‘1.5°C to stay alive’: climate change, imperialism and justice for the Caribbean

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ABSTRACT
Treating the threat of climate change in the Caribbean as a case study instructive for responses globally, this article examines the social and political relations of climate change. It argues for an analysis taking into account the ways in which the histories of imperialism and colonialism have shaped contemporary global ‘development’ pathways. The article charts how Caribbean vulnerability to temperature rises of more than 1.5°C of warming comprise an existential threat structured by contemporary social relations that are imperialist in character. Hope can be taken from a politics of climate justice which acknowledges the climate debts owed to the region.

Introduction

‘This very expensive GLOBAL WARMING bullshit has got to stop. Our planet is freezing, record low temps, and our GW scientists are stuck in ice.’
Donald J. Trump, 45th President of the United States of America

‘climate change represents an urgent and potentially irreversible threat to [Caribbean] societies’,
Dr. Omar Figueroa, Belize’s Minister of State with responsibility for Environment, Sustainable Development, Protected Areas and Climate Change

Dominant framings of climate change tend to reduce it to a technical problem to be solved by better science, engineering or economics. Examples of this reductionism can be taken from discussions about the fate of the Caribbean, where roughly half of the world’s 41 Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are located. Conditions in the Caribbean are varied, yet the research literature documents the common threats: rising sea levels, which are eroding coast lines particularly susceptible to inundation due to the prevalence of coastal development; climate variability, entailing prolonged droughts and unseasonal rain, as well as more frequent and severe tropical storms; coral bleaching and ocean acidification due to warming oceans, as well as negative impacts on ocean life forms; and new vectors of disease. SIDS are already experiencing more intense tropical storms, longer and harsher droughts, and more frequent floods, as the planet warms. Indeed, according to the latest forecasts, countries in the tropics are set to endure ‘unprecedented climates’, or the ‘catastrophic’ impacts of
climate change, by 2020. The impacts of these changes on the health and wellbeing of Caribbean populations are profound. It is unsurprising, then, that commentators in the Caribbean characterise climate change in terms of an existential threat, as noted in the epigraph above. It is also unsurprising that SIDS have been at the forefront of demanding more ambitious action on climate change for over 25 years.

Central to the analysis offered here, and a point obscured by overly technical framings of climate change, is that vulnerability to these impacts within the region is not reducible to location or the globally uneven distribution of the maladies of climate change. Rather, we can only understand these existential threats by recognising that some Caribbean states are among the most indebted globally, an indebtedness that is itself traceable to relations of colonialism and imperialism. To take one example, the reliance of many Caribbean economies on sectors that are threatened by climate change, notably, tourism, agriculture and fishing, is not merely a feature of geography, but a condition with historical antecedents inseparable from unequal contemporary social relations. The restructuring of many Caribbean economies around these sectors, and in favour of neoliberal development models, occurred under duress in light of a debt crisis that was itself somewhat precipitated by countries’ insertion into a vastly unequal global system of relations post-independence.

In a perverse paradox, it should also be acknowledged that wealth expropriated from the Caribbean during the period of early colonialism was expended on processes of industrialisation, which has in turn contributed significantly to the climate change-inducing emissions that now threaten Caribbean societies. While there has been considerable discussion of North–South relations in global climate change governance, mentions of imperialism in mainstream academic and practitioner discussions of climate change in the Caribbean are scant, being more frequently voiced by activist publics. These are imperialist in the sense that unequal global power relations allow ‘carbon-neutral’ consumption in the North to continue, at the expense of high social and ecological costs in the South.

India’s chief economic advisor Arvind Subramanian made reference to imperialism after the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) talks in Paris. This was widely reported, but his reference to the concept was not as critical it might have been. Talk of “carbon imperialism” … on the part of advanced nations [that] could spell disaster for India and other developing countries’ was based on the fact that efforts to curb emissions were perceived as threatening India’s economic growth. Subramanian was partly seeking to protect India’s continued consumption of fossil fuels, which are comparatively low on a per capita basis. The reference to carbon imperialism highlighted the fact that India’s emissions lag some way behind the historical emissions of most global North countries, a point that raises further questions about the unevenly distributed responsibilities of climate change. Part of how climate change politics operates is via the representation of the particular interests of a subsection of the global elite as being universally applicable to all human societies. The idea of a single average temperature target beyond which warming is ‘dangerous’ is an example of this kind of technocratic universalism. However, the role of targets-based diplomacy, such as that of the UNFCCC, in centring Western development norms that favour the interests of imperial powers at the expense of actors in the Caribbean is under-examined. Centring the particular interests of Caribbean peoples, therefore, is key to revealing these imperialist characteristics.
There have been extensive attempts to identify the form contemporary imperialism takes. While there is clearly agreement that imperialism has shifted character in the current era, and that the global order is strongly underpinned by US military might, and the interests of financial elites, there is no consensus about either the form or consequences of that shift. Contemporary imperialism is, according to Foster, a form of financialised monopoly capitalism underpinned by ‘the old imperial powers of the capitalist core’, notably, the US in a triad with Western Europe and Japan, via giant monopolistic firms. Another significant feature of contemporary imperial relations worth mentioning here is the rise of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). Described by Prashad as pursuing a model of ‘neo-liberalism with Southern characteristics’, BRICS have collaborated so as to offer a challenge the more established imperial powers. This challenge has often not been conducted with the interests of other global South nations in mind. The focus of this article, however, is not to address these persistent debates directly, but rather to employ the heuristic of imperialism to analyse the implications of responses to climate change for the Caribbean. The argument being made is that the social relations of climate change are structured by the aforementioned legacies of colonialism and imperialism, and contemporary imperial formations.

