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Protecting Workers' Rights in the Age of Discontent: A Movement in Crisis

André Vincent Henry, PhD

Abstract

Worker protection has always been an uphill battle. As the world of work experiences changes at an ever-increasing pace, the challenges faced by workers and their representatives are becoming more complex and complicated. This requires a rethink of the role of workers' organisations, the forms of organisation, the methods and processes of mobilisation and most important the imperatives of leadership in the workers movement. In the Caribbean, as in most other places, the need for strong, well-led workers' organisations has never been greater. The paper proposes three imperatives of workers organisations in the Caribbean: moving from transactional thinking to strategic thinking; expanding the tent; and strengthening the worker institutions.

Loss of Voice

The International Labour Organization has declared five 'fundamental principles and rights at work." Listed first among these is "freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining."[i] This right is expressed in the relevant core or fundamental ILO conventions[ii] in the context of workers' rights to organize and join trade unions of their choice without fear of victimization. They also place on governments the onus of establishing and managing policies and labour administration systems and institutions to protect these rights.

The evidence is that the international economic system with its organizing principles of globalization and trade liberalisation is becoming increasingly hostile to trade unions and that national governments either by deliberate policy or through ineffective labour administration systems reinforce the character of the international system. In the case of small open economies like those in the Caribbean, which are takers of the rules of the international system and dependent on foreign direct investment, workers organisations face additional jeopardy. In these circumstances, the need for strong worker organisations becomes even more critical.

In every country in the English-speaking Caribbean there has been at least one government since the birth of the modern trade union movement in the 1930s that was formed by a party which had as its core a trade union. In most countries, the achievement of independence was under a labour government. In some countries the alternatives to two-party governments could be both traced to a trade union or a group of trade unions. Indeed, it was not unheard of that the leadership of trade unions were at the same time members of the country's cabinet. The role of trade unions and the influence in the immediate pre-independence period and in the immediate post-independent period was undeniable.

There are those who would still argue that while trade unionists held high office in national politics, this was not translated into benefit value for workers in the respective countries. Abdullah notes that after the upheavals of the thirties, in the transition to independence, "many unions did succumb to the official Colonial Office strategy of stressing industrial relations and constitutionalism over mass mobilization around wider social and political issues."[iii]

Even if it is accepted that in its heyday of political involvement, labour leaders were easily co-opted and therefore exercised only limited power, it could still be argued that the seat at the table provided opportunity for voice and the nature and capacity of that voice can be negatively compared with what exists at the present time.

In the first place, the organic link between many of the "labour" parties and the trade unions, which spawned them, has been effectively severed. Symbols of this are the derelict headquarters of the Dominica Labour Union with its plaintive plaque that said, "Mother of the Dominica Labour Party." It is difficult to discern whether the DLU government even recognises this alleged link. It would appear that the popular organising done by labour activists was captured by educated and other mainly urban elites and the authenticity of labour was jettisoned.

While these and other particular manifestations of retail politics may be peculiar to the political underdevelopment of the Caribbean, the international trade union movement is under threat. There has been a decline in trade union membership across the globe. As early as the turn of the twentieth century, concern was expressed about the decline of trade unions. C. H. Parker, writing in the Quarterly Journal of Economics in 1910 notes:

> Evidence of a settled policy of antagonism toward trade unions by the more powerful industrial combinations has been accumulating during the last two years. The first effect of the movement toward monopoly after 1898 was to stimulate a growth both of industrial consolidation and of combination in the field of labor. The panic of 1903 seems to have tried the industrial combinations by fire, and those which have persisted, find themselves in a position of steadily increasing strength. Appreciating this fact, they now have come into the open with an announced program of the open shop. Undoubtedly the excesses of the trade unions in the years after 1901, which were partly an expression of their sudden accession of power, are in part accountable for this present attitude of the trusts. The movement towards suppression of unionism seems to have gained in intensity during and since the depression of 1907 as well. The employers' associations have all been active. Numerous decisions in the courts have been favorable to the employer. So that, all things considered, the last two years may be accounted extremely critical ones in the field of labor organization.[iv]

Mitrefinch (2021)[v] analysed the reduction of trade union membership in the United Kingdom since 1995 and made projections up to 2050. The results are telling as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Decline in Union Membership

Sector	1995	2019	2050
Overall	32.40%	23.0%	16.32%
Manufacturing	32.8%	17.1%	7.15%
Construction	30.4%	11.9%	3.48%
Transportation	50.7%	35.1%	21.36%
Hospitality	7.9%	3.3%	1.25%
Retail	11.0%	11.9%	13.91%
1nformation Technology	25.5%	7.80%	1.82%
Finance	37.3%	12.7%	3.03%
Education	55.6%	47.6%	38.63%
Mining and Quarrying	35.5%	16.6%	10.2%
Health and Social	48.3%	38.1%	10.2%

Visser (2007),[vi] writing about Germany, notes that "Union membership is declining and bargaining coverage has eroded. Employer pressure and political voices calling for the

withdrawal of legal support for the current model of union-management relations have increased. The decline in union representation decreases the industrial power, public legitimacy, and political clout that unions need to act as the collective custodians of employee rights in the political and industrial arena."

Kollmeyer (2018)[vii] traces the decline in trade union membership in the United States over the period 1947 to 2015. He concludes that "after decades of decline, the American labour movement is particularly feeble," notwithstanding "the well-documented ways trade unions benefit workers."

On the other hand, Richard A. Epstein of the conservative Hoover Institute declared that the decline of trade unions is good news.[viii] He noted that while 2.1 million new jobs were created in the US boom economy in 2019, the percentage of unionised workers fell by 170,000. He was reviewing a Department of Labor report that showed among other things the percentage of unionised workers in the private sector had dropped from about 20 percent in 1983 to 6.2 percent in 2019 and way below the high of 35 percent in 1954.

It appears that the long-term trend is declining trade union membership, even though there are periods when union membership might increase for a while. There is uneven reporting on union membership across the world. However, the indicators are that only six countries of 140 countries for which there is some data, have a trade union membership rate of more than fifty percent of workers. Five of these countries are Nordic (Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark) and the other is Cuba, in which trade union membership is almost compulsory.

In the Parker (1910)[ix] study, he pointed to a growth of industrial consolidation and combination in the field of labour to the increase in industrial activity spurring a consolidation of industrial enterprises and workers organisations.

Firpo, Fortin, and Lemieux (2009)[x] note, that in terms of wages, it appears that middle-income workers benefit more from unionization than lower income workers, a fact which may appear to be counter-intuitive regarding the need for collective bargaining, since it is often low-income earners who are assumed to need greater protection of unions. Interestingly, as the world of work changes, the ratio of skilled to unskilled workers is increasing. It might therefore be expected that with the increasing proportion of skilled workers, there should be an increase in the demand for union recognition. It raises the question, why skilled workers prefer not to avail themselves of union representation.

This is especially pertinent since increasingly, rates of worker productivity are outstripping increases in worker pay. Lavoie and Stockhammer (2013)[xi] point out that in advanced countries productivity and wages tended to track closely, with wages often outstripping productivity. They note that a key factor in this change is the "financialisation" of corporate organisation with its "profit-led growth" by which the interest of institutional investors is paramount.

The result according to Kollmeyer (2018) is that while productivity increases are important because they increase the amount of income available for distribution, there are other factors that influence distribution, including the shape of government and the strength of trade unions.

The Age of Discontent

The Preparatory Committee of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), starting in 1985, which led to the Uruguay Round of negotiations and ultimately the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) was marked by scepticism on the part of developing countries, led by Brazil, Egypt, India, and others)[xii]. Concerns were expressed that the proposed new international trade regime based on the liberalisation of international trade and the opening of domestic economies in new areas such as investment and services would have serious negative consequences for developing countries. On the other hand, the budding neoliberal paradigm was presented as start of a new era of global prosperity.

By the mid nineteen nineties, there were discussions about the relative benevolent versus malevolent impacts of globalisation (Dass 2005).[xiii] At present, there is almost a cottage industry exploring different elements of the "discontents" of globalisation (Stiglitz 2002;[xiv] 2017;[xv] Allen 2002;[xvi] Boeri and Brandolini 2005;[xvii] Axford et al 2018;[xviii] Marina 2021;[xix] Rhodes-Purdy 2023[xx]).

That sense of discontent, and almost despair, was confirmed in biennial global surveys conducted by the International Trade Union Confederation. The topline findings 2017 survey found that there was widespread anxiety among workers who felt that the system was generally unfair, and that globalisation was failing working people. This anxiety was based on the sense that the richest one percent's disproportionate influence on governments was a threat to democracy and that governments were not responding adequately to the current challenges (ITUC 2017).[xxi] The 2022 Global Poll (ITUC 2022)[xxii] showed no improvement in the outlook of workers as shown in a summary of some of the topline findings in Table 1.

Table 2: Topline Findings ITUC Global Poll 2022

Jobs	66% worried about losing jobs
Rights	55% worried about weakening of labour laws
Workplace Violence	53% said that rate of violence had increase
Wages	13% did not have enough money for basic essentials
	72% thought the minimum wage was inadequate
Social Protection	67% worried about the capacity of the health care system to cope
Equality	66% worried inequality in earnings and opportunity
Inclusion	69% worried that the economic system favoured the wealthy.

The ITUC's overview noted that:

> The very foundations of democracy and the global economy have been shattered. Governments, cowered by corporate greed, have failed to act in the interests of working people. When 56% of people say that fear of repercussions would prevent them from reporting corporate malpractice, we know that corporate social responsibility has failed.
>
> Working people know that economic and social progress has stalled or is in reverse. The economic system favours the interests of the few, while government services are stretched to breaking point and workers' rights are under attack, with violence and harassment at work increasing.[xxiii]

As noted above, one of the results of the neo-liberal paradigm of development has been the weakening of the bargaining power of labour as evidenced in a substantial decrease in the share of wages in national income and an increase in wage and income inequality.[xxiv]

All the governments in the English-speaking Caribbean have either bought into this paradigm or feel forced to comply. Countries have identified attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) as critical to their development policy and prospects. The need for FDI is especially critical for countries with limited options for locally generated investment. However, many countries engage in a "race to the bottom" (Ozay and Akbar 2003,[xxv] Gutner and Christensen 2009,[xxvi] Olney 2013).[xxvii] Governments are willing to make compromises where workers' rights are chipped away in different ways but all with the

impact of increasing worker vulnerability in the face of increasing threats to attract such investments. These compromises can be big or small; they can be in the form of policy and/or law (e.g., where special economic or free zones are established in which standard worker protections, normal in the country are not observed); or administrative negligence (e.g., where labour ministries and departments are depleted of resources).

Worker Vulnerability in the Caribbean

All the countries of the English-speaking Caribbean are small and have very open economies. As noted above, they are not in a position to make significant inputs to the rules of the international system. Being, as they are, heavily dependent on FDI, whether in the form of extractive sectors, tourism, or services; they can be easily bent into following the rules as interpreted by the transnational corporations that operate in their space.

