

Psychology, environment and climate change: foregrounding justice (part one)

We are living through unprecedented global heating, environmental pollution, chemical toxicity, biodiversity loss, extractivism, environmental militarisation, exclusion of marginalised people in decision-making processes, violence directed at environmental defenders and limits to public engagement, to name a few issues (IPCC, 2022, Menton & Le Billon, 2021, Noyes et al., 2009, Sealey-Huggins, 2018). While psychologists are paying increasing attention to environmental degradation and climate change (Bailey, Pool & James, 2021, Wainwright and Mitchell, 2021), the discipline has been somewhat slow to address the political and structural dimensions that underpin those issues. Importantly, mainstream psychological scholarship has neglected marginalised people who are disproportionately affected *and* underrepresented in environmental and climate scholarship and practice.

We need a concerted effort to include voices of marginalised people in meaningful ways, avoid individualising and medicalising environmental and climate impacts, and turn our collective attention to the upstream and political causes of environmental and climate change. We need to facilitate, mobilise and agitate; hold policymakers, polluting industry and governments accountable; provide scientific evidence of impacts to affect social change; understand and facilitate new forms of activism; and (critically) theorise. Put differently, we need to recentre power, rights, politics, mobilisation and justice in our efforts.

A small but growing group of psychology scholars and practitioners are active in environmental and climate justice work (Barnwell & Wood, 2022, Adams, 2021, Fernandez-Jesus, Barnes & Diniz, 2021). We deliberately chose the

**Brendon R. Barnes¹,
Garret Barnwell¹ &
Lynn Hendricks²**

¹University of Johannesburg

²Stellenbosch University

Keywords

*Accompaniment,
affects, Africa(n)-centred
psychology, decolonising
psychology, feminist
psychology, reflexivities*

concept justice because of its potential to draw in various sub-fields, including critical, political, community, health, social, feminist and liberatory psychologies. Environmental and climate justice also necessitates inter and transdisciplinary thinking and involvement of sectors outside the academy. Indeed, authors in this special issue are from various academic disciplines and include scholars, activists, writers, students and grassroots community organisers. We also selected justice because of its focus on praxis, intervention, community mobilisation, and social change. The special issue includes articles on *just* interventions, including speculative fiction, photography, civic monitoring, litigation, and protest.

The environmental justice and climate justice literature is vast, rich, and complex, so our intention was not to seek a definitive role for psychology in environmental and climate justice but to identify the coordinates of this work and set the scene for future scholarship and action. Indeed, we hope that the fascinating collection of papers in the special issue gives the reader a sense of the range of topics, theoretical orientations, practices and methodologies.

A further justification for the special was that much of the current climate and environmental psychology writing emanates from global North mainstream psychology. We do not wish to oversimplify the global North versus South dichotomy (after all, marginalised groups in the North are often overlooked, and there are pockets of conservative mainstream psychology in the South). However, we believe that locating the special issue in the South facilitated the inclusion of marginalised voices worldwide. The journal itself enabled an inclusive and justice-oriented tone. *Psychology in Society (PINS)* has a long and rich history of inclusive and socially just scholarship. The journal and the special issue was a good fit, and the response to the call was excellent. We received manuscripts from South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Germany, and Australia focusing on marginalisation, praxis, decoloniality and allyship.

The special issue is divided into two issues. This issue starts with a powerful paper by Serdar Değirmencioğlu titled '*Militarism or peace and justice: psychology at the crossroads of climate change.*' The paper focuses on the military's role in pollution, environmental destruction, and climate change. It interrogates psychology's reluctance to resist militarism to achieve climate justice, mainly because of the close relationship between psychology and the military. The paper draws attention to the military and militarisation as a fundamentally neglected area of scholarship.

Nick Wood and Faeza Meyer follow with an excellent article called '*Just Stories: the role of speculative fiction in challenging the growing climate apartheid.*' The paper focuses on the role of speculative fiction in the climate crisis. It is based on powerful, critical and collaborative reflections by the first author (a psychologist and published fiction

author) and the second (a Cape Town community activist) involved in water justice struggles. The authors skilfully demonstrate the role of writing and fiction in their activism. Importantly, they show how writing can narrow the growing climate apartheid and shape climate and water justice discourses.

