



Centring Reparation, Intersectionality and Interdependence in Feminist Climate Justice

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Feminist Climate Justice Think Pieces

No. 1

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I address two aspects of UN-Women's programme of work on feminist climate justice. First, to elaborate on the potential of adding a fourth R – reparation – to the now established justice-trio of redistribution, recognition and representation. Second, to set out the ways in which a feminist ethics

of care presents important synergies with proposals for ecological justice and decolonial thinking. I explain how this not only gives rise to a new set of moral and material obligations, but also, crucially, provides the potential for progressive solidarities and transformative alliances.

2. Reparation: The fourth R

Nancy Fraser's theory of justice which set out the struggles for redistribution and recognition, and (later) for representation (Fraser, 1995) has become the staple of feminist political analysis of economic, social, cultural and political transformations.¹ A fourth arena of struggle – reparation or reparative justice – has emerged over the historical reckoning of interlocking aspects of (pre)capitalist exploitation, expropriation and extractivism. While calls for reparation for slavery and racially based expropriation have a long history in the United States of America, they have been extended from the history of harms perpetrated on colonised and Indigenous peoples to a recognition of the continuity of such harms ongoing in contemporary structures of oppression. This is also the case in relation to climate change – claims for reparation link the history of colonialist-capitalist extractivism to contemporary inequalities in vulnerabilities and risks. In addition, recent work on reparative justice with respect to the history of slavery, colonialisms and imperialism emphasises the need for not only economic redistributive justice but also recognition for the destruction of cultures and the continuing inferiorisation of racialised minority groups. This is also the case in relation to reparative ecological justice

(Burkett, 2009; Chapman et al, 2021; Perry, 2021; Táíwò, 2022) and to particular aspects of it, such as climate migration (Buxton, 2019; Gonzalez, 2020).

The important point here is the interconnection of reparation with redistributive and recognition struggles and claims. At the same time, reparation drives redistribution and recognition both wider and deeper (see Section 2.2). You can't have one without the others, all the while acknowledging that representation is the vital process through which claims have the potential to be realised. Thus, reflecting these dynamics, the three key elements of realising reparative justice are, according to Maxine Burkett (2009): an apology (which acknowledges responsibility); a monetary or other award (which gives symbolic weight to the apology); and a guarantee that the harms will not be repeated in the future. In these ways, reparation in climate justice goes far beyond notions of international aid which are often conditional and in which the donor country holds the power. They also go beyond humanitarian compensation in which the notion of charity obscures the historic and contemporary power of the donor over the receiving country.²

1 In feminist analysis of care the three Rs of redistribution, recognition and representation have been supplemented by reduction and reward (Elson, 2017; UN-Women, 2022).

2 Recently the Government of the United Kingdom reneged on its commitment to give aid to low-income countries vulnerable to climate change citing the costs of the pandemic and the Ukrainian war. It said it could only maintain its promise if it stopped its aid for women and girls in those countries where they are denied rights (education, etc.). Guardian. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/jun/28/uk-has-made-no-progress-on-climate-plan-say-governments-own-advisers>.

2.1 The importance of an intersectional analysis

It should be said that, from my reading of the general literature on reparation and climate change, references to the entwined and intersecting histories of capitalism, colonialism, extractivism and racism with patriarchy and ongoing structural gender inequalities are relatively few. This is in spite of longstanding research on how women are affected by climate change, and extensive evidence of how environmental degradation intensifies women's inequalities (for example, Shiva, 1988 et passim). That said, there are case studies of, for example, reparative justice being used for women in conflict situations (Labenski, 2020); of environmental justice and reproductive justice claims where degradation has affected women's health and reproductive capacity in communities of colour in the United States of America (Fouad, 2022); and in Britain and South Africa (Macleod et al., 2017); not forgetting important interventions to bring a feminist lens to bear on climate justice (Gaard, 2015; Sultana, 2021).

Nonetheless, because reparative climate justice deals with the construction of disproportionality of both impact and responsibility in which gender features highly, then its employment in the elaboration for feminist climate justice is important. Reparation claims look to the histories of extractivism, expropriation, racial capitalism and colonialisms. In this, a feminist intersectional approach has the capacity to recognise the specificities in the histories of gender inequalities/ justice and, at the same time, to explain how these are caught up and reproduced in other systems of inequality and oppression (class, race, caste, disability, migration status, sexuality, etc.). How have specific and intersecting gender inequalities been reproduced and exacerbated by extractive and expropriative histories? How far do contemporary policies for sustainability, mitigation and adaptation repair these histories or reproduce them in new forms? These are questions for all the four Rs – redistribution, recognition, representation and reparation.

