

CLIMATE, COVID & CARE



FEMINIST JOURNEYS

AUGUST 2020

INTRODUCTION

Climate, Covid and Care: Feminist Journeys is a collection of journeys, stories, and ideas from five feminist activists working at the intersection of gender justice and climate justice. Through conversation and storytelling, the zine aims to re-shape dominant narratives surrounding the climate and Covid crises, by applying an intersectional lens, and re-centring the voices of Black, Indigenous, and women of colour from the Global South. It includes stories of women's empowerment in the Pacific, Indigenous innovation in Chad, feminist resilience in Zimbabwe, youth leadership in Peru, and care as an antidote to violence in Pakistan and beyond.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the climate crisis have a disproportionate impact on people living in poverty, and both are increasing inequality. As we look for ways to fight back, this zine offers reflection on feminist approaches around the world. What can we learn from young peoples' leadership? How can we value and integrate Indigenous Peoples' knowledge? Why is intersectionality crucial in responding to a crisis? How can we build more caring, sustainable societies?

This is an Oxfam project as part of the *#ClimateChangers* campaign, in collaboration with Betty Barkha, Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, Maggie H. Mapondera, Majandra Rodriguez Acha, and Meera Ghani. Oxfam extends sincere thanks to the feminist climate justice activists for sharing their time and labour, and to the organisations, collectives and movements they are part of. Details of how to support these organisations can be found at the end of each interview.

Conversations were conducted in June and July 2020 by Lucy Cadena and Mamata Dash.

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NO CLIMATE JUSTICE WITHOUT GENDER JUSTICE



Betty Barkha (she/her) is a Pacific feminist from Lautoka, Fiji Islands.

Betty's journey began with a youth camp in Fiji, followed by a feminist leadership training called Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF). Since then, it has been a steady voyage from national learning to regional and global advocacy. Currently, Betty is doing a PhD with Monash University, focusing on the gendered impacts of climate change-induced displacement and planned relocation in the Pacific. She is also an advisor for FRIDA Young Feminist Fund and on the board of directors of the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) and CIVICUS Alliance.

In 2009, I was at a training for young Pacific leaders. In the closing circle, a friend stood in the middle of us all and begged us to send sand to protect his island nation. He was from the Marshall Islands. He said that if he stood in the middle of his island and threw a stone towards one side, it would go into the water. And if he threw a stone on to the other side it would go into the water. He stood there begging for a bag of sand. In that instant all I knew is that I had to do something. I didn't know what. But that has shaped my journey ever since.

Climate change is very much an everyday reality for us in the Pacific. For six months of the year, my family is constantly worried about a cyclone or flash flood. We actually don't know any more what strength and intensity to prepare for. Every single time a cyclone would strike, my dad would tell me about his worst cyclone experience, which was in his childhood. Now, my parents' stories have changed; their worst cyclone experience has happened in the last two years. No matter how much we cyclone-proof our homes, we see them being blown away and destroyed every year. There are power cuts, the bridges are flooded in, and infrastructure just breaks down completely.

My family constantly makes jokes about it, and the clean-up campaign has now become a ritual. Humour is a very Pacific way of responding to crises; it is how people get through it. I vividly remember when I was in Kiribati, it was so pristine and blue and beautiful, but only four metres high at its highest point. When king tides come, there is no way you can protect homes –the water enters the hospital and covers the roads. With incoming tides, you hear songs coming from the *kava* bar where the men gather at night. They say, "we can't do anything right now, but we can always come together and sing. We have a climate change song!" In coping with climate change in the Pacific there is humour, there is creativity, there are stories to be told and songs to be sung.

In the Pacific movements we say there's no climate justice without gender justice, and vice-versa. Women's rights organisations have been working on empowering community-level women's leadership. There are structural barriers, and cultural systems are very difficult to navigate around. Fiji has a culture of silence. Patriarchy continues to suppress women and young people from voicing their opinions, and leadership is largely male dominated. But things have changed greatly in the last few decades, women and youth are now at the forefront of community organising for change.

Covid reiterated the fact that climate change is a threat-multiplier. Just because the entire world is on lockdown, doesn't mean that climate change or the patriarchy are on lockdown. When Tropical Cyclone Harold hit Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga in March [2020], people's homes were blown away. How can you be physically, socially distancing when you've got no home and evacuation centres are crammed? As always, women were the worst hit in this double crisis situation. They were locked in with their abusers. Access to contraceptives was limited. Women's care work was overloaded. In the Pacific, women are primary caretakers, live with extended families, and the care burden is extremely high.