Elise Bryant and Christopher Sonn follow with a fascinating paper called '*Country and climate: Journeys toward the decolonial option among non-indigenous climate activists.*' Framed by decolonial thinking, the paper focuses on intersubjective exchange among indigenous and non-indigenous activists in Australia. Based on interviews with five non-indigenous environmental activists, the authors demonstrate how dialogue and shifting subjectivities can be essential forces in allyship and decolonial praxis.

Gareth Morgan, Garret Barnwell, Lucy Johnstone, Kirsten Shukla, and Annie Mitchell follow with a thought-provoking theoretical paper called '*The Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF) and the Climate and Ecological Crises.*' The paper draws attention to the PTMF as a valuable and politically impactful lens to understand climate responses. They draw on their extensive experience to demonstrate the value of the framework. The PTMF questions mainstream psychology's individualising and pathologising framing of climate change impacts. The paper also introduces ecological power as a novel addition to the PTMF.

Andrea Marais Potgieter and Alison Faraday draw our attention to the need to consider the natural world in our conceptualisations of justice in their deeply reflexive paper called '*Foregrounding ecojustice: A case study of trans-species accompaniment.*' The authors remind us that environmental justice cannot be limited to disproportionate human impacts but should include ecological justice. The authors, both activists, demonstrate their activism of trans-species accompaniment of a leopard toad against the backdrop of proposed road development in an ecologically sensitive wetland in Cape Town. The authors analysed public participation processes and questionnaire findings from drivers and communities. The findings critique the exclusionary aspects of participation, emphasize the need for transspecies accompaniment and discuss the long term impacts on activists.

Part one of the special issue ends with a book review by Thandokazi Maseti of '*A Bigger Picture – My Fight to Bring a New African Voice to the Climate Crisis*' written by Vanessa Nakate. Vanessa Nakate is a leading figure in African youth climate activism and has been subjected to severe racism, sexism and undermining; and was famously cropped out of a press photo with more 'famous' white activists, including Greta Thunberg. She has, arguably because of these experiences, strengthened her activism and positioned herself as a critical voice in African youth climate activism.

Thandokazi writes, “I am inspired by Vanessa’s courage to own her voice and tell her story. I am also sad that she has already had to defend her humanity at this young age and explain her existence in spaces that seek to silence black bodies.”

The special issue celebrates the work of psychologists working in environmental, eco and climate justice and we hope that the special issue will inspire more critical thinking and praxis.

References

Adams, M (2021) Critical psychologies and climate change. **Current Opinion in Psychology**, **42**, 13-18.

Bailey, C, Poole, N A & James, A (2021) Crisis care: tackling the climate and ecological emergency. **BJPsych Bulletin**, **45(4)**, 201-204.

Barnwell, G & Wood, N (2022) (forthcoming). Climate justice is central to addressing the climate emergency’s psychological consequences in the Global South: a narrative review. **South African Journal of Psychology**, doi:00812463211073384.

Ferguson, M A & Schmitt, M T (2021) Editorial overview: Six messages of climate psychology. **Current Opinion in Psychology**, **42**, 4-8.

Fernandes-Jesus, M, Barnes, B & Diniz, R F (2020) Communities reclaiming power and social justice in the face of climate change. **Community Psychology in Global Perspective**, **6(2)**, 1-21.

IPCC (2022) **IPCC sixth assessment report: impacts, adaptation and vulnerability**. Geneva: WHO & UNEP.

Menton, M & Le Billon, P (Eds.) (2021) **Environmental defenders: Deadly struggles for life and territory**. London: Routledge.

Noyes, P D, McElwee, M K, Miller, H D, Clark, B W, Van Tiem, L A, Walcott, K C, Erwin, K N & Levin, E D (2009) The toxicology of climate change: environmental contaminants in a warming world. **Environment International**, **35(6)**, 971-986.

Sealey-Huggins, L (2018) The climate crisis is a racist crisis: Structural racism, inequality and climate change, In Johnson A, Joseph-Salisbury, R & Kamunge, B (Eds) **The fire now: Anti-racist scholarship in times of explicit racial violence**. London: Zed.

Wainwright, T & Mitchell, A (2021) Editorial. Special issue: climate and ecological emergency. **Clinical Psychology Forum**, **346**, 3-7.