In this context, the countries and the most disadvantaged of their citizens are particularly vulnerable to the maleficence of globalisation and what passes as free trade, which is really a form of protectionism designed to keep power distribution in the international economy in place. But these small island states are not only vulnerable to structural implications of globalisation, but they are also especially vulnerable to the impact of other manmade disruptions as well as naturally occurring ones.

The labour market in the Caribbean is inelastic, with high rates of unemployment, and underemployment, and large informal economy activity in all countries.[xxviii] Youth unemployment is particularly worrisome. According to the Caribbean Development Bank, "Youth unemployment rates in the Caribbean are among the highest in the world. Nearly 1 in every 4 young people in the Caribbean is unemployed, compared to 2 in every 25 adults. Unemployment among young women is more than 30 %, compared to 20% for young men."[xxix]

In a wider study of the Latin America and the Caribbean labour market, the ILO described the situation in 2023 as "highly complex and uncertain." It was noted that one of the major concerns was informality and that one out of every two employed persons one had an informal job. The ILO goes on to noted that there is "a conjunction of multiple crises that impact labour markets and make it necessary to implement policies to create formal employment" and that "in this economic scenario the most pressing labour issue for the region is the quality of employment and the insufficient labour income generated by workers and their families."[xxx] One of the big challenges with informality is usually accompanied by job instability, low income and no social protection.

With the threats of disruption, the combination of high unemployment rates, job instability, low income and no social protection means increased vulnerability in societies where there is already high levels of poverty and unacceptable rates of indigence.[xxxi]

These structural issues are compounded by man-made and natural disasters. Moreover, certain types of natural phenomena will be exacerbated by climate change, and small island developing countries are particularly vulnerable to the worst impact. The Caribbean has long been subject to natural disasters, mainly hurricanes and volcanos. The impact of hurricanes, global warming and rising sea levels are expected to multiply as a result of Climate change. For countries in the Caribbean, the implications of climate change can be summarised as follows:

- It touches everything
- It is a driver of disaster risk
- It is a threat multiplier
- It exacerbates existing problems
- It amplifies existing social and economic disparities
- The Caribbean is particularly sensitive to climate change

Marginalized and relatively deprived groups within Caribbean society already face social, economic, and political vulnerabilities and the impact of climate change will disproportionately affect them and worsen their circumstances.

With regard to the world of work, we recognise that workers face specific threats as a result of climate change, including:

i. Loss of employment
ii. Increased risk to health, safety, and wellness
iii. Compromise of rights and standards at work
iv. Negative impacts in the world of work have implications for family and community harm

The Caribbean Development Bank has summed up the impact of the convergences of these structural issues and the manifestation of the vulnerabilities in the region as:

i. Rising debt levels
ii. The erosion of fiscal space
iii. Widening policy and project implementation deficits that create a suboptimal environment for private sector-led growth[xxxii]

Working People and Trade Unions

Trade unions are supposed to be a force multiplier. One might think therefore that in the face of all this uncertainty there would be a demand for collective representation and an increase in trade union membership. Over the last fifty years or so, however, there has been a steady decline in the level of union membership in all the countries in the English-speaking Caribbean.

The notion and intent of freedom of association and the effective right to collective bargaining recognises that individual workers are seriously disadvantaged in the face of the

disproportionate power of employers. The model workplace organisation on which trade unions in the Caribbean, like the rest of the world, is built is one of organisational structure, that is almost static. It is premised on the notion of job security and job permanence, in which workers gain an entry level job and remain with that employer throughout her or his employment lifecycle. However, organisation of employment and the employment relationship have changed markedly in the last thirty years or so as a result of factors such as flexible and globalised production and fuelled by mutually reinforcing trends of rapid technology advancement and liberalisation of markets.

The manifestations in the labour market are:

- Increase in non-standard forms of employment
- Increase in contract employment
- Workers exploring options for self-employment
- Workers prepared to work at more than one job, taking advantage of the gig-economy
- Workers more interested in employment security rather than job security and so are more prepared to change employer
- Workers looking for flexibility in employment, including the more recent development after Covid-19 for remote work.

The Labour Research Service of South Africa has provided a useful summary of changes in the world of work, as shown in Table 3 below.[xxxiii]

Table 3: The Change World of Work

Past	Present	Future
Pen and paper More filing - Paper pushers	Digital Backing in the cloud	Centralised connectivity
1 workspace	2 workspaces: home and work	3+ spectrums of workspaces
8-hour workday	More hours	24/7 on call
Permanent employment	Contract, part-time, seasonal	Freelancers
Long-term employment	Focus on projects	Task-focus
Internal information wave	Subcontracting wave	Total-information wave
Employee	Own-account worker	Gig economy
Fixed location for work	Flexible work location	Can work from anywhere

In this context, the value proposition of trade unions comes into question in the mind of workers, especially younger workers, especially when they observe:

- The leadership in the trade union movement has grown out of the old forms of organisation and culture of the employment relationship
- Younger workers are more educated than the leadership
- Workers have concern with a wider array of rights in the workplace beside salaries and terms and conditions
- A perception that unions do not add value to workers
- Workers who have enjoyed the benefits of freedom of association and collective bargaining, as all they know, taking these fundamental rights for granted
- A declining image of trade unionists, especially old guard leaders, as out of touch and not exemplars of the working class.

To address this trend of declining numbers, trade unions in the region need to address some obvious shortcomings over which they have control.

Relevance and Trust: "Haven't We Wasted Enough Time?"[xxxiv]

In this environment of international and national anti-worker structures, weak governance systems, increasing incidences of disruption, and systemic vulnerabilities the role of worker representatives and worker organisations take on special importance. This changed environment requires a rethink by workers and their representatives of how workers can be assured that they have voice and how their interests can be protected.

However, at many levels the response seems inadequate. In her Labour Day greeting in 2018, Paula-Mae Weekes, the then President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago called on the labour movement to "align their goals and strategies with the economic and social realities of the present day… outdated ways of thinking do not bode well for accurate representation of the modern worker."[xxxv]

The President's observation is reflected in other information. The first issue is one of a declining public perception (and that includes on the part of workers) about the relevance of trade unions and the trust that they engender. A poll conducted in September 2019 (Trinidad Express 9 September 2018) found that 51% of the respondents believed that trade unions in Trinidad and Tobago "did more harm than good for the country… and the majority of Trinbagonians viewed trade union leaders with a jaundiced eye." Interestingly, the survey did not distinguish between various groups of respondents (according to class, occupational status, race, and so on).

This perception is supported in the popular media. It is not uncommon to find editorials, news reports and letters to the editor with opinions and assertions such as: "unions do not help a country's prosperity,"[xxxvi] "trade unions bullying Trinidad and Tobago,"[xxxvii] "unions rejecting reality,"[xxxviii] "unions must adapt,"[xxxix] "trade unions on the back foot."[xl] A search of the archives of the three national newspapers in Trinidad and Tobago revels that almost every article or opinion that is not written by a trade unionist is negative. Undoubtedly, this reflects the general bias against unions, which is consistent with the prevailing neo-liberal paradigm that underpins globalisation.

These views are not, however, limited to those instinctively opposed to an empowered labour movement and trade unions. One international trade union leader advised the Trinidad and Tobago movement to "think smart" and to propose more "intelligent" responses to labour issues, since trade unions now "have to deal with very complex issues" and unions must "mobilise, but more important to mobilise with intelligence."[xli]

Cortina's comments made in 2008 have even greater urgency in 2023. More recently, a regional trade unionist lamented that in the face of serious developments that have implications for workers in the Caribbean, trade unionists are not even expressing an opinion, far less seeking voice to influence the evolution of the world of work.[xlii]

The South African LRS has identified six bargaining (emphasis added) strategies for unions[xliii] in that country:

1. Develop a strong knowledge base on the future of work.
2. Negotiate for precarious workers.
3. Look and listen for new issues in the workplace.
4. Use technology to grow the workers' organisation.
5. Intensify communications with members.
6. Intervene in national dialogue.

Put in the context of the Caribbean, there are at least three imperatives with which trade unions in the Caribbean must grapple: moving from transactional thinking to strategic thinking; expanding the tent; and strengthening the worker institutions.

This requires balance on the part of the trade union leadership. In the face of difficult circumstances and vulnerabilities, there is constant pressure from members of trade unions to secure better terms and conditions, usually calculated in increases in wages. At the same time, however, there are other considerations that should be included in the unions' approaches. Increases in wages can themselves be pyrrhic victories. The case of Arcelor Mittal in Trinidad and Tobago is illustrative. The company used an award in the Industrial Court of Trinidad and Tobago as the rationale for closing its operations in the country. Cutter (2015)[xliv] has noted that there is a need to marry distributive bargaining with

integrative bargaining and confirms that this strategy yields more sustainable results for both workers and their institutions.

The need for strategic thinking is not limited to bilateral negotiations but must also include the national debate about the structure of the economy and other matters relating to the field that workers and their institutions are required to play on. The Barbados model of social dialogue, while imperfect and has waxed and waned depending on the political dynamic in the country, is instructive. It has endured for more than thirty years. Undoubtedly, its endurance is in part due to a relatively stable political culture in the country. However, trade unionists should seek to inform and negotiate rules of engagement that are more suitable to their respective countries. In this regard, building of alliances is critical.

The LRS highlights the need to negotiate on behalf of precarious workers in both the formal and the informal economy. In the present, with the large informal sector and the vulnerabilities of many working people, there are large groups that need some form of protection, especially in the face of overstretched and under-resourced labour administration systems. Moreover, with the future of work pointing to a more dispersed labour force, unions need to be thinking differently about who they organise and mobilise and how they organise and mobilise.

The Trinidad Express Newspaper (12 April 2011) in an assessment of the labour climate in Trinidad and Tobago noted that "extreme exploitation of minimum wage and sub-minimum wage workers was the norm. Sub-minimum wage workers are denied the legal provisions of the schedule of minimum wages and conditions. Domestic workers are

denied the entitlements of other workers. Worst of all are conditions in the private security industry, particularly for non-precepted security personnel." Part of the challenge for workers' organisations in this regard is a question of resources. Organising structured workplaces and single workplaces/employers is far easier and more cost-efficient than organising or providing services to disparate groups. Workers' organisations may have to dedicate scarce resources to such activities and even view it as a "loss leader" business opportunity. Failure to step up to this challenge is not only making space for further exploitation of working and vulnerable people but also runs the risk of making space for organisations that are not labour based to fill the gap further weakening the value proposition of trade unions. Visser (2007)[xlv] offers three hypotheses for the unfolding of union organisation, one of which "states that feedback mechanisms from internal diversity among both employers and workers trigger processes of institutional destabilisation and decline." While he notes that such an eventuality could negatively affect both trade unions and employers, one suspects that in the neo-liberal system, workers' organisations are more vulnerable to destablisation.

The third imperative for trade unions in the Caribbean is the strengthening of the institutions themselves. This must start first with regular, transparent, and democratic elections for leadership. It sometimes appears as though trade union leadership is self-perpetuating and revolves around particular personalities. One factor that may assist in this regard, is for trade unions to treat leadership that has been voted out or retired with respect for their service, including ensuring that pension and other retirement benefits are settled expeditiously. It does the image of the movement no good when unions are party to lawsuits or complaints from former leaders.

