Received: 13 June 2023 | Revised: 7 August 2023 | Accepted: 12 September 2023

DOI: 10.1111/geoj.12547

COMMENTARY

Youth and climate justice: Representations of young people in action for sustainable futures

Onyx Sloan Morgan[1] | **Fabiola Melchior**[2] | **Kimberley Thomas**[3] | **Laura McNab-Coombs**[4]

[1]University of British Columbia (UBC) Okanagan, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada

[2]UBC Okanagan, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada

[3]UBC Vancouver, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

[4]University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, British Columbia, Canada

Correspondence
Onyx Sloan Morgan, University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus, Syilx Okanagan Nation Territories, 1147 Research Road, Kelowna, British Columbia V1V 1V7, Canada.
Email: onyx.sloanmorgan@ubc.ca

Funding information
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Grant/Award Number: 430-2019-758

Abstract

From fossil fuel corporations sponsoring climate change education to youth-washing international gatherings, young people are bombarded, and simultaneously abandoned, by struggles for climate justice. The root issues fuelling interlocking environmental and social crises are often erased in initiatives involving youth. These crises are a direct result of broader, structural conditions that have become the de facto global order and propel notions of sustainable development. In settler colonial contexts such as Canada, colonialism, capitalism and inequitable forms of violence mutually depend upon one another to perpetuate climate injustice. Youth are increasingly aware of these entanglements, while seemingly discouraged from transformative action. With these tensions in mind, this commentary investigates the obstacles youth face despite making key contributions to justice-focused climate action, and draws attention to the necessity of strengthening meaningful youth engagement. To explore this issue, we engage with climate and environmental justice literature, youth-led initiatives, and youth representation on a global stage.

KEYWORDS

climate justice, environmental justice, settler colonialism, social change, youth

1 | INTRODUCTION

From fossil fuel corporations sponsoring climate change education (UBC Blog, 2022) to youth-washing international gatherings (Patterson & Linley-Mota, 2021), young people are bombarded with, and simultaneously abandoned by, struggles and actions for climate justice. Justice is a key aspect to our understanding and engagement with climate crises and, specifically, anthropogenic causes and results of climate change. Indeed, as Whyte (2018), Martiskainen et al. (2020), Stapleton (2019) and Sultana (2022a, 2022b), to name but a few, have pointed out, climate justice is a social, environmental and moral issue (see also Naguib Pellow, 2017, for a similar argument within environmental justice realms). Sultana (2022b, p. 118) describes that 'climate justice fundamentally is about paying attention to how climate change impacts people differently, unevenly, and disproportionately, as well as redressing the resultant injustices in fair and

equitable ways'. In this commentary and based on our youth-led research and actions with young people, we argue that youth[1] are foregrounded while simultaneously ignored in climate justice initiatives; a tendency for which deeper attention is required. We do not make this argument to suggest that youth need 'saving' or are unable to advocate for themselves (Steinberger, 2022). Rather, we look to youth—and particularly youth of colour and Indigenous young people[2]—because they have long worked and organised in often unacknowledged ways in grassroots communities, in the courts, streets and schools (see, for instance, Dembicki, 2018; Indigenous Climate Action's Youth Needs Assessment, 2020; Thomas Black et al., 2016). While we do not intend to homogenise youth or to assume a universal investment in climate action, youth have more recently been profiled on the global stage as they demand intersectional actions across all levels of society for social, environmental, and indeed, climate justice (see Loss and Damage Youth Coalition, 2022; Youth4Climate Manifesto, 2021). Young people continually confront the rooting of colonial and capitalist structural processes that have led to our current climate—and social—crises.

