



## Commentary

Resplendent care-full climate revolutions<sup>☆</sup>

Farhana Sultana



“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” – Audre Lorde

I am deeply thankful to Jennifer Rice and Meredith DeBoom for generosity of spirit, critical eye, and thoughtfulness in their responses to my 40th anniversary plenary paper for the journal *Political Geography* at the 2022 AAG conference (Sultana, 2022). The paper on climate coloniality was one of the most exacting papers I have written so I am grateful it has garnered popularity and traction among disparate audiences, in and outside of academia, across wildly different fields, and among circles of activists and policymakers. In the months that the paper traveled the globe since its publication, igniting debate and discussion, being called a manifesto by some and eye-opening by many, I experienced the greatest personal losses of deaths and devastation that sidelined such intellectual endeavors as being inconsequential amidst the tsunamis of bereavement and mourning. Yet at the same time, the traumatic months also highlighted how in times of desolation, wreckage, and suffocating sorrow, both strangers' and friends' compassion and care are elemental. This is the very stuff of life, whereby in the face of grief and desolation, we survive and carry on through generations because of transgressive love and mutuality that propels us forth, forcing us to take another breath, disallowing us to wither away, embracing us in the drowning overwhelm of distress and turbulence. Care and care ethics are thrown into sharper relief for survival, renewal, and regrowth. Living persists amidst dying, whether personal or planetary. Ironically, the heart of my plenary paper was prognostically about that in many ways, albeit entangled in different complex, scalar, historical, and socioecological geographies.

Thus, I want to focus my response on issues that my interlocutors foregrounded from the intertwined strands of my paper, the very issues central to decolonizing climate coloniality: the role of care, care ethics, and transformative politics. While Rice situates her comments on praxis within/for/beyond the academy, DeBoom focuses on the planetary scale. There is complementarity across both responses around care ethics and praxis of care. Both inquire about mutuality and care at different scales of action and collaboration, and along several pathways, whereby there are resonances and confluence in intentions and actions even if at different sites and among different actors. For instance, as academics, our immediate sites of action are often within and adjacent to the academy. Yet many of us do work in other spaces and with various

collaborators, can have impacts in profound ways in policy and practice, and are in conversations with many constituents across the world who enable us to pursue radical outcomes seeded with hopes of transformative change. To that end, our work is always personal, political, institutional, intimate. But it can also be planetary.

Climate coloniality is a violence requiring resplendent climate revolutions to counter it, and I posit that care and ethics of care can be the revolutionary vehicle for such abolitionist climate praxis. Care here embraces but goes beyond the radical care of the self to encompass others, both human and more-than-human. Recognizing that self-care can be acts of resistance against rapacious neoliberal capitalism, coloniality, or racism that devalues life and living, what emerges is a care politics that centralizes addressing interlocking oppressions by creating coalitions against intersectional harms for many (cf. Lugones, 2010). Reciprocity and intersubjective vitality allow for care-full mutuality beyond interpersonal interactions and interdependence. Care is always political here. It is also intentional. Radical care praxis is transgressive and an ethical action of responsibility (Dowler et al., 2019). A care-full approach intentionally recognizes its limitations and works out possibilities through challenges without naïveté (Sultana, 2021b; Williams, 2017). Caring about, giving/receiving care, and developing ethics and networks of care necessitate working through contradictions and pitfalls. Feminist, Indigenous, and allied scholars have written much on care ethics and practices of care, on feminist environmental care ethics for collectivity, identifying how justice can be enacted in particular contexts but also how care reaches beyond the immediate to distant processes, spaces, and communities, both human and more-than-human (e.g. Gaard, 2018; Tschakert et al., 2021; Whyte & Cuomo, 2016). A shared commitment can be often born out of shared pain, or a sense of injustice that traverses space and time. Care work is not always easy but more actionable in solidarities that are grounded in places and experiences (Lawson, 2007). Radical care accounts for the embodied emotionalities that saturate everyday experiences of climate coloniality, fostering not just place or site-based care ethics and practices of healing but encouraging connections and inspiring action elsewhere and across scales, ecosystems, and places. There are affective, political, and relational dimensions of co-production of knowledge and praxis in care-full collaborations. Given that carework is often unevenly borne and devalued (Bhattacharya, 2017), normalizing and nurturing wider

<sup>☆</sup> Political Geography Plenary response paper (on Climate Coloniality).

E-mail address: [sultanaf@syr.edu](mailto:sultanaf@syr.edu).

participation across positionalities towards praxis of care are necessary components of co-creating radical pathways for alternate futures of healing, flourishing, and relating (Simpson, 2021). Developing care ethics of mutuality and responsibility is like developing muscles, they are complemented by practices of care in everyday quotidian and revolutionary ways. Anti-colonial and decolonial movements throughout history are full of such examples, of both success stories and lessons learnt.