Trade unions should also seek to ensure that their own employee relations are above board. It is telling when workers of a trade union feel the need to join another trade union to protect their rights as employees and, more so, when these disputes reach the point of adjudication by courts of law.[xlvi]

LRS has identified the need for trade unions to increase the knowledge base of their negotiations. Indeed, this was one of the main drivers for the formation of that organisation, by comparison, the trade unions in the Caribbean are relatively small and many of them have seen their numbers significantly decline in the last twenty-five years. Building knowledge bases will therefore be a significant challenge. The need for research both for negotiations and for organising and mobilising cannot be underestimated. The model of the LRS may be instructive for both the national and regional levels in the Caribbean.

Related to resource constraints for knowledge development and knowledge management are the resource constraints for management and administrative services in unions and the impact that these have for providing services to members and potential members. Unions need to reconsider different forms of organising their administrative structures, including sharing services or even amalgamation.

Finally, unions need to focus on the new generations of workers and need to think deeply about how they can become more attractive to younger workers who have never known the struggle of fighting for the right to collective bargaining; who are better educated than the leadership; and who have a different perspective of what matters in the world.

The trend is clear. The international system does not favour worker organisations. On the other hand, the need for such organisations is probably now as great as it was when in the early days of organising workers were often met with deadly force. The threats may be more subtle, but they are just as existential.

[i] Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (adopted in 1998 and amended in 2022), specifically in respect of this right of freedom of association and collective bargaining, see Convention 87 Concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise and Convention 98 Application of the Principles of the Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

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Intersection of Climate and Social Justice: Implications for Just Transition in the Caribbean

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Abstract

Climate change touches everything, but its impacts are not experienced equally by everyone. Climate change also exacerbates existing stresses and vulnerabilities in the environmental, social, and economic systems, thereby amplifying existing social and economic disparities. The injustices associated with climate change are inherent in the drivers of climate change, the amplification of existing inequities by the impacts of climate change, and the inequities inherent in and/or resulting from the processes, policies, and actions to address climate change. However, climate policies and actions are developed and delivered through the system of governance that shapes all aspects of national development and regional cooperation. As such, climate justice cannot be treated as separate from other notions of justice. This paper explores the intersections of climate justice and social justice within the Caribbean, highlights some of the main constructs and constraints to forging a smooth transition to a more just society, and suggests that a just transition requires re-framing development to make human well-being the primary goal of sustainable development.

Keywords: climate change, climate justice, social justice, just transition

Climate Change as Context in Caribbean Development

Climate change affects human health, environmental systems, and physical infrastructure through the impacts of heat, variable rainfall, and sea level rise. Small islands have limited options for sustainable development due primarily to their small natural resource base, small populations, small economies, and the high cost of providing utilities and public services.[ii, iii] Small islands are therefore extremely vulnerable to climate change, resulting in identification of climate change and sea level rise as a priority area of focus in the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS POA) adopted by the United Nations in 1994.[iv]

The vulnerability of small island developing states (SIDS) to climate change has been confirmed by assessments undertaken by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) from 2001[v] to 2022.[vi] Assessment of the vulnerability of the Caribbean and the economic and social impacts of climate change on various sectors of Caribbean economies have been conducted by research institutions and Caribbean inter-governmental organisations such as the Caribbean Development Bank, the Caribbean Community Climate Change Center, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.[vii]

The evidence is clear that climate change is a driver of disaster risk, it amplifies other threats, it exacerbates existing problems, and it amplifies existing social and economic disparities. These outcomes are recognizable when viewed through the lens of the social impacts of climate change, which include:

- Food and water insecurity
- Health insecurity
- Disruption to livelihoods and economic activities
- Disruption to provision of social services
- Damage to property and infrastructure
- Cost of living increase
- Disruption of ecosystem services
- Loss of life
- Increased conflicts.

The urgency for the Caribbean is underscored by the number of intense hurricanes and the highly variable precipitation pattern that result in longer droughts and more intense rainfall events. The challenge is to design new development strategies that are not predicated on the current development models, that are responsive to the complexities created by climate change, and that pave the way for transition to a sustainable and just society.[viii]

The Climate Justice - Social Justice Continuum

There is no single definition of climate justice, though there is agreement that the term is used for framing climate change causes, impacts, and responses as an ethical issue.[ix, x] This framing includes inequities (in the global economic system) that drive climate change,

global and national disparities in the impact of climate change, and policies and actions that increase or create new inequities.

However, climate change involves complex socio-ecological interactions and cannot be addressed in isolation from broader development goals. The third IPCC climate change assessment report states that:

> Climate change involves complex interactions between climatic, environmental, economic, political, institutional, social, and technological processes. It cannot be addressed or comprehended in isolation of broader societal goals (such as equity or sustainable development), or other existing or probable future sources of stress. (IPCC Third Assessment Report 2001-Mitigation, pp.19, Technical Summary, section 1.2, para. 3)[xi]

As such, climate justice cannot be separated from the broader issue of social justice.

As with climate justice, there is no single definition of social justice.[xii] The term, which is considered narrower than the traditional concept of justice and injustice,[xiii] generally encapsulates the core values of equal rights, equal opportunities, and equal treatment.

Many of the inequities in society result from the design of the social structure, which is typically hierarchal, competitive, and, over time, dependent on the masses of working and poor people functioning as both primary producers and primary consumers while being governed by an elite class. In the Caribbean, the inequalities are compounded by the model of development followed. The development model, a remnant of the Caribbean's colonial past, is one where Caribbean economies are primarily single-sector economies designed primarily for export.

If one accepts the basic definition of exports as goods and services that are produced in one country and consumed in, or by persons from, another country, then the main economic sectors in the Caribbean (tourism, financial services, agriculture, and oil and gas) are all export sectors. The needs of the export sectors are typically prioritized in the national development planning and resource allocation processes. This produces not only injustices, but also makes Caribbean countries vulnerable to changes in demand, policies, politics, and perceptions of leaders and people in the region's trading partners. Additionally, given the constraint of landmass and other resources, orienting local economies for export also results in a high level of importation of basic goods,[xiv] including food products, further increasing the vulnerability of Caribbean countries to the impact of climate change in the extra-regional countries.

Another major feature of the export-driven development model is the reliance on foreign direct investment and loans to drive the development process. The reliance on foreign direct investment may be undermining the development potential of Caribbean countries due to the high level of financial incentives offered, the significant level of external ownership of the main foreign exchange sectors,[xv] the associated degradation of ecological systems, the repatriation of profits and loan payments, and the leakage of earnings from the main economic sectors.[xvi, xvii] A related issue is the inadequate support given to micro, small, and medium enterprises, which constitute approximately 75 percent of companies and accounts for approximately 50 percent of the employment in Caribbean countries.[xviii]

The defining feature of the current development model in the Caribbean is that it does not produce the economic outcomes desired,[xix, xx] constraining delivery of social services and creating social tensions. The difficulty in achieving development goals makes Caribbean economies and peoples extremely vulnerable to disruptions, especially multiple overlapping disasters.[xxi] This is particularly true in instances where extreme weather-related events devastate infrastructure and the economy, and full recovery may take decades.[xxii, xxiii]

Intersections of Social Justice and Climate Justice

Climate change creates new stresses and exacerbates existing stresses and vulnerabilities in the environmental, social, and economic systems, thereby amplifying existing social and economic disparities.[xxiv] Against that background, achievement of sustainable development goals requires an enabling environment built on effective government (the capability to develop and deliver public policy) and good governance. To quote the late Professor Edwin Jones:

> Governance is a participative process in which individuals, groups, communities and authorities combine in collective decision-making to re-design policies and institutions and to clarify their mutual roles and responsibilities in implementation. At the most basic level, then, governance relates to ways in which society solves its problems collectively, using government merely as one instrument in that process.[xxv]

Participatory decision making is not standard practice in governing arrangements in the Caribbean,[xxvi] and inequities and injustices are often by-products of decision-making processes wherein a small number of voices set the agenda and influence allocation of

resources. Injustices and inequities resulting from development decision making and resource allocation are often associated with the following:

- Differential access to financing, natural resources (e.g., fisheries, wetlands, water, natural areas, land), government procurement programmes, incentives, and decision-making processes.
- Disparities in access to goods and public services (e.g., housing, healthcare, education, food, water, clean air, healthy environment, equal treatment under the law), especially services needed by marginalised and at-risk groups.
- Sub-optimal quality of spaces used by most of the residents of a community as residence, as workplace, for recreation or relaxation, and for spiritual and creative rejuvenation.
- Appropriation of property rights (indigenous and traditional knowledge and practices, genetic material, technology, and industrial processes developed with public funding or through community practices, common property, intellectual property), loss of access to common spaces, and transfer of public property (including natural spaces such as wetlands, landscapes, and seascapes) to private use or ownership.
- Investment strategies and incentive programmes that transfer wealth to private interests and transfer the risks and costs (e.g., environmental degradation, disruption by natural disasters and man-made shocks, business failure) to the public.

Interestingly, it is acknowledged that inequity is inefficient and acts as a barrier to development.[xxvii]

In addition to the trauma experienced during and after weather-related disasters, people can be subjected to injustice and further risk in unexpected ways, including; displacement of children,[xxviii]social and political tensions associated with relocation of communities,[xxix] and hostility directed towards selected groups.[xxx]

The impact of climate change on human health is one of the most significant areas of concern, and one that requires urgent action. Climate change affects health directly by the impact of extreme heat[xxxi] and indirectly through impact on clean air, water and food security, increased damage of social infrastructure and disruption of services by natural disasters, and increased number and impact of vector-borne and cardio-vascular diseases.[xxxii, xxxiii]

However, the impact of climate change on human health is partially dependent on the health status of the person (challenges from non-communicable diseases[xxxiv]) and socio-economic factors that create healthcare disparities. Socio-economic factors that influence social vulnerability and health susceptibility include gender, income, insurance coverage, education, racial and/or ethnic minority, age 65 years or older, and household members with chronic medical conditions and/or disabilities.[xxxv, xxxvi] Appropriate responses include conducting vulnerability and adaptation assessments,[xxxvii] being proactive in addressing vulnerable groups in national/local climate adaptation programmes,[xxxviii] and participating in regional programmes to facilitate sharing of resources and to scale impact.[xxxix]

A major concern regarding vulnerability of Caribbean communities is the inadequate capacity in many governments to integrate disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation strategies fully into the national development planning processes.[xl, xli] Comprehensive disaster management programming involves integration of economic, legal, socio-political, institutional, and other measures to reduce vulnerability and strengthen resilience.[xlii] Although guidelines for integration of climate change adaptation

into the disaster management framework is available to many countries in the Caribbean,[xliii] economic planning takes place primarily in sectoral silos, with limited multisectoral collaboration in risk reduction strategies. This reduces the ability of governments and communities to respond to and recover from multiple disasters.

One approach to understanding how climate change amplifies existing social and economic disparities is to view climate impact and climate action through the lens of the availability and quality of spaces on which people depend for shelter, food, work, and community.

