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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Queer/Green collaboration as a radical response to climate crises: foregrounding the green stripe

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This article has two aims. Firstly, to highlight a general marginalisation of queer and trans voices within the environmental/ecological movement. Secondly, to identify and explore some contemporary efforts to overcome these tensions and forge closer alliances between queer and green politics. Drawing on queer and trans ecology literatures, we highlight the radical potential that closer synergy between the progressive goals and activities of environmentalist and LGBTQIA2+ politics can bring about. Examining the online content of a number of activist organisations and platforms, we highlight some of the ways in which the queering of green politics and the greening of queer politics are being given practical contemporary expression. In doing so, we highlight the space that this type of politics can create for a reimagining of alternative ecological futures and a more progressive political economy based around a transformation of relationships both within human populations and between humans and other-than-human species and ecologies.

Keywords Queer ecology • queer environmental justice • climate change • environmental crisis • rainbow flag

Key messages

- There has been a general marginalisation of queer and trans voices within the environmental/ecological movement.
- There are a number of recent efforts to overcome these tensions and forge closer alliances between queer and green politics.
- A closer synergy between the progressive goals and activities of environmentalist and LGBTQIA2+ politics can create potential for more radical and creative responses to the climate crisis.

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Introduction

The rainbow flag, designed by Gilbert Baker for San Francisco's 1978 Gay Freedom Celebration, includes a green stripe across its centre. The green stripe signifies nature. This use of green is consistent with other political projects and campaigns where the colour works as a shorthand for environmental/ecological (political) parties, organisations, movements, groups and (academic) approaches. Since Baker's flag was launched, a proliferation of different flags representing the spectrum of LGBTQIA2+ (or combinations and subdivisions thereof) identities have emerged, many featuring a green stripe. In these iterations, rather than representing nature, the green stripe tends to represent non-binary genders and sexualities. For example, the green on the gender-queer flag represents those who identify outside of normative binary genders, and on the polysexual flag the green represents those who are attracted to individuals who do not identify with normative binary genders.

Differing interpretations of the green stripe within the LGBTQIA2+ community¹ hint at a general lack of solidarity and synergy between environmental/ecological and LGBTQIA2+ groups, organisations and movements (Foster, 2021). This article sets out to explore some of the tensions that have contributed to that overall lack of synergy, before moving on to identify some contemporary attempts to overcome these tensions. Informed by queer ecology scholarship, notably the work of authors such as Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands (2002; 2005), Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson (2010), Greta Gaard (1997; 2011) and Tim Morton (2007; 2016), our approach is premised on the understanding that the majority of green organisations and perspectives have historically been unwelcoming, if not actively exclusionary, to LGBTQIA2+ individuals and communities. Exploring this problem, the first part of the article has three main aims. Firstly, to highlight how ideologies of Nature² within contemporary, Western environmental/ecological politics are bound up with heteronormativity. Secondly, to explore claims that the prevalence of biophobia within queer theory and queer communities (Garrard, 2010) has further contributed to these tensions. Thirdly, to consider the potential that synergising LGBTQIA2+ and environmental activism could have in providing a radical response to environmental degradations, including climate change.

The second part of this article sets out to identify and explore some contemporary efforts to forge greater collaboration between queer and green politics.³ We examine the online content of organisations, activists and groups attempting to bridge the gap between environmental activism and the fight for queer and trans justice. In doing so, we firstly highlight recent attempts by mainstream environmental organisations to forge a greater sense of allyship with sexual and gender minorities. We then explore attempts by a small number of organisations and activists to create even closer synergies through queer environmental justice and queer ecology lenses.

Our findings signpost the radical potential of these latter types of queer/green and green/queer politics in promoting a more progressive and sustainable future political economy. Firstly, through their identification of the connections that exist between queer and trans exclusion, environmental degradation and wider systems of power, such as capitalism, heteropatriarchy and colonialism. Secondly, through the space which they create for the production of radical solutions to the climate crisis and more equitable forms of political economy through the reimagining of relationships, both within human societies and between humans and other-than-humans. Overall,

our findings contribute to the extant literature on queer and trans ecology, which to date has been largely based in literary and cultural studies (MacGregor, 2017: 5), by bringing the practical expressions of these politics to the fore.

Green equals LGBTQIA2+ marginalisation

Historically, green activism, organisations and movements have failed to provide a welcoming setting for those who are not heterosexual or cis gender. The dynamics that have driven this unwelcoming reception for non-conforming sexual and gender minorities are linked to the way that Nature has been conceived by environmentalists/ecologists. For most environmentalists/ecologists, Nature is the target of their politics. It is the 'thing' that they do their activism, campaigning and initiatives for. However, in defining Nature, green groups also reproduce cis-heteropatriarchal logics that work to exclude sexual and gender minorities, among others.

This is because Nature or, more precisely naturalness, is linked to heterosexuality; constructed as crucial to the reproductive imperative and evolutionary drives. From the assumption that species are pre-programmed to perpetuate their own genetic make-up it follows that it is natural for animals, including humans, to experience a drive to reproduce. As reproduction is regarded as the outcome of heterosexual sex, heterosexual sex is regarded to be natural sex. This can, of course, be problematised at numerous levels. For example, the logic that follows regarding heterosexual procreation is problematic because it casts those who depart from cis-heterosexuality and/or reproduction as unnatural – where unnatural is akin to wickedness or illness. As Greta Gaard (1997) notes in her important work synthesising ecofeminism and queer ecology, the link between naturalness and procreation has been simultaneously bad for queers and women, with women being bound to the idea that only motherhood can lead to the satisfaction of a woman's destiny and queers (and women who do not have children) being expelled as an aberration to the natural order. This logic, where non-normative sexualities and gender non-conformism has been regarded as a 'crime against Nature', is embedded in numerous religious and scientific discourses (Hogan, 2010) and, consequently, has been punished through penal or medical apparatus. This cis-heteropatriarchal ideology of Nature, instead of being challenged by environmentalists/ecologists, has been (un)consciously accepted and regurgitated in well-known green thought and practice today.