For trans women and men, gender non-conforming individuals, and people from the LGBTQI community, the challenges are very different. Many have been denied entry into evacuation centres (which are often church buildings), on the basis that God was punishing them for their sins. But these groups have become a transformative and vibrant movement of their own. Things are progressing. Now, more than ever, people are aware of national helplines, or where to go when they need information, or who to call if they need support. Women have taken up leadership and live by the principle of "nothing about us without us". Women are actively contributing to disaster risk management and climate change conversations nationally. They are the first responders in the community – as soon as there is a disaster warning, these women know what to do, what to pack, where to go. And that has saved lives in the last few disasters.

Solutions have to be two-tiered; targeted at the short-term, but also long-term and sustainable. It can't be one or the other, we have to figure out a way to make them both work in a way that's gender inclusive and socially inclusive. It's about shifting the oppressive and restrictive power structures in order to incorporate the needs of the communities. It's always been about justice. Once again when a crisis strikes, social inequalities will go up, those who were always marginalised will suffer the most, those who were privileged and safe will continue to be safe, billionaires will become trillionaires, while small developing nations will be pushed further into debt. If this is not an example of global systemic failure, I do not know what is.

There has been a change in the narrative.

The way Greta [Thunberg] used her privilege is inspirational. I truly appreciate what she did behind the scenes, in connecting with youth from the Global South, and making sure they had a space to voice their stories wherever possible. At the Global Climate Summit in 2019, she was constantly asking, "do you want me to say something? Is there something you would like me to do?" People using their privilege to make a difference gives me hope.

The people on the streets give me hope.

Whether it's anti-racist marches or the climate march, people are now standing up for what they believe in. It is a revolution. It's also a moment of realisation. Nobody is going to question what the powerful Global North countries do. If you're a person of colour, if you're an Indigenous person, your rights will be violated and nobody will question it. But people are challenging structures and people are speaking up. They're no longer going to be silent about things that matter.



To support Betty's work, visit:
www.theglobalresiliencefund.org

To find out more about Monash Gender, Peace and Security, go to:
www.monash.edu/arts/gender-peace-security

Follow Betty on Twitter:
[@BettyBarkha](https://twitter.com/BettyBarkha)