Availability and Quality of Human Spaces

The spaces where people live, work, play, commune and which support physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing are routinely degraded and lost. Attention must be paid to the quality of these spaces if human well-being is the goal of national development.

Shelter is a significant concern in Caribbean countries, and both informal settlements and formal housing initiatives can perpetuate social inequities based on access to programmes, location, and constraints in providing adequate public services.[xliv] [xlv] Location of affordable housing units in areas of sub-optimal environmental quality (especially noise and air quality) is common in urban areas. As such, given the trend towards increasing urbanization in the Caribbean, settlement strategies must include multi-hazard risk assessments[xlvi] and renewed focus on the health of residents.[xlvii] Additionally, affordable housing solutions to alleviate demand and/or as recovery from natural disasters may increase the vulnerability of working and poor persons to climate change due to:

- Location of homes in floodplains and close to wetlands increases damage to property, reduction in property values, and potential health problems. Location of such housing units may also create new problems, such as increasing the distance between worker and workplace, vendor and customers, and access to social infrastructure and services.
- Design of small concrete homes to withstand intense storms could produce negative health outcomes resulting from heat stress due to higher nighttime temperatures.[xlviii]
- Settlement strategies in the English-speaking Caribbean typically uses 3.5-4 persons as the average family size, though low-income families (the primary target group for assistance in disaster recovery programmes) can be twice as large. The small size of the house provided in many disaster recovery programmes, coupled with the dense clustering of such units, may increase tensions within families and communities. These impacts are likely to be exacerbated because of the inadequacy or absence of social infrastructure (such as recreational and natural areas) that support community cohesion and individual health.
- A new trend has surfaced in the Caribbean wherein there is loss of housing stock after disasters due to: (i) conversion of long-term rental units to air B&Bs, and (ii) purchase and conversion of damaged homes to vacation units or second homes for non-residents.

Another important human space at the intersection of climate and social justice is the workplace. Typically, laws and labour agreements dictate working conditions and terms for many employed workers. Similar protections are not usually in place for self-employed persons, care givers, contractors, and newer classifications of workers (e.g., remote worker, gig worker, virtual assistant). Global warming will affect the conditions of the workplace, especially outdoors, requiring new rules and practices to protect the health of persons working in those conditions. Responses may range from basic (e.g., clothing, time of day, cooling) to comprehensive (e.g., provision of onsite health emergency support systems) to reconceptualization of work and redesign of the workspace.

Communal spaces - for recreation, community gatherings places, places for worship or spiritual connection, cultural spaces - facilitate community cohesion, identity, growth, and resilience. Natural spaces also provide significant health benefits to both the individual and community.[xlix, l] The degradation and loss of those spaces through the regular development process is exacerbated by climate change and disasters. Inequalities are perpetuated when there is increased need for communal spaces after disasters[li] but that need cannot be met when communal spaces are the last to be cleared/restored, the community loses temporary usage to select groups, or when such spaces are permanently lost to other uses or groups.

Ecological systems provide a range of goods and services that form the basis for development in the Caribbean.[lii, liii] Not only are inequalities created through differential access to such goods and services, but dependence by the poor on nature tend to increase after disasters and economic shocks.[liv] The degradation of ecosystems from climate change may reduce availability of, or access to, ecosystem goods, presenting another area of intersection of climate and social justice.

Place and place connection must therefore be one of the pillars of the transition towards a just society, particularly the use, allocation of benefits from, and ownership of common property. As such, maintenance of quality human and ecological spaces and protection of common property must be central to concepts and strategies such as sustainability, resilience, green economy, blue economy, circular economy, ocean economy, and Just Transition.

Considerations for Just Transition in the Caribbean

Just Transition is a philosophy and framework to shift the economic activities from a paradigm of extraction[lv] to one rooted in regeneration and justice.[lvi] Within the international arena and labour movement, the Just Transition framework[lvii] was adopted by the International Labour Organization as guidelines for implementing its Decent Work Agenda.[lviii] Both are focused on full employment and "decent work" within the construct of sustainable economic growth. The United Nations defines decent work as "… work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration."[lix] How many of the elements that comprise the definition of decent work can be discerned in current definitions of worker, worker protections, and social development in the Caribbean?

The conceptualization of work and worker changes in tandem with corporate strategies and technology. Terms such as un-compensated work, livable wage, decent work, green jobs, employee, contractor, full time, part time, permanent, and temporary are used interchangeably to describe both type of work and category of worker. The Caribbean is embracing some of the terms used for workers in the adjacent large economies, such as: independent contractor/freelancer; self-employed/sole proprietor; tipped worker; gig worker; remote worker; virtual assistant; intern; volunteer. However, the legal protections, benefits, and support systems for employees in the workplace often do not extend to these categories of workers, increasing the vulnerability of such workers to disruptions from disasters and economic downturns. Additionally, there are groups of workers that do not enjoy the same attention and support as workers in the 'traditional' roles and workplaces.

In terms of worker protections and support, a large and important group that requires additional attention is the micro, small, and medium-size enterprise (MSME) sector. In the Caribbean, MSMEs represent 70-85 percent of Caribbean businesses, contribute 60-70 percent of gross domestic product, and approximately 50 percent of total employment. The sector is beset by many constraints, one of the most important being an unsupportive enabling environment. Yet, the policy prescription aimed directly at workers in the MSME sector is not to strengthen worker protections and support systems but to "Introduce labour reforms that allow MSMEs to be more flexible in terms of hiring and firing."[lx]

A second group that requires additional attention and support is the Caribbean civil society sector. The civic sector is recognized as a distinct third sector (along with the private and public sectors) that is critical to the development process, and the role of the sector is highlighted in global sustainable development programmes. The size of the Caribbean civic sector and its impact on Caribbean development are unknown. The adverse impacts of national policies and globalization on the Caribbean civic sector are recognized,[lxi] yet there is a persistence of outdated conceptualization of the sector,[lxii] inadequate financial and public policy support, and capacity and other constraints within the sector.[lxiii, lxiv] Increased institutional protections and support for workers in the civic sector are needed, given the expanded role of the civic sector in Caribbean development,[lxv, lxvi] increased employment of full-time professional staff, comparatively low salaries, and inadequate access to pension systems in most Caribbean countries.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[lxvii] is a framework and blueprint for ending extreme poverty and reducing other social and environmental problems. Although Agenda 2030 focuses on improvements in health and education while maintaining economic growth and reducing inequality and environmental degradation, it is necessarily situated within the construct of a system of governance that is unjust. In that context, Just Transition should be conceptualized and implemented along two converging paths: (i) working within the current national, regional, and international governance arrangements to improve the protections and support for all workers; and (ii) working on the evolution of the sustainable development framework to place people at the center of the development agenda.

Working within the current development paradigm would require action on two complementary tracks:

- Track 1-Improving Worker Protections: (i) the Decent Work agenda; (ii) protection for marginalised and at-risk groups in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction policies and strategies; (iii) ongoing research to ensure that the changing nature of work and definition of worker do not transfer the costs and burden of corporate sustainability and community resilience onto workers.
- Track 2-Supporting Workers and Work Families Beyond the Workplace: (i) increased investment in social infrastructure and services to support community development; (ii) expand programming and investment to reduce vulnerability of individuals with disabilities and special needs; (iii) incorporate assessment of social vulnerability into routine decision making; (iv) support life-long learning programmes for retirees; (v) bolster and expand pension systems.

The need to expand the concept of Just Transition to encompass more than decent work is implicit in the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable

Development Goals, in that a broader framework and more effective policies and strategies are necessary to reduce poverty and inequality. It has been suggested that the Caribbean needs new frameworks and innovative solutions to create "*transformative shifts*" "*to address poverty and promote shared prosperity*".[lxviii] Innovation within the workplace could include boosting financial literacy, legislative and technical support to build wealth for individual workers and worker collectives, and programmes to reduce the vulnerability of workers to economic shocks and other forms of disruption. Innovation beyond the workplace could include building mechanisms and support systems for wealth creation and development of social infrastructure through worker collectives (labour unions, co-operatives, credit unions) and community development organizations.

Closing Thoughts

One of the hurdles in addressing inequities in Caribbean societies is to frame development in terms of human well-being and sustainable communities and then translate that construct to development policies and strategies. One approach to solving this dilemma is to mainstream two related concepts, Equitable Infrastructure and Regenerative Societies.

Equitable Infrastructure is posited as a way of understanding and framing the types of infrastructure that support human development. The focus on infrastructure is a useful starting place for transition to a just society because infrastructure is a central component of the development process, because infrastructure has contributed to both social good and social harm, and because several types of infrastructure are needed to

create a just society. Pitter (2021) identifies the following types of infrastructure; physical infrastructure, social infrastructure, participatory and democratic infrastructure, digital infrastructure, and economic infrastructure, with the natural environment as a central "sacred" place.[lxix]

This typology of infrastructure is implied in public decision-making processes, though not with the same framing. Natural systems used for protective purposes (e.g., windbreaks, erosion control, flood control) are traditionally treated as "soft" infrastructure, re-branded as "green" infrastructure or "nature-based" solutions. Governance systems for public policy development and delivery or for collective action are critical to social development outcomes and maintenance of democratic societies but are usually described by terms such as "processes" and "platforms", not "participatory and democratic infrastructure".

The construct of Equitable Infrastructure is particularly relevant to the role and functioning of government in democratic societies. If, as suggested earlier, government is an instrument that society uses to solve its problems collectively, and government is the main actor in creating the enabling environment that underpins the development process, then the society needs to be more active in ensuring that the infrastructure of government is appropriately designed and maintained to formulate and effectively deliver public policy that supports a just society.

An illustration of that point is the capabilities and processes needed for rational decision making to ensure that economic strategies do not undermine national development possibilities. As an example, many Caribbean countries routinely remove mangroves and other wetlands for hotels and other physical infrastructure in pursuit of economic growth. However, removal of wetlands is likely to increase social inequity resulting from decreased livelihoods to fishers and benefits to other resource users, increase community vulnerability by decreasing the provisioning and protection services of the wetlands, and increase national vulnerability through the need to import lost ecosystem goods and/or increased cost to maintain or replace physical infrastructure that is damaged due to loss of the protection services of the wetlands. An example of irrational decision making that encompasses different infrastructure types and perpetuate injustice is the continued placement of critical physical infrastructure and low-income housing in floodplains and adjacent to coastal wetlands, disregarding decades of warning about the impact of sea level rise on coastal communities.[lxx]

As with the government, the framing of Equitable Infrastructure is critically important to understanding the potential roles of citizens/workers and civil society in a Just Transition process. It provides a foundation for designing collective action (with the other two social sectors) to address community needs, improve community decision making on economic strategies and projects, and redesign and energise worker collectives to build prosperity for their members.

The degradation of environmental and social systems has renewed discussions of “the commons”[lxxi] and regeneration[lxxii] as operating principles for human action, essentially to transition to ‘Regenerative Societies’. Regeneration is common in natural systems (restoration) and human systems (urban renewal) and is sometimes identified as an element of the just transition framework. However, renewal in human terms also applies to mental, spiritual, and creative rejuvenation. Therefore, regeneration of a society requires maintenance of conditions and spaces for personal renewal, which in turn requires institutional cultures and practices that maintain just and sustainable societies.