An oft-cited example of the ways in which queers have been excluded from environmental/ecological projects is through the demarcation and designation of recreational natural spaces, such as national and urban parks. For instance, queer ecologists and geographers such as Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands (2005) and David Bell (2010) have written extensively on the ways in which heteronormativity is 'built in to' these designated spaces. Mortimer-Sandilands (2005), discussing the origins of the National Parks Movement, many of whose supporters continue to be held in high esteem as early environmentalists, notes the violence of producing these recreational spaces. This, she argues, was a particularly racialised violence, creating the displacement of aboriginal people in order to foster an image of 'pristine wilderness' for wealthy tourists to enjoy. The recreational pursuits 'enjoyed' in these contrived wildernesses were organised around masculine gender-conforming imageries of the natural world, such as hunting and hiking. This masculinised 'tame and conquer' attitude to nature is not only consistent with (hetero)normative gender categories, but also capitalism.

Capitalism requires the fantasy of a tameable Nature to justify human superiority (anthropocentrism) and facilitate the rapacious use of what, within that same logic, is reduced to resources, goods and services (Bauman, 2015).

National parks then, are shaped by gendered, racialised and heterosexist assumptions around what is and what is not natural. They are indicative of the image of nature that environmentalists/ecologists seek to protect. This Nature is one that works to displace and then exclude those whose identities challenge middle/upper class, White, cis and heterosexual norms. This Nature, in fact, invites elite, White, cis-gender men to exercise that privilege over it and rejects those who may read nature(s) differently/queerly. Simultaneously, in the production of the national park, we can infer its opposite. The national park is a salve to treat the polluted degeneracy, constructed as akin to urban spaces (Bell and Valentine, 1995; Mortimer-Sandilands, 2005), where individuals can rest and cleanse themselves of their urban lifestyles. Urban spaces have long been associated with vice and dirt, which is translated onto the poor, migrant, queer populations that reside there; the latter often escaping themselves from unwelcoming rural or small-town communities.

Writing specifically about queer communities, David Bell and Gill Valentine (1995) note that the experience of gays and lesbians in the countryside is often one of isolation, offering limited support and little service provision. In many small close-knit communities, homosexuality tends to be regarded as something to be 'overcome' and not something that is positively reinforced, meaning many rural queers may choose to stay 'in the closet' or, to avoid a life of abstinence or secrecy, move to bigger urban areas that offer anonymity and better support and facilities. Even though Bell and Valentine were writing in the 1990s, recent scholarship continues to identify the ways in which rural and small-town communities tend to silence, marginalise and exclude queers through gossip, threats and, even, violence (Barry, 2021; McKearney, 2021). The result is self-perpetuating in that rural spaces, coded as 'natural', then appear 'free' from queer identities, while urban spaces, coded as artificial and corrupt, appear to cultivate them.

Queering green – the challenge of biophobia

Biophobia refers to a fear or dislike of Nature or, indeed, aspects of nature (for example snakes and spiders etc). Scholars have pointed out that biophobia is endemic to human populations; functioning as a way to distinguish humans from other animals (Armstrong, 2008). In other words, biophobia is the outcome of a cognitive separation between human-animals and other-than-humans, where the latter can – in full or in part – be cast as repellent. Further, it is the 'distasteful' aspects of Nature – such as death, decay, decomposition and (some forms of) reproduction – that incite this fear of life (Morton, 2007; 2016; Parkin, 2017). For LGBTQIA2+ communities, biophobia is less the biophobia that works to place at loggerheads human-animals with everything deemed natural, but a biophobia that is a response to Nature as an exclusionary logic (as discussed earlier). Nature for LGBTQIA2+ people, as an idea, expunges that which is regarded as unnatural – including sexual and gender minorities – and Nature as a space excludes and marginalises, sometimes violently, those who are considered as contaminating or polluting – including sexual and gender minorities (Gosine, 2010). As such, LGBTQIA2+ biophobia comes from a fear of ideologies of Nature that revere heterosexuality and cis gender and the societies that

police those ideologies (such as scientific and religious communities). This has meant that LGBTQIA2+ individuals have tended to shy away from nature, and arguably environmental and ecological projects, in favour of the sanctuary of the urban, kitsch and artificial. Relatedly, queer theory, as an academic approach, is similarly regarded as biophobic. At the heart of queer theory is the argument that gender and sexuality, rather than being fixed biological realities, are discursively constructed and fluid. What makes these categories appear fixed is their repeated enactment (often referred to as performativity) and the discursive architecture that supports them, such as scientific discourses around reproduction or religious discourses around morality.

This acknowledgement of gender and sexuality as discursively constructed, rather than biological realities, has led some authors to argue that queer theory is, at its core, biophobic. For example, speaking of Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, Greg [Garrard \(2010: 79\)](#) writes that 'gender performativity is one of the most biologically illiterate – indeed biophobic – theories ever to embarrass the humanities'. Garrard here rehearses a common criticism levelled at queer theorists; that queer theory, in reducing reality to discourses, ignores or rejects the material and biological realities (ontologies) underpinning them. Simply put, the focus that is lent to discourse in queer theory, as with any of the more constructionist approaches to nature and the environment (including illustrious and notable publications such as [Castree and Braun, 1998](#); [Plumwood, 2002](#); [Haraway, 2003](#); [Latour, 2004](#)), is (often unfairly) critiqued by many ecologists/environmentalists for anthropocentrism, in that it reduces nature to a human-animal's interpretation of it.

