it becomes "Global North" versus "Global South". Or at least that's what it comes off as in more general settings. Whenever I use those terms, they are defined by power dynamics and positionality. So most people have now started saying "majority world" instead of Global South, but I refrain from even using that because when you use "majority world" that it itself shows a very majoritarian thinking. You know, trying to do like a reverse discrimination that if you colonized us with a certain perspective or approach, we're going to reverse the power hierarchy. So I don't think we have found the particular terminologies to reflect this complexity yet, whether it should be "Global South" or "majority world" or "periphery".

But I think as far as including localized narratives and knowledge within the LGBTQ and climate activism, in the Global North or the South, we need to have localizing vernacular language-based climate justice narratives. So even if you see global organizations or even local and national organizations, they are mainly dealing with the dominant language. For example, if an Assamese queer civil society organization approaches the climate justice perspective they would still frame their ideas and their advocacy in the dominant language, which is Assamese - and most probably English - but these are the 2 dominant languages of the state. These are not the only languages, we have hundreds and thousands of languages within a few 1000 kilometers so I think to really localize climate justice impacts on queer populations and even for women and young girls, what we really need to do is to make the entire queer and climate advocacy toolkits, and implementation guides, and scholarly literature very much localized and embedded in vernacular languages. And that is something that is also missing at the global level in the sense that when you are talking about voluntary national reviews and sustainable development goals and "not leaving anyone behind" - what we're really doing pushing the ostracization as we're not having an audit or we are not conducting vernacular language based voluntary national reviews. If they are all dominant language based, the language becomes an issue.

To say that Global North and Global South have completely juxtaposed to each other is also correct. [Wendy Harcourt](#) talks about how there are "margins within the centre" and periphery within the Global North. The Global North is also not a homogeneous entity itself. Because there are margins, we can create solidarity from the margins in Global South to the margins and periphery in the Global North. We also have power dominant and hierarchical places within the Global South who try to completely suppress the voices of the periphery in our countries. I think creating solidarity from the periphery in the Global South to the periphery in the Global North is what we're really looking at when we're talking about climate justice solidarities from queer population across the spectrum.

 Points clés en français :

- L'utilisation des termes Nord Global et Sud Global est souvent juxtaposée, reflète certes les dynamiques de pouvoir, mais imposant également un aspect dualitaire; ou [binaire*](#) du monde. Des termes alternatifs tels que "monde majoritaire" ou "périphérie" sont aussi utilisés, mais posent également problème, car ils peuvent perpétuer une pensée majoritaire ou inverser les hiérarchies de pouvoir. Vani considère que la terminologie reflétant la réelle complexité du sens derrière ces termes reste encore à être identifiée.

- Pour inclure les récits et les connaissances localisé-es dans les mouvements LGBTQIA+ et climatiques, il est crucial de développer des récits de justice climatique basés sur les langues vernaculaires. Actuellement, la plupart des organisations mondiales et locales travaillent principalement avec les langues dominantes, négligeant la multitude de langues au sein d'une région. Pour véritablement aborder les impacts de la justice climatique sur les populations queer, ainsi que sur les femmes et les jeunes filles, il est nécessaire de créer des outils, des guides de mise en œuvre et une littérature savante localisées dans les langues vernaculaires. Cet aspect de localisation fait également défaut au niveau mondial, où les approches basées sur les langues dominantes entravent l'inclusion et laissent certaines populations de côté.
- Il est important de reconnaître que le Nord global et le Sud global ne sont pas des entités homogènes. Vani fait référence au travail de Wendy Harcourt et souligne la présence de "marges au sein du Centre" et de Périphéries au sein du Nord Global lui-même. Une solidarité peut être développée des marges du Sud Global aux marges et aux Périphéries du Nord Global. Il est crucial de reconnaître l'existence de dynamiques de pouvoir et de hiérarchies également au sein du Sud Global, où les voix de la périphérie sont souvent réprimées. La création d'une solidarité à travers l'ensemble du spectre des populations queer est un aspect clé de l'activisme pour la justice climatique.