We continue, then, by considering the ontological characteristics of climate change, and the future of Caribbean societies, embedded within calls for no greater warming than ‘1.5°C to stay alive’. Next, the article considers what is happening in practice via the UNFCCC. It suggests that the failure of the governance of climate change can partly be attributed to the imperialist tenor of discussions. The structuring of climate finance in such a way as to prescribe, and prescribe, particular responses for those Caribbean countries in need of resources is also examined. Finally, the prospect of reparations in order to help facilitate anti-imperialist responses to climate change is discussed. We begin, then, with a summary of climate change impacts in the Caribbean, which reveals the significance of the call for ‘1.5°C to stay alive’.

**Existential imperialism: what hopes for ‘1.5°C to stay alive’?**

‘anything above 1.5 will be catastrophic’, James Fletcher, chairman of the CARICOM Task Force of Sustainable Development and the Regional Coordinating Committee on Climate Change

The threats heralded by climate change led Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Heads of State to call for the stabilisation of greenhouse gases (GHGs) at a level that would limit overall average global warming to no more than 1.5°C. Hence, the slogan 1.5 °C to Stay Alive! was adopted by the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) and used by Caribbean SIDS, and others, in their attempts to define an ‘acceptable’ limit to the warming induced by climate change. A world warmed by no more than 1.5°C, to be clear, is one in which existing Caribbean societies have a future.

The apparently abstract target of 1.5°C feeds into dominant discussions of climate change as having a potentially ‘dangerous’ limit. It reflects the idea that there is a ‘tipping point’ beyond which climate change becomes dangerously ‘unmanageable’ because of natural feedback loops. The governance counterpart of this claim, emerging from the ‘co-production’ of climate science and policy, is the idea that quantitative policy targets be set, at the international scale, to force national governments to keep climate change at a ‘manageable’ level. The idea of a ‘manageable level’ of climate change relates to the prominent logics of ‘resilience’ that are emerging as key features of the neoliberalism inherent to developmentalist responses to environmental crises. Work by Grove, Pugh, Joseph and others has
highlighted the role of resilience in shaping attempts to manage and respond to disasters and catastrophe. The deployment of these managerialist approaches engenders new configurations of relationships between different scales of governmental, educational and financial institutions, and the people subject to the operation of what is seen by some to be a new form of biopower.

A tension inherent in these discussions is that ostensibly abstract metrics are, prima facie, held to be authoritative because they are based on ‘objective’ ‘universal’ science and therefore beyond dispute. In practice, however, embedded within different targets are normative appeals to particular presents and futures. A world warmed by 2°C entails substantially different implications for Caribbean societies than one warmed by 1.5°C. Relatedly, in contrast to how climate change policy is often presented, there is no universal human subject. Nor is there one agreed climatic state around which problem-solving activities can be consensually organised globally. This is a major limitation of the problem-solving framing of climate change.

Disconcertingly, for advocates of the 1.5°C target, the ‘dangerous limit’ of 2°C was agreed at the UNFCCC COP in Paris, with a vague commitment to ‘pursue efforts’ to limit warming to under 1.5°C. However, the likelihood of meeting the voluntary commitment to 1.5°C recedes just as emissions continue to cascade out of the chimneys and exhausts of industrial plants, refineries and vehicles. The emissions reductions that COP member countries have voluntarily agreed to, called their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), have been predicted to lead to warming of 2.7–3.7°C. Some calculations even predict catastrophic rises of 4–7°C by 2100. What is more, at the behest of the dominant actors in the negotiations, the UNFCCC currently lacks a mechanism to hold countries to these ‘commitments’, which are only voluntary. This is partly why we are witnessing the ongoing expansion of forms of carbon capitalism. In light of this, the credibility of the UNFCCC process for securing liveable Caribbean futures, as well as the claims that there can be a global policy consensus over an all-encompassing ‘safe’ limit to warming, are substantially undermined. The implications of warming in line with these current trajectories are unthinkable from the perspective of contemporary Caribbean societies, which are already experiencing significant climatic changes. Apocalyptic futures for the Caribbean can thus be inferred from increasingly catastrophic presents.

