

Original citation:

Sealey-Huggins, Leon. (2017) '1.5°C to stay alive': climate change, imperialism and justice for the Caribbean. *Third World Quarterly*, 38 (11). 2444-2463.

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Publisher's statement:

"This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & . *Third World Quarterly* on 08/09/2017 available online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1368013>

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'1.5oC to stay alive': Climate change, imperialism and justice for the Caribbean

Journal:	<i>Third World Quarterly</i>
Manuscript ID	CTWQ-2017-0168.R1
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper (peer reviewed)
Keywords:	climate debt, reparations, vulnerability, SIDS, development, resilience
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'1.5°C to stay alive': Climate change, imperialism and justice for the Caribbean

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 ~~which-that~~ are imperialist in character. Hope can be taken from a politics of climate justice which acknowledges the climate debts owed to the region.

Keywords: climate justice; climate debt; reparations; vulnerability; SIDS; development

'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 America¹

'...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 Change²

Introduction

Dominant framings of climate change tend to reduce it to a technical problem to be solved by better science, engineering or economics.³ 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 this literature documents the common threats of: 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.⁴ 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 2020.⁵ The impacts of these changes on the health and wellbeing of Caribbean populations are ~~significant~~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.⁶

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.⁷ Rather, we can only understand these existential threats by ~~drawing attention to the fact~~recognising that some Caribbean states are among the most indebted globally, an indebtedness that is itself traceable to relations of colonialism and imperialism.⁸ To take one example, the reliance of many Caribbean economies on sectors that are threatened by climate change,⁹ notably, tourism, ~~subsistence~~-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 ~~which that~~ was itself somewhat precipitated by countries' insertion into a vastly unequal global system of relations post-independence.¹⁰

In a perverse paradox, it should also be acknowledged that ~~the wealth expropriated from the Caribbean during the period of early colonialism was expended on~~ processes of industrialisation, ~~on which wealth expropriated from the Caribbean during colonial times was expended,~~ has in turn ~~ve~~-contributed significantly to the climate change-inducing emissions that now threaten Caribbean societies.¹¹ While there has been considerable discussion of North-South relations in global climate change governance, mentions of imperialism in mainstream ~~of~~-academic and practitioner discussions of climate change in the

Caribbean are scant, being more frequently voiced by activist publics.¹² Authors have drawn attention, for instance, to the imperialist underpinnings of carbon offsetting practices.¹³ 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. ~~Elsewhere, w~~While India's chief economic advisor Arvind Subramanian made's reference to imperialism after the Paris climate change. ~~This talks~~ was widely reported, but his reference it was not as reflexive a 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.¹⁴ 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, although India's emissions lag some way behind the historical emissions of these were are negligible compared to most most global North countries ~~over history~~, a point that raises further questions about ~~who bears the most~~ the unevenly distributed responsibilities ~~for of climate change historical pollution~~.¹⁵

Part of how climate change politics operates, ~~the n,~~ is via the representation of the particular interests of a subsection of the global elite as being universally applicable to all human societies.¹⁶ The idea of a single average temperature target beyond which warming is 'dangerous', is an example of this kind of technocratic universalism.¹⁷ ~~However, t~~The role of the targets-based diplomacy, such as that of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in centring Western development norms that favour the interests of imperial powers at the expense of actors in the Caribbean is under-examined, ~~though~~. 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.¹⁸

While there is clearly agreement that imperialism has shifted character in the current era, and that the global order is strongly underpinned by U.S. military might, and the interests of financial elites, there is no consensus about either the form, or consequences of that shift.¹⁹ Contemporary imperialism is, according to Foster, a form of financialised monopoly

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capitalism underpinned by 'the old imperial powers of the capitalist core', notably, the U.S. 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 the 'BRICS' [countries](#) (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Described by Prashad as pursuing a model of 'neo-liberalism with Southern characteristics', the BRICS have collaborated so as to offer a challenge the more established imperial powers.²⁰ As we will see later 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.