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Women's Vulnerability to the Climate Crisis: Ecofeminism and a Small Island Developing Petro-State

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Abstract

Why are women one of the groups vulnerable to and within the climate crisis? Using the concept of capitalist patriarchy, we demonstrate the value of ecofeminist theory to reiterate the inter-social dimensions to an existing geopolitics of emissions. This requires attention to connect the 'exploitation of nature and the oppression of women.' We reference the example of Trinidad and Tobago as a small island Petro-state to reiterate the usefulness of considering an 'Anthropocene of Earth Democracy' perspective as an alternative to extractivism under carbon capitalist patriarchy. This analysis is as relevant today at the beginning of the 21st century as it was in the 1980s.

Keywords: capitalism; Caribbean; climate justice; patriarchy; Trinidad and Tobago.

This discussion paper takes the position that examining systemic vulnerability to the present-day climate emergency is an important consideration in achieving climate justice. To make this argument it looks to the ecofeminist critique of patriarchy, a "system that privileges the practices, values, attributes associated with…concepts of masculinity while devaluing those associated with women's social role – caring, compassion, cooperation, gentleness."[i] This sort of examination is beneficial to highlight how some groups have greater responsibility for causing the climate crisis—and should be positioned as differentially responsible. Ecofeminism can show that if the unequal relations that produced this crisis are not changed, dominated groups will be subjected to the most severe consequences of the climate emergency.

It will also demonstrate how ecofeminist literature and the accompanying social thought offers a great deal to various actors and entities—academics, activists, technocrats, the public and state institutions—that have the power to mitigate these harms. Some of these actors and entities in the Caribbean have been key in developing ecofeminism and the environmental justice movement, making this praxis familiar to the Caribbean experience. Relatedly, rather than thinking of socialist-oriented ecofeminist analysis as outdated, ecofeminism is a useful intellectual framework for thinking about risks and vulnerability to the looming social disasters that result from extreme weather events. Some of these include various hurricanes that have destroyed several Caribbean countries, islands in particular, in the past five years. Consider the impacts of Hurricane Elsa in 2021 across the eastern and northern Caribbean, Hurricane Maria in 2017 Dominica, and Hurricane Ian in Cuba in 2022 such as the physical damage to

ecosystems, the economy and broadly the society with the destruction of shelters, workplaces, schools, care facilities and the like.

While halting the most extreme environmental destruction is a collective effort, and expense should not be spared locally to ensure that there are fewer deaths in the coming years, not every country has produced equal amounts of carbon emissions per capita.[ii] As expected, countries that industrialised early in the 19th century have produced more emissions than those that did in the 20th century. There is also a close relationship between colonialism and industrialisation, as Eric Williams has demonstrated in *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944). Even within countries that are high polluters across the Global North or Global South, subordinated groups typically do not produce the same amount of carbon and methane emissions as dominant groups.

In addition to this geopolitics of emissions, there are also inter-social dimensions that require attention. This is the analytical premise of ecofeminism. The core point for considering groups that are most at risk to the effects of the climate emergence is that there are social relations arising from colonial and postcolonial capitalist patriarchy. The concept of capitalist patriarchy as the lynchpin for the argument that returning to 'older' theories like ecofeminism is useful in understanding the continued vulnerability of groups, such as women. This sort of analysis is as relevant today, at the beginning of the 21st century, as in the years before and after the independence and decolonisation movements in the English-speaking Caribbean, in the second half of the 20th century.

The notion of climate justice recognises that there are political and moral issues at stake in the current state of the global environment.[iii] Some of these issues are evident in the drafting and incorporation of climate change policy across countries, territories and international organisations in both the Global North and the Global South. Countries and territories that have signed onto and ratified climate change agreements range across continents and cultures: Barbados, Cuba, France, the Palestinian Authority, South Sudan, and the like. The existence of entities like the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and framework documents such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with global targets for reducing carbon emissions by 45% by the year 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050—demonstrate a recognition by powerful states, industrialists and financiers of the gravity of the climate crisis.[iv]

Nonetheless, this recognition is often framed in terms of threats to commodity production, or as a threat to the 'human way of life,' meaning the maintenance of capitalist and social hierarchies. In fact, "more than half of all emissions since the Industrial Revolution have occurred since its establishment [of the UNFCCC] in 1992," John Bellamy Foster reminds us.[v] These international frameworks and initiatives are necessary and laudable, even with the urgent need to change the discourse around what is possible for the future of the planet. At the same time, there are limitations to these policy initiatives. Often, they lack critique of the "dominant socioeconomic system in the world today", capitalism, which "impacts the everyday lives of most people on Earth."[vi] In addition to the exploitation of free labour, the system of capitalism thrives on the 'exploitation of nature and the oppression of women.'[vii] The unpaid, socially reproductive work that women do is essential for commodity production. Within

capitalist systems, environmental destruction and unpaid domestic work are framed as external to the reproduction of life. In practice, these conditions mean that the market, institutional, and social discriminations that shape women's experiences and make them more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, are often overlooked.

Patriarchy in the Anthropocene

The concept of the Anthropocene describes the adverse effects of human activities on the world's inhabitants and biomass following centuries of modern industrialisation and mass production. All cultures and geographies are experiencing a common disaster that connects more extreme weather, the decline in the quality and public availability of clean water (to which access and use is a basic human right), deforestation, poorer air quality, polluted oceans and polluted food chains, and so forth. As scholars have referred to the Pleistocene, another geological period millions of years ago during which the earth had the last major Ice Age, Anthropocene categorises another epoch. Put differently, the "Anthropocene is a term used to describe the period (or epoch) in geological time in which the effects of human activities have altered the fundamental geochemical cycles of the earth as a result of converting forests into fields and pastures and burning oil, gas, and coal on a large scale."[viii]

Archaeological evidence shows that past societies have faced ecological collapse. The Maya of Central America, societies of the Indus River Valley and the Rapa Nui of Easter Island in the southern Pacific present "a sobering warning as many pre-historic cultures' practices were, at some level, environmentally unsustainable leading to deforestation, soil salinization, or erosion."[ix] One of the major factors in the decline of

Mayan cities by the end of the 10th century appears to have been deforestation combined with a population expansion in a specific location (around Copán in present-day Honduras and Guatemala) and land clearing for increased agricultural production. Research "suggests that prehistoric groups' lack of adequate environmental management systems could have affected their ability to maintain their complex urban societies—a warning for society today."[x] While these examples provide specific, localised events, given centuries of imperialism, industrialisation and decades of globalisation, the Anthropocene is global. No group or place will be unaffected by the climate crisis.

Coming from a sustained involvement and familiarity with the trajectory of environmentalism, ecofeminists, radical feminists and Marxist feminists from the 1960s put forward a cogent analysis of the material and ideological interconnections of environmental degradation and patriarchal authoritarianism.[xi] Such critiques have continued relevance for everyday people, scholars in many disciplines, activists and social justice advocates. In *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1986), for example, Maria Mies explains the domination that underlies capital accumulation. With the labour necessary for production, a division of labour based upon a hierarchy of value distinguished between 'productive' and 'reproductive' or 'unproductive' labour. This division set out the conditions for the "oppression of women and the exploitation of nature," which are interrelated Mies and Shiva explain, and developed with additional institutionalised differences.[xii] Some of these differences are inclusive of the division between 'public' and 'private' spheres of life–where productive and reproductive labour primarily took place–along with normative roles and expectations

for men and women. The key point is that within a capitalist patriarchal system, these differences are hierarchical and "uniformity [is] a prerequisite for equality."[xiii]

But quantitative data demonstrates the value of this so-called non-productive labour to national and global economies. As Mies and Shiva explain, "Henderson (1999) estimated that up to 50% of all useful products and services are unpaid and largely produced by women. Their worth is about $US16 trillion, all of which is missing from the GDP of all countries."[xiv] So housewives' role was "to reproduce this working class from day-to-day and from generation-to-generation. Housewives apparently did not produce any exchange value, any commodities, any money value, the only value that counts in capitalism."[xv]

Mies and Shiva, on the contrary, argue that the sort of work done by women as a group is productive. But with the institutionalisation of this gendered and hierarchical division of labour over centuries of industrialisation, the accompanying logic has meant that violence against women and violence against nature remain steeped in extraction and entitlement (Mies 1993). In relating the story about scientists who developed the atomic bomb, which was then deployed over Hiroshima and Nagasaki during WWII, Mies and Shiva explain scientists referred to the bomb as "their baby, their son."[xvi]

> Before the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, these men had codewords for the success of their invention. If there was a big explosion, the codeword was 'Fat Man'. If there was only a small explosion, the codeword was 'Little Boy'. After the 'success' of the bomb over Hiroshima they congratulated each other about the birth of their 'Little Boy'. After Nagasaki, it was a 'Fat Man'.[xvii]

As Bellamy Foster plainly states, nature is viewed as a 'free gift' to capital. Systemic violence of this sort appears also against women. Gender based violence "is still part and parcel of all institutions in our patriarchal societies. It is part of the economy, the family, religion, politics, the media, culture. It exists in so-called 'civilized' countries as well as in 'backward' countries. The forms of this violence may differ but the core is the same."[xviii] Across cultures and geographies, it is women who are

> Economically disadvantaged compared to men and are more likely to live in poverty; sexual and reproductive health and physical demands on their bodies during pregnancy, child-bearing and rearing, and menopause put them at special risk; women's lives tend to be longer and they spend more time as seniors compared to men, with resulting economic and health implications; and women typically continue to fill paid and unpaid roles related to physical and emotional caring – for children, the elderly, families - that put them at special risk of environmental injustice.[xix]

This systemic violence appears in extreme disparities of wealth and poverty. Data collected by Oxfam shows these worsening gaps. Whereas in 2017, "26 people owned the same as the 3.8 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity," in 2018 "the 26 richest people on earth had the same net worth as the poorest half of the world's population, some 3.8 billion people."[xx] And a more worrisome development is that "2,200 billionaires worldwide saw their wealth grow by 12 percent."