To understand this situation, we must pay attention to the very particular concerns of the imperial elites whose specific interests are recast as universal via the unfolding of uneven power relations in climate change negotiations. As Catney and Doyle have commented, the framing of ‘sustainability’ in the global North is concerned with the future conditions of Northern citizens, often at the expense of the present existence of people in the global South. In this way, environmental imperialism demands that certain ‘vulnerable’ people are ‘resilient’ in the face of unfolding catastrophes. People’s capacity to survive can thus be recast as a commodity, turning their very survival into something that can be financialised and subsequently traded upon by those agencies who claim the authority of having resources to help alleviate their vulnerability. Climatic changes that might otherwise be deemed as threats to existing social arrangements are instead included as evidence that these arrangements must be further extended.

The call for 1.5°C is optimistic in sociological terms, however. Structural constraints on social action have been demonstrated to undermine efforts to ameliorate climate change where these efforts require departure from highly resource-intensive models of capitalist
development. This is one of the limitations of focussing on the technicalities of temperature targets, rather than the social relations which structure and pattern the emissions causing them. Ostensible commitment to these increasingly unrealistic temperature targets, however, enables elites to claim that they are responding to the climate crisis. Yet, in acknowledgement of the unlikelihood of meeting the 1.5°C target, policy-makers in the Caribbean have signalled the necessity of resources to enable them to ‘meet their adaptation needs’. The conditional availability and form of these resources is considered further later in the article. In seeking to explain how and why the international climate change governance regime has failed to secure policies and practices that would safeguard Caribbean societies, we must examine the practices of the UNFCCC in more depth. In particular, we need to attend to how these systems are characterised by imperialist dynamics akin to those that formed the same Caribbean societies currently under threat.

**Spies, bullies and bribes: imperialism and the UNFCCC**

‘The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make US manufacturing non-competitive.’ Donald J. Trump, 45th President of the United States of America The UNFCCC COP climate summits are the international policy forum for climate change. These have historically been fractious events, with the US and China only recently, and reluctantly, agreeing to non-binding targets for cuts in carbon emissions. As with most global governance institutions of the post-Second World War era, the UNFCCC is heavily structured to suit the interests of actors in the global North. Subverting the ostensibly inclusive process of the UNFCCC, the COPs have a history of secret side-deals, such as the closed, backroom negotiations that took place between the US and BRICS in Copenhagen in 2009 at the COP15. Those particular talks resulted in a ‘deal’ that was rejected by a number of global Southern states, including Bolivia, Venezuela, Sudan and Tuvalu. Aside from the exclusionary method of authoring the text, opposition to it stemmed from the grounds that the ‘agreement’ did not offer the necessary support for countries under threat; would further enshrine market-mechanisms in climate policy; and failed to secure targets on emissions reductions that would limit temperature rises to 1.5°C. Presidents Evo Morales and Hugo Chavez, of Bolivia and Venezuela, respectively, were so dissatisfied with the content of the market-oriented Copenhagen Accord that they organised an alternative, social movement-facing, summit in Cochabamba.

Thanks to diplomatic cables obtained by the organisation Wikileaks, and published by the UK’s Guardian newspaper, we are able to explore in more depth how the interests of particular powerful countries were leveraged at the high profile COP15 in Copenhagen. The COP15 was promoted at the time as being ‘the last chance to save the climate’. The cables cover the period immediately following the until February 2010. They document the use of bribery and blackmail by the US and its allies to force countries to agree to their voluntarist, free-market approach to climate governance. In order to secure the agreement of nations dissenting from the ‘Copenhagen Accord’, the US negotiators used financial aid as a bribe. In one cable, EU negotiator Connie Hedegaard, speaking to US state representatives, is reported to have ‘suggested that the AOSIS (Alliance of Small Island States) countries “could be our best allies” given their need for financing.’ Other cables detail a meeting in Addis Ababa in 2010 between Ethiopian prime minister, Meles Zenawi, leader of the African Union’s climate change negotiations, and the US undersecretary of state Maria Otero. Zenawi is told
that Ethiopia must sign the Copenhagen Accord or else any other diplomatic discussion, and the prospect of further financial aid, would be halted. Elsewhere, bullying tactics were in evidence in a cable recording a meeting between Hedegaard and US deputy national security adviser, Michael Froman. The pair discussed the need to ‘neutralise, co-opt or marginalise unhelpful countries including Venezuela and Bolivia’. Similarly, Ecuador and Bolivia were punished for their dissent from the Copenhagen Accord by having their US development aid cut. The use of aid in this way to manipulate vulnerable nations is particularly problematic given that these countries are not historically responsible for climate change. In fact, the historical responsibility of richer nations, such as the US, has been directly acknowledged alongside a ruling out of climate reparations to atone for climate debt. The US’s chief negotiator Todd Stern commented:

> We absolutely recognize our historic role in putting emissions in the atmosphere up there that are there now … but the sense of guilt or culpability or reparations, I just categorically reject that.