Queer ecology attempts to reconcile queer theory with ecology by jettisoning the biophobia of the former and demonstrating the precariousness of singular and coherent conceptualisations of Nature in the latter. To this extent, [Garrard \(2010: 79, emphasis added\)](#) has argued that this integration of ecology works to liberate queer theory from a rut by allowing it '*to avoid the ethical dead-end of repetitive aporetic gestures, its reflex of reflexivity*'. However, critical of queer ecology, he goes on to complain that he is not sure what it is that green gets from queer. In this article, and elsewhere ([Foster, 2021](#)), we take the position in line with Tim [Morton \(2007\)](#) that ecology needs to be detached from Nature (with a big 'N') in order to unravel the multiple oppressions emerging from its construction (for example, the injustices that are underpinned by the idea that queers and migrants are unnatural, or that women and people of colour are bestial) as well as sustain its destruction (rooted in the discriminatory architecture of capitalism, colonialism and cis-heteropatriarchy). Tackling this intertextual architecture of discrimination through acknowledging the intimate and co-constitutive ways that (hetero)sexism, racism and speciesism are interlinked is key to creating a radical and just response to climate change and other environmental degradations ([Gaard, 1997](#)). Queer ecology provides a framework to expose the inter-relatedness of these isms and promote a type of biophilia where natures (small 'n'; plural), warts and all, are respected. It is to the promise of a queer ecology that this article now turns.

Green is a colour of the rainbow

A recognition of this inter-relationship between discriminations and the environment means that queer ecology finds much common ground with environmental justice scholarship and activism. Simply, the core principle of environmental justice is that individuals, regardless of race, class or sex, have the right to live in a safe environment.

As such, environmental justice scholars and activists have tended to focus on the (usually spatial) organisation of communities and political economies where the environmentally damaging by-products of industry and business – and attendant health implications – are concentrated in areas of high deprivation. By the same token, environmental justice is concerned with the ways in which ‘natural’ resources and access to ‘natural’ spaces are unfairly distributed. Queer (and trans, which we turn to in a moment) ecologists, such as Catriona [Mortimer-Sandilands \(2005\)](#), [Katie Hogan \(2010\)](#) and [Nicole Seymour \(2013\)](#), emphasise the ways in which environmental justice exposes the complex hierarchies of race, class and gender while highlighting that sexuality should be added to this list, arguing that the distribution of environmental goods (and harms) reinforces the disadvantage of those regarded as ‘unnatural’ and, somewhat paradoxically, ‘bestial’ ([Gaard, 1997](#)). Visibilising the ways in which access to, and distribution of, environmental goods and harms disadvantages sexual and gender minorities underpins the objectives of a queer environmental justice approach – an important project in itself.

Not only does this critical interrogation of Nature work to promote (environmental) justice for queers, but it also allows for a more comprehensive ethic of care for diverse species and ecosystems. Big ‘N’ Nature, channelled through a capitalist, racist and cis-heterosexist logic, recognises Nature as a resource – insofar as it has a use-value for human-animals – where gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity provide divisions upon which the unequal distribution of those natural resources relies. Moreover, where Nature is regarded as a resource for (some) human-animals to exploit for leisure, there is only a partial ethic of care, with the less obviously beautiful or useful parts of Nature being neglected, hidden and/or eradicated. Queer ecology promotes understanding of multiple, polymorphous and multifaceted natures, as not indistinct from culture, often shorthanded in their rhetoric along the same lines as [Donna Haraway’s \(2008\)](#) ‘naturecultures’ and extended by authors such as [David Bell \(2010\)](#) as ‘queernaturecultures’. Queernaturecultures as a concept aims to demonstrate the arbitrary distinctions between nature and culture at the intersection of sex and sexuality. Bell goes to some lengths to demonstrate that so-called natural spaces can present, for want of a better word, a sexual freedom where public and private distinctions are also called into question. Practices ranging from dogging and (gay) sex in parkland to lesbian separatism, challenge urban/nature binaries and present a (sexually) radical and positive engagement with what is culturally defined as natural space. These ‘queernaturecultures’ work to produce an alternative basis for environmentalism/ecologism; encouraging an ethic of care derived from an intimate, even erotic, conceptualisation of nature(s) (also see [Mortimer-Sandilands, 2002; 2005](#)).

Explicitly building on queer ecology, a burgeoning and instructive scholarship on trans-ecology has emerged. Like queer ecology, trans-ecology challenges the concept of naturalness, but through the perspective of embodiment, where trans bodies are deemed distinctly unnatural (as ‘manufactured’, ‘(over)produced’ and/or ‘interfered with’ through medicine and technoscience). This focus on the (un)naturalness of the body, as opposed to the (un)naturalness of sexuality, distinguishes trans from queer ecology. Trans-ecology scholars, such as [Eva Hayward](#), through attention to material (other-than)-human-bodies, focus on the constructed relationship between gender-normative bodies and ‘healthy environments’. For example, [Hayward \(2011\)](#) writes about environmental panics surrounding pollution-induced gender transitioning of river-based life, challenging the reader to question why there is

more hysteria around toxin-induced sex changes in some species than there is to the more widespread cancers, auto-immune and other diseases that are a consequence of the very same polluting political and economic systems. Hayward reminds us that the panic around toxin-induced sex changes distracts from any serious attempts to ameliorate environmental degradation, noting that '[f]ear of impending gender perversions is simply queer-fear and fails to address the broader consequences of pollution' (Hayward, 2011: n.p).