In addition, an intersectional approach is particularly important here not only because of its focus on lived experiences but also on understanding the complex nature of context and contestation. It helps unearth those groups who are hidden or marginalised, those issues that fall between the cracks. It asks which social relations of power and inequality are particularly salient in a given time and context. Here, in the analysis of climate justice, an intersectional approach identifies women, and particularly women and girls from minoritized groups and those living in the Global South, to be at particular risk (Williams, 2021; see also Sultana, 2022, for more specifics in relation to climate justice). But also, a point I come back to in Sections 2.3 and 2.4, intersectionality is a praxis. It provides both analytical and *political* purchase for thinking and acting on the possibilities for solidarity and alliances across differences. This connection to praxis is important. It avoids the pitfalls of intersectionality becoming an abstract theory that can be loosely applied to every social category. It reiterates intersectionality's roots in black feminist struggles of the 1970s and 1980s as a resistance to black women's invisibility in struggles around gender, sexuality and racism.

2.2 How reparation extends the spatial and temporal

Reparation as an analytical tool enhances the other three Rs in important ways. First, it is rooted in a historical analysis of the processes of domination, exploitation, expropriation, and extraction of labour and resources by some (mainly Global North) countries over others (mainly Global South). In this it extends the analysis of redistribution, recognition and representation to *geo-political inequalities* and in turn this extends their *spatial and temporal* aspects.

In terms of *space*, this is about the relations of power not only within countries but between them. It points to the limitations of nation-state boundaries for redress: struggles for redistribution, recognition and representation here going beyond the boundary of the nation state; they are multi-scalar from local to transnational and global; they may involve

diasporic and stateless communities (especially in climate migration).

In relation to the *temporalities* of (in)justice, reparation extends the analysis by including the past and the present and their relationship to the future. Maxine Burkett's three elements of reparation demonstrate this – apology for the past harms, compensation for the present risks/inequalities, guarantees for the future commitments Burkett (2009).

In both these ways, these spatial and temporal extensions lead to a new set of moral and material obligations which operate both within and across/outside national boundaries. These are mutual transnational and transgenerational obligations not only for the generations now living but reparative obligations for the suffering of past generations and a commitment to save the planet for future generations. Furthermore, a new actor enters this scheme of obligations – the planet itself which, with all its resources and non-human inhabitants, is at risk and requires care, repair and regeneration. This is less spelled out in writing on reparations, but it is clear in many environmental movements, in some ecofeminism (Mies and Shiva, 1993; Ostrom, 1990), in posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013), and traditions such as *Buen Vivir*. All these add up to new sets of interdependencies which I come back to in Section 2.4.

2.3 Reparation as a conceptual alliance

Reparation, in common with redistribution, recognition and representation, is a 'conceptual alliance'. This is a term I use for concepts which enable *both* analysis of intersections between phenomena (in this discussion, climate justice, gender justice, racial justice) *and* as a political issue that has the potential to align different movements or campaigns (Williams, 2021), in this case, feminist, environmentalist, anti-racist and decolonial

movements (and more). In other words, reparation signifies a site for solidarities across difference which in the present conjuncture of crises is crucial.³ In this way it says something more about representation than ensuring equal voice and, although this is essential, it is about ensuring equality across voices to create the possibility for deliberative democracy and solidarity (the practice/praxis of intersectionality). In some decolonial literature this space for deep dialogue is referred to as pluriversality, or pluriversal politics (Escobar, 2007, 2020; Mignolo, 2011). This relates to the next point.

2.4 Universalism and difference

One of the tensions in the implementation of universal global or national policies is how they should recognise and redistribute for structurally-based inequalities. Universalism is based in an assumption of shared humanness, a right to a share in the collective wealth or established rights and social goods, but what happens when groups feel they do not share in that humanness because of, say, persistent gender-based violence or long-time exposure to toxic waste? Reparative justice responds to this by going deeper than both recognition and redistribution in setting out the historical processes contributing to these continuing inequalities.⁴ By the same token it also takes account of differentiated responsibilities for them.