Observing the tensions of focused abandonment of youth actors by decision-making bodies (e.g., nation-states youth councils without accountable government mechanisms, such as Canada's 2018 formed Prime Minister's Youth Council [Yesno, 2018]), mainstream educational initiatives (e.g., energy diet challenges sponsored by fossil fuel corporations, as demonstrated below), and trends to simultaneously youth-wash environmental and climate justice based initiatives, in this commentary we ask, how have youth been engaged in climate justice for social and environmental transformation? Exploring the topic of transformation offers us the opportunity to foreground the systemically invigorating ways in which youth are perceiving justice, while sidestepping the colonial and capitalist trap that relies on adaptation and mitigation (Grosse & Mark, 2020; Whyte, 2020). While we agree that mitigation and adaptation may be required for immediate responses to pressing threats facing communities (for more on this tension, see Jafry et al., 2018), we refuse to rely on the very structures that have brought us to our current moment(s) for just and sustainable futures. In this commentary and building from our youth-led research that took place across unceded Dakelh territories in so-called northern British Columbia, Canada (see Inheritors of the Future, 2020; Sloan Morgan et al., 2022), we engage climate and environmental justice literature and youth-led initiatives to demonstrate how youth are centred while simultaneously abandoned by decision-making bodies (what we see as 'youth-washing'), despite offering crucial contributions to advancing just climate action. Learning and building from the voices of youth that took part in our earlier research, we illustrate the normalisation of environmental and climate injustices in the everyday lives of youth. We then explore youth engagement in climate justice for social and environmental transformation and outline the contradictory position of youth as climate actors, particularly on the international stage where youth are frequently advocating for a voice. We contend that the trend to prop up while simultaneously abandoning youth in struggles for action perpetuates systemic injustices and erases colonial relations driving a need for transformation.

2 | BACKGROUND: YOUTH-LED RESEARCH AND JUSTICE

A youth-led participatory action research project with youth across so-called northern British Columbia (BC) in Canada on unceded and ancestral Dakelh territories guides our engagement here.[3] During our research, we heard about how youth perceive interlocking structures of power that impact healthy environments and communities in settler colonial contexts (Sloan Morgan et al., 2022). The interests of youth involved in our research led us to the environmental health literature to explore the interconnections between, for example, environmental contaminants and human health, while also encompassing the health of all living beings. The majority of youth who took part in and led our research identified as Indigenous women, with all youth pointing to systemic racism and colonialism that created (and maintains) barriers to healthy environments and communities with ongoing intergenerational disparities, while also highlighting the structural conditions that contribute to environmental and climate injustices. Youth were quick to point out the role that gender plays in access to power for decision-making, in addition to the key role that feminist and Indigenous (and we would like to add Two-Spirit and queer) leaders play in shifting discourses on environmental and social justice in so-called British Columbia and beyond. In other words, youth are no strangers to the histories and, importantly, levers of change that must be grasped to create futurities other than our current trajectory.

It is from our youth-led research that we arrived at climate justice, a relatively new framework from which to analyse our current global situation. Because climate justice emerged from environmental justice (Jafry et al., 2018), we begin by profiling youth in environmental justice literature before we pivot to climate justice.

2.1 | Youth and Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice (EJ) emerged in the late 1970s out of grassroots activism by Black African Americans against the disproportionate and overburdened placement of toxic industry, facilities and waste in primarily Black communities in the Southern USA (Bullard, 2000; Naguib Pellow, 2017).[4] Early conceptualisations of EJ directed attention to disproportionate exposure to environmental harms and the unfair and structurally racist and, to a lesser extent, gendered geographic distribution of environmental burdens and hazards. Inherent to this mode of inquiry was an interrogation of environmental racism, pointing to the lived experience of pollution, environmental degradation, and decision-making that created toxic 'sacrifice' zones (Davies, 2022). Our review of the literature revealed that, more recently, EJ has been subsumed by scholars in a way that downplays systemic racism as a cause of environmental degradation, pollutants and resulting health outcomes in lower income communities and those of colour. Indeed, scholars, such as Naguib Pellow and Robert Bruelle, have proposed a 'critical environmental justice' framework to foreground systemic dimensions and interdisciplinarity, while keeping race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic positions and ability at the centre (e.g., Naguib Pellow, 2017, pp. 11–16).