YOU CANNOT SPEAK ABOUT US WITHOUT US

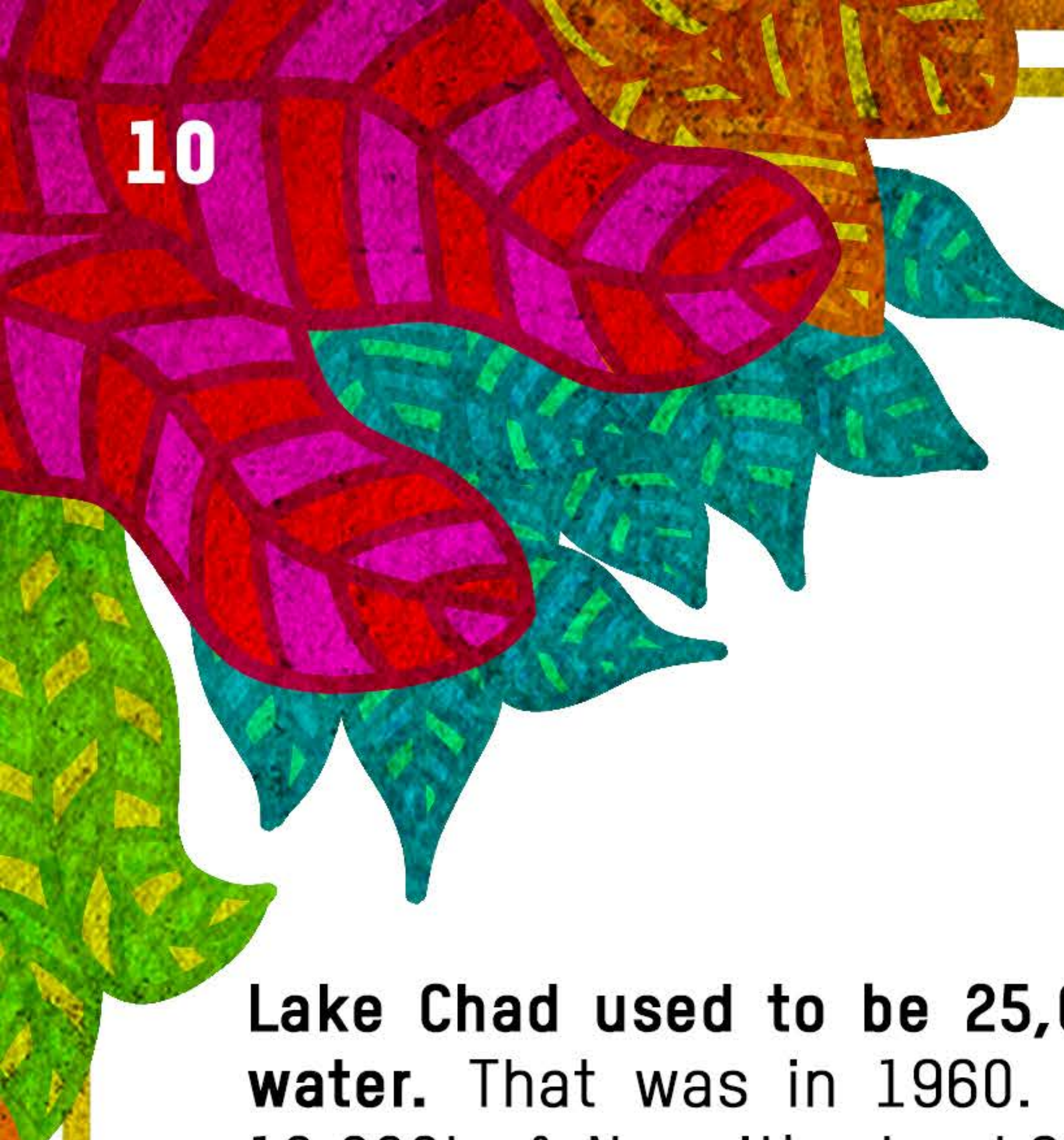


Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim (she/her) is an activist from the Indigenous Mbororo community, Chad. Hindou started fighting for Indigenous Peoples' rights while she was at school. She is the founder of the Association of Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad (AFPAT) and is a member of the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC), and the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee (IPACC).

I was a kid at primary school when I started to fight for Indigenous Peoples' rights, because I was fighting for my own rights. At the age of 16, when I founded AFPAT, I realised that I can't talk about human rights without talking about environmental rights. When the environment is degraded, it is our identity, our culture, our lives that are severely in danger. That was a revelation for me. So now, I talk about human rights, Indigenous Peoples' rights, and environmental protection at the same time.

For many Indigenous communities, when we talk about the environment, it's where we come from, who we are. What makes us common as Indigenous Peoples is our dependence on the environment we live from. You can have Indigenous Peoples from forests, from mountains, from the savannah, from glaciers, from every diverse ecosystem on our planet. My community are pastoralists, we are livestock keepers. The cattle are not only part of our environment, they are also our economy, our culture. The cattle are our identity, because the name of my people, Mbororo people, is the name of the cattle that we have. The red cattle with big horns, they are called *Mbororo-dji*, and we are called *Mbororo-en*. So from the beginning, we know that our life, and our culture, and our environment are interlinked.

When climate change started impacting us, the environment changed a lot, the seasons changed a lot. The rainy season became much, much shorter. Heavy rain, followed by a drought where everything dries up, and then a flood. Before, we knew when the rain was starting, when it was ending, and people could plan their life. That has changed a lot. We had many seasonal lakes that I knew personally, that disappeared. When we say that they are drying up, people may think, "it's drying, it comes back," but no, it's disappearing forever. Certain kinds of birds, insects, grass, that I knew personally, in my lifetime, have disappeared forever. I do not see them anymore. One report says we lost 60% of our species. It's too real, because I'm seeing it myself.



Lake Chad used to be 25,000km² of fresh water. That was in 1960. In 1980, it was 10,000km². Now, it's about 2000km² of water. From my mom's generation to me, from me to now, 90% of this water has just evaporated. Lake Chad is a trans-border area, and you have about 40 million people depending on those resources. They are cattle herders, fisher-folk, and farmers. They do not depend on an end-of-the-month salary, they depend on the rainfall for their livelihood. So, people that used to live in harmony, now are becoming enemies, fighting just to access resources. Everyone wants these resources for the survival of their families – I think anyone can understand that. They are fighting for a piece of fertile land, and those who are more powerful get this land before those who are the most vulnerable. There comes the issue of injustice, inequality and inequity.

Women are always those who are left behind – especially women who do not have children, who do not have a husband. Maybe the community will give them a small piece of land – but not the best, most fertile land. Even if they have this land, now people have double the work, and so social life is changing a lot, and that impacts our culture. Then, that impacts our identity – who we are. Many of my people, who used to be nomadic, have now become semi-nomadic, or *sedentarised* [settled in one place]. My uncle used to have a lot of cattle, but now he's sedentarised, and he's doing agriculture. Some of my uncles have become semi-nomadic, they leave during the dry season, and come back during the rainy season. Cultural change is not just about big culture, it starts from the ground, from the family, growing out to the whole community.

When we talk about climate justice, for us it's not only about stopping greenhouse gases, then we're done. It is about the social, economic and political interlinkages. Climate justice is more than halting climate change, although this is very important. It's also about my people's fight for social justice because the degradation of the environment is creating conflict and inequality. The most vulnerable communities, including Indigenous Peoples, are fighting to access these resources and we are seeing terrorist groups using these conflicts to become very powerful in the region. The political response is to respond to the terrorism rather than to the population's needs, or environmental issues. Yes, it's important to be safe, but it is not a long-term vision because human safety depends on a healthy environment.



Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge is very important for humanity. Centuries of knowledge, passed through generations, helping us to co-operate with each other and live in harmony with nature, need to be recognised. For this to happen, the rights of Indigenous Peoples need to be respected first. Governments around the world must respect our rights, our value to society and our time-tested knowledge. Secondly, we want to share our knowledge so that it informs policy decisions that impact our lives. Indigenous People's knowledge is evolving every single day because it's based on the observation of nature. So, when nature changes, many things change at the same time, and we know why it's changing. From that, we learn and adapt our life. It's not 'sleeping' knowledge – it's innovative knowledge. It's crucial for helping us to find climate solutions.

At the UN, we told them, "you cannot speak about us without us." We can't just sit there, and you negotiate about our knowledge, and we just shut up. We came up with an equal-speaking rule: we speak and negotiate for ourselves, for what we want. So, there is evolution, they are giving us the floor. But we're still in the time of recognition. It took the IPCC [The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the scientific body advising the UN] more than 30 years before they recognised that Indigenous People's knowledge is valid. We don't have time, that's my worry. We have ten years to act! Not ten years to make a new plan, ten years to act, right now. They are not moving as fast as possible to integrate Indigenous Peoples' knowledge.

We have Covid now because we are destroying our environment. If we don't fight climate change at the same time as Covid, we will have more pandemics that we cannot fight any more. The "Super Year" of 2020 can still be a Super Year if we can invest in biodiversity, in climate change, and at the same time, human health. "Green Recovery" does not mean to just invest again in the developed world, in the North, and then to forget the developing world. It is time now to use this money to invest in the countries that need it. To invest in climate change adaptation and mitigation. To invest in the SDGs (the UN Sustainable Development Goals). With climate change, we cannot wear a mask, lock down, or build a wall to escape from it. There has to be a radical change.



To support the Association des Femmes Peuples & Peuples Autochtones du Tchad (AFPAT) and Conservation International, go to www.AFPAT.net and www.conservation.org.

To follow Hindou's work as an advocate for the UN Sustainable Development Goals, visit www.unsdgadvocates.org.

Follow Hindou on Twitter and Instagram: @hindououmar

“MOM, SAVE YOUR SEEDS!”



Maggie H. Mapondera (she/her) is an activist-communicator-facilitator from Zimbabwe. Maggie has been involved with feminist and social justice movements in Southern Africa and around the world for more than half of her life. She is currently coordinator of communications at WoMin, an organisation that unites African women against destructive resource extraction.

I've had a series of realisations and understandings, of where I stand in the world. The moment when I realised how women in my family are treated, how women in my community were treated. That moment when you first learn what it means to be Black. What it means to be a Black woman in the world. What it means to be a Black woman from a country like Zimbabwe, in the Global South. And what it means, then, to exist in the world.

It's only when we recognise all the interlocking forms of oppressions that are playing out on our bodies, that we can begin to break them down. The power of feminism is that you can connect with other women, and recognise that, even though we come from completely different contexts, there is a system that is oppressing us in particular ways, because of our gender, because of the colour of our skin, because of our economic situation, because of the language that we speak, whatever it may be. And it is in these shared experiences that we can build connection, build solidarity, and begin to organise. We cannot change the system with surface-level approaches. We have to really approach it as a system.

The system is violent. The extractivist, capitalist system, in particular, is violent. You hear stories that women are telling, about what they are facing, and how communities are being completely ripped apart. Communities in Mpumalanga, South Africa, will tell you, "we can't breathe," because of the levels of pollution from coal-fired power plants. Communities in Zimbabwe are facing incredible levels of violence in highly militarised diamond fields in the east. One fisher-woman and activist from Senegal shared a photo of her house a few years ago, at least fifty meters away from the coastline. And now that spot where her house stood has completely disappeared, and they've been forced back by the rising sea levels.

The climate crisis is real for so many communities. Sometimes we don't have the language for it, we can't explain it. But we can feel it in our bodies. We feel it in our land. We see it in the water. When you see tragedies like Cyclone Idai, the intensity of that cyclone, you can really see what climate change is doing. Rocks the size of a car were being torn out of the ground. When you see land that used to yield so much crop but is no longer able to yield, you can see that something is not right. When you talk to women in Marange, Zimbabwe or in Sendou, Senegal, they are living the reality of the climate crisis. They know the issues, they have a powerful analysis, they don't need to be mediated by me, or anyone else.