In such ways, care and care ethics hold the possibility for the revitalization of revolutionary potentialities against atmospheres of violence of climate coloniality. It is thereby restorative but open to transformation (i.e. not only restoring to what was, but a nurturing towards better). It is an iterative process and nonlinear. Intentions and politics are reassessed throughout, requiring critical self and group reflexivity of being-in-community. The processes are thus dialogic and praxis based. It is recuperative in its nature against the violence of the mind. It is a renewal and restoration of dignity (Fanon, 1963). Care and collectivity can foster pathways of decolonization that allow for oxygenation of multiplicities of revolutionary potentialities in the psyche. This is an affirmative nourishing of revolution through care and being in the world through others. Revolution here does not gesture towards endless cycles of violence or never-ending protest and resistance, but rather creating peace and wellbeing, conviviality and pluriverse (Fanon, 1967; Kothari et al., 2019). Political action can be revolutionary when it leads to fostering recursive care-full and collective wellbeing that is simultaneously social and ecological.

Thereby, radical praxis of care for care-full climate revolutions can open up spaces of action and conversation, of dialogue and reflection. This has to be critically intersectionally attuned, with attention to spatial intersectionality that acknowledges and accounts for differential lived experiences across groups and spaces, and confronts reproduction of exclusions and marginalizations (e.g. addressing whiteness and coloniality permeating activism and non-profit groups that tend to sideline global majority voices/concerns around climate change). This is part of the process of debridement in my mind, to allow for regrowth and regeneration when necropolitical outcomes are recognized and removed. In other words, it is a perfusion that is full of care and authentic mutuality, a quenching of parched relationalities, a cultivating of fertile futurities, healing through radical vulnerability. All healing processes are open to circumvention and stumbling along the way, but working for the healing through care sustains its very evolution to flesh out what togetherness, empathy, responsibility, and belonging can look like. Healing is needed for liberatory practice, simultaneously internally and interpersonally, institutionally and internationally. This may consist of ontological disobedience, epistemological inversions, methodological changes, pedagogical retraining, citational revisions, and more - ultimately, being open to surprise and wonderment amidst chaos and loss, embracing alternate worldviews and entanglements.

Abolition of various structures that hold places and people in ongoing traumas allows for liberation, for reparative relations, and this requires intentional labor of care and care ethics. A radical revolution that aims towards this end goal demands political power and willpower to address problems in multipronged ways at various scales. I discussed the multitudinous pathways that material and discursive decolonization are necessary towards scalar acts in the plenary paper, so I will avoid repetition here, but reiterate that recognition of injustice and coloniality are precursors to redress, redistribution, and justice. Of course, systems sedimented over spacetimes and reified through global policies and instruments can limit the possibilities of change. But it also depends on what change is desired, who gets to define its contents, and under what rationale. Rapid wholesale change is mostly unrealistic, but small changes can result in unexpected domino effects in conjunctural alignments (Ranganathan & Bratman, 2021; Sultana, 2021a). Small acts of care and courage can set in motion series of destabilizations of persistent ideologies and usher in deconstructions of hegemonic strangleholds. Reframing, resistance, and reconstitution are infused with the labor of care that fosters their flourishing in opposition to colonial-capitalist

hegemony for care-full climate revolutions.

What is evident is the necessity of transformative politics to address problems across different scales. This can occur within the academy in theorizations and pedagogies, in institutional transformations and redress, where universities are powerful sites where futurities can be co-envisioned and co-enacted for revolutionary changes. Indeed, student-led anti-colonial mobilizations were foundational for decolonization and independence movements across Africa, Asia, and Latin America pre- and post-WWII. Universities have been sites of political and ontological battles, crucibles of radical thought and galvanizing. Since stamina is necessary for collective-building and sustained action, these must be mutually trialed, learnt, and shared, both within and beyond the academy. Reframing and refusals are dialogic. Wider praxis of community co-creation and collaborations, deep listening, grounded inclusivity, and practicing reciprocity plant seeds of resurgent resplendent climate revolutions. Creating sacred spaces of kinship, dialogue, and collaboration across differences can be avenues of cross-scalar politics. Again, it is a sense of responsibility to selves beyond the self, of reflection, healing, and desirous verve that end up fueling revolutionary care work. It is a decentering of the self to cultivate somatic, epistemic, ecological kinship more widely.

In other words, academia and universities can be productive sites in tackling complex questions and relations to confront climate coloniality at a planetary scale. For scholars, the academy is a more doable site of action that undercuts a sense of despair and inaction when a problem is overwhelming in order to have impacts beyond the academy and into the future.<sup>1</sup> For instance, tackling systemic racism and xenophobia within educational settings allows for pedagogies and practices to be learnt, adapted, reiterated beyond the academy to tackle racial violence, ecocide, and more. As scholars such as Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire and Black feminist scholar bell hooks teach us, pedagogies can be fecund and powerful acts of solidarity and radical care that can inspire, reimagine, and co-create change (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2014). Beyond pedagogy, mentoring, research, collaborative engagement, policy impact, and public discourse influence – the key spaces that academics, scholars, students have direct roles in – universities as a coalition of institutions can also enact wider change, for instance through divestment from fossil fuels, withdrawing from imperial violence projects, and so on. Sustaining such endeavors requires renewed care ethics practiced by many. These are but some small examples, as working to redress harms are always arrived at through collective deliberations.