As well as a focus on embodiment, trans-ecology brings to the fore some aspects of queer ecology that have been underdeveloped. In particular, the focus on movement, relationality and irregularity, which is crucial to trans studies more generally. It's important to note that the operative word in trans-ecology is 'trans'. Rooted in transgender studies, the 'trans' in 'trans-ecology' infers 'movement', be that across, beyond, or through. Simply speaking, it is not so much about the starting point and destination (as in male to female, or vice versa) but rather about the journey. In other, more eloquent words, trans is 'movement that produces beingness ... marking the *with, through, of, in, and across* that makes life possible' (Hayward and Weinstein, in Steinbock et al, 2021: 3, emphasis added). Further, trans, while emerging from transgender studies, is not restricted to discussions of gender. Rather it is a relational concept that can prefix a multitude of other words. As Stryker and Currah (2014) emphasised in their opening introduction to the first edition of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 'trans' is to be interpreted broadly, whereby the addendum of a hyphen signifies relationality. In other words, trans- can be fixed onto any word, which demonstrates the importance of relationality for trans-scholarship. Trans-ecology, then, is about the relationship between trans (movement into being) with ecologies (the complex of living organisms and their environment). Through this analysis we see an active focus on blurring the boundaries between human-animal and other-than-humans (Seymour, 2020) as well as the promise of non-exploitative forms of inter-species collaboration (Woelfle-Erskine and Cole, 2015).

In summary then, trans and queer ecological perspectives have the potential to offer a radical response to environmental degradation; going beyond environmental justice to call for a comprehensive reimagining of human and other-than-human relations. As noted in our introduction, green in the original gay liberation rainbow signified Nature. Green has since been integrated into numerous LGBTQIA2+ flags to represent non-binary identity and attraction. The use of green in these later flags does 'queer/trans' work by symbolically challenging the naturalness of cis-heterosexual logics, in favour of a more complex, polymorphous and fluid mesh of identities and sexualities. Queer and trans-ecologists begin from the starting point that Nature – as coherent and (ideo)logical – is a fantasy entrenching the inequalities inherent to capitalism, colonialism and cisheteropatriarchy. It follows that the dismantling of this understanding of Nature and replacing it with conceptualisations of natures (or, better still, queernaturecultures, as per Bell, 2010) would produce more just inter- and intra-species relations.

Exploring contemporary queer/green politics: aims and method

In what follows, we turn our attention to looking at some of the ways in which contemporary environmental activism is responding to this historical exclusion of

queer voices and agendas. To do this, we explored the online content of a limited selection of contemporary green activist movements and platforms, with two key aims in mind. Firstly, to examine the response of what might be termed more ‘mainstream’ environmentalist activism to some of the issues highlighted earlier. In this regard, we conducted an examination of the online content of two high-profile contemporary environmental movements – Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion – and one political party – the Green Party of England and Wales. Our research aim here was exploratory and illustrative only. We make no attempt to suggest that these groups – two of which are UK-based – reflect a representative sample of all ‘mainstream’ environmentalist organisations; indeed, we recognise that some might object to our use of the term ‘mainstream’. Nevertheless, our key aim was to identify any attempts by these groups to integrate LGBTQIA2+ voices and agendas into their online communications. As well as conducting a detailed examination of these groups’ general online messaging, we also conducted specific Google searches for each of the organisations which included the keywords ‘queer’, ‘LGBTQ+’ and ‘trans’. Given the historical tensions between environmentalism and the queer community discussed in the preceding sections, it is at the intersection of such mainstream environmental activism and LGBTQIA2+ campaigns that we expected to find the least amount of integration between the progressive goals of both broad movements (Foster, 2021).

Our second, and largely primary aim, both normatively and empirically, was to explore what a more integrated queer/green or green/queer politics might look like and whether it is possible to locate the real-life emergence of a queer ecological project. To do this, we conducted several online searches based on keywords such as ‘queer green politics’, ‘green queer activism’, ‘queer ecology’ and so on. We were unsurprised to find that these searches drew up a very small selection of examples of online queer/green activism. However, we were also encouraged by the fact that each of the searches tended to highlight similar networks of key groups and activists. We were further guided by a Climate Culture webpage,⁴ which highlighted 15 prominent activists, platforms and artists, most of whom had also been flagged through our previous keyword searches. To better understand the ways in which these groups attempt to amalgamate queer and green theory and activism, we conducted a detailed survey of the online content of nine of these platforms and groups: Our Climate Voices; Out for Sustainability; Queer Brown Vegan; Queer Eco-justice Project; Queers4Climate; Queer Nature; Queer X Climate; The Institute of Queer Ecology; and The Venture Out Project.

While we found that each of these groups shared a common, core agenda – of situating queer voices at the forefront of green debates and environmental activism – our initial survey of their messaging and tactics highlighted some discernible differences between the aims, scope and underlying philosophies of some of the groups. To help us map out these differences, we coded the content into a twofold typology, according to whether their goals fell broadly in line with a queer environmental justice agenda – aimed at creating fairer and more equitable environmental sustainability, through an intersectionality lens – or, a queer ecology agenda, which seeks a more fundamental redefinition of Nature, informed by a queer theory, or trans theory perspective.

This online research was conducted from May to September 2021 and the following sections detail our findings during those dates.