It's always been a challenge for Black women's voices to be heard, whatever arena it may be. How Black women have been impacted by colonialism, by histories of violence playing out across Africa; that injustice must be understood, so that we can begin to lift up those voices and support those women to be able to speak out. It's the job of movements and organisations – particularly NGOs – to step back and offer space and a platform for the voices of Black women to be heard. Even me, in this interview, I feel a conflict, because I may be Black, I may be African, but I'm not sitting at the frontlines, in communities that are being hit hardest by climate change right now. So there is a tension, in even my voice being here.

This is a question that we're all grappling with, that we'll be grappling with until the end of time. And that's a good thing! For me, it's a cool feminist principle. We have to constantly ask these questions, and understand that we are always going to be living in a contradiction. For example: Where does our clothing come from? We could take a hard line. But we can't eat truth. That's the contradiction of this violent capitalist system. And so, I feel like we have to find ways to live within that contradiction. To live with that questioning. To be open to being called out. It's uncomfortable, and it should be.

If I could say one thing to my mother, I would tell her, mom, save your seeds! Because she needs to hear something very practical. I can't go and say, "mom, go and read this article, they've talked about the politics of..." no. I would say, "mom we need to save seeds. There are corporations out there that want to take away our Indigenous seeds. And we have to fight against that." Then, I would imagine, that conversation would open up a whole doorway of analysis. You have no idea the power that you claim from the system, simply by saving the seeds that your grandmother was growing, that are now almost extinct. That in itself is a radical act of resistance.

In Zimbabwean tradition, you meet by the fireside, as a family or community, to share stories, to talk about your day, your life, how you're feeling. Some collectives use these kinds of spaces, for women in particular, to open up whole avenues of discussion. Starting with, how is their body feeling? People say: "I'm in pain because I spent eight hours yesterday collecting water for my family. I was carrying a bucket on my shoulder for eight hours and my back is in pain. And I have had back pain for the past 20 years." And then that opens the door to a larger discussion. Why do women have to carry that particular burden? You can start talking about risks and the violence that women face when they're going to collect that water. The way that the system is impacting our bodies. And that can take you to these incredibly powerful discussions about systemic oppression and violence.

Using feminist spaces and approaches that allow women and to pause and connect to one another, to connect to themselves, is a very radical and powerful thing. Building spaces where people can care for themselves, and care for one another. That should be the first principle of all of our work as feminists. How can we build this transformative alternative and different way of being? And reclaim ways of being that have been stripped from us? Covid surfaced, for people who didn't understand, the burden of the social reproductive role that women play in society. Now, you understand how much work it takes to care for children, for a community. These roles have been imposed on us. How can we find a more equitable way to divide labour, to divide care, to organize all communities on a huge on a massive scale?

Covid has really laid bare this terrible system. I've never seen so much discussion in the mainstream around systemic violence, never in my lifetime. People are really receptive to speaking the language of change and revolution and transformation. The Black Lives movement, and people talking about race, and class, and the intersections of privilege and all of these things. People organising despite the restrictions, finding ways to connect, creative ways to get their message out there. Even in the midst of this difficult moment, people are still pushing, challenging the system. I think that's incredibly hopeful.