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We [begin-continue](#) 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 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 proscribe, 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 Change²¹

The threats heralded by climate change led Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Heads of State to call for the stabilization of greenhouse gasses (GHGs) at a level that would limit

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7 overall average global warming to no more than 1.5°C.²² Hence, the slogan '1.5°C to Stay
8 *Alive!*' was adopted by the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC), and used
9 by Caribbean SIDS, and others, in their attempts to define an 'acceptable' limit to the
10 warming induced by climate change. A world warmed by no more than 1.5°C, to be clear, is
11 one in which existing Caribbean societies have a future.
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16 The apparently abstract target of 1.5°C feeds into dominant discussions of climate change as
17 having a potentially 'dangerous' limit.²³ It reflects the idea that there is a 'tipping point'
18 beyond which climate change becomes dangerously 'unmanageable' because of natural
19 feedback loops.²⁴ The governance counterpart of this claim, emerging from the 'co-
20 production' of climate science and policy,²⁵ is the idea that quantitative policy targets be set,
21 at the international level, to force national governments to keep climate change at a
22 'manageable' level.²⁶ The idea of a 'manageable level' of climate change relates to the
23 prominent logics of 'resilience' that are emerging as key features of the neoliberalism
24 inherent to developmentalist responses to environmental crises. Work by Grove, Pugh,
25 Joseph, and others has highlighted the role of resilience in shaping attempts to manage and
26 respond to disasters and catastrophe.²⁷ The deployment of these managerialist approaches
27 engenders new configurations of relationships between different scales of governmental,
28 educational, and financial institutions, and the people subject to the operation of what is
29 seen by some to be a new form of biopower.²⁸
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40 A tension inherent into these discussions is that ostensibly abstract metrics are, *prima facie*,
41 held to be authoritative because they are based on 'objective', 'universal' science, and
42 therefore beyond dispute.²⁹ In practice, however, embedded within different targets are
43 normative appeals to particular presents and futures. A world warmed by 2°C entails
44 substantially different implications for Caribbean societies than one warmed by 1.5°C.
45 Relatedly, in contrast to how climate change policy is often presented, there is no universal
46 human subject.³⁰ Nor is there one agreed climatic state around which problem-solving
47 activities can be consensually organised globally. This is a major limitation of the problem-
48 solving framing of climate change.
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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.³¹ 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, however.³² 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°C – 3.7°C.³³ Some calculations even predict catastrophic rises of between 4°C – 7°C by 2100.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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 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.³⁷ In this way, environmental imperialism requires demands that those certain ‘vulnerable’ people in the global South/vulnerable peoples to bear ‘resilient’ in the face of unfolding catastrophes.³⁸ In this way, —people’s capacity to survive can be recast [before/after?]: Resilience then becomes a commodity, that at once enables communities to survive, while making turning their very survival something that can be financialised and subsequently traded upon by those who agencies who claim the authority of having resources to help alleviate are enforcing their vulnerability. It can be evaluated on by technocrats who offer their consultancy services for fees paid by the Climatic changes

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that might otherwise be deemed as threats to existing social arrangements are instead included as evidence that these arrangements must be further extended.³⁹

The call for 1.5°C is optimistic in sociological terms, ~~however, because of the~~ structural constraints on social action have been demonstrated to ~~that~~ undermine efforts to ~~pursue~~ ameliorate climate ~~action change~~ where ~~it these efforts~~ requires departure from highly resource-intensive models of capitalist development.⁴⁰ 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'.⁴¹ 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 U.S. manufacturing non-competitive.' Donald J Trump, 45th President of the United States of America⁴²

The UNFCCC COP climate summits are the international policy forum for climate change. These have historically been fractious events, with the U.S. and China only recently, and reluctantly, agreeing to non-binding targets for cuts in carbon emissions.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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 U.S. and BRICS in Copenhagen at the COP15. Those particular talks resulted in a 'deal' that was rejected by a number of global Southern states, including Bolivia, Venezuela, and Sudan and Tuvalu.⁴⁵ 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, [mass social movement-facing, civil society](#) summit in Cochabamba.⁴⁶