Quite on what grounds such guilt can be discounted alongside an acknowledgement of historical responsibility is unclear, other than by the imperialist logic that ‘might is right’. In addition to bribery and bullying was spying. The CIA, via the US State Department, sent a series of ‘intelligence gathering directives’ to its diplomats to gather intelligence on UN staff and senior diplomats. The directive instructed them to find evidence of UN environmental treaty circumvention, the implication being that this evidence could be used to undermine countries’ negotiating positions on the grounds of their inconsistency. A separate set of documents leaked in 2014 by whistle-blower Edward Snowden confirmed that the US was directly spying on fellow countries at the COP15. If we further examine the conditionality attached to the meagre funding that has been begrudgingly promised to vulnerable countries, we can better understand how the interests of imperial elites are prioritised in the climate regime at the expense of Caribbean societies.

**S/he who pays the piper: imperialism via climate finance**

‘It doesn’t make sense just continuing to give us money if you will continue to emit greenhouse gasses at the level at which you’ve been emitting … There is a point to which the money can’t help, so if you’re going to have a climate that by the end of the century would have warmed up by 4 degrees Celsius, I don’t know that there is any amount of money that you can give to a country like the Maldives … or maybe some other island in the Bahamas, because these islands will disappear’. James Fletcher, chairman of the CARICOM Task Force of Sustainable Development and the Regional Coordinating Committee on Climate Change

Foster suggests that financialisation is integral to contemporary forms of imperialism. The accounts of bribery and conditionality identified in the preceding section take on greater significance in light of this. If considered reductively, in economic terms only, climate change has been projected to cost the Caribbean economy at least US$22 billion annually by 2050, around 10% of the current total annual GDP. A lack of capital in the region, and the dominance of neoliberal ideology, means that zero-sum models of sustainability and development come to dominate, in which resources for responding to climate change are in competition with other state spending. Under prevailing economic conditions, therefore, it is easy to see why Caribbean Heads of State must seek funding to ‘help the region reduce fossil fuel dependence and exposure to price variability and mitigate climate change’.
The susceptibility of Caribbean countries to forms of bribery is directly related to the unstable financial position occupied by those states who owe substantial debts. Jamaica has a debt-to-GDP ratio of 130%, for instance. For these countries, the costs of climate change will be impossible to bear, due to the uneven global distribution of wealth and the aforementioned zero-sum models of sustainable development. Some officials have thus called for ‘debt swaps’ to finance responses to climate change. Col. Oral Khan, chief technical director in the Jamaican Ministry of Water, Land, Environment and Climate Change, remarked that:

We need to be able to put more funds into adaptation, but because we have to spend so much money on debt repayment, then the funds left for development and for adaptation are curtailed.62

The continuities between forms of highly conditional development financing and imperialist and colonial relations are well-documented elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, then, initial scholarly evaluations of the ‘functioning’ of the emerging climate finance sector identify the use of climate finance deals to suit the needs of donor countries and corporations, and to reinforce hegemonic development models. Bracking, for instance, has documented the ways in which the design of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) has institutionalised the interests of powerful countries, corporations and banks to deepen the neoliberal governance of environmental harms. Others, meanwhile, have warned of the dangers associated with the tendency towards the financialisation of climate change so as to reconstitute harms as potential opportunities for capital. According to Grove, for example, disaster insurance is a mechanism used to financialise the risk incurred by Caribbean countries suffering higher levels of debt as they try and meet requirements of dealing with more intense storms.

In dominant models of climate financing, climate change is not understood as undermining the legitimacy of the models of social organisation that have precipitated the climate crisis. Rather, financing is utilised as a chance to further extend that form of organisation via the pursuit of the ‘business opportunities’ and potential investment returns associated with responses. Hence, actors involved in these processes in the Caribbean have remarked that:

while the threat posed by climate change – through droughts, hurricanes, heat waves and other severe weather events – seem overwhelming, it presents unique opportunities for innovation and job creation.