To find out more about Maggie's work with WoMin, go to www.womin.org.za

BUILDING A CULTURE OF CARE



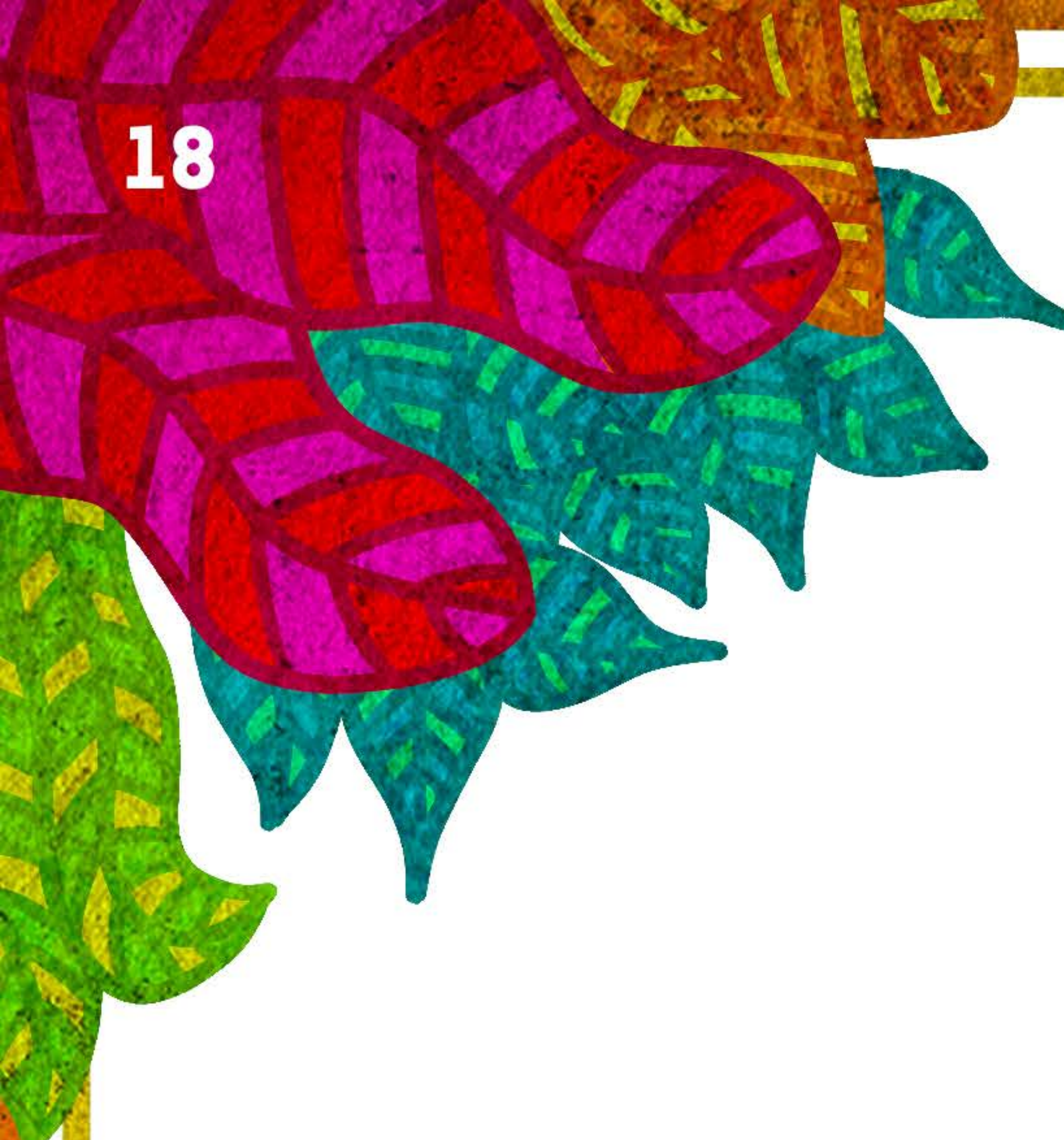
Meera Ghani (she/her) is an anti-racist, anti-capitalist feminist and abolitionist from Pakistan. *Meera identifies as a Brown, Muslim, queer, disabled immigrant to Europe. She worked in the climate justice movement for many years, before leaving the movement, after experiencing violence, a lack of care, and burnout. Now, Meera works to support community initiatives with Ecolise, and co-founded Moxie Consultancy Collective, helping organisations to create transformative change through building a culture of care.*

I grew up in the north of Pakistan. I am a daughter of the mountains. For me, it's very natural to be in communion with Nature. Pakistan is one of the most vulnerable countries when it comes to climate impacts and climate breakdown. Within some of the mountain regions, there's a direct impact on glacial melt, and the availability of fresh water. In certain regions, there are droughts, erratic weather patterns and seasonal shifts. It's not one thing. They all connect to climate breakdown.

There are so many interlinkages with our political, and geo-political situation. Had we, as a region, been working together, maybe we would have been better prepared. We could adapt better and we could care for emergencies in a more coordinated way. I grew up during a military dictatorship, and my country was impacted by the invasion of Afghanistan. For me there's such a connection between violence – whether it be police brutality, or military force – and climate injustices, because they stem from the same roots: the white supremacist, cis-het capitalist patriarchy. For me, there's no distinction between fighting for abolition or calling for demilitarisation and fighting for climate justice.

Saidiya Hartman said, "care is the antidote to violence." If we want to move away from systems of violence, we have to reimagine a world that centres care. My role in the movement is to bring attention to care and push for a culture of care. Some call this the caring economy, care ethics, the regenerative economy, a feminist degrowth economy, a decolonised economy, etc. I'd say it's broader than all that. It's my vision for the world, where we can all belong and thrive.

Care can be self-soothing, self-care. For me the larger element is community care and how we define that. But care isn't just about inter-personal care, it's about the systems we create. How we integrate it into our policies. Anything that can't be cared for within the community is something that the state is then responsible for. Instituting universal healthcare, a universal basic income, abolishing state militaries, abolishing borders: these are some of the political questions that, of course communities can push for, but as long as we have representation through governments, there is a role for the state to play. Care is at the heart of everything.


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In terms of policy, that means that we need to first divest from institutions and corporations that are life-threatening: those that are killing the planet, killing the people. We need degrowth in the northern economies – those that enable the life-threatening conditions. We need to decolonise hearts and minds. It's not a limited pie that we must distribute in a certain way, we must get away from this scarcity mentality. We need to reinvest in communities, institutions, and organisations that are life-affirming. And then we need the redistribution of wealth and resources in a fundamentally different way. That's what abolition is all about too. We move away from life-threatening institutions to life-affirming ones.