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 November – December 2009 in Copenhagen. The COP15 was promoted at the time as being 'the last chance to save the climate'.⁴⁷ The cables, covering the period immediately [after following](#) the COP15 until February 2010, [They](#), document the use of bribery and blackmail by the [U.S.](#) and [its](#) allies to force countries to agree to their voluntarist, free-market approach to climate governance.⁴⁸ In order to secure the agreement of nations dissenting from the 'Copenhagen Accord', the U.S. negotiators used financial aid as a bribe. [In one cable, The latter](#) EU negotiator Connie Hedegaard, speaking to U.S. 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.'⁴⁹ Other cables detail a meeting in Adis Ababa in 2010 between Ethiopian prime minister, Meles Zenawi, leader of the African Union's climate change negotiations, and the [U.S.](#) 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.⁵⁰ Elsewhere, bullying tactics were in evidence in a cable recording a meeting between Hedegaard and [U.S.](#) deputy national security adviser, Michael Froman. The pair discussed the need to 'neutralise, co-opt or marginalise unhelpful countries including Venezuela and Bolivia'.⁵¹ Similarly, Ecuador and Bolivia, were punished for their dissent from the Copenhagen Accord by having their [U.S.](#) development aid cut.⁵² 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 U.S., has been directly acknowledged [alongside a ruling out of climate reparations to atone for climate debt. The U.S.'s](#) ~~with their~~ chief negotiator, ~~Todd Stern~~, [commented](#), ~~simultaneously ruling out the possibility of climate reparations paid to atone for climate debt:~~

'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.'⁵³

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 ~~the~~ bribery and ~~the~~ bullying [was spying](#), ~~T~~he CIA, via the U.S. 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, ~~with~~ the implication being that this evidence could be used to undermine countries' negotiating positions on the grounds of their inconsistency.⁵⁴ A separate set of documents leaked in 2014 by whistle-blower Edward Snowden, ~~demonstrated confirmed~~ that the U.S. [was directly spying on fellow countries](#) at the COP15 ~~was even directly spying on fellow countries~~.⁵⁵ 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,

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because these islands will disappear.” James Fletcher, chairman of the CARICOM Task Force of Sustainable Development and the Regional Coordinating Committee on Climate Change⁵⁶

Foster suggests that financialisation is integral to contemporary forms of imperialism.⁵⁷ The accounts of bribery, and conditionality, identified in the preceding section take on greater significance in light of this. If considered reductively, in solely economic terms only, climate change has been projected to cost the Caribbean economy at least \$22 billion annually by 2050, around 10% of the current total annual GDP.⁵⁸ A lack of capital in the region, and the dominance of neoliberal ideology,⁵⁹ 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’.⁶⁰

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 per cent, for instance.⁶¹ 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.⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ 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, in order to deepen the neoliberal governance of environmental harms.⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ According to Groves, 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.⁶⁷

In dominant models of climate financing, climate change is not understood as undermining the legitimacy of the neoliberal models of social organisation that have presided over 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.⁶⁸ 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.'⁶⁹

~~broadens the subtlety of the discussion of how imperialism functions in practice~~

~~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. act a neoliberal project on ... DO WHAT. As mentioned above, for instance,~~

~~the notions of resilience have been utilised. Grove and Pugh, for instance, have highlighted~~

~~the It is, however, crucial to acknowledge that these approaches do not necessarily~~

~~Rather than simply proceeding straightforwardly, unopposed, however, a point that helps~~

~~develop a more nuanced understanding of how the imperialism of climate change functions~~

~~in practice. , people have pushed back against the straightforward imposition of this...~~

~~An emerging body of ethnographic work has shed light on the nuances of the subtle ways in~~

~~which people in the Caribbean are actually negotiating the emergence of resilience and~~

~~catastrophe as tropes imperialist integral to the promotion of particular forms of~~

~~imperialist development relationships in practice.⁷⁰ footnote~~

~~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~~

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control'.⁷¹ 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'.⁷² Crucially, attention to this fact provides greater insight into how people in the Caribbean are ...

