Global BIPOC Climate Activism vs. Mainstream Environmentalism: A Case Study

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Pledge

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Abstract

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This project draws attention to the shortcomings of mainstream environmental movements. Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) youth climate activists throughout the globe, especially those coming from majority-world countries, are all too often ignored and discredited for their contributions to environmentalism by mainstream environmental movements, along with media and academic institutions that partake in environmental discourse. The fact that many of these BIPOC climate activists are also experiencing the climate crisis more quickly and severely than those from relatively white, wealthy, and Western countries shows the risk(s) and violence that can be tied to erasure, oppression, and marginalization. As a result of various forms of globalized systemic oppression, white activists (particularly those from wealthier, industrialized countries), receive more attention, credit, and coverage relative to the climate work they are doing compared to other climate activists that are working out of majority-world countries and small-island communities. White voices from wealthy countries are given precedence over those of global BIPOC climate activists, and so are their contributions and concerns relative to climate change discourse and decision making. These omissions result in the deliberate erasure of environmentalists who do not readily conform to mainstream ideas surrounding environmentalism that are rooted in globalized forms of white supremacy. This project employs a case-study approach to examine the implications of these shortcomings, paired with an analysis of the strategies being utilized by climate activists and groups in various parts of the world to combat these oppressive systems today. These case studies can be used by climate activists across the globe who are working to uphold climate justice within their own communities in their battle against oppressive institutions and corporations.

Introduction

Throughout different communities across the country and globe, BIPOC climate activists are tirelessly working to uplift their communities from ongoing legacies of oppression by pressuring local leaders in policy and industry to place effort on bettering the conditions of the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the lands they live on. Following the 2018 release of the IPCC 1.5 C report, the effects of past emissions on global weather patterns, paired with projections about climate change based on the amount of action taken to curb future emissions before the year 2050, allowed for a "factual backcloth for the demands of global youth (climate) movements which have played a key role in bringing about a new rise in global public and media attention to climate change" (Eide & Kunelius, 2021). Researchers Eide and Kunelius (2021) also found that "enabled by the current global, networked communication infrastructure, the (youth-led climate) movement has crafted a relatively autonomous identity in the global debate and has re-energized the message of climate science and expertise with a new distinct voice as well as a kind of moral authority and resonance (p.2)." Activism and pressuring political and industrial leaders have been part of environmentalism in the past by people from different nation-states, tribes, and territories alike. The emergence of global youth climate activism has, in the words of youth climate researchers Eide and Kunelius (2021), "enabled the activists to construct an authentic, generational and temporal identity that has helped them to carve out an autonomous position and voice with considerable moral authority among existing climate policy actors" (p.1). Many of these activists directly experience the compounding impacts of climate change and social/environmental injustices due to the effects of systemic and institutionalized imperialism, classism, and racism. Many of the activists and activist groups that this project has examined belong to *frontline communities*, which are "groups of people that are most directly and severely impacted by climate change compared to people that have more resources available to them and power in society" (Georgetown Climate Center, 2021). Even in wealthy industrialized countries like the United States, frontline communities bear the burdens of industrialization and waste-management. Black Americans are three times more likely to die from pollution-related illness than white Americans due to the ongoing effects of environmental, systemic, and institutional acts of racism like red-lining and loan denial (Di et al., 2017).

While Black Americans have been subject to environmental racism, Black grassroots organizing has an important role in the configurations of the environmental justice movement. For example, in 1979 *Bean Vs Southern Waste Management Inc.* was one of the first legal cases that challenged the unethical implementation of a waste management facility in a majority Black neighborhood of Houston, Texas. The case highlighted the connections between civil rights and environmental law. Through the utilization of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which states that "federal law prohibits discrimination on the

basis of race, color, or national origin in all programs or activities receiving federal funding" (OCR, 2021), Black, middle-income homeowners organized to combat the development of a landfill in their community. "From the early 1920s through 1978, over 80 percent of Houston's household garbage landfills and incinerators were located in mostly black neighborhoods—even though Black (people) made up only 25 percent of the city's population" (Bullard, n.d). Landfills and incinerators come with an elevated risk of exposure to hazardous toxic waste and airborne pollutants that can result in elevated risks of certain cancers, low birth weight, and other congenital malformations (Domingo et al., 2020). Though the judge appointed to the suit found favor in profit over people and the request to stop the construction of the landfill was denied, this instance is suggestive of the ways in which environment and race interact and function within a society (Thomas & Hayes, 2020). Cases such as *Bean Vs Southern Waste Management Inc.* illustrate the risk in not considering race when there is clearly practiced devaluation of majority Black communities on an economic, political, and social scale. Black Americans experience environmental injustices at higher rates than white Americans, and their contributions to environmentalism are also ignored and often violently silenced. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) describes the environmental justice movement as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies" (EPA, 2021). Environmental justice studies are central in understanding the work of global BIPOC youth climate activists as the work they are doing actively is ensuring that environmental justice is considered in decision making regarding climate change adaptation and mitigation discussions. Grassroots forms of community organizing are a central aspect of youth climate activism and have also aided in shaping public opinions on environmentalism, and many of the first environmental demonstrations that birthed the environmental justice movement were deeply intertwined with racial and economic justice. On April 22 1970, one of the largest public demonstrations to date took place on a day that is now known and celebrated as Earth Day. On this day, over 20 million Americans took to the streets, marching to bring awareness to global climate change. During this time there was a growing public concern about civil rights, as well as environmental concerns related to clean air, water, and food systems. Senator Gaylord Nelson from Wisconsin was inspired by how the grassroots organizations and movements of the time influenced national protests against the Vietnam War, and decided to host teach-ins on different campuses throughout the nation (Rome, 2013). This effort led to a boom in various groups and movements across the country organizing together to plan a national demonstration of environmental advocacy, and the first Earth Day is the largest single day protest in history (Rome, 2013). The demonstrations showed leaders and policymakers in the U.S. that the public was in fact concerned with the quality of our air, our water, and the spaces where we live, work,

and play. The Earth Day marches and advocacy propelled environmentalism's presence in American society during the 1970's. Earth Day is an example of community advocacy propelling momentum around the establishment of environmental legislation in the country.