We have internalised capitalism in the way we define our own worth. It's tied to our careers, what we're producing, where we got educated, how much money we are making, what house we have, what car we have. Creating division leads to people individualising each situation and problem. Framing everything around scarcity, fear, separation, isolation. Culture of care is really in opposition to all of that. It's about the abundance that exists between us and Nature. It's about approaching everything from a place of love. It's about inter-being, inter-connection, inter-dependence. It's about cooperation, collaboration.

Climate justice work is framed as noble work, and we have to sacrifice ourselves at the altar of this work. And I did this for many years, to the detriment of my own mental health, and my safety, and my physical health. I experienced violence in the movement, as a person from the Global South, as a woman and a woman of colour. The violence is anywhere from being disregarded and some of your ideas being co-opted to threats of rape and death. It's a whole spectrum. The worst of it was to see the replication of these systems of oppression. Patriarchy, white supremacy. I was always welcomed at the beginning, but as soon as I started raising questions about misogyny, about racism, about inequity in the hierarchies within the movement, when I started questioning power dynamics, there was huge resistance to that.

Intersectionality is a framework which allows you to centre the most marginalised. It allows us to look at things from different perspectives, and see the communities that are most impacted, and start to care for them first then move outwards. Once we find solutions for them, then of course the solutions will be beneficial for others too. The majority of the climate movement focuses on emissions and how to control those. And then a little group focuses on adaptation. And then an even smaller group focuses on climate finance – it's all still within the context of the UN framework. Everything else gets missed. The impact on queer communities gets missed. The impact on Black bodies gets missed. The impact on the disabled. That has been such a struggle, to get an understanding of how climate breakdown is impacting the disabled community.

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Covid brought attention to a lot of the asks that disability justice groups have been demanding, like remote working. To the asks that care workers have been demanding, like increased wages, because their work is essential. In the lack of government responses, people came to each other's aid. Here we have a lot of learning to do from Indigenous leaders, but also from Black, trans and queer communities. Because they have been practicing community care like no other, forever. We have seen a lot of their own approaches and methodologies come to the fore.

When I see circles of care, community care, people coming together, that gives me hope. Young people, Generation Z gives me hope, my God, they give me hope! Shout out to communities everywhere, especially Black, trans communities, queer communities. There's a quote by Sonya Renee Taylor: "If you want to find the path to freedom, follow a Black woman." There have been so many Black women who have been visionary in showing us what a future could look like, what we should be striving for. That we can imagine better, and then call that into being.

Imagination is essential. Creativity, culture: crucial. Building relations, repairing relationships: crucial. That's what's going to save us. If we don't learn to repair relationships, it's never going to work. Because community building is all about relationships. Watching people put forth their creativity and gift it to the world – whether it's writing, art, music – that gives me hope.



To follow Meera's work with Ecolise, visit www.ecolise.eu

Follow Moxie Consultancy Collective here: www.instagram.com/moxie.cc

Follow Meera on Twitter: @MeeraGhani

SYSTEM CHANGE NOT CLIMATE CHANGE



Majandra Rodriguez Acha (she/her) is a climate justice and queer feminist activist from Lima, Peru. Majandra's activism focuses on gender, intersectionality, capitalism, youth activism and the environment. She is co-founder of TierrActiva Perú, has been Young Feminist Fellow for Climate Justice at the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), and is a member of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Working Group at Global Greengrants Fund. Majandra is currently Co-Executive Director of FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund.

From very early on, I understood the intersections between inequality and environmental injustice. When I was 19, my government passed laws to make it easier for foreign companies to access lands in the Amazon for extractive activities. Indigenous Peoples, in response to that, got up in arms, bows and arrows, and occupied highways. The central government sent in national forces and police, and there was a very violent confrontation. Over 30 people died. The first protest I ever went to was for justice against this massacre. It was also the first time I got tear-gassed. I remember running and crying alongside others, thinking, "I don't know if I'm crying because of the tear gas or the impotence at this injustice." But then also – it's unlikely that I'm going to get murdered on the streets of Lima at this protest, right? Indigenous Peoples can be. You can't separate the issue of violence against Indigenous communities from the disappearance of the rainforest.

At a young age, I knew that gender inequality was a fundamentally unjust form of violence that I couldn't escape, because I was a woman in a world where women are second-class citizens, or are seen as disposable in a lot of ways. I experienced, for example, street harassment, before I could even fully understand what it was about. I just knew that it was infuriating and that it was violence. I actually didn't want to engage in gender issues for a while, because it was too painful. It was only six years ago that I took a women's leadership course. I remember the last day of that course, when we were all saying thank you and goodbye to each other, and I burst into tears. For ten minutes I couldn't stop. To me it was like opening up this thing that had been dammed up inside of me emotionally, intellectually. It was a really powerful moment for me.