Exploring mainstream green LGBTQIA2+ activism

Our exploration of the online content of Greenpeace, Extinction Rebellion and The Green Party of England and Wales found that each demonstrate varying degrees of commitment towards environmental justice and a call for progressive ecological change to be linked to tackling wider inequalities around race, class, gender and increasingly, sexuality. However, the commitment towards addressing LGBTQIA2+ issues comes mainly from a position of ‘allyship’. In addition to this, much of the discourse from these organisations is built around ideas of inter-generational justice, which in and of itself links to wider heteronormative logics.

While Greenpeace has no dedicated LGBTQIA2+ group, the organisation has an active presence at global Pride events, particularly in countries with poor records on LGBTQIA2+ rights. The group’s identity as ‘rainbow warriors’ provides a useful banner to dovetail their respective LGBTQIA2+ and environmentalist activism. In doing so, Greenpeace commit to demonstrating ‘solidarity with the LGBTQ+ movement’ and promoting ‘the diversity of its people’. At the campaign level, Greenpeace also draw energy from the success of past queer activism. They celebrate the Stonewall uprising in 1969, the Act Up coalition’s direct action to highlight the plight of AIDS sufferers in the 1980s and the UK protests, during the same decade, against the introduction of Section 28 legislation.⁵ The group also challenge wider normative perceptions that queer behaviour is unnatural. In a 2020 blog post, they highlight research showing the rich diversity of sexual behaviours, including homosexuality and bisexuality, that occur within other-than-human animal communities.⁶

Yet Greenpeace do not foreground LGBTQIA2+ issues. The reader has to search for LGBTQIA2+ in order to locate their stance on queer issues. The stance which they do take is one which expresses solidarity with the queer community: ‘The fight for LGBTQ+ rights – as the fight for social and racial justice, and gender equality – have a direct link with the climate movement. Marginalized communities are the ones who suffer the most from the climate and environmental crises, especially people of color and low-income communities.’⁷ As such, Greenpeace’s focus on LGBTQIA2+ issues remains largely concealed within their broader discourse on environmental justice, and the bulk of their energy is directed towards ecological matters. As such, the fight for queer justice is viewed as being aligned with, but largely separate to, the fight for environmental conservation.

The Green Party of England and Wales, which has in recent years experienced internal conflicts over some of its members’ positions on trans rights, similarly do not foreground LGBTQIA2+ issues, though they do have a more accessible link on their website to their campaign group, LGBTQIA+ Greens. The focus of LGBTQIA+ Greens is aimed at developing policies directed towards LGBTQIA2+ issues, rather than emphasising the potential benefits of an integrated queer and environmentalist agenda. Their six main campaign priorities focus on an LGBTQIA+ rights and equalities agenda.⁸ The party also run LGBTQIA+ workshops, aimed at promoting ‘inclusion, diversity and equality’.⁹ These workshops aim to help members: ‘understand the difference between sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity; develop understanding of active allyship; and, show local and regional parties how they can work towards creating an inclusive environment’.¹⁰

As with Greenpeace, the key emphasis is on allyship and inclusion. No clear rationale is given as to why greater queer inclusion could be beneficial to the party's environmental agenda, other than the fact that it increases diversity and participation. Arguably, this type of inclusion discourse does little more than to directly mirror the types of diversity policies pursued by mainstream corporate organisations: 'LGBTIQA+ Greens aim to build a more sustainable and just society where everyone is valued, respected and empowered *regardless of* their sexuality, gender identity or intersex status' (emphasis added).¹¹

Overall, we found little acknowledgement of any value that could be gained from a closer alignment of the progressive agendas of both movements.

This is also true for Extinction Rebellion, who demonstrate even less commitment to foregrounding LGBTQIA2+ issues. The movement has a narrower focus than Greenpeace and the Green Party and aims mainly at placing pressure on governments to meet net zero emissions targets and reduce pollution. They do, however, commit strongly to an environmental and climate justice agenda, and the need for rapid social and political changes, though these remain largely unspecified on their web-pages. They also foreground the necessity to enhance democratisation and participation. A major part of this brief is the tackling of injustices: 'Injustice is at the heart of the climate and ecological crisis and has to be central to the learning and deliberation of the citizens' assembly. Racial justice, social justice, economic justice, global justice, are all part of historical and ongoing injustices.'¹²

For Extinction Rebellion then, their commitment towards tackling LGBTQIA2+ issues is similarly subsumed under the broader goal of tackling injustice in general. There is no specific commitment to queering the green movement, or indeed, to greening queer politics.

Despite this, Extinction Rebellion do place a strong emphasis on inclusivity (Kotak, 2019), with a large number of affiliated 'community groups', representing an expansive range of identities, subjectivities and ethnic and religious groups. These groups provide: 'a way to connect and work together through communities of shared self-identity'¹³ and reflect XR's commitment to decentralised collaboration and allyship with wider activist communities. It is important to note that this includes two online LGBTQIA2+ groups (Extinction Rebellion LGBTQI+ and Rainbow Rebellion). Yet, despite its 'preference for ... building a movement that is participatory, decentralised and inclusive' (Gunningham, 2019: 199), Extinction Rebellion has been more widely criticised for failing to meet its goal of inclusivity and mainly representing White, middle-class people in the Global North (Bell and Bevan, 2021). Relatedly, it has also been criticised for not demonstrating a strong enough commitment to anticapitalist and antiracist discourses, for fear of alienating moderate and conservative support (Kinniburgh, 2020).