This further invites an exploration of the future of humanness, not only in our relations of interdependence with non-human elements of the planet, but also in response to the challenges in anti-racist and decolonial literature as to who is considered human and what sort of humanness can be supported for the future. Thus, Paul Gilroy says that in the long history of racialised groups being considered 'infrahuman' we should be moving to a new form of 'planetary humanism' (Gilroy, 2014; see also

3 The Global Municipalist Movement provides a good example of this aspiration (Barcelona en Comú, 2019) even although its influence has declined due to recent political shifts (Kussy et al., 2022). It develops solidarities across different groups (feminist, anti-racist, environmentalist) within cities and across cities internationally.

4 This is a point explored well by Klein and Fouksman (2021) in relation to reparations through income redistribution.

Táiwò, 2022). This is not dissimilar from *Buen Vivir* developed in different ways by Indigenous people in Ecuador and the Plurinational State of Bolivia which centres on a cosmivision in which people strive to live in harmony with nature. This understands the unity of space and time to be in a constant state of becoming, as is the relationality between individuals and their communities. It seeks to be redistributive within a respect for difference and diversity, recognising that the struggle for decolonization is constant both personally and politically (Solon, 2018). Similarly, the Caribbean anti-colonial philosopher Sylvia Wynter argues, the struggle of people of colour is more than being allowed into present humanness, but one of consciously and communally creating a *new* 'ecumenical' notion of what it means to be human, that is to say, a humanism which acknowledges and repairs

history and moves towards peaceful co-existence (Wynter, 2003). In the context of the climate crisis, she argues, this is a praxis that becomes more urgent.

To sum up, I'm suggesting that including reparation and reparative justice helps to take analysis and action wider and deeper. Combining decolonial, intersectional and feminist approaches to climate justice makes it possible to encompass low-, middle- and high-income countries and (the histories of) inequalities across them and within them. This connects to examples of claims for representation and evidence of prefigurative practices and alliances/solidarities across difference. As I argue below, this further links to the ethics/principles that might underpin the intersections in feminist climate justice.

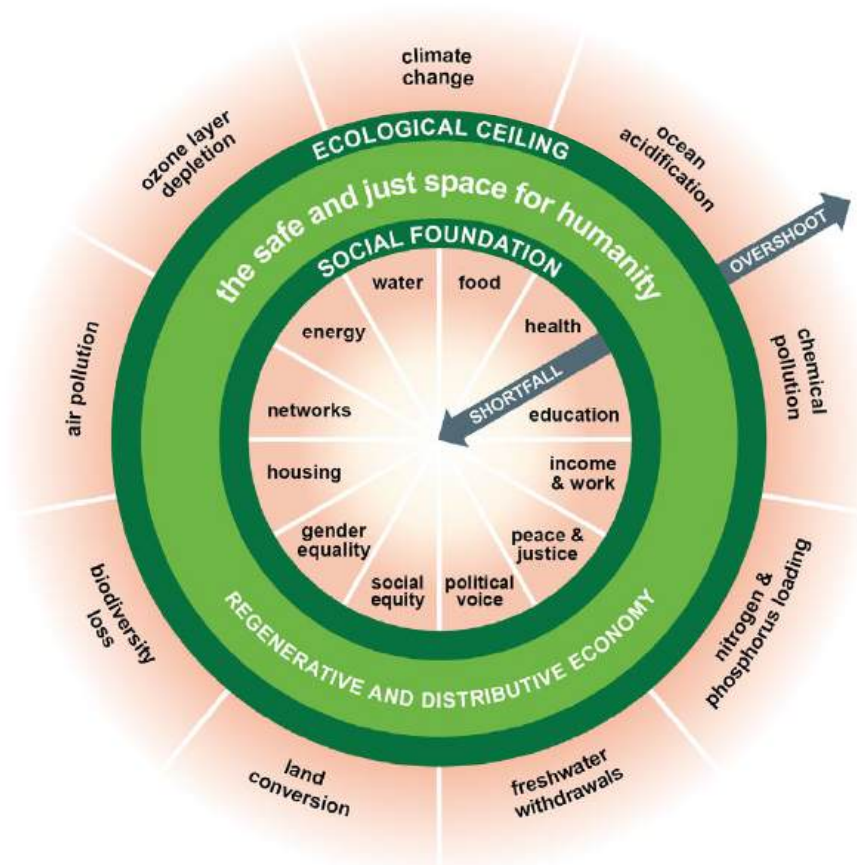
3. Alignments across feminist, decolonial and ecological political thought

