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Intimate Environments

I am interested in exploring the connection between what Catriona Sandilands calls “motherhood environmentalism” and care labor, specifically how these issues are developed in the text *Solar Storms*, by Linda Hogan. As Sandilands argues in *The Good-Natured Feminist*, cleaning up the environmental “mess” that has resulted from the overuse of toxic chemicals and insecticides, manufacturing pollution and toxic corporate waste, destructive over-planning of the built environment and reconstruction of the landscape, and so forth is often conceived of as women's work. That is, caring about the environment is construed as an extension of caring for the home and family, the private sphere that is the primary site of domestic care labor provided by women. Sandilands suggests that framing environmental activism in these terms “reprivatizes” or makes intimate women's political life, while naturalizing the gendered relations at work in this paradigm. Ecofeminism itself has suffered from similar critiques, as it has tended to essentialize the relationship between women and nature.

In this paper, I will discuss the ways in which the gendered relations of care for the earth are challenged in *Solar Storms*. Drawing from Wendy Hollway's work, *The Capacity to Care*, I will explore the ways in which the liberating potential of imagining care about the earth and for the family that is not constrained by the motherhood paradigm are negotiated in the novel. The novel itself articulates the relationship between the labor of preserving the history and culture of a native community slowly being drowned (both literally and figuratively) by “development” and the political struggle for land rights against the backdrop of the American Indian Movement. The paper will also consider the ways in which learning to care about others, learning how to do intimate labor, might be figured through laboring on and with the land; how knowledge of the history of a place fosters intersubjectivity and interdependent relationships of care that are infused with political practice; and the capacity to care as a vital component to membership in a community.