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Nevertheless, as often is identified by these authors, these interactions/processes are somewhat overdetermined/structured/patterned by the globally uneven distribution of resources and power globally.

In this sense, resistance to the processes taking place is by no means straightforward.

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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 ~~themselves~~ continuations of the unequal relations established under imperialism and colonialism.⁷³ 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 ~~Also underpinning~~ the climate financing regime are ~~technocratic interpretations of both climate change, and possible responses to it~~. Examples include: building rainwater harvesting plants; renewable energy projects; and coastal defence barriers.⁷⁴ 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

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7 ~~finance and responses to climate change to climate change mitigation measures to forms of~~
8 ~~imperialist~~ economic control. This happens via the use of mono-crop plantations as 'carbon
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10 ~~offsets' which in practice displace indigenous communities, for example, via the use of~~
11 ~~mono-crop plantations as 'carbon offsets' which in practice displace indigenous~~
12 ~~communities~~. These projects rely on unequal global power relations in order to brand
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14 consumption in the north as 'carbon-neutral'.
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18 ~~The notion of the UN process as representing the interests of all nations is unconvincing.~~
19 ~~The Perversely, vulnerability of the established climate change agenda to the whims of~~
20 ~~climate-denialist U.S. President Donald Trump underlines this a factor further undermining~~
21 ~~the already unconvincing notion of the UN process as representing the interests of all~~
22 ~~nations, is the vulnerability of the established climate change agenda to the whims of~~
23 ~~climate-denialist U.S. President Donald Trump.~~ While other countries have been
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25 manipulated into adhering to an approach favoured by the U.S., ~~it is suggested by~~ President
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27 Trump ~~'s recently advisors and appointees that he will withdraw~~ the U.S. from the Paris
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29 climate agreement, while simultaneously pursuing carbon-intensive industry domestically,
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31 and cutting federal support for climate science and environmental protection.⁷⁵ These
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33 developments are not a break from the imperialist tenor of climate governance via the
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35 UNFCCC to date. ~~Instead, , however, but rather they are actually examples of the~~
36 ~~asymmetrical distributions of power within the contemporary configurations of imperialist~~
37 ~~governance a more obvious assertion of the interests of some U.S. elites.~~⁷⁶ The prospect of a
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39 U.S. withdrawal from the UNFCCC climate agreements, along with the decision to tear up
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41 existing carbon reduction plans at the Federal-level, seems sure to condemn Caribbean
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43 populations to ~~a forms~~ of 'climate-barbarism'.
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46 In contrast to the pessimistic picture portrayed above, critical accounts, such as those
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48 emerging from the climate justice movement, offer an alternative model of 'development' in
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50 which responding to climate change is also about reorganising society in a more equitable
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52 fashion. This model undermines the idea that there are necessarily inherent tensions
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54 between development and sustainability.⁷⁷ It is instead suggested that it is impossible to
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56 'solve' climate change, and its associated social problems, by using the same logics that
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58 caused the problem in the first place.⁷⁸ Central to these critiques is often the
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acknowledgement of both the historical legacies of imperialism and colonialism, as well as their contemporary ~~successive~~ 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.'⁷⁹

In this context, it is important to consider more seriously the claims made for wealth redistribution via, for instance, calls for reparations, such as including 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,⁸⁰ 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'.⁸² 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 U.S. chief negotiator Todd Stern was not solely evading debts ensuing from the uneven consumption of carbon, he was also further cementing the U.S.'s favoured model of a voluntary, market-oriented financing mechanism.⁸³ ~~Yet~~However, as noted in the epigraph at the start of this section, there comes

