

Decolonizing Climate Justice

by SIAN BORDEN

PHOTOS: Simon Ryder-Burbiage



Mi'kmaq land defenders and their allies march in support of the Wet'suwet'en and their fight to stop a pipeline being forced through their traditional and unceded territory.

Climate justice recognizes that climate change affects people and places differently based on a multitude of factors such as race and class. People who historically benefitted from colonialism are more likely to be better equipped to deal with its effects. This is why climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies should be grounded in equity and why decolonial climate justice is crucial in our fight for a better future.

Upholding the foundations of society often takes precedence over justice and morality. Exponential growth on a finite planet is impossible and yet, it is a key component in the principles of modern capitalism. The consequences are being felt right now: our land is burning, and our ocean is boiling.

Kathryn Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* centers the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized groups in the field of geography. While each community's experience is unique, the common denominator is otherness. Colonial powers continually overexploited distant lands and waters guided by domination, greed and homogeneity. It is important to note that the origin of this violence in North America is European, but that conquest exists globally. Regardless of where they are in the world, marginalized communities are treated as disposable and inhuman because they do not adhere to the homogenous ideology of the colonizer.

Ingrid Waldron's *There's Something in The Water* and its subsequent documentary provide an example of otherness, showing environmental racism that African Nova Scotians and Mi'kmaq experience as a result of colonialism. Waldron's work displays how land stewards know their environments best, but unfortunately, their place-based knowledge is often disregarded when it comes to policy-making and environmental management.



Protest signs at a march in support of the Wet'suwet'en and their fight to stop a pipeline being forced through their traditional and unceded territory.

Leah Thomas' *The Intersectional Environmentalist* provides case studies for how marginalized communities worldwide are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis. The book delves deeply into the intersectionality of environment and identity and provides a wealth of resources for those seeking to further their knowledge of environmental justice.

Decolonization questions the root of beliefs and actions in a colonialist system. It is a constant choice and can be challenging as it requires introspection and radical honesty regarding internalized practices such as racism, misogyny and homophobia. It requires a fight against the status quo, which can be difficult, isolating and often terrifying. It is a life-long journey that requires self-forgiveness, open-mindedness and community, and should not be done in a silo. According to Malcolm Ferdinand's *Decolonial Ecology*, climate justice requires us to confront capitalism and colonialism in pursuit of environmental restoration. It includes a reframing of worldviews. Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* is another excellent book that can assist with the reshaping of perspective as it prioritizes values such as respect and reciprocity.

Compassion is crucial. It's important to reflect on the consequences of colonialism that persist to this day across the globe. Certain countries and communities may have inequitable access to infrastructure and, due to the effects of colonialism, they must prioritize other concerns before the environment. Collective action is needed to honour people and the planet, and we need to make space for all communities to take part.

TAKE ACTION

Support climate activists from diverse backgrounds. Listen to the problems that their communities are facing and let them speak first.

Be aware of how you are taking up space, especially as a guest in another community.

Acknowledge that the impact of colonialism and capitalism is integral to understanding climate justice. Pursue further knowledge on decolonizing climate justice.

References

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