I finally found my place, which was connected to the ecofeminist struggle. Seeing how the exploitation of the earth, and exploitation of people, and violence against women are all interconnected. In a binary understanding, masculine is seen as strong and rational, about success and competition, and the feminine is associated with emotions and spirituality, seen as weak. In Peru, there's a strong tradition of the Earth being feminised, culturally. It's Pachamama, Mother Earth. In a patriarchal world, of course, that means that she's there to be exploited and abused for the benefit of power and dominance.

Intersectionality is key. I can't separate the fact that I'm a woman from the fact that I'm middle class or the fact that I went to university, I speak English. We all enter the room carrying our multiple identities. In young feminist activism, intersectionality, and a systemic analysis of the crisis that we're facing is almost second nature. It's not something that groups need to be convinced of in any way. It's completely natural. The climate crisis as an expression of a systemic crisis, and the need to address all of the different expressions of that crisis at the same time. We need to talk about the economy. We need to talk about the political system. We need to talk about these binary cultural beliefs and address all of that at the same time.

We should hold ourselves to account to ensure that we're all happy and thriving, and not reproducing these systems. The capitalist focus on production and efficiency, "you need to get all these things done by the deadline." We're not machines, you know? We're trying to build a new system, so we need to act accordingly. We need to build new ways of working with each other and of envisioning even that work. We can build a better future right here right now, just by engaging with each other and working with each other in a way that centres our collective and individual wellbeing, our shared humanity.

Ageism – on both sides – is a big barrier to sharing wisdom across generations. There's prejudice towards young people, as well older generations, that prevents us from seeing the wisdom that each generation holds and their particular experiences and perspectives that can really benefit all of us. Age is relative. Youth is also relative. It's culturally specific as well. There's a lot of complexity in defining who's young, and who defines that. In an ageist world, our mission is to uplift the voices of people who are often told, "you're not the expert, you don't know, you haven't lived enough, you don't understand."

In a capitalist, patriarchal system, artistic and spiritual expression are not given importance. They're feminised. They're not seen as relevant to changing political economic systems. Young feminist activists, all around the world, very much understand the importance of intuition and emotion, to uplift our voices and to engage in dialogue. Barriers that were built on conflict and division, can be broken down through art and creative expression. The patriarchal, capitalist system doesn't see that power. It's diminished. But activists around the world are seeing that value, and engaging in theatre, music, dance, performance and public interventions, in ways that make you laugh and think, much more perhaps than holding up a sign sometimes.

In Latin America in general, a lot of governments have taken a very hard, authoritarian, militarised approach to the pandemic. I think for younger generations, that has been more shocking, because we haven't necessarily lived that way before. Hopefully we won't be going down the road of increased surveillance and authoritarian rule. I'm reminded of Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine* - how right-wing, or capitalist interests can use these crises to push through their own favourable regulations. But activists can do that, too.

We can rethink the way we're doing things.

In the climate negotiations, for example, we were told so many times, "this isn't politically feasible. It's not realistic. We can't cut back on production of these industries." Now, we're seeing, in a few months, just how we've been able to completely shut things down. And oil! The price of oil going below zero. These things that, just a few months ago, would have seemed completely impossible, are happening. Of course, this is not the way we want change to happen - people are dying and inequalities are sharply increasing. But change can happen, and must happen.

Hopefully, this will open up these mental blocks. All these systems are constructions, right? We built them. We can rebuild them. Gender roles are constructed. Men can also be caretakers. We could build new masculinities. Environmentally: we built this industrial, extractive, hyper consumption-based system. We can build something else. There are so many examples being built already, all around the world. Something different is possible. It's very possible you know? We can build it!



To support Majandra's work at FRIDA, go to www.youngfeministfund.org.

Follow TierrActiva Perú's work at www.world.350.org/tierractiva.

Follow Majandra on Twitter: @majandraa

We asked Oxfam's #ClimateChangers community: What do climate justice and gender justice mean to you?

"Climate change affects women more than men, bringing about gender inequality. When we take action on climate change, this will not only promote climate justice but also gender justice across the globe." *Faith, Kenya*

"The effects of climate change and gender do not impact equally on men and women. This results from the social construction of gender roles." *Mijan, Bangladesh*

"Gender equality, supporting social movements, and institutional transformation are important for a people-centred global response." *Nimra, Pakistan*

"Women and girls, who are more vulnerable to climate emergency, are often underrepresented in the policymaking process. Climate justice is also about making room for women to participate and lead in decision-making." *Priscilla, Hong Kong*

"Climate justice and gender justice go hand in hand." *Khristyn, Philippines*

Sign up at: oxf.am/climate-changer



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