It is evident that advocacy efforts are at the root of contemporary environmentalism, but the concerns of many people who called themselves environmentalists at the time of the first Earth Day were still far removed from the concerns of Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and poor communities. The connections between racial justice and environmentalism and the systemic racism and classism that influences mainstream environmental movements and organizations steers environmental agendas from their roots and true goal(s). Mainstream environmental movements overemphasize elite forms of environmental advocacy like lobbying and policy, while also actively ignoring the grass-roots movements and contributions that propelled these beliefs into society in the first place. This results in the exclusion and erasure of frontline communities, as well as their contributions to environmental advocacy. It was a social justice movement that led to the demonstration which propelled environmentalism from the back burner, and advocates and groups that operate through the lens of environmental justice will be more successful at addressing the interconnectedness of contemporary environmental issues.

Unless environmental movements and organizations begin to acknowledge the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and risks, the contributions of grassroots activists, and the implications of international climate change adaptation solutions, are sure to leave specific groups out of the conversation who have already suffered due to elitists and imperialist ideologies and practice. The Oxford English Dictionary defines activism as "the policy of active participation or engagement in a particular sphere of activity; spec. the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change" (OED, n.d). Today, activism and other forms of collective action play a large role in getting people to consider the implications of how climate change is affecting our lives now, as well as how climate change will affect us in the future. Climate change activism is being demonstrated through in-person protests as well as through social media platforms through digital campaigning. Activism is especially important in relation to the current climate crisis, as collective action and activism have already been a driving force in historical changes that were previously thought to be unachievable in our political and social lives, such as the marches for women's rights or Civil Rights and better pay/protection for workers. Ultimately, many of the freedoms and opportunities enjoyed today by people that historically have had little to no political, social, and economic power were furthered through collective action and activist efforts.

BIPOC youth climate activists around the world are actively combating the systemic and

institutional forms of racism, classism, and sexism that oppress and try to erase their communities from the realm of global climate activism through in-person as well as digital forms of resistance. These activists, while actively speaking out against the injustices they face, are often ignored by larger media institutions that favor the status quo. Media that is influenced by those that hold fame, power, wealth, and status in society has led to a world where the perceptions and experiences of the elite and industrialized minority-world nations are favored over those of majority-world countries, and where white perspectives are deemed more appealing, appropriate, and important than those of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) from majority-world countries (Finney, 2014). Mainstream environmental movements and organizations glamorize activists like Greta Thunberg while actively contributing to the erasure of BIPOC climate activists' efforts. Mainstream environmental organizations and movements have been known to purposefully invisibilize the efforts and contributions of BIPOC youth climate activists all over the world, especially those from the global South (Gilliam, 2021). Activist groups tend to emerge as a combative measure to injustice(s) being experienced by a particular group of people, yet even within activist spaces, discrimination and exclusion occur.

In order to better understand the marginalization of BIPOC climate activists, as well as the strategies being deployed to combat oppressive systems tied to racism and classism, this project begins with a case study of Vanessa Nakate, a Ugandan environmentalist whose experiences in climate change activism highlight the failures of mainstream Western environmental movements to recognize the historical and current importance of centering BIPOC youth climate activists. The examination of Nakate as a climate activist is followed by a section highlighting the strategies being used by African climate activists like Nakate in combating the oppressive systems that influence contemporary environmental discourse and decision-making. Following my discussion of Nakate is another case study highlighting small-island and Indigenous climate activists and groups, many of whom are faced with the specter of climate-change migration. They make use of internet communication technologies and choose voluntary immobility as an act of resistance (Farbotko, 2018). To conclude, I argue that the omissions of mainstream environmental movements and organizations are hindering response to climate change across the globe.

Case Study: Vanessa Nakate and African Climate Activism

Born and raised in Kampala, Uganda, Vanessa Nakate had just graduated college and was 22-years-old when she began protesting in front of the Ugandan Parliament. Inspired by Greta Thunberg's Fridays for the Future school climate strikes, Nakate began as a single climate striker to bring awareness to the future implications of climate change after taking notice of the ways in which climate change was

already affecting her homeland (Barnes, 2021)(Bascomb, 2021). The Republic of Uganda is situated in the eastern region of Africa and has a tropical climate. Uganda is currently experiencing both increasingly higher temperatures and drier rain seasons due to climate change (Nsubuga & Rautenbach, 2018). These changes in weather patterns have led to increased flooding and droughts throughout various parts of the region. The impacts of climate change are proving to be exceptionally harsh on Ugandan agricultural and economic systems (Nsubuga & Rautenbach, 2018). The availability of freshwater has decreased, and this has further led to damaged food and water systems and social disruptions such as demonstrations and communal conflicts (Hendrix & Salehyan, 2012)(Obubu et al., 2021). For many people in Uganda, agriculture is a main source of living, resulting in even more vulnerabilities to the implications of climate change for those that work directly with the land. While Uganda, among many other African nations, is experiencing the impacts of climate change, few people from minority-world countries are aware of these climate issues due to the failures of many mainstream environmental movements. The countries that are responsible for the majority of global greenhouse gas emissions are the same nations that owe their vast wealth and development to the Global South. The Global South has experienced vast over-extraction and exploitation by wealthier nations, often to the detriment of those that actually live and work in the Global South (Smith, 2016).