In summary, "The richest 147 billionaires in the world control about 1 percent of global wealth." Exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the wealth disparity means that:

> The world's small elite of 2,755 billionaires has seen its fortunes grow more during Covid-19 than they have in the whole of the last fourteen years combined. This is the biggest annual increase since records began. It is taking place on every continent. It is enabled by skyrocketing stock market prices, a boom in unregulated entities, a surge in monopoly power and privatization, alongside the erosion of individual corporate tax rates and workers' rights and wages. Since the pandemic began, a new billionaire has been created every 26 hours.[xxi]

Wealth means increased carbon and methane omissions too with run on effects: "We all suffer from a heating planet when rich countries fail to address the effects of their responsibility for an estimated 92% of all excess historic emissions. We all lose out when the world's wealthiest 1% use double the carbon emissions of the bottom 50%, or when a few powerful corporations are able to monopolize production over life-saving vaccines and treatments in a global pandemic."[xxii]

Rather than the extractivism that dominates social, economic and political systems at present, Mies and Shiva advocate for a change in systems as well as perspectives. This macro and microlevel intervention centred on the "Anthropocene of Earth Democracy" entails attitudinal change. It involves "ecological humility in place of arrogance, and ecological responsibility in place of careless and blind exercise of power, control and violence."[xxiii]

But changes in attitudes and perspectives mean little without structural change. As they write, "Our aim is to go beyond this narrow perspective and to express our diversity and, in different ways, address the inherent inequalities in world structures which permit the North to dominate the South, men to dominate women, and the frenetic

plunder of ever more resources for ever more unequally distributed economic gain to dominate nature."[xxiv] As in many locations, and for these reasons, women are one vulnerable group to the effects of the climate crisis within the Small Island Developing State (SIDS) of Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad and Tobago – An Example of a Small Island Developing Petro-State

In a simple example of littering in urban Trinidad, the common act of tossing a plastic bottle out of a vehicle window or dropping a food wrapper on the ground while walking indicates both neglect and dismissal of the environment. Underscored by an attitude of dominance of humans' control over nature—a benign paternalism reminiscent of imperial attitudes to the colonies or a 'we've created it and can do what we want with the environment' attitude—this notion of human mastery over nature is core to capitalist systems which developed in particular, over the past 300 years of industrialisation.

As a SIDS in the southern Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago is particularly vulnerable to the climate emergency. It is also among the largest oil producers in the Western hemisphere with a huge percentage of the national economy coming from oil and its transfers. This juxtaposition is of particular public and scholarly interest because the climate crisis is global and impacts all populations, but differentially so noted by this author. Like many developing countries, Trinidad and Tobago has signed onto and ratified climate change agreements and policies, inclusive of the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol. The government recognises the threat to life with rising sea levels and

the like, of particular concern for a SIDS, but the economic dependence on non-renewable energy sources such as oil and gas, remains.

In *Energy Without Conscience: Oil, Climate Change, and Complicity* (2017), Dylan McDermott Hughes examines the complexities of oil and natural gas production in Trinidad and Tobago as a small island Petro-state. McDermott Hughes details how complicity and vulnerability are mobilised by various groups locally, and in particular promulgated within the global politics of climate justice as well as the tentacles of international infrastructure: development agencies, aid groups, petrochemical blocs, national interests and geopolitical rivalries. Industrialisation through oil and its related energy materials have been integral to national development and the profit of international companies. Old patterns of production for export that were challenged with the opening of the local oil refinery, Petrotrin, in post-independence Trinidad have accumulated large debts of approximately TT$12million (equivalent to US$2million) and led to the company's dissolution and restructuring.[xxv]

Despite this, the postcolonial bourgeoisie have flourished, and while there has been the growth of a middle class (largely the descendants of enslaved and indentured African, Chinese and Indian plantation workers), social inequality widens in this small island developing, and industrialised state, as evidenced in increasing numbers of violent crimes. Inter-ethnic antagonism is political. But the profits are not largely invested in renewable energies.[xxvi] There is little to no recognition of the environmental pollutants from production, despite the government ratifying international climate change agreements. Significantly, there is no acknowledgement of a symbiotic relationship

between human, animal and nature that guides production. One reason is the historical benefit for oil production for the country and its population, whereby oil has brought wealth to some, including Africans and Indians, especially from the WWI era. Given this history, a false oppositional framing of climate justice and economic advantage stymies recognition of the adverse impacts of hydrocarbons on life.

Oil production has also brought disastrous consequences. In Trinidad and Tobago, oceanic oil spills directly harm ecosystems as shown in 2021, 2020, 2017 and 2013 to provide merely a few examples.[xxvii] Trinidad and Tobago's now well-established role in the global economy of carbon-based capitalism is small in comparison to Iran, Saudi Arabia and neighbouring Venezuela. And many persons inclusive of "scientists, activists, policy makers, and energy specialists [considered] the country's first policy on climate change not in terms of carbon emissions [but] instead centred environmental hazards, including even threats to oil's infrastructure [thereby positioning] T&T as a victim of climate change."[xxviii]

The discussion of differential responsibility for the adverse consequences of industrialisation – the Global North over 300 years or the Global South over 100 years - often becomes conflated with "innocence" in the South. "Consider the movement for international climate justice," McDermott Hughes summarises, "using cardinal points as a shorthand, activists are pursuing a claim of the Global South against the Global North. In the course of industrializing, the North has polluted the biosphere, to the detriment of everyone but particularly to the detriment of the resource-dependent societies of the South."[xxix] But the same routes toward industrialisation and mass

production are occurring in the Global South as well—consider China, South Africa and India for instance. Massive deliberate deforestation and displacement of peoples in the Congo and in the Amazon are taking place right now.[xxx] What will oil production look like in Guyana, neighbouring Trinidad and Tobago, where deposits have recently been identified, over the next 50 years?

As ecofeminists have shown, the system of capitalist patriarchy is interrelated to the experiences of group members, including those of women. Capitalism as a dominant socioeconomic system therefore harms some groups while privileging others, increasing or decreasing life and death chances for many. While ecosystems and life on Earth are more at risk to death and extinction in the present-day climate crisis, some groups such as women are more vulnerable to these life-ending conditions.

Conclusion: Toward De-Carbonisation and Gender Equality

Following centuries of imperial extraction and postcolonial as well as neo-imperial extraction within the Global South and the Global North, "an ecofeminist perspective propounds the need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of co-operation, and mutual care."[xxxi] There are previous movements and models for this sort of 'radical' critique, however. In the mid-20th century environmental and feminist movements provided the groundwork for the international development mainstreaming of the climate emergency.

John Bellamy Foster asserts that capitalism in its neoliberal form is a "system that inherently and irredeemably fouls its own nest, which has now been extended to the planet itself."[xxxii] To counteract this systemic problem that threatens all life, but to which some groups are more at risk inclusive of women, an Anthropocene of Earth Democracy perspective is useful. The latter involves "ecological humility in place of arrogance, and ecological responsibility in place of careless and blind exercise of power, control and violence." More fundamentally, recognising that there are no jobs on a dead planet,[xxxiii] the core ecofeminist argument that violence against women and violence against nature are enacted by carbon capitalist patriarchy means that de-carbonisation entails systemic changes to engrained local and global inequalities. Ecofeminism reminds us this is essential to achieve climate justice.

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[i] Antrobus 2004, 38.
[ii] See https://ourworldindata.org/contributed-most-global-co2.
[iii] See John Bellamy Foster's *Ecology Against Capitalism* (2002).
[iv] These targets are merely to avoid an increase in global warming from 1.5 degree Celsius. https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/net-zero-coalition
[v] https://monthlyreview.org/2023/01/01/mr-074-08-2023-01_0/
[vi] Bellamy Foster 2022, 1.
[vii] Mies 1993.
[viii] Palmer 2017, 22.
[ix] Palmer 2017, 3.
[x] Palmer 2017, 4.
[xi] As examples see Mies 1986; Mies and Shiva 1993; Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 2000; Shiva 2008; Sassen 1996; George 2010.
[xii] Mies and Shiva 2014, 20.
[xiii] Mies and Shiva 2014, 32.
[xiv] Mies 2007, 269.
[xv] Ibid.
[xvi] 2014, 21.
[xvii] Ibid. In the year 2016, the UN estimated that the global cost of violence against women in particular was US$1.5 trillion (Chase and Gomes for Commonwealth Secretariat, 2022). During national lockdowns in the initial phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, reports of domestic violence increased worldwide (ibid). Violence against women was one social issue that united women across culture and geography in the mid-20th century. This point addresses cultural critics who argue against the relevance of 'foreign' theories for Trinbagonian and Caribbean social problems.
[xviii] Mies and Shiva 2014, 24.
[xix] Perkins 2018, 1 https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/288470904.pdf.
[xx] https://www.oxfam.org/en/5-shocking-facts-about-extreme-global-inequality-and-how-even-it and https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2019/1/22/18192774/oxfam-inequality-report-2019-davos-wealth
[xxi] https://www.oxfam.org/en/5-shocking-facts-about-extreme-global-inequality-and-how-even-it
[xxii] Ibid.
[xxiii] Mies and Shiva 2014, 19-20.
[xxiv] Mies and Shiva 2014, 32.
[xxv] See http://www.news.gov.tt/content/petrotrin-exits-oil-refinery-business-reinvent-itself.
[xxvi] There is a recent agreement for a European Union-funded solar park at the international airport in northern Trinidad (http://www.news.gov.tt/content/tt-government-and-eu-agree-solar-park-project-piarco), talks for a "wind facility" funded by oil companies British Petroleum and Shell (https://www.bnamericas.com/en/news/offshore-wind-promising-for-trinidad), and a proposed British-funded wind farm in Trinidad: (https://tt.loopnews.com/content/uk-tt-discuss-collaboration-wind-farms).
[xxvii] See https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/aug/13/its-outrageous-trinidadian-fishers-film-half-hearted-oil-spill-clean-up - 'It's outrageous': Trinidadian fishers film 'half-hearted' oil spill clean-up ; https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/stranded-venezuelan-oil-tanker-potential-disaster-what-we-know; https://www.guardian.co.tt/article-6.2.412552.eb804c1e5d 'Petrotrin oil spill spreads

to La Brea,' December 18, 2013; https://www.planning.gov.tt/content/preliminary-results-oil-fingerprinting-analyses-chaguaramas-oil-spill 'Preliminary Results of Oil Fingerprinting Analyses – Chaguaramas Oil Spill,' undated.

[xxviii] McDermott Hughes 2017, 120.

[xxix] McDermott Hughes 2017, 122.

[xxx] The recent change in political leadership from Bolsonaro to the Lula daSilva signals a political commitment to halting Amazon deforestation in favour of conservation.

[xxxi] Mies and Shiva 2014, 36-37.

[xxxii] 2022, 1.

[xxxiii] Timcke 2020.

Expanding the Scope of Climate Justice

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Abstract.

Climate change is primarily a cultural and therefore political problem, not a scientific or technical one, since the socio-economic system that produces it is a specific cultural system with a particular history. But if climate change is human-caused, then it is a cultural-political-moral problem of massive proportions and we will not solve it without an epic transformation in ideas and values in how we relate to the natural world, other species, and each other. If everything is interconnected in terms of its sociohistorical origin in a specific cultural system called capitalism, then fighting against any form of injustice—be it social, economic, political, and so forth—is also working intersectionally for climate justice too, since they are all oriented toward transforming the underlying system generating so many vexatious global problems and planetary pathologies, from the climate-related, environmental and infrastructural to the political-economic, sociocultural and moral.

Keywords: climate change, climate justice, relatedness, intersectionality, politics, Anthropocene

Climate change is primarily a cultural and therefore political problem, not a scientific or technical one. This is a rhetorical provocation, of course, since global warming, climate change and all the rest are certainly technical problems, scientific problems, logistical problems, policy problems, and so forth. Indeed, they are devilishly difficult problems in these regards.