This kind of optimistic response to unfolding catastrophes reflects the aforementioned role of resilience as a trope accompanying attempts to entrench new forms of biopower in response to crises. It is crucial to acknowledge that these approaches do not necessarily proceed straightforwardly, however; a point that helps develop a more nuanced understanding of how the imperialism of climate change functions in practice. An emerging body of ethnographic work has shed light on the subtle ways in which people in the Caribbean are actually negotiating the emergence of resilience and catastrophe as tropes integral to the promotion of particular forms of imperialist development. There is a sensitivity among some civil servants, for instance, to the ‘tensions emerging from legacies of independence that give rise to particularly weak national development control’. Another example shows how ‘black resistance to colonial and post-colonial domination’ helps to produce ‘collective anxieties’ among disaster management workers over forms of ‘life that refuses to be objectified through the techniques and rationalities of community-based resilience’. Nevertheless, as is identified by these authors, these processes are patterned by the globally uneven
distribution of resources and power. In this sense, resistance to the processes taking place is by no means straightforward.

Thus, the inequalities reproduced via climate finance deals, and the required adherence to socio-political models favoured by elites, need to be considered in relation to the tendencies of global trade and development established after the formal end of colonialism. These were continuations of the unequal relations established under imperialism and colonialism. To be clear, a specific consequence of the legacies of imperialism and colonialism, and contemporary forms of neoliberal capitalism, is the globally unequal distribution of wealth that leaves many Caribbean countries without the resources necessary to adequately respond to climate change. Now, the same logics of unlimited economic growth and unchecked global inequality implicated in the causes of climate change in the Caribbean are extended to the conditionality accompanying proposed ‘solutions’. Here the distribution of financial support is made contingent on potential returns for wealthy investors.

Moreover, technocratic interpretations of both climate change and possible responses to it underpin the climate finance regime. Examples include: building rainwater harvesting plants; renewable energy projects; and coastal defence barriers. These narrowly technical conceptualisations of the appropriate responses to climate change allow little scope to challenge the forms of social organisation that have contributed to the region’s vulnerability. As noted above, however, a body of critical work has connected climate finance and responses to climate change to forms of economic control. This happens via the use of mono-crop plantations as ‘carbon offsets’ which in practice displace indigenous communities, for example. These projects rely on unequal global power relations in order to brand consumption in the global North as ‘carbon-neutral’.

The notion of the UN process as representing the interests of all nations is increasingly unconvincing. The vulnerability of the established climate change agenda to the whims of climate-denialist US President Donald Trump underlines this. While other countries have been manipulated into adhering to an approach favoured by the US, President Trump recently withdrew the US from the Paris climate agreement, while simultaneously pursuing carbon-intensive industry domestically and cutting federal support for climate science and environmental protection. These developments are not a break from the imperialist tenor of climate governance via the UNFCCC to date. Instead, they are examples of the asymmetrical distributions of power within the contemporary configurations of imperialist governance regimes. The prospect of a US withdrawal from the UNFCCC climate agreements, along with the decision to tear up existing carbon reduction plans at the Federal-level, seems sure to condemn Caribbean populations to forms of ‘climate-barbarism’.

In contrast to the pessimistic picture portrayed above, critical accounts, such as those emerging from the climate justice movement, offer an alternative model of ‘development’ in which responding to climate change is also about reorganising society in a more equitable fashion. This model undermines the idea that there are necessarily inherent tensions between development and sustainability. It is instead suggested that it is impossible to ‘solve’ climate change and its associated social problems by using the same logics that caused the problem in the first place. Central to these critiques is often the acknowledgement of both the historical legacies of imperialism and colonialism, as well as their contemporary forms. As Bond remarks:

large parts of Africa as well as low-lying islands, the Latin American and Asian mountain chains, and sites like the Bay of Bengal are already owed reparations for the massive damage done to
local climates. But Paris failed to substantively advance the cause of ‘climate debt’ payment by the North to the South. This is damage far worse than the effects that will be felt in France and other sites in the industrialized world where CO₂ emissions per person are greatest. While being a climate creditor gives African negotiators the moral high ground, unfortunately it took until 2012 (at the Doha COP18) for the UN to recognize ‘loss and damage’ (the UN’s technical term) suffered in weather-related crises.

But the voluntary nature of Copenhagen and its Green Climate Fund means there is no legal liability on the part of climate debtors in the Global North. In this context, it is important to consider more seriously the claims made for wealth redistribution via, for instance, calls for reparations, such as those being pursued formally by the Caribbean Heads of State via CARICOM. Losses suffered by Caribbean societies can be identified in terms of the expropriation of wealth and resources used to enrich colonial and imperial societies in general, such as via the establishment of welfare states, and elites in particular, fuelling rapacious industrial capitalism and its associated inequalities. 81 Reparations are called for as redress for the global inequalities resulting from this appropriation of wealth. They are also necessary to counter the effects of uneven entry into world markets, often accompanied by the punitive conditions attached to unfinished efforts at ‘decolonisation’ or ‘independence.’ Things do not bode well for CARICOM’s reparations claim, though, which the British government has so far rejected outright. Meanwhile, in ruling out the prospect of climate reparations, the US chief negotiator Todd Stern was not solely evading debts ensuing from the uneven consumption of carbon, he was also further cementing the US’s favoured model of a voluntary, market-oriented financing mechanism. However, as noted in the epigraph at the start of this section, there comes a point at which no amount of money will be enough to compensate for the existential threats facing small island nations such as those in the Caribbean.