Overall then, our limited exploratory survey of these groups' webpages suggests that some significant progress is being made in creating links between high-profile mainstream environmental activism and the queer community. Yet, the bulk of these groups' energy is dedicated towards ecological concerns with the tackling of queer justice presented as a largely second, or even third order, concern. As such, the emphasis in these groups' online communications lies in strengthening collaboration with the queer movement and increasing the representation of LGBTQIA2+ people within the green movement. Tactically, there is also a recognition that the green movement can learn valuable lessons from queer activism of the past. Yet, there

appears to remain a perception among the mainstream environmentalist groups we surveyed that tackling queer issues lies beyond their core concerns. As a result, it is difficult to detect any integrated green/queer or queer/green agenda emerging from within these groups.

Towards a queer/green or green/queer politics

As discussed earlier, our primary research aim was to explore what a more integrated queer/green or green/queer politics might look like. In this regard, our research found a very small number of activist groups which do seek much closer integration of the agendas of these two broad movements. Most of these are led by queer and trans activists. Our survey of the online content of nine such groups, platforms and activists¹⁴ revealed that, while each of these share a common, core agenda – of situating queer voices at the forefront of green debates and environmental activism – there are some differences between the aims and underlying philosophies of some of the groups. To help map out these differences, we have categorised the groups according to whether their goals fall broadly in line with a *queer environmental justice* agenda – aimed at creating fairer and more equitable environmental sustainability, through an intersectionality lens – or, a *queer ecology* agenda, which seeks a more fundamental redefinition of Nature, informed by a queer or trans theory perspective.

In what follows, we attempt to group these organisations into these two categories. However, we recognise that multiple lines of overlap exist between the goals and discourses of each. Indeed, there is evidence that some of these groups and activists collaborate with each other and within wider activist networks. As such, rather than imply that these groups have fixed identities, it is more fruitful to suggest that each move along various points of a spectrum between a queer environmental justice and a queer ecology approach.

Queer environmental justice

The platforms and activists we group under this category include Out for Sustainability; Queers4Climate; Queer X Climate; and The Venture Out Project. The common starting point for each is recognition that LGBTQIA2+ voices have been excluded, or have excluded themselves, from debates around environmental issues. For example, this is noted in a blog on the Queers X Climate (QXC) website:

Despite the economic, political and social success of the LGBT activism, this group has been greatly absent on climate action. There has not been significant efforts to specially target the attention of LGBT+ members towards environmental consciousness, and their voice is usually missing during key climate negotiation and debates.¹⁵

This is echoed by Netherlands-based organisation Queers4Climate, who state: ‘we are aware that our struggles are connected, and our survival depends on our solidarity’.¹⁶ Underpinning these calls for solidarity is an acknowledgement that: ‘around the world, the poorest and most marginalised people have been and are impacted by the climate crisis first and hardest. Black, brown and indigenous LGBTQIA* folks at the frontlines

of climate-related disasters, conflicts and displacement face more hardships and discrimination than anyone else'.¹⁷

As such, these groups are broadly defined by their recognition of the connectedness between the fight for climate justice and the struggles of various marginalised communities, and hence, the need for a joined-up, intersectional approach to environmental activism. Importantly, this recognition is much more foregrounded by these activist groups than we see in the mainstream environmentalist organisations.

While these activists acknowledge that LGBTQIA2+ people are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change in countries with poor records on queer rights, they also emphasise a fear that the climate crisis can become a catalyst for the erosion of queer rights that have been achieved in other countries. Queers X Climate, for example, state: 'All the development accomplishments, including the achievements on LGBTQ+ rights, could be erased within barely a decade by exacerbating resource scarcity and social unrest.'¹⁸

Some of these groups offer practical advice on strengthening the resilience of LGBTQIA2+ people in the face of environmental crises. The US group, Out for Sustainability (Out4S), engage in 'advocacy, training, fundraising, and relationship-building' activities aimed at 'co-creating climate resilience and environmental justice'.¹⁹ Their QReady programme offers 'disaster preparedness' tips for queer people in the face of climate emergencies, including a documentary highlighting the experiences of queer people in the face of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico and the fires in Santa Rosa in California in 2017, with the aim of accentuating 'queer and trans strategies for resilience, transition, and survival'.²⁰

Along similar lines, the US-based Venture out Project (TVOP) offers 'adventure learning' activities to help LGBTQIA2+ people 'develop leadership skills, and gain confidence through the shared experience of outdoor adventure and physical activity'.²¹ These goals speak directly to the exclusion of queer and trans people from so-called 'natural' spaces such as national parks. Such activities aim to empower LGBTQIA2+ people to overcome social and psychological barriers that perpetuate such exclusion. This aligns with a broader commitment to environmental and social justice. Ann Seiler, one of the key members of the group, advocates for an intersectional approach to community building and environmental stewardship:

Fixing one rung on that ladder is not going to save the whole ecosystem ... it's interesting to look at that and then also look at our own LGBTQ+ community in a very similar way ... We are one big community, and there are a lot of rungs on that ladder ... Fixing one rung on that ladder is not going to protect or guarantee equitability for the whole LGBTQ+ community.²²

This recognition of the connectedness between the fights for environmental, queer and intersectional social justice permeates the discourse of each of these groups to varying degrees. Yet, despite this, these organisations still tend to reinforce distinctions between humans and nature. This is particularly evident in the case of TVOP, which views nature as a space for 'recreation' with which the LGBTQIA2+ community are encouraged to 'reconnect'. The goals of these groups are not directed towards a broader redefinition of Nature and, with that, a reorganisation of the political economy which treats Nature as an external resource to be exploited and utilised for human pleasure and consumption. Out4S, for example, advocates for a more

sustainable economic future, rather than a fundamental rethink of humans' relationship to Nature. Our next section, however, considers a handful of activist groups and platforms which are pushing in that type of deeper green, queer ecology direction.