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7 a point ~~at which where~~—no amount of money will be enough to compensate for the
8 ~~apocalyptic~~ existential threats facing small island nations such as those in the Caribbean.
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11 A question to emerge from the failure of the existing climate governance regime, ~~then~~,
12 how ~~might~~ pressure ~~might~~ be applied from below in order to secure the necessary political
13 action. Foster (2015, citing Amin), suggests that challenging contemporary imperialism:
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16 ‘means fostering a more “audacious” global movement from below in which the key
17 challenge will be the dismantling of imperialism, understood as the entire basis of
18 capitalism in our time—with the object of creating a more horizontal, egalitarian,
19 peaceful, and sustainable social-metabolic order controlled by the associated
20 producers.’
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25 It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider the ‘climate justice movement’ (CJM) in great
26 depth, but it is a framework that is inherently more promising for securing responses to
27 climate change that acknowledge historical responsibility and present inequalities.⁸⁴ A useful
28 definition of climate justice is provided in the introduction to ‘Paths Beyond Paris,’ an
29 anthology of articles produced around the time of the COP21:
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34 ‘Climate justice movements are diverse, but a fundamental principle lies at the heart:
35 the recognition that the threats posed by climate change are a consequence of
36 unequal, colonial, economic and social power relations.’⁸⁵
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40 Climate-just futures, in contrast to technocratic policy or infrastructure tweaks, imply and
41 necessitate a radical restructuring of society and economy. A climate-just world would
42 involve tackling forms of environmental harm, but it would also be about pursuing social
43 justice in general. Taking our cue from the CJM, we must interrogate existing responses to
44 climate change in terms of questions of climate debts and reparations hitherto closed down
45 by overly technocratic representations.
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50 51 **Conclusion** 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60

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

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22 ~~Need of acknowledge too, the subtly of how people actually interact with the function of~~
23 ~~imperialism in practice-~~

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26 An analysis [was conducted](#) of the ways in which [some](#) countries were forced to adhere to
27 ~~the an international agreement, the~~ Copenhagen Accord, ~~which ran-~~ [counter to their](#)
28 [interests. This](#) demonstrated how imperialist tendencies, in the form of uneven power
29 relations, have worked against the interests of Caribbean peoples for a response to climate
30 change that secures warming at a level under '1.5°C to stay alive'. Meanwhile, exploring how
31 global inequalities are leveraged in order to enforce neoliberal modes of development via
32 climate finance instruments, shows that these are poised to exacerbate imperialism's legacy
33 of exploitation. [It was also highlighted that attending to the ways in which people actually](#)
34 [interact with the tropes of resilience and disaster risk management allows for a more](#)
35 [nuanced appreciation of functioning of imperialism in practice.](#) ~~Need of acknowledge too,~~
36 ~~the subtly of how people actually interact with the function of imperialism in practice-~~

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43 An alternative reading of the relationship between debt and climate change is also possible.
44 ~~One, however,~~ which acknowledges the fact that industrialised countries have benefitted
45 significantly from the same processes that caused climate change, and that they thus owe a
46 considerable climate debt due in the form of reparations.

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51 To date, the climate change governance regime has stymied discussion of alternative
52 approaches, in accordance with the interests of imperial powers. Yet moving beyond overly
53 technocratic responses requires acknowledging the sociological implications of the legacies
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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 the character of 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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² Caribbean News Service, "Caribbean Urged To Take Action On Climate Change."

³ Lohmann, "Climate Crisis: Social Science Crisis"; Grundmann and Stehr, "Climate Change: What Role for Sociology?: A Response to Constance Lever-Tracy"; Urry, *Climate Change and Society*; Swyngedouw, "The Non-Political Politics of Climate Change"; Bellamy, "A Sociotechnical Framework for Governing Climate Engineering"; O'Lear, "Climate Science and Slow Violence: A View from Political Geography and STS on Mobilizing Technoscientific Ontologies of Climate Change"; Mikulewicz, "Politicizing Vulnerability and Adaptation: On the Need to Democratize Local Responses to Climate Impacts in Developing Countries"; Bäckstrand and Lovbrand, "Planting Trees to Mitigate Climate Change: Contested Discourses of Ecological Modernization, Green Governmentality and Civic Environmentalism."