A question to emerge from the failure of the existing climate governance regime, then, is how might pressure be applied from below in order to secure the necessary political action. Foster (citing Amin) suggests that challenging contemporary imperialism:

means fostering a more ‘audacious’ global movement from below in which the key challenge will be the dismantling of imperialism, understood as the entire basis of capitalism in our time – with the object of creating a more horizontal, egalitarian, peaceful, and sustainable social-metabolic order controlled by the associated producers. 84

It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider the ‘climate justice movement’ (CJM) in great depth, but it is a framework that is inherently more promising for securing responses to climate change that acknowledge historical responsibility and present inequalities. A useful definition of climate justice is provided in the introduction to ‘Paths Beyond Paris,’ an anthology of articles produced around the time of the COP21 talks in Paris:

Climate justice movements are diverse, but a fundamental principle lies at the heart: the recognition that the threats posed by climate change are a consequence of unequal, colonial, economic and social power relations. 86

Climate-just futures, in contrast to technocratic policy or infrastructure tweaks, imply and necessitate a radical restructuring of society and economy. A climate-just world would involve tackling forms of environmental harm, but it would also be about pursuing social justice in general. Taking our cue from the CJM, we must interrogate existing responses to climate change in terms of questions of climate debt and reparations hitherto closed down by overly technocratic representations.
Conclusion

The analysis proposed by this article is that the political and social relations of climate change in the Caribbean are significantly patterned by contemporary forms of imperialism, as well as by the historical legacies of imperialism and colonialism. Further, we cannot fully understand the shaping of distinctive ‘development’ pathways in the Caribbean without reference to these histories. Yet this is precisely what a-historical responses to climate change, such as those focusing on technical solutions, try to do. Beyond being unethical, such discussions, and the responses they entail, will fail in their own terms to ‘deal’ with the climate change problem, insofar as they mis-locate the causes of climate change in abstract-technical rather than social-relational terms. This kind of analysis has not thus far been brought to bear in scholarly considerations of climate change in the Caribbean.

An analysis was conducted of the ways in which some countries were forced to adhere to an international agreement – the Copenhagen Accord – which ran counter to their interests. This demonstrated how imperialist tendencies, in the form of uneven power relations, have worked against the interests of Caribbean peoples for a response to climate change that secures warming at a level under ‘1.5°C to stay alive’. Meanwhile, exploring how global inequalities are leveraged in order to enforce neoliberal modes of development via climate finance instruments shows that these are poised to exacerbate imperialism’s legacy of exploitation. It was also highlighted that attending to the ways in which people interact with the tropes of resilience and disaster risk management allows for a more nuanced appreciation of functioning of imperialism in practice. An alternative reading of the relationship between debt and climate change is also possible. One which acknowledges the fact that industrialised countries have benefitted significantly from the same processes that caused climate change, and that they thus owe a considerable climate debt due in the form of reparations.

To date, the climate change governance regime has stymied discussion of alternative approaches, in accordance with the interests of imperial powers. Yet moving beyond overly technocratic responses requires acknowledging the sociological implications of the legacies of empire, some of which can be conceived of in terms of the reparations owed to exploited regions. While the vulnerability of many Caribbean societies has geophysical dimensions, it is largely structured by unequal social relations which are imperialist in character. An analysis of the imperialism inherent in responses helps to delegitimise the current regime; it also helps to underline the significance of wealth redistribution in order to secure climate justice.

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Notes

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6. Trotz, “Climate Change and Development.”
7. Bishop, “Political Economy of Small States”; Bishop and Payne, “Climate Change and the Future”; Mikulewicz, “Politicising Vulnerability and Adaptation”; Rhiney, “Livelihood In/Securities, Vulnerability and Resilience”; Smith and Rhiney, “Climate (In)justice, Vulnerability and Livelihoods.”

8. Ibid.

9. CDKN Global, “Building Climate Resilience.”

10. Bishop, “Political Economy of Small States”; McAfee, Storm Signals; Williams, “Third World and Global.”

11. Williams, Capitalism and Slavery.

12. Bachram, “Climate Fraud and Carbon Colonialism”; Bassey, To Cook A Continent; Bassey, Oil Politics; Bond, Politics of Climate Justice; Foster, Ecology Against Capitalism; O’Lear, “Climate Science and Slow Violence.”