During this time, much of the international conversation surrounding climate change implications and adaptation was being had by relatively white and wealthy audiences. The new face of youth climate activism was a young white girl from Sweden, Greta Thunberg, who is credited with catalyzing the Fridays for the Future movement and connected school climate strikes that have been taking place around the world since 2018. Nakate was inspired by the work that Thunberg was doing and decided that she would work to bring awareness to the ways that different nations and ecosystems of Africa will be affected by climate change (Bascomb, 2021). Nakate began as a single climate striker and spent every Friday standing in front of the Ugandan Parliament, demanding climate change acknowledgement and response by her country's leaders. As Nakate became more immersed in her work, some climate activists from different countries began to take notice of the certain kinds of voices that were being omitted from environmental discourse. Eventually, Thunberg, one of the most prominent youth climate activists at the time, saw the work that Nakate was doing and invited her to the 2020 World Economic Forum in Davos, a global platform for cultural, political, and business leaders to discuss global and industry agendas. Nakate recounted the experience she had at the forum as one of the only African climate activists that attended the event in an interview with Steve Curwood and Bobby Bascomb on Living on Earth, a public radio station and news magazine that covers a broad range of ecological issues. During the interview, Nakate tells of the experience and later heartbreak she experienced after attending the forum (Bascomb, 2021).

Below lies Nakate's response to Curwood's question about the disappointment Nakate experienced during the World Economic Forum In Davos:

> And then my other disappointment, the one in Davos, of course, I was really heartbroken and frustrated when I saw the picture and also read the article because I remember the press conference, one of the things that I really emphasized was the amplifying of voices from different parts of the world, because the activists from different parts of the world, and it was important for the media to do that. I remember mentioning that while at the press conference, so when I saw, you know, the picture, and then the article, I felt like everything that I said at the press conference, like it didn't matter at all effort, like it just went into the air and immediately disappeared, and no one was really paying attention. So it was really heartbreaking to see the picture (Bascomb, 2021).

During the press conference for the event, Nakate had addressed how important it was to amplify the voices of activists working in different parts of the world, especially those that have been historically marginalized in similar fashion. After the forum, Nakate returned home where later she realized that she had been cropped out of an image that had been taken of her and other white, youth climate activists at the forum in Lagos, including Greta Thunberg. The image had been used in an article released by the Associated Press covering youth climate activists that attended the forum. Nakate now had firsthand experience of having her voice and her efforts disregarded and disposed of. Not only was Nakate cropped out of an image taken at the forum, but she also realized that her name was not even included on the list of participants at the event. This image that Nakate had been cropped out of was used for the cover of an article about the World Economic Forum that had been released by Associated Press. After seeing that she had been removed from the images, Nakate used social media platform Twitter to ask the news outlet why she had been cropped out of the image they had decided to use. The news outlet changed the image after a wave of outcry from other climate activists and web users. @DrKasahun tweeted: *I feel so sad, not just that i(t) was racist. I'm sad because of the people from Africa* [Tweet]. Another user, @kainazamaria tweeted: *Here's what sucks about this argument - folks see the photographer's decision to crop Vanessa Nakate as an innocent mistake, not "malicious," a focus on composition. I'd argue that a photojournalist not understanding the implications of the crop is actually editorial negligence* [Tweet]. The Associated Press referred to the photo cropping as having "no ill intent" (Evelyn, 2020). The image below shows the cropped photograph used in the initial article, and under it is the original photo that was taken with Nakate (Schreiber, 2020).



Figure 1.1 Vanessa Nakate cropped out of image by Associated Press

This incident clearly highlights how white perspectives and contributions to climate sciences are favored over the efforts of BIPOC climate activists across the world, especially those working out of the global South. Choosing to crop out the only person in the image that was not white was not only blatantly racist, but this action also reinforced the idea of environmentalism as a default white-space by perpetuating racism in media practice. Nakate later stated during an interview for *The Guardian* that she felt like she "had not even been at the conference," as no images of her were used, nor were any of her comments used in the article the Associated Press had initially released. Nakate's name did not even appear on the list of participants at the event (Evelyn, 2020). This incident is one of many that illustrates the tendency of mainstream environmentalism to propel the erasure of marginalized groups' voices, perspectives, and contributions to environmental science and action, especially those relative to African countries. On January 24th 2020, at 3:44pm, Nakate (@vanessa_vash) tweeted in reference to the incident:

You didn't just erase a photo.

You erased a whole continent.

But I am stronger than ever [Tweet].

When the Associated Press decided to crop the only Black woman activist representing African climate activists, their actions erased Black women and other frontline communities from environmental discourse and decision-making relative to the climate crisis. Thankfully, this omission had not gone unchecked by Nakate herself, among other famous climate activists like Greta Thunberg (who was not cropped out of the image used in the article), which ensured that the experiences of African communities and ecosystems would not be kept in the background in environmental discourse.

White supremacy has influenced media in a way that has resulterd in racialized hierarchies in media practices and reinforces both the erasure and persecution of activists like Nakate on the basis of her geographic location, skin tone, sex, and young age. Barnes examines three distinct social binds, location, gender, and youth, to describe how certain aspects of Nakate's identity are commonly used by critics to undermine the experiences, contributions, and success of African climate activism in the international