Pumping carbon and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere traps heat, with all sorts of noxious consequences we most often hear about. But "climate change" is about much more than global warming alone. The web of industrial changes and energy-system transformations producing more intense and catastrophic climatological events are also affecting planetary processes and life forms in new and countless ways. These manifestations are vast and many-tentacled. Half of Earth's surface is now used for agriculture, forestry, and habitation, to start with. Three-quarters of the biosphere has been altered by human activity. Sea levels rise, oceans acidify, coasts erode, soils deplete. Industrial civilization uses over half of renewable fresh-water sources. Accelerating rates of species extinction and loss of biodiversity are weirdly counterpointed by a massive increase in domesticated industrial biomass in the form of humans, poultry, pigs, cows, and a few other "lucky" creatures. We also now all have microplastics flowing through our veins and concrete has officially entered the geological record. All of these indicators and many more have been studied and it is clear that everything began to significantly shift on a planetary scale with the rise of industrialization, powered by fossil fuels, within the last two centuries but especially took off since the mid-20th century in a period now referred to as the Great Acceleration.

But if climate change is human-caused, in other words *Anthropogenic*, which we now very robustly know that it is (only an ever-diminishingly small number of extreme right-wing denialists exist in the USA), then it is ultimately a cultural-political-moral problem of massive proportions and we will not solve it without an epic transformation in ideas and values in how we relate to the natural world, other species, and each other. A fundamental cultural revolution, in other words. And if climate change is cultural, we must ask what system of human activity puts massive amounts of carbon and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, thereby heating it up and causing a whole set of cascading, time-released, catastrophic effects? A cultural system with all of these other effects above and beyond and around "climate change" in the narrow sense that has knowledge of what it is doing and keeps on doing it anyway?

This is the very same global system that is toxifying almost every dimension of the environment on the planet; generating accelerating rates of species extinction and biodiversity loss; intensifying mounting inequalities of all kinds and hastening downward mobility across the board; spurring and exacerbating economic and political instabilities of all sorts; displacing more and more people throughout the world, turning them into migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers; spawning crime, violence, and conflict everywhere alongside escalating levels of increasingly-privatized incarceration; and undermining the ability of governments, states, civil society organizations and communities to respond—indeed both incentivizing disaster and then profiteering upon it. Vulnerability is not simply a natural condition. Most recently, we all witnessed the advent of COVID-19 on the global

stage and the #Coronachaos it unleashed, which are an essential part of the story too even though we largely managed to look away and not see its connections to climate change and all the rest.[i]

The inert piece of RNA that quickly became known as the "novel" coronavirus was in fact SARS-2, hailing from a family of already-known respiratory coronaviruses. SARS-1 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) materialized in 2002 and wreaked havoc for several years, which is why many Asians already wore facemasks or were primed to quickly don them. Like the others, COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease that moved from a non-human animal host—likely bats, and possibly via another intermediary such as the pangolin—because of industrialization, deforestation, and urbanization bringing humans and animals with previously little-to-no interaction into contact. This means that a bat coronavirus underwent a "spillover" event in central China at some point in 2019, making Wuhan the original epicenter of a disease that spread quickly and wrought havoc throughout the world, revealing problems and faultlines in public health systems, infrastructures, and politics at every turn. (Even if COVID-19 was somehow and for whatever reason let loose upon the world by a lab in China, as some—again, especially in the USA—have alleged, it would nonetheless still be Anthropogenic.) Thus the pandemic must be seen for what it is: a plague of modernity on an increasingly defiant Earth. Akin with climate change and all the rest, COVID-19 and the #Coronachaos it unleashed are manifestations of human activity in what is now called the *Anthropocene*, the geological epoch in which humans have become full-scale planet-shapers and hijacked the climate, perhaps—some contemplate—even gaining the capacity to eclipse Nature itself. Calling COVID-19 "novel" signals how we

deceived ourselves and allowed ourselves to look away. It is Anthropogenic on the front end and Anthropogenic on the back end. (By the way, I think Trinidad and Tobago did much better than the United States of America societally in rising to the occasion of dealing with the pandemic.)

The point I am making here is that climate change is but one manifestation, one dimension, one symptom of the dominant global cultural system we call capitalism and that dealing with the impacts of climate change writ-large—including and especially the challenges of *climate justice*—cannot just be dealt with through technical-scientific-logistical-infrastructural-engineering fixes, even though we desperately need all of that too. The system that generated the set of industrial changes and energy-system transformations producing climate change and all the rest is good at freedom for elites, has a hard time doing equality, and can hardly even begin thinking about justice. Moreover, the law and actual praxis of litigation and conflict mediation in courts of law does not always, or necessarily deliver justice, hence only a radical cultural revolution will reset the parameters of what is possible in terms of social, economic, political, and climate justice. Indeed, if it is true that climate change is a gigantic and frightening new symptomatic manifestation of the dominant global modern-industrial system, then we must deal with that system as a many-tentacled whole, with climate change understood as but one of the beast's many tentacles. Now this may sound even more daunting than tackling climate change itself. But I want to submit otherwise here.

Firstly, we have hundreds of years of experience with industrialization and capitalism to draw upon in our critiques, responses, mobilizations, and counter-moves—indeed, an entire rich lively heritage of opposition, resistance, counter-organizing, and imagining otherwise. This history is critical because it offers the opportunity to continually reconsider what has worked and what has not in the past in relation to different changing times and circumstances, benefitting from hindsight as we reimagine and work toward a better, more sustainable and just future.

Secondly, everything is interconnected with everything else, so you do not have to be a scientist or engineer or climate expert, or a politician or policymaker for that matter, if you want to do something about the huge ball of confusion we call "climate change." Anyone and everyone can and should find their way into and take part in the sort of cultural revolution we need by organizing cooperatives of all kinds, changing how we treat each other and raise our kids, holding our leaders and those in power accountable and not tolerating their craven shenanigans and foolishness, and so on and so forth, transforming ways of life both big and small, whether environment-related or not. All forms of organizing matter and make a difference since everything is interconnected. We need innovation and creativity in every direction at every level. Small changes add up and can become bigger transformative changes. Some examples I think of in Trinidad and Tobago include the Fondes Amandes Forest Restoration Project, Wa Samaki Permaculture Institute, IAMovement, the woman-led Manzanilla plastic recycling project, and Fishermen and Friends of the Sea, to name just a few environmentally oriented efforts. But I also think of educational reform and the tireless unsung work of teachers, the Silver

Lining Foundation's anti-bullying campaign, feminist pedagogy and organizing for gender justice by the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies-St. Augustine, CAISO's inspiring work for sex and gender justice, prisoner recuperation programs, and so on, and so on. We all must figure out what we can do where we're situated with the resources and circumstances we're each working with. A transformative culture of sustainability and right livelihoods means sustainability in terms of everyday life and in relation to what each of us can do in order to contribute to the greater cause.

In other words, climate justice is gender justice is economic justice is racial justice is migrant justice is disability justice is health justice is community justice and so forth. Given that it is the same underlying dominant global capitalist system that produces all the various forms of inequality and injustice, as well as global warming, climate change and all the rest, we face in the contemporary world, you are actually doing something for climate justice when you work for some other kind of justice within the interconnected matrix of everything. For me, this is a hopeful message even though I am very frightened by and mad as hell about what we're dealing with at large. I always remind myself and teach my students that cynicism, pessimism, and hopelessness—while an understandable and reasonable response to the overall situation—essentially capitulates to the worst of our possible futures and is exactly what the corporate globalitarist oligarchy wants us to think and feel. It contributes to the political construction of hopelessness that helps reproduce the status quo.

Yet even though the present is chaotic and the future murky, we cannot afford to lose hope. We have made some gains, such as solving the Ozone hole problem in the 1980s. More and more young people are joining the movement for climate justice. Moreover, humans have always excelled at creatively solving problems and evolution has been remaking us all along through the transition to bipedalism, the advent of tools and hence technology, the invention of agriculture, and development of the state. Yet we stumbled unknowingly into all of these previous radical transformations in ways of being human. This time around we know what is going on and have history to educate ourselves. The big question is whether we use our knowledge and capacities to play a new trick on evolution by imagineering a sustainable and just future more in balance with the rest of the planet, as well as ourselves. We're all part of the necessary cultural revolution and need all hands on deck.

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[i] McNeal, Keith E. (2024, forthcoming) Pedagogy of Death in the Era of #Coronachaos. In *Religious Responses to Pandemics and Crises: Isolation, Survival, and #CovidChaos*, ed. S. Borkataky-Varma, C. Eberhart & M. Bjelland Kartzow, pp. 170-186. New York: Routledge.

A Review of What is Climate Justice and Why Should We Care About It.

Saadiqa Khan

Abstract

In this review of *What is Climate Justice and Why Should We Care About It,* philosopher Elizabeth Cripps situates climate change as a human rights issue. Ranging from cultural rights to reproductive rights, Cripps' perspective demonstrates Homi Bhabha's belief in the significant role that art and humanities play in re-evaluating outcomes for human relations and catastrophes through that discipline's ability to uncover enunciative spaces and opportunities for agency that traditional perspectives elide.

Keywords: **climate justice; human rights; Homi Bhabha; Elizabeth Cripps**

Philosopher Elizabeth Cripps attempts to make the discussion about climate change and climate justice accessible for readers who are not of scientific inclination. Her interpretation of the climate change narrative is not only a construct of geography, economics, and corporate greed, but also a narrative whose roots are embedded within human rights, cultural rights, imperialism, gender, disability and sex discrimination as well as reproductive rights. In other words, climate change and climate justice are human rights matters that work alongside the latter's legal parameters but also seeks to transcend them. Indeed, this multi-faceted approach resides within Homi Bhahba's framework of discussing human rights that sees the aspirational and interpretative powers of the arts and humanities as a means of enhancing traditional perspectives on human relations and human disasters as well as their outcomes.

Homi Bhabha is well known for his cultural interventions to postcolonial theory and has recently focused his attention on the issues of human rights matters. He firmly believes that the arts and humanities can provide a unique interpretation to such issues that has relevant, productive outcomes for all parties involved, namely, the oppressor and the oppressed. Traditionally, human rights are explored through historical, legal and political contexts. Yet the human experience of human rights issues, while legitimately used to elucidate concomitant disenfranchisement, violation, and trauma can benefit from an enlarged scope. For Bhabha, the emotional experiences in human rights issues have the performative potential to transform the way in which such narratives are interpreted, mitigated, and handled for more productive outcomes of the societies involved:

> Important as the act of testimony surely is, it is the aspirational and interpretational power of the arts and humanities that have the creative potential to transform human relations and human disasters.[i]

These creative capacities provide the link between the emotional continuum of human rights matters (the struggle, survival) and what he terms the aspirational goals for human rights: the desire to provide human progress and sustainable development and equality irrespective of race, gender, and economic status. Embedded within these goals is the human experience of suffering and survival which inspires not only political resistance but also the desire to represent and reconcile the narratives of the invisible and disenfranchised. The result of such efforts constitutes "culture of community and citizenship based on an ethic of public virtue that goes beyond legal status and standing."[ii] Ultimately, Bhabha claims that these interpretations of human experience, the language, the images, the symbols, the discourse, are not flights of imagination but are deeply grounded in the grim realities. They are not only representations of human resilience and free will, but also acts of connection and empathy of those so disenfranchised. They are acts of "empathetic intercession", giving voice to those devoid of agency, power, and privilege. These acts of interpretation also introduce deconstructive readings of laws, customs, and regulations, thereby carving out a performative space in which the victims and oppressed can be heard.[iii] The advantage of examining human rights issues with this interpretative approach is that it reifies those legal and political goals embedded within human rights matters to make them accessible to everyone, thereby enhancing communal and citizenship bonds in ways that were formerly impossible.