An important precursor question though is: once we recognize and understand what climate coloniality is and does, what kinds of futures can we imagine *beyond* coloniality and how do we co-create these care-fully and ethically configured futurescapes of regeneration, world-making, and decolonial flourishing? What insurgent potentials need excavating or reconstituting? Recuperating silenced, suppressed, and discarded discourses and practices involves praxis of openness and care-full critique and dialogue; such acts may be deemed subversive but are generative (e.g. Federici, 2018; Liboiron, 2021; McKittrick, 2021). Care and solidarity work are integral to remaking, resistance, re-envisioning, and reciprocity. For instance, nature that is/was seen as commodity (e.g. 'land' or 'forest') in hegemonic discourse and framing is now open to considerations of nature as kin, Pachamama, vital component in webs of life derived from decolonial, feminist, and abolitionist work that engages grounded experiences and lived realities of communities globally. Practical and policy outcomes involve sustained collaborative action to reorient and change values attributed to different sets of worldviews, practices, and policies.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Emergent critical university studies can be useful for such conversations (e.g. Bhambra et al., 2018; Mbembe, 2016; Steele & Rickards, 2021; Tuhiwai Smith et al., 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Much can be gleaned from fruitful engagement across scholarly work in Black geographies, maroon geographies, post-colonial studies, decolonial geographies, transnational feminisms, and Indigenous studies.

And that battle for epistemic justice is as much in the classroom as it is in the streets and boardrooms. It is in the undoing and confronting the interlocking systems of oppression that coloniality sediments where care ethics and collectivity can be potent solvents.

Attention to climate coloniality allows us to be attuned to the ways dialogue and critique are not only necessary but inherent to care praxis. As I demonstrated in the plenary paper, modernity/coloniality subsumed the violence and traumas of various places into subordinate, inferiorized positions in international systems (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2007). This enforced marginality crippled abilities to respond to climate coloniality in addressing impacts, and also curtailed negotiating power and leverage in international scenes of power. A disposability of people and species inhabiting different spaces thereby followed. Since Eurocentrism spread with imperial 'discoveries', so uprooting the structures requires not just the oppositional but also beyond it. Re-educating and re-orienting monocultures of ecosystems and of minds are replaced instead by care-full cultivation of biocultural diversity of landscapes, livelihoods, and worldviews not shackled to historical pre-configurations and biopowers of modernity/coloniality (Shiva, 1993). What is strived for is a vitality in the multiplicity of being in the world – a pluriversality that upends the harmful destructive false universalisms, whereby generative critique, ethical collaboration, reciprocal relationships, and care become normalized for new beginnings.

Such beginnings are always in flux and fluid, they do not follow fixed formulas for rigid outcomes. This is contra to the appropriations, exclusions, and entanglements throughout history that propelled the workings of coloniality by hegemonizing rigidities and chronicities. There is thus a need to recuperate a recognition of co-produced emergence and its impermanence. It's a becoming, not an ending. The very possibility of this occurring is often when radical and revolutionary care work is most visible, sutured into anti-capitalist acts or anti-colonial struggles. The mutual responsibilities that emerge through debate, critique, and action for care-full climate praxis allow for further radical revolution of planetary mutuality to also be sites of critical hope. Freire's notion of critical hope is useful here as hope that is active/activated through praxis, not a vacuous hope (see also Sultana, 2019). Regeneration and rebirth – of whether willpower or ecosystems – are thwarted otherwise. The indomitable spirits in co-constitution that foster rejuvenation, regeneration, repair, and reparations enable the reclaiming, building, and flourishing that heal colonial wounds while birthing new fluid futures.

Ultimately, coloniality is simultaneously ecological, embodied, and psychic destruction whereby there is unwellness of the colonized subject but also of colonized lands that are environmentally destroyed. Thereby, spatial anti-colonial and anti-capitalist thought and praxis centering care and ethics of care are essential for emergent sensitivities and structural reconfigurations to foster wellbeing, vitality, and freedom. It is also about rest, rejuvenation, and peace. Living and thriving are possible when caring for self includes caring for others, ecosystems, the earth. Care-full, resplendent climate revolutions have to be co-created through iterative praxis to confront climate coloniality. How to foster collaborative networks of care, solidarity, and justice that support this remains the task at hand, but we have the tools and teachings necessary should we desire it, one that beckons vibrant life against the necropolitical dying of climate coloniality.

After my father suddenly died shortly after the plenary paper was published, I planted a tree in his honor – an alien tree in cold soils thousands of miles away in the eyes of the glorious mango tree that shades his grave with tropical winds in the Bengal Delta, but a vital lifeforce nonetheless. As I write this paper in the aftermath of ongoing personal and planetary losses, I hope that the nascent tree will flourish, inspire, and offer shade to others in distant futures – a symbolic tree that now carries the weight of emotions and possibilities across oceans, continents, centuries. With death comes new life, living amidst dying is

to intentionally persist, to love despite grief, to care for self and others with renewed vigor. With climate coloniality thereby comes revolutions of care, hope, and transgressive love for thriving resplendent futures otherwise.

যতক্ষণ শ্বাস আছে, ততক্ষণ আশা আছে (While there is breath, there is hope)  
– Bengali proverb

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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