socio-political realm. Nakate has received critiques ranging from her hair style(s) and young age, to her supposed 'role' as an Ugandan woman (Barnes, 2021). Backlash Nakate has received from both the Global North and South, from media institutions to political leaders alike further highlights how African activists' voices are regarded in the environmental realm. Nakate has even received criticism for calling out the racist photo-cropping incident at the forum in Lagos. Those that critiqued her actions challenged her as a representative of African climate activism, claiming that Nakate is too much of one thing, not enough of another for her experiences and contributions to be representative of African and Black youth climate activists (Rafaely & Barnes, 2020). While academia has recently begun to show interest in the emergence of global youth climate activism, there is still very little research on how African women in particular are marginalized in mainstream media surrounding climate activism, as well as how agency is employed to combat these oppressive systems in play. In an article titled "Reimagining African Women Youth Climate Activism," Brendon R. Barnes (2021) highlights what he refers to as "social binds," which inhibit the activism of African youth climate activists that may already be marginalized, ignored, and/or erased from the mainstream environmental sphere. One term that can better help one understand how social binds work is the concept of *intersectionality.* Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American critical-race theorist and civil rights activist, coined the term in 1989 to describe how various aspects of one's social identity can overlap and interact, creating unique experiences of oppression based on multiple identity categories. Crenshaw created the term to help explain the social and political oppression and experiences of Black women in the United States. Crenshaw (1989) explains how both traditional feminist ideologies and anti-racist systems and institutions have excluded Black women in particular due to the lack of consideration of how the discrimination Black women face overlaps with multiple aspects of their identity. For example, during the first-wave feminist movement, Black women were often excluded from discourse and decision-making regarding women's rights in a time of political unrest and prevalent racial divide.

Even before Black feminist scholars like Crenshaw had created terminology to help people better understand how social identities can intersect and compound, Black women had already identified and critiqued interlinked oppressions long ago. One historic example of one woman's resistance to the omission of Black women from feminist discourse occurred in 1851 during the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. During this convention, abolitionist and activist Sojourner Truth addressed the crowd and demanded equal rights for *all* women, regardless of race and/or social standing. "Ain't I a woman?" Truth asked the crowd:

> That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages,
> and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody

> ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? (Tenney, 1992)

Truth drew attention to the erasure of Black women in the demonstrations of women's suffrage that were occurring at the time by comparing how she was treated by men to how men were raised and expected to treat (white) women. In the same ways that race and gender compounded the systemic marginalization and oppression of Black women during the U.S. women's suffrage movement, similar connections can be made between the intersections of race, gender, and geographic location when examining the injustices being experienced by contemporary BIPOC youth climate activists from different areas across the globe. Both power and marginalization are expressed through the social and political systems we live, work, and play in, and the intersectionality of one's identity can result in compounding injustice(s) being experienced by an individual belonging to one or more groups that are already or have been historically marginalized, ignored, and erased by those that hold social and/or political power within any given society (Crenshaw, 1989). These intersections between social identities can increase access to goods for some, and simultaneously decrease access or increase negative exposure for others, based on how people who share these identities and traits are perceived and treated in society. For example, Nakate experiences intersectional harms due to her identity as a younger person involved in environmental discourse, as an African, as a woman, and as someone who is dark-skinned, which have all acted as obstacles to her success as a climate youth climate activist due to the systemic racism and classism that has influenced mainstream environmental organizations and movements (Barnes, 2021). The intersectionality of BIPOC youth climate activists' identities also compound the injustices that an individual must face in order to be successful in climate activism, which make it all the more difficult for climate activists that belong to one or more groups that have been historically marginalized to receive recognition for their work and contributions to the field in the same way that those from predominantly Western, wealthy and white countries are. "Oppressive structures ultimately serve to take away agency from youth climate activists by delegitimizing and undermining them. However, it is essential to remember that activists are not passive recipients of oppressive systems. In the face of oppression, activists deploy their agency to resist, negotiate, maneuver, break down and reconstitute their positions. In so doing, activists attempt to create, reimagine and develop representations of their activisms" (Barnes, 2021, p.2).

Defying Oppressive Systems Through Internet Communication Technologies (ICTs)

The erasure and disregard of the African climate experience(s) and contributions to environmental movements and organizations has led to the creation of the Rise Up Movement (RUM). Founded by Nakate in 2018, the movement uses a variety of tactics in order to amplify the voices of African climate activists by highlighting the various contributions African environmentalists have made to eco-sciences, movements, and organizations. In the interview with Bobby Bascomb, Nakate states:

> And I also think another challenge is that the media is putting a face or faces on the climate movement. And I find it really dangerous, because in a way, it erases other people's stories. So media has a responsibility to report about the climate crisis, to point about the climate solutions, to report about the science, to report about the activists who are speaking up, especially activists from the most affected areas, it's important to listen to their stories, every activist has a story to tell every story has a solution to give and every solution has a life to change. (Bascomb, 2021, p.1)

Both Nakate and the RUM act on the belief that countries most responsible for the climate crisis must acknowledge their actions and be held accountable for their part in the climate crisis in order for true climate justice to occur, and many of their digital demonstrations reflect these ideas (RUM, n.d). RUM combats mainstream media's tendency to exclude African perspectives from the conversation by participating in protests and other demonstrative efforts to draw light to the experience of African climate change. RUM utilizes new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to do their work.

Digital platforms like websites and social media are the two ICTs being used by the Rise Up Movement. Scholars have recently begun to recognize the increasing relevance of ICTs in social movements by examining the ways in which many activists are beginning to use these technologies to communicate, collaborate, and even demonstrate their stance(s) on a variety of socio-political issues that the world experiences today (Tinga et al., 2020; Wasserman, 2005). ICT's have been studied as an effective tool for grassroots activism, as the internet allows for a less centralized and structured mode of communication and information sharing, and has been utilized by a variety of different social groups throughout history (Wasserman, 2005; Wood, 1997). For example Wood covers how Native Hawai'ians have used the web to combat the dissemination of distorted ideas concerning the illegal overthrow of the independent kingdom of Hawaii by the United States government (Wood, 1997). ICTs allow for international communication and collaboration, surpassing physical barriers like distance and borders. Overcoming barriers of time, space, and identity, ICTs have made communication more accessible for

climate activists in areas where digital justice is lacking. Much of the world agrees that access to internet is becoming an increasingly relevant aspect of economic and social life, bringing into question human rights considerations in majority-world countries, where only 35% of people from countries that are considered to be still in the process of political, social, and economic transitions have access to high-speed internet, compared to over 80% of people in what is considered the 'developed' world (The World Bank, 2018).