The earlier point about humanness links to the development of the ethics of care in feminist political/ethical analysis over the past thirty years (Kittay, 2015; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Tronto, 1993, 2013). Key to the ethics of care is the assertion that interdependence and human flourishing are central to life and that care practices signify their daily enactment. This idea challenges Western liberal philosophy in which rationality, individualism and autonomy are privileged as the basis to human interaction. Care ethics argues that our autonomy is relational as are the moral practices which flow from it. These ideas have been applied to democracy, highlighting the values of communication, trust, plurality, and listening (Tronto, 2013). The enactment of care justice would thus involve developing a caring, democratically participative infrastructure which values paid and unpaid care work and gives people and communities time, financial and practical support to care and be cared for. It requires equal access to public space and transport, as well as

policies to counter poverty and discrimination. More fundamentally, institutionalising the ethics of care involves challenging the priorities of macroeconomic policies of productivism, market competition and consumerism. And it is here that care ethics begins to share some of the demands of climate and ecological justice advocates creating important synergies between feminism and climate activism, especially those arguing for a post-growth or degrowth economy and against productivist imperatives as measured by GDP.

One example (see Figure) is Kate Raworth's post-growth economic model for a sustainable future which she calls *Doughnut Economics* (Raworth, 2017). She argues that we have replaced orthodox economists' figure of *homo economicus* (economic man – a close relative of rational autonomous man who is the focus of the care ethics critique) with what it takes to make flourishing societies that can express humanity, justice, generosity and human spirit (ibid: 128).

Figure. The doughnut of social and planetary boundaries



Source: Raworth, 2017.

The concentric circles of the doughnut act as a guide to enable us to consider what is required to arrive at a space which is both 'an ecologically safe and socially just space for all humanity'. Three conceptual principles frame her argument. First, the need to consider the social foundation of the basics for life (within the dark green ring above), and these are drawn from the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015). Second, these have to be underpinned by the principles of gender equality, social equity, political voice and justice (ibid: 45). Third, policymakers need to act in service to human flourishing; respect autonomy of communities by ensuring their engagement and consent and recognizing their differences; exercise policy-making which minimises harm; and work with humility and transparency (ibid: 161). Similarly,

Tim Jackson (2009) argues for a new definition of prosperity (away from GDP) based on a relational understanding of well-being as human flourishing. Like many ecological economists Jackson draws on Martha Nussbaum's 'central capabilities for human flourishing' (Nussbaum, 2006).

The point here is that there is clear synergy between these ideas and those of feminist care ethicists. However, I think these examples of post-growth literature are not specific enough about inequalities; they mention gender equality, North-South geopolitical inequalities, but are vague on the dynamics and histories of racial inequalities, or intersecting inequalities. They are more 'development' than 'decolonial'. Greater recognition of these issues and their synthesis is to be found in the literature

on environmental racism which I come back to in Section 3.2. Nonetheless, coalitional thinking between care ethical feminism and environmentalism has been influential especially in the politics of care.

3.1 Coalitional thinking: The example of policies for care and the environment

Bringing together ‘care for each other’ and ‘care for the planet’ now features more in policy reports. For example, the United Kingdom-based Women’s Budget Group Report *A Green and Caring Economy* identifies four structural changes needed for a national green and caring economy:

- ‘Reorienting the economy: Put wellbeing above profit, moving away from energy-intensive and polluting industries and towards activities that care for people and planet, and ending GDP growth as our main economic objective.
- Changing ownership models: Democratise ownership of natural resources and basic services, overhauling the energy system including through a new public renewable energy company; rolling back private provision of care, ending public land sell-offs, and supporting alternative ownership models throughout the economy.
- Change how we raise and spend money: Put public investment in decarbonising physical infrastructure and expanding social infrastructure at the centre of the United Kingdom’s fiscal and monetary strategy, supported by targeted subsidies and progressive taxation.
- Supporting a global green and caring economy: Build efforts to reorder the global economy around climate justice through debt relief, gender-sensitive climate finance, reforming international financial institutions, clamping down on tax havens and ending exploitative treaties.’ (WBG 2022).

The Report *A Care Society. A Horizon for Sustainable Recovery with Gender Equality* by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean is similar in its overall framing: ‘Sustainability of the planet requires a development pattern that places care at the centre of priorities; recognizes the interdependence that exists between people and between people and the environment; and distinguishes the multiple interdependencies with the economic, the cultural and the socio-environmental.’ (ECLAC, 2022:24).

