

# History and Theory of Climate Justice

Block 2. Preparatory Session 25.03.2025 | Public Panel Discussion 01.04.2025

## A SUMMARY BY BIBI QUDSIA SHUJAZADA

The sources emphasize that environmental challenges cannot be divorced from historical and ongoing structural inequalities. According to a collective of BIPOC scholars, social and environmental justice are inseparable, as demonstrated by years of “ecowarriors.” The Anthropocene is analyzed through invasion, extraction, and exploitation, exposing how “safety” is constructed for some, while others face danger. Robert W. England’s “Tales of a Stunt Drone” illustrates this dynamic. Other crises, such as the spread of malaria in the American Southeast, are deeply linked to coerced labor and the reshaping of landscapes for economic and disease-related interests, particularly the plantation system and the exploitation of enslaved Africans (Baker et al., 2020).

Disasters like Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico revealed government failures rooted in inequality, creating a trust void and acknowledging that, while shelters no longer exist, storms continue (Baker et al., 2020). The concept of “resilience” is critiqued as a neoliberal tool that overlooks historical injustices. Instead, “climate justice” is presented as a framework demanding attention to history and intersectional processes beyond climate concerns (Ranganathan & Bratman, 2021).

Using the example of Ward 7 in Washington, DC, they show how the legacies of plantation slavery and the Kenilworth dump have made life in this predominantly Black neighborhood precarious both socially and environmentally. The resulting issues, like food insecurity and lack of mobility, are tied to this history. In response, an “abolitionist and feminist ethics of care” is called upon to heal historical trauma and serve as a guide to restructure this precarious situation (Ranganathan & Bratman, 2021).

Climate justice, emerging from the environmental justice movement, inherits the epistemological framework of avoiding harm while adhering to the principles of participation, self-determination, and harm compensation (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). It critiques multinational corporations and advocates for a post-carbon, ecological debt reparations system and sovereign access to resources for at-risk communities (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). A “transformative climate justice” stance is called for, one that addresses underlying drivers of injustice, centers marginalized needs, and interrogates hegemonic power structures, including the “polluter elite.” The focus is on pluralizing knowledge, making just transitions, and deepening democracy (Newell et al., 2021).

This discourse on climate justice aligns with a broader understanding of the interconnectedness between environmental and social crises, as shown in case studies like Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico and oil extraction in Alberta. It demonstrates how environmental crises are rooted in and exacerbated by social and economic injustices. For example, colonial legacies, political centralization, and economic vulnerability influenced the exposure of Beira, Mozambique, to Cyclone Idai in 2019. Reconstruction efforts in the city faced challenges as donor priorities focused more on infrastructure than housing, misrecognizing community needs and offering shallow consultations.

This critique reveals that transformative climate justice can only be achieved by centering marginalized voices, recognizing interconnected injustices, and moving from critique to action-oriented solutions that promote equity, sustainability, and inclusive reconstruction processes.

What I have gathered from all these discussions is that there is a disconnect between the majority of environmental activists and direct involvement in politics. Many of them avoid even discussing politics. In my view, rather than solely focusing on altering people's lifestyles to make them more environmentally sustainable, it is more critical to address the political systems and regimes that are connected to these lifestyle changes. That is, instead of merely pushing for individual changes, we must focus on political structures that perpetuate unsustainable systems.

We need to recognize that without substantial shifts in political and economic systems, environmental crises cannot be solved in a sustainable, long-term way. Anti-capitalism should not be a side issue but an integral part of the environmental justice movement. Therefore, environmental activists should directly engage with political parties or even create new parties that offer solutions to combat capitalism. This direct involvement in politics could lead to structural and fundamental changes in political and economic systems, which is the only way to effectively address environmental crises.

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