Rural and poor communities in countries across the globe also encounter issues of access to digital and internet technologies, but ICT use by African activists has still proven to be useful as an international communication tool. The use of ICTs by activist groups helped build digital support networks and allowed various groups to show solidarity for groups that may have similar interests through these digital platforms (Wasserman, 2005). RUM uses ICTs as a tool to share information and images, highlighting the work that is being done by African climate activists across the continent. These tools directly combat the tendency of contemporary environmental movements and organizations to exclude and disregard BIPOC environmentalism. @riseupmovement1 is the current Instagram page for the organization. 1Million Activists stories is the official website of the organization. @riseupmovement1 shares photos of civic demonstrations and digitally created images covering the latest information about the experiences of and current events surrounding climate change throughout various African nations. The account currently has over 3800 followers from countries all over the world. #RiseupMovement is a hashtag they frequently attach to their posts. Hashtags have been especially useful for BIPOC climate activists as hashtags work to create mutual connections between multiple posts that can be used in order to build narrative agency that is "communal, invented, skillful, and protean" (Yang, 2016). Yang discusses how narrative forms are an essential part of the human experience, which ultimately gives narrative agency the power to use personal emotions, thoughts, and stories to express a single sense of action/force against social and/or political injustices (2016).

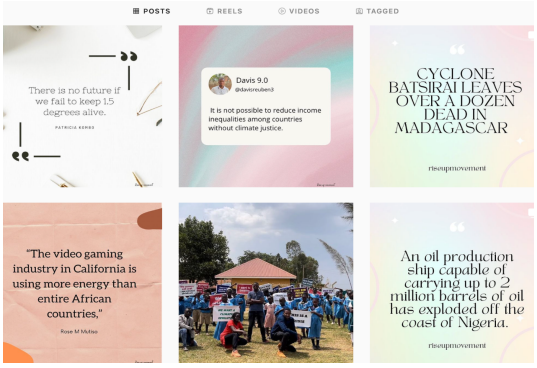


Figure 1.2 Rise Up Movement Instagram Page

The @riseupmovemnet1Instagram account allows people from all over to have digital access to the latest climate-related news about African experiences of climate change, coming straight from the source instead of through corporate media outlets. @riseupmovement1 is a tool to combat mainstream media's tendency to exclude Africa from environmental and climate-related discourse. With this new form of distribution and communication tools, environmental activists don't have to rely on mainstream media institutions to share their experiences, work, and contributions with the rest of the world. In addition to Instagram, the 1Million Activist Stories website allows people more detailed information about the work that African climate activists are doing and access to various other climate-related images for users to save and share. Each post has links to more detailed sources and ways to get in touch with people all over the world that share similar concerns.

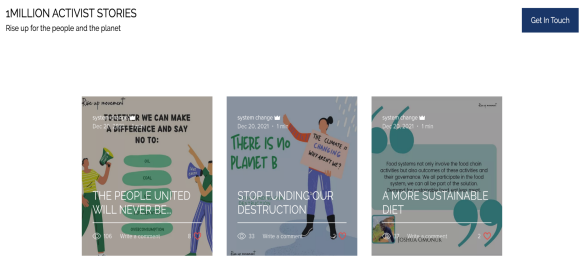


Figure 1.3 Screenshot of 1 Million Activist stories Webpage

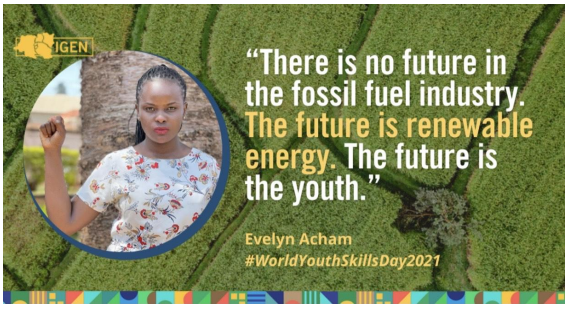


Figure 1.4 Example of 1Million Activist Stories Post

Historically, the continent of Africa has released the least amount of carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere when compared to the Americas, Europe, and Asia, but the entire continent is experiencing the impacts of climate change more quickly and more severely than any of these wealthier, fossil-fuel dependent countries. Much of the Global South already suffers from poverty-related issues like negative social and health outcomes, paired with a lack of resources due to over-extraction by wealthier countries. Much of the 'development' of the West is largely due to the extraction and use of fossil fuels (Pirani, 2018). Africa is a continent that is expected to undergo extensive urbanization in the future to reach developmental goals, and there is discourse happening pertaining to whether or not the West's ideas of development should be the ideal or standard (Eyong, 2006). Another region that has suffered from colonialism and imperialism and is now experiencing the devastating aftermath of climate change is the Pacific Islands. Various regions throughout the Pacific have also adopted strategies to combat mainstream environmentalism's tendency to exclude frontline communities

from environmental discourse by advocating for a seat at the table and defying Western narratives of environmental adaptation and response.

Case Study: Small-Island and Indigenous Climate Activism

In addition to many regions of the African continent, Pacific Island communities and other small-island nations are also areas of the world where the effects of climate change are already negatively impacting people and ecosystems alike. Rising sea levels are one of the most pressing concerns for small-island communities due to the devastating effects that sea-level rise has on coastal communities (IPCC, 2014, 2018). Loss of biodiversity and habitable land due to climate change across island ecosystems have been the result of drastic increases in dangerous weather patterns, like storms, typhoons, and droughts, which have taken lives and destroyed ecosystems and communities. Climate change has led to the degradation of coastal community infrastructures due to rising sea levels, changing temperatures, soil erosion, which have resulted in the collapse of local fisheries and coral reef degradation (United Nations, 2010). Corporate expansion into oceans also greatly threatens Indigenous and small-island food sovereignty. With many Pacific island communities already being affected by histories of imperialistic displacement, marginalization, and oppression, the onslaught of climate change impacts has resulted in compounding injustices for various communities living throughout small-island communities. Like countries throughout the African continent, Pacific and small-island nations have also been on the receiving end of many imperial injustices, such as nuclear testing, which I discuss in further detail below. They are also experiencing the climate crisis more severely, and with less conventional resources at their disposal when compared to wealthier industrialized nations. While the vulnerability of island ecosystems to climate change impacts has been researched and discussed by Western scientists, the way these observations are framed tends to ignore the contributions of island communities to environmental discourse and climate change adaptation strategies (Mcleod et al., 2018). The Western perception about island communities also ignores the role industrialized nations have played in some of the negative experiences of island life, work, and play.