Queer ecology

The activists we group under this category include: Our Climate Voices; Queer Brown Vegan; Queer Eco-justice Project; Queer Nature; and The Institute of Queer Ecology. Each of these embrace many of the same themes around queer environmental justice. However, their emphasis differs, to varying degrees, in two main ways. Firstly, they place greater emphasis on the role that systems of power such as colonialism, capitalism and heteronormativity play in shaping both environmental problems and the marginalisation and oppression of key groups. Secondly, they each highlight the value of reimagining 'big N' Nature and the various relationships which comprise it. Thus, we find attempts here to think beyond Nature as an external force or as a resource for humans to exploit. This deeper green approach is captured by Queer Nature, who claim to 'strive to go beyond recreation in nature to deep, slow, and thoughtful engagement with the natural world to build inter-species alliances and an enduring sense of belonging for all'.²³

These groups start from recognising the exclusion of LGBTQIA2+ and other marginalised voices from environmental debates. Our Climate Voices, which does not identify as an explicitly queer organisation, seeks to highlight this exclusion and amplify the views of a range of marginalised voices, through first-person 'storytelling'. Their podcast 'listening series', aims at 'bringing together leaders from the climate movement and broader fights for social, economic, and racial justice'. An episode from the series, on Climate Justice & Queer and Trans Liberation, highlights the fact that: 'Over the past few years, the climate movement has mobilized hundreds of thousands of youth to demand climate action. However, queer and trans, and black and brown, people are often sidelined, tokenized for their stories, or pushed out of movement spaces.'²⁴ Similarly, in line with groups such as Out4S and TVOP, there is an emphasis among some of the groups towards fostering greater resilience for marginalised communities in the face of climate emergencies. Queer Nature, run by trans activists, offers 'place-based skills' and naturalist education, stressing that 'ecological awareness and outdoor self-efficacy skills ... [are] ... vital and often overlooked parts of resilience-building for populations who have been silenced, marginalized, and even represented as "unnatural"'.²⁵ These activists can arguably be distinguished from the groups highlighted in the previous section by their deeper recognition of the interconnectedness between human-centred environmental destruction and the marginalisation of vulnerable communities. For example, the Queer Eco-Justice Project (QEP), emphasises that: 'people don't see the connection between climate change and the treatment of queer and trans people'.²⁶ To underscore this connection, the group make the following rallying cry:

We prioritize leadership from people who are most impacted by the cisnormative, white supremacist, capitalist, ableist, settler-colonial heteropatriarchy system that is also the root of environmental degradation - as such, people of color, two-spirit, undocuqueer, trans*, gender

non-conforming, and folks with dis/abilities are centered, highly respected, and encouraged to get involved.²⁷

Thus, connections are made between processes of environmental degradation, the treatment of queer and trans people and the systems of power that exclude non-normative and other marginalised communities. Alongside this lies an emphasis on the idea that marginalised communities, at the forefront of environmental disaster, may be a vital source of innovation and solutions to the environmental crisis. Thus, there is recognition of the value of tapping into the experiences and voices of marginalised people to derive insights into how we might imagine alternative ecological futures. Within this, emphasis is placed on the value of both intra-species and inter-species community and relationship building. This includes recognising the need to rethink both human relationships and the wider relationships that exist between humans and other parts of nature.

Through this type of queer ecology lens, which places a premium on ‘listening and relationship building with ecological systems and their inhabitants’,²⁸ queer and trans communities are viewed as carrying the potential for radical change. Part of that potential stems from the strong tradition of mobilisation and resistance shown by the LGBTQIA2+ community. Both in terms of their recent history of organised protest, but also the much longer history of resistance to societal norms. Our Climate Voices note that the LGBTQIA2+ community ‘resist control of our bodies and express to many the possibilities of transformation and liberation of self’. As a result: ‘queer and trans communities embody a transformational shift in how we exist in relationships and community together’. Thus, there is a recognition that the types of reimagining of relationships and identities within LGBTQIA2+ communities can bring energy and ideas to a wider reimagining of relationships within nature.²⁹

This is echoed by the artistic group The Institute of Queer Ecology (IQECO) who, ‘guided by queer and feminist theory and decolonial thinking’, state that ‘the solutions to environmental degradation are found on the periphery’. As such, IQECO set out to ‘look at the critical importance of things happening invisibly; underground and out of sight’, in order to ‘make space for collectively imagining an equitable, multispecies future’.³⁰

A similar ethos drives the work of activist Isaias Hernandez, creator of the platform Queer Brown Vegan, who stresses the political potential of veganism as a means of bringing about the ‘total liberation’ of ‘nonhuman animals and humans’. Hernandez is critical of the lack of diversity within the vegan movement, leading to a type of White Veganism ‘that focuses solely on animal liberation while actively ignoring the effects of colonization and how it is interconnected to the oppression of humans and animals’. In contrast, Hernandez describes his own veganism as ‘anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalistic’. Citing inspiration from the eco-feminist Vandana Shiva (1993), Hernandez notes the importance of tapping into localised knowledges to build ‘ecological wealth’, as opposed to ‘generational wealth’. The problem with the latter is ‘its reliance on the current capitalistic system exploiting the land, people, and animals’. To Hernandez, ‘ecological wealth centers on the need for local biosystems and the liberation of multi-species’. As is common with the other organisations looked at in this section, much of the emphasis is directed towards combatting the wider systems of power that underpin a ‘big N’ ideology of Nature and perpetuate social inequalities and environmental exploitation, in order to foster more equitable intra- and inter-species relationships.