Employing a ‘gender, intersectional, intercultural and human rights perspective’ the report examines the disproportionate effect of climate change in terms of degradation and disaster on women and particular groups of women in the region, especially Indigenous women. In an interesting conceptual alliance (see above) they apply the concept of extractivism, usually used to describe the exploitation of the planet’s resources, to women’s care activities and their time, citing Wichterich (2019) where care extractivism means ‘the commodification of social reproduction and care work along hierarchies of gender, class, race and North–South as a strategy to cope with a global crisis of social reproduction’. (See also the Appendix).

3.2 Coalitional thinking: The example of environmental racism

Carl Anthony (2017) documents the ways in the United States of America in which racial and planetary subordination and racial and environmental injustice go hand in hand over time. This moves from the colonization of both peoples and the earth to the ways in which gentrification, expulsion and the deregulation of water and waste hit minority communities. He and other writers critique the mainstream environmentalist movement for the marginalisation of the struggles and knowledge of people of colour and Indigenous communities.⁵ David Naguib Pellow in *Critical environmental justice* (Pellow 2018) says

5 An interesting example of this is the critique by the movement of people of colour Wretched of the Earth for environmental justice of the movement XR – see Williams, 2021, 203–204.

the movement for environmental justice started in the United States of America in the 1970s and it ‘fused discourses of public health, civil and human rights, anti-racism, social justice, and ecological sustainability... it articulated a transformative vision of what an environmentally and socially just and

sustainable future might look like.’ (2018:4). He calls for a critical approach which is intersectional and multi-scalar focusing on the interactions between the local, national and global, that learns from local prefigurative innovations and works towards solidarity with other struggles.

4. Transforming our moral obligations of redistribution, recognition, representation and reparation

To bring the two parts of this paper together, I hope to have made clear that in many of these coalitional movements, there are certain common ideas to do with the relationality of our being and interdependence as its living enactment underpinned by the principle of human flourishing. This is not to deny their omissions and marginalisations, but to emphasise how the gendered and intersectional dimensions of environmental justice demand a more radical and critical understanding of the sort of humanism in which co-operation, coexistence and solidarity are enacted in respectful and caring democratic dialogue, one that can balance universality with pluriversality.⁶ This suggests that:

- Our interdependence is global both in a *geographical* sense but also *planetary* in the interdependence between humans and the ecosystem which extends to non-human beings and living organisms.
- These interdependencies summon up *intergenerational* obligations, not only to the present generations but to future generations who will inherit this planet. But also, they invoke the dehumanized racial and other suffering of *past generations*, which signify material and moral obligations towards reparation.

6 For an extended discussion of the ethical basis for mutual moral obligations see Williams, 2021: Chapter 7.

Appendix. Towards an application of feminist reparative justice: An example

Here, I include a brief description of my recent research on migrant care as an example of a case for reparative justice (Williams, 2022). This is not (yet) to do with climate justice, but it illustrates a method of applying decolonial knowledge and reparative history to the British Welfare State in order to reframe a feminist analysis of the employment of female migrant care workers over time.

The context of the research was work I'd been doing on the transnational political economy of care as part of a global crisis of care. I argue that while the effects of this crisis are different for different women in different countries and regions, they are nevertheless characterised by two key dynamics:

- The *devaluation of care*. This is its longstanding invisibility as women's work either unpaid or low paid plus its subordination to paid work and to productivism. This is not just about gender alone: it is also bound up with inequalities in class, caste, race, migration in the care providers; and disability, class and age for those receiving care support.
- The second is the *depletion of care* (Rai et al, 2014), that is, the failure to provide the resources that give people the capacity to care and to be cared for – material resources, time, support, space and so on. This has been exacerbated by changing demographics, austerity and neo-liberalism, as well as by conflict, increased chronic illness and climate disasters.

Note that the same two dynamics can be applied to the planet's resources.

The migration of care workers to the richer countries of the Global North from the Global South and other poorer regions at low cost represents both the devaluation of care and its depletion not only because of the failure of richer states to provide adequate social and child care but also because of family members of migrants left behind.

Path-breaking decolonial analysis by Gurminder Bhambra (Bhambra 2022) established the integral part that imperialism and colonialism played in the development and, more precisely, *the funding* of the British welfare state over the course of the twentieth century. She provides a forensic account of the deeply regressive forms of taxation inflicted upon colonised populations as a 'normal' part of colonial rule whose revenues were then rendered to the British state. These forms of extraction were as dire in effect as the extraction of raw material and labour in not only contributing to poverty and famine in India but also in withholding mitigation support for such devastation. Over half of the income available to the British state in the late nineteenth century came from labour, taxes and resources of the empire. While Irish-British fiscal relations had served to establish the practice of extracting from the periphery to subsidise the centre, the funding of British wars through colonised taxation (and soldiers) provided a template for extracting taxation to subsidise early twentieth century welfare reforms for the domestic population and thus relieve *their* tax burden. Focusing on India, (later India and Pakistan), Bhambra unfolds the profound asymmetry of these 'relations of extraction' and how they were compounded by the unequal 'relations of redistribution'. This was the failure in the early welfare reforms – and continued in the post-war welfare state – to enact any form of redistributive measures to the Indian population whose heavy taxation helped support the British welfare state.