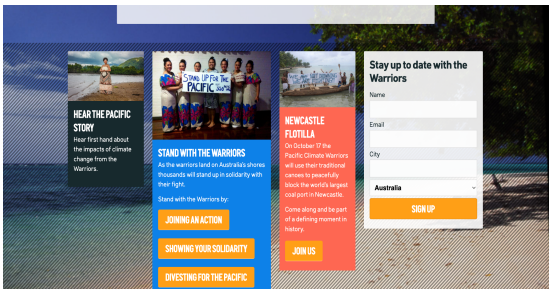
Climate activists from island nations have made efforts to change the narrative surrounding climate change and island communities' response to environmental harms and social injustices. For years the Pacific islands have been at the receiving ends of many injustices that are largely unnoticed and ignored by the rest of the world, and many regions are still suffering from the after-effects of imperialism, overfishing, and forced migration (Trask, 2019). Due to the remote location of many of the Pacific Islands, some have been occupied by foreign militaries or used as dumping grounds and test sites for industrial toxic substances that pollute the soil, water, and air. In the Republic of the Marshall Islands, for

example, communities are still suffering the effects of nuclear testing by the U.S. military conducted throughout the region following World War II. Between 1946 and 1958, the U.S. military conducted nuclear tests on the Marshall Islands approximately 67 times (Johnston, 2015). These tests have led to concentrations of toxic nuclear pollution across the atolls. One of these toxic substances is radioactive plutonium, which is understood as one of the most toxic substances known to humankind. Radioactive plutonium has a half-life of 24,100 years and is known to increase risk of disease like lung fibrosis and cancers of the lungs and liver with heavy exposure (Romanov et al., 2020). The nuclear tests that were conducted in the Marshall Islands, along with other injustices like commercial overfishing and improper waste-disposal that have affected small-island nations like the Marshall Islands, have resulted in an increase in health-related risks tied to poisoned water and food sources, forced displacement, and cancer. Subsistence economies like the Marshall Islands and other Pacific island communities are being further impacted by climate change. Small-island nations are combating these challenges through different forms of climate and social activism, paired with traditional ecological strategies like ecosystem-based adaptation. While the Marshallese have been forced to leave their island or face the effects of nuclear fallout, some in the island community have decided to reclaim their homeland as a statement of resistance and an attempt to resurface traditional tribal systems and cultural Marshallese ways of life.

In the same ways that the Marshallese have decided to reclaim the lands that were forcibly exploited and combat their deracination, other island communities are combating oppression and marginalization through climate activism. One group, known as the Pacific Climate Warriors, are working to combat the industries responsible for island ecosystem degradation through in-person as well as digital forms of resistance, activism, and information distribution. In “No Retreat: Climate Change and Voluntary Immobility in the Pacific Islands,” Carol Farbotko (2018) shows how mainstream environmentalism often assumes that climate migration will be inevitable for communities most vulnerable to climate change, such as small-island nations. These narratives ignore the relationship between people and their ancestral lands, as well as ignoring the concept of voluntary immobility as a viable alternative to conventional strategies of climate change adaptation. Voluntary immobility can be understood as when a group of people affected by climate change in a region choose to stay due to cultural, historical, and spiritual attachments to ancestral place(s) (Farbotko, 2018). The Pacific Climate Warriors are opposing the narrative that climate-induced migration may be the only viable solution for those residing in island communities, as well as narratives that depict people from small-island communities as victims by actively practicing voluntary immobility. These portrayals ignore the agency of these groups and their unique climate experiences and responses to their changing environments. It is important to understand that populations have unique and specific attachments to place, meaning that some members of

climate-vulnerable communities may choose to stay (Farbotko, 2018). This act of voluntary immobility relays small-island communities unacceptance of the conditions that the industrialized world has largely created. Through deploying their own agency, Pacific island and small island communities are demonstrating their own agency through community-led responses and adaptation strategies to local climate change impacts being experienced in a given region. Both Indigenous and small-island communities have long histories of employing ecologically sustainable food and infrastructure systems, as well as anticipating and adapting to fluctuations in the environment accordingly. This is contrary to Western mainstream ideas of environmentalism and sustainability as Pacific island and Indigenous communities have been known to operate through systems of communal knowledge and traditional ecological knowledge (Nelson & Shilling, 2018, p.13).

Activists working out of the Pacific Islands are working to ensure they are not being described or looked upon as mere victims of imperialism, but as 'climate warriors' who are collectively defending their ancestral lands, and actively combats the imperialistic systems that largely influence the narrative surrounding economic, social and political interactions between different countries. "We are not drowning. We are fighting" is the motto for the Pacific Climate Warriors (PCW, n.d). The movement began when Islanders gathered under the name 350 Pacific to join with the global climate change movement, 350.org. Active in 15 Pacific island nations, the Pacific Climate Warriors have a unique approach to empowering young people to understand the issue of climate change and to take action to protect and enrich their islands, cultures, and oceans. The Pacific Climate Warriors are currently planning to embark on a journey through 13 of the Pacific islands, ending in one of the world's largest coal ports in Australia, *New Castle Flotilla,* to peacefully but powerfully protest the industry processes that are damaging small island ecosystems and communities (PCW, n.d).The Pacific Climate Warriors plan arrived in Australia on October 17th, 2014, on traditional handmade canoes that the Warriors have been forging all year. Similar to the Africa-based Rise Up Climate movement, the Pacific Climate Warriors are also utilizing internet communication technologies (ICT's) in their climate activism through a website designed to promote awareness of small-island climate experiences and promote interaction between Pacific islanders and the rest of the world. The website for the group offers information about how users can donate and even sign-up to participate in the demonstrations themselves. The Pacific Climate Warriors demonstration that took place in 2014 is an example of a direct collective stance being taken against the operations of the fossil fuel industries responsible for the emissions and waste that small-island communities have been subjected to.