13. Bachram, “Climate Fraud and Carbon Colonialism”; Böhm and Dabhi, Upsetting the Offset; Bond, “Emissions Trading, New Enclosures”; Bumpus and Liverman, “Accumulation by Decarbonization”; Lansing, “Realising Carbon’s Value.”

14. Marszal, “Paris Climate Talks.”

15. Bachram, “Climate Fraud and Carbon Colonialism”; Bumpus and Liverman, “Accumulation by Decarbonization”; Newell and Bumpus, “Global Political Ecology.”

16. Clement, “Let Them Build Sea Walls”; Catney and Doyle, “The Welfare of Now”; Knox-Hayes and Hayes, “Technocratic Norms, Political Culture”; Swyngedouw, “Apocalypse Forever?”

17. Bäckstrand and Lövbrand, “Planting Trees to Mitigate Climate Change”; Shaw, “Choosing a Dangerous Limit.” The latter work identifies many of the problems with trying to establish a single ‘dangerous’ limit for climate change.

18. Amin, “Contemporary Imperialism”; Chomsky, Hegemony or Survival; Escobar, “Beyond the Third World”; Foster, “New Imperialism of Globalized Monopoly”; Hardt and Negri, Empire; Norfield, The City.

19. Foster, “New Imperialism of Globalized Monopoly.”

20. Prashad, “Neoliberalism with Southern Characteristics.”

21. Amandala, “Belize Most Vulnerable in Central America.”

22. Bishop and Payne, “Climate Change and the Future”; Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, “2011–2015 Caribbean Regional Resilience.”

23. Shaw, “Choosing a Dangerous Limit.”

24. Pearce, With Speed and Violence.

25. Jasanoff, “States of Knowledge.”

26. Shaw, “Choosing a Dangerous Limit.”

27. Evans and Reid, “Dangerously Exposed”; Grove, “From Emergency Management to Managing Emergence”; Grove, “Security beyond Resilience”; Joseph, “Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism”; Pugh, “Resilience, Complexity and Post-Liberalism”; Pugh, “Postcolonial Development, (Non) Sovereignty and Affect”; Pugh and Grove, “Assemblage, Transversality and Participation.”

28. Ibid.

29. O’Lear, “Climate Science and Slow Violence”; Shaw, “Choosing a Dangerous Limit”; Swyngedouw, “Non-Political Politics of Climate Change”; Wynne, “Strange Weather, Again.”

30. Chakrabarty, “Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge,” 14; Knox-Hayes and Hayes, “Technocratic Norms, Political Culture”; Catney and Doyle, “The Welfare of Now”; Swyngedouw, “Apocalypse Forever?”; Ojha et al., “Policy without Politics.”

31. UNFCCC, “Paris Agreement,” 3.

32. Bond, Politics of Climate Justice, xv; Rajamani, “The Cancun Climate Agreements,” 508; Wapner, “Conclusion,” 138.

33. Levin and Fransen, “INSIDER.”

34. Friedrich et al., “Nonlinear Climate Sensitivity.”

35. Rockström et al., “Roadmap for Rapid Decarbonization.”

36. Zuesse, “Climate Catastrophe Will Hit Tropics.”

37. Catney and Doyle, “The Welfare of Now.”
38. Grove, “Preempting the next Disaster”; Grove, “From Emergency Management to Managing Emergence”; Grove, “Biopolitics and Adaptation”; Grove, “Adaptation Machines and the Parasitic Politics.”

39. Grove, “Preempting the Next Disaster”; Joseph, “Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism.”

40. Bassey, To Cook A Continent; Bassey, Oil Politics; Grundmann and Stehr, “Climate Change”; Moore, Capitalism in the Web of Life; Urry, Climate Change and Society.

41. Institute for the Study of the Americas and Centre for Caribbean and Latin American Research & Consultancy, “Responding to Climate Change,” 3.

42. Trump, “Concept of Global Warming.” 6 November 2012.

43. Bassey, To Cook A Continent, 104.

44. Joshi, “Understanding India’s Representation”; Williams, “Third World and Global.”

45. Bassey, To Cook A Continent; Bond, Politics of Climate Justice; Hochstetler and Milkoreit, “Emerging Powers in the Climate Negotiations”; Stokes, Giang, and Selin, “Splitting the South.”

46. Bassey, To Cook A Continent; Bond, “Climate Capitalism’Won At Cancun”; Bond, “Copenhagen to Cancún to Durban”; Bond, Politics of Climate Justice; Building Bridges Collective, “Space for Movement?”; Russell, Pusey, and Sealey-Huggins, “Movements and Moments for Climate Justice,” 28.