⁴ Smith and Rhiney, "Climate (In)justice, Vulnerability and Livelihoods in the Caribbean: The Case of the Indigenous Caribs in Northeastern St. Vincent"; Rhiney, "Livelihood In/Securities, Vulnerability and Resilience to Global Change in the Caribbean Agriculture Sector"; Institute for the Study of the Americas and Centre for Caribbean and Latin American Research & Consultancy, "Responding to Climate Change in the Caribbean"; Popke, Curtis, and Gamble, "A Social Justice Framing of Climate Change Discourse and Policy: Adaptation, Resilience and Vulnerability in a Jamaican Agricultural Landscape"; Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, "Mainstreaming and Adaptation to Climate Change (MACC)"; Bishop and Payne, "Climate Change and the Future of Caribbean Development"; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, "The Economics of Climate Change in the Caribbean"; Grove, "Preempting the next Disaster: Catastrophe Insurance and the Financialization of Disaster Management"; Bueno et al., "The Caribbean and Climate Change: The Costs of Inaction"; Benjamin, "Climate Change and Caribbean Small Island States: The State of Play"; de la Torre, Fajnzylber, and Nash, "Low Carbon, High Growth: Latin American Responses to Climate Change: An Overview"; Taylor et al., "Climate Change and the Caribbean: Review and Response"; Witter, "Mainstreaming Climate Change in Caribbean Development Strategies"; Blake and Websol, "Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre: Annual Report July 2009 - July 2010"; McGregor, Dodman, and Barker, "Global Change and Caribbean Vulnerability: Environment, Economy and Society at Risk."

⁵ Mora et al., "The Projected Timing of Climate Departure from Recent Variability"; Zuesse, "Climate Catastrophe Will Hit Tropics Around 2020, Rest Of World Around 2047, Study Says."

⁶ Trotz, "Climate Change and Development in the Caribbean Sub-Region."

⁷ Bishop, "The Political Economy of Small States: Enduring Vulnerability?"; Bishop and Payne, "Climate Change and the Future of Caribbean Development"; Mikulewicz, "Politicizing Vulnerability and Adaptation: On the Need to Democratize Local Responses to Climate Impacts in Developing Countries"; Rhiney, "Livelihood In/Securities, Vulnerability and Resilience to Global Change in the Caribbean Agriculture Sector"; Smith and Rhiney, "Climate (In)justice, Vulnerability and Livelihoods in the Caribbean: The Case of the Indigenous Caribs in Northeastern St. Vincent."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ CDKN Global, "Building Climate Resilience Is Integral to Continued Prosperity in the Caribbean."

¹⁰ Bishop, "The Political Economy of Small States: Enduring Vulnerability?"; McAfee, *Storm Signals: Structural Adjustment and Development Alternatives in the Caribbean*; Williams, "The Third World and Global Environmental Negotiations: Interests, Institutions and Ideas."

¹¹ Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*.

¹² Bachram, "Climate Fraud and Carbon Colonialism: The New Trade in Greenhouse Gases"; Bassey, *To Cook A Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa*; Bassey, *Oil Politics: Echos of Ecological Wars*; Bond, *Politics of Climate Justice: Paralysis Above, Movement Below*; Foster, *Ecology Against Capitalism*; O'Lear, "Climate Science and Slow Violence: A View from Political Geography and STS on Mobilizing Technoscientific Ontologies of Climate Change."

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²⁸ [bid. BID?](#)

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3 The suggestions of the first referee were very helpful in honing the argument of the piece and
4 addressing potential shortcomings.

5
6 1. In response to their first criticism, an in-depth discussion of these the ethnographic work on
7 resilience has been included on pages 10-11. (See also the response to the referee's second
8 point outlined below). Here reference to the recommended literature helps to provide greater
9 insight into how people in the Caribbean are actually dealing with imperialism. This has
10 broadened the subtlety of the discussion of how imperialism functions in practice

11
12 On Referee 1's second suggestion, the literature here has been very helpful for nuancing some
13 of the broader points. For instance, I have expanded the discussion of imperialism so as to
14 include a discussion of the relevant recommended literature around the role of resilience in
15 skewing environmental governance. This has been done on pages 5 & 6, returned to in the
16 discussion of ethnographic work in the Caribbean, and mentioned in the conclusion.

17
18 I have also addressed the typos identified by Referee 2.
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