Climate change adaptation strategies that focus on migration as the only viable option actively ignore the perspectives of those most affected and vulnerable to climate change impacts, leading to assumptions that are largely patriarchal and Western in thought (Farbotko, 2018). The ways in which climate change migration are described are also overly simplistic and ignore socio-political factors associated with international migration implementation and subsequent responses in any given region of the world. Conversations and solutions that are centered in retreat as the only viable option for communities impacted by climate change impacts ignore entire groups that have deep ties to their ancestral lands. Localities should be at the forefront of conversations surrounding climate change adaptation in order to ensure that frontline communities are not being left out of the discussion. Developing, managing, and protecting ecosystems also coincides with Indigenous and island practices that are vital in addressing climate injustice issues in a regenerative holistic manner. “Even in the midst of immense inequality, lived experiences can make visible hidden truths and encourage transformative change” (Johnston, 2015, p.140). Hearing the stories and experiences of those who are directly impacted by climate change impacts and subsequent response will ensure that all issues are being addressed.

Combining traditional practices with contemporary Western scientific innovations like climate-smart and regenerative agriculture are some of the ways that traditional practice has influenced environmental response to changing climates in various parts of the world. Mcleod et al. (2019) examine the ways in which ecosystem-based adaptation (EBA) strategies are largely ignored by academia surrounding climate change response and adaptation. EBA refers to a combination of “biodiversity and ecosystem services into an adaptation and development strategy that increases the resilience of ecosystems and communities to climate change through the conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of ecosystems” (Mcleod et al., 2019). Different kinds of EBA’s can be used in the development of secure water and food sources that are not only provisional for the local community but also help to reduce climate change related risks such as flooding and droughts. Indigenous populations and those residing in small-island communities should be able to voice their concerns in a social and political context, as they have been instrumental in shaping environmental policies and agreements with

leaders in policy and industry. For example, the Paris Agreement included recognition of Indigenous knowledge and role in designing, adopting, and implementing climate change policies (Tormos-Aponte, 2021). Indigenous peoples also make up less than 5% of the global population, but protect over 80% of the earth's biodiversity (National Geographic, n.d). Indigenous people and Pacific Islanders have been instrumental in shaping environmental policies and demanding more access to ecologically related sciences as well as decision-making positions. Indigenous and small-island populations are also experiencing various forms of systemic and institutional injustices due to long histories of imperial genocide and marginalization, largely by European settlers and other imperialistic nation-states. Some of the world's most industrialized nations were founded through the erasure of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral home-lands through different forms of genocide and institutional/system marginalization, and these same nations are largely responsible for the unregulated and careless release of the emissions that are responsible for climate change impacts like changes in weather patterns and subsequent eco-system damage and/or loss of life.

Conclusion

By 2100, says United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights Philip Alston, "We risk a 'climate apartheid' scenario where the wealthy pay to escape overheating, hunger and conflict while the rest of the world is left to suffer" (United Nations, 2019, p.1). Many, he projects, will be forced to choose between starvation or migration. International climate migration as an adaptive strategy to climate change poses risks due to ongoing legacies of classism and racism that can produce marginalization. Vulnerable communities are too often the scape-goat of environmental negatives associated with industrial processes due to unequal power dynamics that allow vulnerable populations to be exploited, forgotten, and then violently ignored. While the work of prominent activists like Greta Thunberg has been raising awareness about how climate change is decreasing habitability across the world, the success of Western and white activists from wealthy nations comes at the expense of the erasure of BIPOC climate activist efforts. It is because of these omissions and shortcomings of Western environmental movements and organizations that a white teenage girl from Sweden has become the face of climate change activism, despite the impacts of climate change being experienced much more heavily and severely by BIPOC communities, especially those from majority-world countries that have been ravaged by overexploitation and imperialism colonialism. The mainstream environmental movement has forgotten the invaluable impact that grassroots mobilization has had on the implementation of environmental policies and agreements.

No single group should have to bear a disproportionate amount of environmental negatives due

to systemic classism and racism, especially when frontline communities are not only disproportionately exposed to hazardous physical environments, but also less likely to have access to social, economic, and political resources with which to mitigate the adverse health effects of those exposures (Collins et al., 2015; Huang and London, 2012).Today's mainstream environmentalism does not act on the goal of true liberation for the people and the planet due to the lack of representation of Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian, LGBTQ+, disabled, and other marginalized voices and places. Today's mainstream environmental movements and groups favor wealthy, white, and Western ideas surrounding environmentalism and what it means to legitimately contribute to environmental discourse, problem-solving, and solution creation. Even the environmental justice movement has received critique due to failures in achieving results. EJ scholars have hinted at why the movement has failed to achieve substantive results, including industry capture of the state (Faber, 2008; Lievanos, 2012; Holifield, 2007). The question of who gets to participate in environmentalism in a way that is deemed valid is also based on these influences of mainstream environmentalism. Those that do not fit the mold are violently excluded and ignored from important discourse and decision-making environments which can have devastating effects. People who are forgotten or are seen as disposable are not the first to receive disaster relief, they don't have access to green spaces in the same ways that those that are favored in society are able to either (Finney, 2014). For example, during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, disaster relief was not allocated to the public equally and internal displacement after the hurricane was prolonged for Black victims of Hurricane Katrina (Craemer, 2010).