47. Bond, Politics of Climate Justice; Russell, Pusey, and Sealey-Huggins, “Movements and Moments for Climate Justice.”

48. Bassey, To Cook A Continent; Bond, Politics of Climate Justice; Carrington, “WikiLeaks Cables Reveal.”

49. US Deputy Special Envoy for Climate Change, “US Embassy Cables: EU Raises ‘Creative Accounting.’”

50. US Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Maria Otero, “US Embassy Cables: US Urges Ethiopia.”

51. Carrington, “WikiLeaks Cables Reveal.”

52. Bond, Politics of Climate Justice.

53. Broder, “US Climate Envoy’s Good Cop.”

54. Carrington, “WikiLeaks Cables Reveal”; MacAskill and Booth, “WikiLeaks Cables.”

55. Vidal and Goldenberg, “Snowden Revelations of NSA Spying.”

56. Ramos, “Belize Urges CARICOM.”

57. Foster, “New Imperialism of Globalized Monopoly.”

58. Benjamin, “Climate Change and Caribbean.”

59. Bishop, Political Economy of Caribbean Development; Fiona, “Bishopton Villagers in Wind Turbines Protest”; Icaza, “Global Europe, Guilty!”; Meeks, Envisioning Caribbean Futures; Smith and Rhiney, “Climate (In)justice, Vulnerability and Livelihoods.”

60. Brown, “Cash for the Climate Please.”

61. Williams-Raynor, “Jamaica Eyes Debt Swap.”

62. Ibid.

63. Afionis and Stringer, “Environment as a Strategic Priority”; Escobar, Encountering Development; Harvey, The New Imperialism; Robbins, Di Muzio, and Robbins, Debt as Power; Veltmeyer and Petras, New Extractivism.

64. Bäckstrand and Lovbrand, “Planting Trees to Mitigate Climate Change”; Bracking, “Anti-Politics of Climate Finance”; Sovacool et al., “Political Economy, Poverty, and Polycentrism”; Knox-Hayes and Hayes, “Technocratic Norms, Political Culture.”

65. Bracking, “Anti-Politics of Climate Finance,” 281.

66. Fieldman, “Financialisation and Ecological Modernisation”; Tienhaara, “Varieties of Green Capitalism”; Lohmann, “Financialization, Commodification and Carbon”; Grove, “Preempting the Next Disaster.”

67. As above. See also: Grove, “From Emergency Management to Managing Emergence.”

68. Bäckstrand, “Accountability of Networked Climate Governance”; Lohmann, “Financialization, Commodification and Carbon”; McCarthy, “The Financial Crisis”; McAneny et al., “Market-Based Mechanisms.”

69. Jamaica Observer, “There is Business in Climate Change.”
70. Grove, “From Emergency Management”; Grove, “Hidden Transcripts of Resilience”; Grove, “Adaptation Machines and the Parasitic Politics.”
71. Pugh, “Postcolonial Development, (Non)Sovereignty and Affect.”
72. Grove, “Adaptation Machines and the Parasitic Politics,” 620, 622.
73. Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.
74. Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, “Special Programme for Adaptation”; Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, “Closed Projects”; Jamaica Observer, “There is Business in Climate Change.”
75. Foster, “Trump and Climate Catastrophe”; Seymour, “Heatwave in the Arctic.”
76. Foster, “Trump and Climate Catastrophe.”
77. Catney and Doyle, “The Welfare of Now.”
78. Foster, “Capitalism and Ecology”; Moore, Capitalism in the Web of Life; O’Connor, Natural Causes.
79. Bond, “Who Wins From ‘Climate Apartheid’?”
80. Narayan, “Fanon’s Decolonized Europe.”
81. Beckles and Shepherd, Caribbean Freedom; Beckles, Britain’s Black Debt; Blackburn, The American Crucible; Williams, Capitalism and Slavery.
82. Gunder Frank, “The Development of Underdevelopment”; Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.
83. One of the major stumbling blocks facing any attempt to price carbon debts for reparations is that it is impossible to quantify loss and damage and harm that the existential threat of climate change brings. See Adelman, “Climate Justice, Loss and Damage.” Others, too, will object to the fact that the negative effects of climate change were not known throughout the time industrialised powers were polluting. Reparations can be a useful symbolic and rhetorical move towards highlighting the need for wealth redistribution. There also needs to be a consideration of the limitations of such action without a more widespread reorganisation of economy and society.
84. Foster, “The New Imperialism of Globalized Monopoly-Finance Capital.”
85. Bassey, To Cook A Continent; Bond, Politics of Climate Justice; Bond, “Who Wins From ‘Climate Apartheid’?”; Mueller, “From Copenhagen to Cochabamba”; Russell, Pusey, and Sealey-Huggins, “Movements and Moments for Climate Justice.”
86. Cabello and Gilbertson, “Paths Beyond Paris.”

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