Conclusion

Overall then, despite the general marginalisation of queer and trans voices within the environmental/ecological movement, discussed in the earlier part of this article, our research has found attempts, within some mainstream environmentalist discourses, to link environmental and queer justice through a discourse of allyship, rather than a deeper recognition that these progressive struggles are closely intertwined. Yet, a limited number of groups are attempting to create closer synergies between queer and green politics. Here, we have distinguished between those groups which pursue a queer environmental justice agenda and those which fall under the umbrella of a queer – and, at times, trans – ecology approach. Our analysis shows that activists in both categories stress a much closer connection between the fight for queer and environmental justice than we see in both the mainstream environmental and LGBTQIA2+ movements. Moreover, each of the groups are united in their calls for an intersectional approach to fighting climate, queer and other types of social, economic and racial injustice. Yet, the groups which occupy a queer ecology space place greater emphasis on the idea that the systems of power that marginalise queer, trans and other marginalised groups are the same systems that have worked to create ecological degradation. Thus, to these groups, there exists an intimate connection between the struggles of both movements and, those of other marginalised communities against systems of capitalism, colonialism and heteropatriarchy.

A related theme within these activist discourses is that queer and trans communities, with their strong traditions of resistance to, and queering of, normative relations, have the transformative potential to help rethink ideas around ‘big N’ Nature and reimagine alternative ecological futures and solutions to the present crisis. Through this type of trans/queer-lens, it becomes possible to think beyond the distinction between the green stripe in the rainbow flag representing either a static idea of Nature or more fluid sexual identities. Rather, space is created for blurring these types of meanings and for the potential transformation of relationships both within human populations and between humans and other-than-human species within multiple ecologies and nature(s).

Notes

- ¹ We use the term ‘community’ to indicate groups who have in common experiences of belonging to a gender and/or sexual ‘minority’. This is not to obfuscate the hierarchies, divisions and exclusions within LGBTQIA+ communities, where for example affluent cis-gender gay men have a very different relationship to the movement than, say, trans women of colour (for an interesting discussion see [Drucker, 2015](#)) or to undermine the importance of an intersectionality for/in queer politics and political theorising.
- ² When talking about Nature, with a capital ‘N’, we are referring to an ideology that presents Nature as coherent and ahistorical, and, which stands in binary contrast to that which is perceived as culture. When referring to nature or natures, with a lower-case ‘n’, we are referring to the multiple, constructed and specific ways nature is understood and experienced by humans and other-than-humans.
- ³ As with any article of this kind, it is appropriate to add a brief note on terminology. We use a broad-brush approach when discussing sexual and gender minorities, opting

for the acronym LGBTQIA2+. We are well aware that these choices are inclusionary and exclusionary in themselves and so we selected one of the most inclusive acronyms. LGBTQIA2+ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, a-sexual and 2-spirit – with the plus added to demonstrate the acronym is not exhaustive. As well as LGBTQIA+, we also use the term ‘sexual and gender minorities’ (where minority is not numerical but refers to those outside the dominant group) or queer as a shorthand for those belonging to this community. Where we do use abridged versions or variations on LGBTQIA2+, this is to mirror the environmental groups we are discussing.

- ⁴ <https://www.climateculture.earth/5-minute-reads/top-15-queer-ecology-activists>.
- ⁵ <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/rainbow-warriors-queer-movements-climate-activists/>.
- ⁶ <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/lgbtq-behaviours-animal-kingdom/>.
- ⁷ <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/48320/lgbtq-pride-month-greenpeace-rainbow-warrior/>.
- ⁸ <https://lgbtiqa.greenparty.org.uk/campaigns/>.
- ⁹ <https://lgbtiqa.greenparty.org.uk/lgbtiqa-inclusion-workshop/>.
- ¹⁰ <https://lgbtiqa.greenparty.org.uk/lgbtiqa-inclusion-workshop/>.
- ¹¹ <https://lgbtiqa.greenparty.org.uk/>.
- ¹² <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/decide-together/citizens-assembly/>.
- ¹³ <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/act-now/resources/communities/community-groups/>.
- ¹⁴ Our Climate Voices; Out for Sustainability; Queer Brown Vegan; Queer Eco-justice Project; Queers4Climate; Queer Nature; Queer X Climate; The Institute of Queer Ecology; and The Venture Out Project.
- ¹⁵ <https://www.queersxclimate.org/post/make-a-change-raise-5900-for-the-cur-national-wildlife-refuge-in-costa-rica>.
- ¹⁶ <https://www.queers4climate.nl/> (deleted).
- ¹⁷ <https://www.queersxclimate.org/about>.
- ¹⁸ <https://out4s.org/mission-%26-strategy>.
- ¹⁹ <https://www.queerecoproject.org/firefloodfilm>.
- ²⁰ <https://www.ventureoutproject.com/>.
- ²¹ <https://www.ventureoutproject.com/>.
- ²² <https://www.queernature.org/what-we-do>.
- ²³ <https://www.podchaser.com/podcasts/in-conversation-a-listening-se-881315?>
- ²⁴ <https://www.queernature.org/what-we-do>.
- ²⁵ <https://www.queerecoproject.org/firefloodfilm>.
- ²⁶ <https://www.queerecoproject.org/about>.
- ²⁷ <https://www.queernature.org/>.
- ²⁸ <https://www.podchaser.com/podcasts/in-conversation-a-listening-se-881315?>
- ²⁹ <https://queerecology.org/About>.
- ³⁰ <https://queerbrownvegan.com/what-is-white-veganism/>.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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