Critics of mainstream environmentalism often claim that the concerns of mainstream environmentalists are out of touch, or not all encompassing of the overarching issues that have led to the conditions we find ourselves in today. Mainstream environmentalism also does not value the same kinds of environments that global BIPOC activists in environmentalism tend to. Mainstream environmentalism tends to be concerned with the preservation of natural resources and spaces, different from many grassroots activists and BIPOC groups that are concerned with both natural and industrial environments that enclose where we live, work, and play (Cortland, 2021). One reason for the disconnect between the valuation and interpretations of environmentalism is that many elites have not been subject to environmental negatives in the same regard as frontline communities. Most people do not consider all of the different ways that poverty and racism negatively affect you unless you belong to a group that experiences similar issues and obstacles. The elite and racist influence in mainstream environmental movements and organizations are out of touch with grassroots, collaborative ideologies that allowed environmentalism to flourish in the past. Mainstream environmentalism must acknowledge their part in the omissions of grassroots, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, impoverished, and other marginalized groups in order to

address climate change issues from a climate justice perspective.

This project highlights the failures of contemporary environmental movements and organizations, as well as some of the strategies being utilized by BIPOC climate activists to combat these compounding systems of oppression that influence climate activism. Global ecological processes are being affected by climate change in ways that can no longer be ignored by world leaders in policy and business. Maneuvering and navigating the systemic oppression that has been embedded in contemporary environmental organizations and movements requires an acknowledgement of the Global North's contribution to climate change as well as their involvement in the issues being experienced by the Global South. Research regarding the implications of environmental injustices on Black communities within the U.S. shows historical trends related to environmental injustices that also produced anti-Black violence. These connections make clear that contemporary, mainstream forms of environmentalism, along with responses to issues relative to the climate crisis, are heavily influenced by white privilege and white supremacist ideologies.This observation leads to the reality that minority voices are underrepresented and even purposefully ignored when it comes to addressing environmental injustices and climate change. Answers to whether or not climate justice can be achieved without racial justice draw further connections between environmentalism, anti-Blackness, and the racialized aspects of the field. Some forms of activism like the Black Lives Matter movement have been demonized by the media and other institutions that operate through systems rooted in white supremacy while other activists/organizations receive positive coverage for doing very similar work.

The social identities and geographic locations of BIPOC youth climate activists can have a drastic impact on these activists' abilities to receive recognition for their work and contributions to environmental sciences. Environmental activism has been on the rise due to the increasing concerns about the implications of human-induced climate change. In a time where there is increasing concern of global climate change, activists all over the world have been sacrificing their time, energy, and resources in order to bring awareness to the true implications of continued unregulated waste and emission production. The distribution of costs and benefits from industrial processes are also riddled with injustice. Different social groups are allotted different kinds of authority in decision making that affects those most impacted by climate change the most. The social, economic, and political repercussions of unchecked industrialization need to be equally distributed among the population in order to achieve global climate justice. It is important to reconceptualize environmentalism and realize that environmental justice is not separate from the field of environmental science, and that environmental justice is part of the political and social history of environmentalist movements and organizations. One way to begin to combat this complex and interconnected set of injustices is by giving the people who are experiencing this issue the

stage and allowing them to speak on their experiences with the world and how to make it better for all of its inhabitants, especially those that are often underrepresented and unheard.

It must also be understood that the contributions of BIPOC are of immeasurable value considering the implication of global climate politics. The ability to contribute to the decision-making process regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies is especially important for those residing in areas of the world most vulnerable to climate change disasters. Indigenous perspectives must be centered in environmental conversations and decision-making as their contributions are *essential* in ensuring that humanity can operate in a way that works in a cyclical relationship with nature so that we are still able to receive life-sustaining services from the lands we inhabit without depleting and polluting the land, air, and water that sustain all life on this planet.Environmentalists everywhere must recognize that climate justice cannot occur without racial-social-class justice.

This project works towards dismantling the historically oppressive systems of contemporary environmental movements in the context of climate change by highlighting the successes and strategies being implemented by BIPOC climate activists across the globe. These youth activists face the compounding onslaught of climate change-related vulnerabilities, paired with intersectionality of social, political and economic injustices at the same time, resulting in even more barriers to the attainment of true climate justice for the earth and all of its inhabitants. In addition to the barriers to true climate justice, oppressive systems that have historically influenced contemporary environmental movements and organizations contribute to the injustices commonly experienced by the lands and people that have been historically marginalized, oppressed, and overexploited. BIPOC climate activists across the world are actively combating these systems of oppression through their own activist efforts. By actively raising awareness about the experience and implications of climate change throughout majority world countries that have been over-exploited and excluded from international discourse and decision making regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, BIPOC youth climate activists are putting themselves at the forefront of the discussion. It was in fact the same omission of BIPOC voices in environmental discourse that allowed Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate to directly call-out the erasure of her own contributions and further propel her career in climate change activism. ICTs have proven to be a new effective tool in increasing the ability for different stakeholders to communicate with each other internationally, but some people still do not have access to ICTs due to lack of internet access so there are still people that are being left out of the conversation. Digital communication technologies are useful but they shouldn't be taken for granted or as an everlasting form of communication. There are still millions of people across the world that do not readily have access to ICTs due to social or political restrictions (e.g China and Russia). True climate justice is intersectional and frontline communities need a seat at the table

if there is any chance of achieving global climate justice. Climate justice is racial justice, economic justice, gender justice, reproductive justice, immigration justice, housing justice, and labor justice. Climate justice and social justice are intertwined in ways that can no longer be ignored if we want sustainable, regenerative, and reparative solutions to the climate issues we face now, as well as in the future.

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