Bhambra's analysis reframes the issue of redistribution for social policy by extending the parameters to the imperial state and British fiscal governance to its colonies and colonial subjects thereby forcing us to look again at *funding sources* and mechanisms, collective reciprocity and the taken-for-granted national boundaries of redistribution. In addition, it raises the question of inequalities in the colonial and racial divisions of welfare *over time*, and what that means for reparation in the present. In other words, this empirical work transforms the spatial and temporal redistributive principles and practices of the welfare state.

The logic, as well as tragic irony, of British imperialism is that it set social, political and cultural external and internal boundaries which served, in different ways at different times, to exclude colonised subjects of colour from access to welfare provision while their labour, lives and countries underwrote the nation-building projects of warfare and welfare (Semmel, 1960; Williams, 1989; Shilliam, 2018). My work employs Bhabra's decolonising frame to examine extraction through the expropriation and exploitation of care labour in the British welfare state from the colonies, ex-colonies and the poorer regions over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Williams, 2022). From this I surmise that, in the context of the global crisis of care and the histories of care labour, that migrant care work may present a suitable case for reparative policies.

The dynamics of devaluation and depletion of care were bound up in the exploitation of the female care labour of migrant colonial subjects in the post-war period and of care labour of migrant workers from poorer regions in the twenty-first century. While Britain has a particular colonial history, these developments, especially of migrant care labour, have similarities across the wealthier regions.

In post-war Britain, women workers from the colonies and ex-colonies were recruited to work as nurses and carers in the health service yet their access to welfare services was routinely questioned or denied. Without their work, the jobs would have to have been filled by British married women which was at odds with the ideology of the time of women as primarily mothers and housewives. The new migrants contributed not only to the construction of the welfare state but to the social reproduction of the White male breadwinner family at cost to (a depletion of) their own family lives. No attempt was made to support their own responsibilities for care and children were often left behind with relatives. Indeed, a pathological discourse of Black families developed that identified them as failing mothers precisely because of their contribution as workers (Carby, 1982; Williams, 1989).

Some half a century later the new normative ideal in Western welfare states is of a dual earner family. By the 1990s, domestic service for professional dual-earner families increasingly became the norm. By the turn of the century, ageing societies, declining fertility, and

relatively unchanged gendered care responsibilities have combined with political imperatives to keep care costs down and created a demand for low-cost care labour. It is migrant women from the poorer regions, often educated and skilled and under pressure as main breadwinners, who are meeting this demand in many, if not most, countries of the developed world (Williams, 2021). Once again, these workers provide cost-effective solutions to securing the family norms and care needs in their countries of destination, while their countries of origin experience a depletion in care.

The multiple, historical and intersecting inequalities and injustices that migrant care work reproduces raises important questions about how to tackle them. There have been important struggles such as those realised in the ILO's Convention 189, 'Decent Work for Domestic Workers', and those of international migration groups which look to improving migrants' citizenship and family reunion rights. But transforming geopolitical inequalities of care needs to go further. Migrant care work lies at the intersection of both global, regional and national failures in migration governance and a global care crisis in which extractivist productivism of contemporary racial and patriarchal capitalism has devalued and depleted the capacity of people and their societies to provide care. This is where reparative justice as a frame can begin to be useful. As Klein and Fouksman explain: 'Recognition and redress through reparations are important for acknowledging not just past wrongs, but the way these wrongs underpin contemporary inequalities' (Klein and Fouksman, 2021).

It is possible that reparative justice can build on the sorts of developments in transnational health work in which the WHO have set ethical codes and principles of transnational reciprocity – for example, preventing poaching of health workers and guaranteeing free training and support for returning doctors and nurses. In addition, there are arguments for public health reparations (Soled, et al. 2021). Such policy developments begin to provide a route towards thinking about material redistribution in relation to migrant care. Rather than framing redistribution as aid or compensation it would be framed as reparation for past and present extraction and exploitation of care resources from those migrant workers' countries of origin.

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