

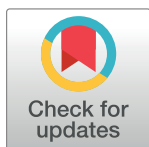
OPINION

# An Atlantic eco-poetics of relations: Intercultural communication and Caribbean decolonising approaches to face the climate crisis

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## OPEN ACCESS

**Citation:** Jerez Columbié Y (2023) An Atlantic eco-poetics of relations: Intercultural communication and Caribbean decolonising approaches to face the climate crisis. PLOS Clim 2(4): e0000187. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pclm.0000187>

**Editor:** Jamie Males, PLOS Climate, UNITED KINGDOM

**Published:** April 10, 2023

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**Funding:** The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

**Competing interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

In 1986, a group of researchers gathered in the Caribbean alerted that a network of tide-gauge stations was essential to the monitoring of sea-level change in the region. The group even co-produced a list including many of the existing tide-gauge stations and those proposed by attendees at the workshop on Physical Oceanography and the Climate of the Caribbean Sea and Adjacent Regions, held in Cartagena, in the Colombian continental Caribbean, under the auspices of the United Nations Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission [1]. More recent experiences corroborate that Caribbean environmentalism is transcending linguistic and cultural barriers thanks to region-wide efforts by activists [2]. Although researchers and practitioners working both in and on Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) were among the first ones calling attention to climate change and co-producing environmental knowledge for climate action, these territories are often taken only “as poster children for climate change vulnerability” and there is still insufficient recognition in the academic literature of the valuable information they provide to inform adaptation pathways at a global scale [3]. Similarly, although the Arts and the Humanities are vital for connecting diverse types of knowledge and supporting inclusion and epistemological nuance in interdisciplinary research, creative practitioners and Humanities experts still occupy a marginal position within environmental studies. This is simultaneously one of the consequences and causes of most funding bodies’ focus on technical solutions, which translates in insufficient funding for Humanities-led environmental research. Decolonising climate change and fostering equal partnerships across the globe would require acknowledging both the vulnerability and the expertise of subaltern communities, as well as fully integrating the work of the Arts and the Humanities for the co-creation of inclusive policies. In this light, it is vital to acknowledge the role of Caribbean Studies in addressing the climate crisis and decolonising environmental research, teaching, and action, both in Europe and globally [4].

The Caribbean has been at the centre of the processes of expropriation, enslavement and exploitation of peoples and ecosystems, that have fuelled industrialisation processes in the Global North and, consequently, global climate change. This archipelago is both, one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change and one of the most experienced in dealing with its impacts [5]. Drawing upon Édouard Glissant’s [6] ideas on a Caribbean poetics of relations that connects the region to other territories and peoples across and beyond the Atlantic, I propose to consider an eco-poetics of relations to voice out, understand, further develop, replicate and support, firstly, the creative forms of environmental knowledge emerging from the

Caribbean archipelago, and secondly, the successful experiences of triangulation with Europe and international organisations for climate action [7]. The success and fairness of the latter depends greatly on setting the basis for equitable collaborations. For instance, any forms of “financial aid” from Europe and international organisations to the Caribbean, should be publicly acknowledged as part of overdue reparations to postcolonial territories. If the “development finance remains silent on the historical responsibility and continuing coloniality that reproduce uneven and extreme consequences in climate-impacted Caribbean communities”, achieving equity in international relations will continue to be a pending task [8]. In the context of climate change, language and representations are important. What is said or omitted in relation to diverse communities’ roles within the current climate crisis is precisely part of the focus of scholars working at the intersections between Caribbean Studies, Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies [9].

Furthermore, it would be important to highlight in any reports and academic literature resulting from this type of international cooperation, that foreign investment in climate change adaptation and mitigation in the Caribbean directly contributes to test the implementation of strategies on the ground, in places where people are already experiencing climate impacts. It would be safe to say that the Caribbean, as other postcolonial territories, continues to be a testing site for the socio-ecological realities that could affect an increasing part of the global population in coming years. Caribbean knowledge is particularly, although not exclusively, relevant to other islands. Comparisons of challenges and opportunities for climate change adaptation in SIDS and other types of island territories reveal that, despite critical socio-political and socio-historical differences between regions, more general lessons can be learned as islands across the globe face similar challenges [10]. In triangulation experiences, once more Europe and the Global North benefit from the Caribbean. However, this is an opportunity to make the exchange more equitable. Interrogating the terms we use and finding appropriate ways to describe both sociohistorical and current exchanges between the Caribbean, Europe and international organisations is an exercise in intercultural communication and cultural translation that can contribute to decolonise global responses to the environmental crisis.

Excessively technical perspectives on climate change pose significant challenges to island communities, where both vulnerability and resilience are framed by different sociohistorical factors. Extant research emphasises the importance of bringing forward diverse local perspectives on environmental degradation that help people to both understand and respond to the climate crisis [11]. Reading, listening, watching, and experiencing representations of other—real and/or imagined—people, communities, and sentient beings, can contribute not only to weave networks of solidarity among those who are already experiencing the impacts of climate change, but also to appeal to others living in less vulnerable territories. An eco-poetics of relations connecting diverse peoples, knowledges and imaginaries could contribute to counteract the negative impact of unsuccessful technocratic initiatives and failed climate communications by proposing new forms of interdisciplinary and international collaborations that bring together and enable diverse ways of living, thinking, feeling, imagining more just futures, and taking action to make them possible.

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