For Cripps, this emotional connection is at the heart of her discussion. In an introduction inundated with eyewitness accounts of the effects of climate change, Cripps remarks:

> I'm not trying to make you feel guilty. Your guilt won't help, anymore than mine will. But I want you to *feel something* [my italics]. Because acknowledging the bleak reality of climate justice is the first step towards recognizing our urgent responsibility to challenge it: to strive instead for justice.[iv]

This is immediately followed by her confident declaration that climate justice is a human rights issue as she connects the aspirational goals of human rights (using theorists such as Mill, Shue, Nussbaum and Sen) as only being possible through respectful connections with all aspects of the environment and careful management of climate change. This intertwining of the human progress and decent life in tandem with and not at the expense of the environment hits home in her initial discussions on climate change. In addition to the morbid statistics, Cripps elucidates those aspects of the human experience that are often elided, such as the psychological degradation of victims (especially those of children), field experts and relief workers involved in climate disasters. The countless examples of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, strained social relationships, depression, anxiety and concomitant substance abuse are just the tip of the iceberg in these situations. This revelation takes climate change beyond the photo-op moments created by mainstream media to whip up public sympathy for such causes. Cripps' foregrounding of the mental health impact of climate change is significant given that many relief policies and programmes function on the assumption that the recipients are psychologically functional to participate fully in their initiatives. The reality is often the opposite, particularly for those demographics who, prior to the disaster, were already vulnerable and suffered from socially induced stresses. To Bhabha's argument about the role of the humanities in representing the human experience of human rights issues, Cripps' deep dive into the psychological battles being fought alongside climate change battles presents a promising beginning for forging the necessary empathetic connections constituent in climate justice struggles; in addition, it presents an opportunity to rethink action plans for climate change resiliency.

In addition, Cripps' inclusion of eyewitness and field experts' mental health issues signal another empathetic connection within climate justice as human rights. Whether through direct or vicarious methods, the strong and passionate emotions from these quarters as well as their

effects are interpretative responses that demand recognition and legitimacy. They are part of a larger framework of her new "observer ethics" that allocates peculiar responsibilities that transcend passive witnessing to one of awareness, recognition, and phased engagement with climate change and its injustices. Cripps argues that to deny climate change is to deny that it violates human rights and strips people of the ability to enjoy a decent life.[v5] In other words, following the logic of this observer ethics, it is through our inaction and ignorance of climate injustices that we become complicit in violating not only human life, the right to a decent life but also those in the future generations. Altering our observer ethics from disavowal to recognition is a significant step in redressing current and imminent disenfranchisement of those affected by climate disasters.

Part of this recognition involves coming to terms with climate injustices as cultural violations, especially with first peoples. Cripps argues that environmental changes and policies connected to climate disasters disrupts the relationship between first peoples and their natural habitats. The disruption is both physical and ontological; their spiritual and religious frameworks are necessarily unmade through coerced migration or removal from their lands and religious sites. This breaks their "collective continuance", that is, the esoteric knowledge accrued for adaptation and survival within a particular natural space.[vi] This spiritual break is tantamount to the cultural violation of the particular group/s.

Cripps is not satisfied with highlighting the immediate outcomes of climate injustices but also examines the historical factors to help explain the current power dynamics in climate change politics. Using examples from the US and the South Pacific, she argues that resource rich territories were exploited at considerable ecological expense, the effects of which are only felt in the present time. Although historically accurate, Cripps' argument would have benefitted

from a discussion on the underlying complexities attendant to such matters, with special reference being made to the punitive neocolonial policies that kept such territories in an economic chokehold as well as the internal complicity of certain political forces and actors.

On the other hand, her accounts of environmental racism are well grounded when it comes to the fate of African Americans in the Southern USA. The traumatic experiences of these populations during recent climate disasters are arguably the pernicious legacies of Jim Crowism still at work within American administrative policies. Whether it is the urban planning policies or housing policies in such states that place African Americans in high-risk habitats or within unsafe and hostile housing spaces, Cripps reveals the connection between institutionalised racism and the fate of certain racial demographics within the US.

In addition to the institutionalised racism, Cripps reveals climate injustice as gender discrimination constituted by a rampant psychological ambivalence housed within various political and social networks. On the one hand, Cripps observes, it is women, especially indigenous women, who have risen to assume leadership roles in these climate wars even as they are arguably its greatest victims. She gives numerous examples of women in Uganda and Mali who have successfully managed to make that transition.[vii] Yet while there is this growing recognition of such contributions, there is also a systemic disavowal of this change because too few women are situated within organizations and networks that can make the necessary decisions and enact the much-needed policies. Thus, Cripps argues, the warrior tag traps these women by reassigning climate change responsibilities onto their already burdened shoulders while fully cognisant of the barriers women face to achieve their climate goals.

This ambivalence occurs in other ways. While there is recognition of women's growing role as climate change warriors, the legitimacy apparatus lags behind in their own cultural and sociocentric codes and systems. Many cultural value systems still inhibit or proscribe female access to power, resources, and relevant skills needed to facilitate their adaptation to climate change in the short and long term. For example, Cripps notes how women's chances of survival in climate disasters are compromised due to restrictive dress codes that could drown them in floods, or if even they do manage to escape, become susceptible to sexual abuse and violence due to failure of knowledge about self-defense. Such interpretations allow for an understanding that climate injustices are not gender neutral or affect all women in the same way; if anything, the examples reflect how certain patriarchal cultural systems cripple women's current and future chances for climate change adaptation, and by extension, their society's overall future. It is not without irony that Cripps realises that in order to provide this demographic with the performative space and agency it needs, it has to be filtered through the privileged white female Western intellectual space, as in this case, the publishing domain, a move which renders it susceptible to criticisms of inadequate representation and new power hegemonies for women of colour.

This vexing issue allows Cripps to introduce Kimberle Crenshaw's interpretative framework of intersectional injustice and its significance for future climate justice policies. Intersectionality allows others to see how someone's political and social identities, even their disabilities, actively disenfranchise or alternatively entrench their privilege.[viii] Cripps demonstrates examples of such injustices with climate disaster casualties whose sexual orientation and HIV status doubly victimised them: first by the disaster and secondly, by the relief centres such as churches that view such identities as taboo and for which the victims did not have guarantees for personal safety. Such insights are crucial for the constitution of legal

and policy frameworks on climate change, but which are often overlooked altogether. It also ironically reveals how in the height of disaster, the very instruments for relief can become those of oppression, injustice, and disenfranchisement. This information was only possible through interviews provided by such victims and who were provided an enunciative space through which their realities could be recognised and legitimised. It also signals the impetus the recognise as our social dynamics have transformed, relief ethics embedded within rescue efforts must also follow suit. To that end, the interpretative framework of intersectionality brings a much-needed interrogation of such initiatives with the added imperative to probe other related systems and initiatives for similar oversights and loopholes and the recognition to create more socially dynamic policies for the future.

After widening the scope of climate change as a human rights matter, it is instructive that Cripps makes an attempt to explore the alternatives for the way forward. As she analyses the popular climate justice options of mitigation and compensation, she also introduces to the reader some key issues that must be considered for any future policies on climate sustainability and resilience.

The first such issue entails the worrisome narrative of human population control. For Cripps, draconian policies are not the answer. Rather, the solutions reside in popular modern initiatives of contraception, sex education, education of women and family planning options without identifying the problematics of their implementation in conservative societies. Cripps glosses over the cultural resilience that view such "solutions" as a dismantling of traditional gender roles and their commensurate power relations. Without providing any further alternatives, she then proceeds to make the connection that current policies geared towards overpopulation are

not just climate injustice but also reproductive injustice. A brief foray into restrictive population policies and other cases of forced sterilization among the poorer, non-white demographic in the US and Korea successfully engenders the reader's sympathy and outrage; a sleight of hand that allows Cripps to leave this matter of population control unresolved.

A similar problematic approach arises in her discussion of the second issue, that is, allocation of responsibility for the cost of climate change. For Cripps, that lies at the feet of the longstanding corporate perpetrators of climate change, but she remains silent on the specificities of compliance. This fiscal duty should also be passed on to their beneficiaries. The only condition she identifies is that the current users of fossil fuels for survival purposes should be exempt from such responsibility.

The financial obligations that Cripps arrogates to these parties also extend to other philanthropic efforts. Cripps believes that it is integral that the global north and south engage in "collaborative research", where the former assumes the research costs for climate friendly solutions of developing nations. Such altruism is not realistically possible and once more, Cripps fails to propose political strategies and network strategies that might make such efforts a reality.

Notwithstanding those ideals, Cripps makes another appeal for the application of intersectionality to climate justice solutions to elucidate the invisible vulnerabilities of climate disasters to create realistic policies for climate change sustainability and resilience. She ties this with the imperative of deliberate, multi-tiered engagement that connects citizens, experts,

and policy makers in relevant climate justice conversations. Intersectionality allows and reassigns legitimacy to those demographics who have remained invisible and under-represented for too long in the climate change discussions. In the process, what initially began as a scientific discussion has widened in scope to become a critical social justice initiative. The details of such collaborative engagement remain vague but more importantly, ignore the fact that the social and political structures that make these possible exist in different ways, if at all in different societies. These conversations can only occur within Western spaces which Cripps assumes others can access easily and cheaply.

Overall, even though Cripps' climate justice solutions are largely aspirational, her approach to this matter as a human rights conversation deserves consideration. This perspective creates different and more appropriate ethical standards and benchmarks for climate disasters and policy/decision making, whether it is the reassigning legitimacy and agency for the vulnerable demographics, revising the observer ethics for witnesses and field workers, or deoconstructing power dynamics to reveal the ambivalence and disenfranchisement faced by those who are trying to improve the situation. In that regard, Bhabha's bold claims for the relevance of humanistic perspectives are demonstrated and are justified. For Cripps, making an intervention in climate change requires a shift in perspective and approach that not only interrogates our current actions but one that is aimed at creating more socially dynamic initiatives to this ongoing global conversation.

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[ii] Homi K. Bhabha. "On Writing and Rights".
[iii] Homi K. Bhabha. "On Writing and Rights".
[iv] Elizabeth Cripps, What Climate Justice Means and Why Should We Care (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), Introduction, Kindle.
[v] Elizabeth Cripps, What Climate Justice Means and Why Should We Care (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), Chapter 1, Kindle.
[vi] Elizabeth Cripps, What Climate Justice Means and Why Should We Care (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), Chapter 2, Kindle.
[vii] Elizabeth Cripps, What Climate Justice Means and Why Should We Care (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), Chapter 2, Kindle.
[viii] viii. Elizabeth Cripps, What Climate Justice Means and Why Should We Care (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), Chapter 2, Kindle.