While some scholars are pointing to the need to ensure criticality is central to EJ, EJ remains a framework in many youth-based environmental initiatives.[5] Indeed, early youth initiatives on environmental justice demonstrate how social justice and climate action have long been inseparable from youth-led actions (Di Chiro, 2008; Loh & Sugerman-Brozan, 2002). Messaging shared through youth-led movements about the climate crisis in the early 2000s often included calls to action that reach far beyond mitigating the measurable effects of climate change (Di Chiro, 2008). Evidently, young people have long demanded global temperatures and greenhouse gas emissions to be lowered, while simultaneously calling for system-level reform towards equity, rooted in social justice (Lausanne Climate Declaration, 2019, pp. 3–6).

2.2 | Youth and Climate Justice

Climate Justice (CJ) has emerged on an international level from locally focused EJ movements (Jafry et al., 2018, p. 4). CJ provides an opportunity to expand upon broader structural issues, such as colonialism, and our current climate crisis (Foran et al., 2017; Martiskainen et al., 2020; Stapleton, 2019). To revisit Sultana (2022a), 'climate change lays bare the colonialism of not only of the past but an ongoing coloniality that governs and structures our lives, which are co-constitutive of processes of capitalism, imperialism, and international development' (p. 3). In 2022, the sixth report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) agreed that colonialism was a current and historical driving force of climate change (Funes, 2022). While the scientific and mainstream climate change movement is finally accepting this fact, Indigenous communities and communities of colour have long pointed to the entanglements of colonialism (e.g., genocide) and capitalism (e.g., slavery) as necessary pillars in the Global North's current reality, and how these conditions led to increased rates of toxic exposure, dispossession and violence (see Women's Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2016). Engaging with issues of CJ on the international level, young activists have reported struggles, systemic exclusion and focused abandonment. Some have argued that such trends point to 'adultism', with Ritchie (2021) noting that adults generally perceive youth as lacking competency to be relevant political advocates. Indeed, youth have relayed their difficulties when negotiating their position as young people in international spaces of climate negotiations, criticising the exclusiveness of such spaces restricting the opportunities for Indigenous activists and youth from the Global South to meaningfully impact the international agenda (Foran et al., 2017; Grosse & Mark, 2020). These youth-identified barriers are either institutional, originating from 'Western, capitalist, heteropatriarchal ways of understanding and imagining solutions to climate change' (Grosse & Mark, 2020, p. 156), or colonised practices of organising, with reporting and movement-building happening mainly around white, Global North based climate activists (Evelyn, 2020).

While our engagement with EJ and CJ is not intended to provide a neatly comprehensive overview of 'environmental justice and/or climate justice + youth', we do wish to profile the grounded, embodied and nuanced ways in which young people are pushing forward justice initiatives as they relate to the intertwining realities that have led to our climate crisis. As such, we now turn to youth-identified barriers in transformative, climate-justice initiatives.

2.3 | Systemic (in)action

The case of climate change education in schools across Canada (and the world) being funded by fossil fuel companies demonstrates how fossil fuel companies are insidiously entrenched and normalised in the everyday lives of youth. Youth are exposed to lessons that, for example, focus on carbon footprints. While helpful in fostering consciousness about fossil fuel use, these initiatives erase the responsibility of corporations, transferring such responsibilities to everyday people

and, in this case, youth (UBC Blog, 2022). Rarely in educational resources does there appear to be discussion about life necessities that will become increasingly scarce with climate change, such as equitable access to safe drinking water; nor about key determinants that further impact life-necessary resources, including how socioeconomic status, gender or discrimination based on race or ability manifest and are heightened due to changing climates across the globe. In settler colonial contexts such as Canada, there is further a glaring lack of discussion about the need to foreground Indigenous self-determination while engaging legal apparatus for environmental policy (Indigenous Climate Action, 2021). Furthermore, when such responses are funded by the perpetrators of mass scale social and environmental injustices that are systemically entrenched in our everyday lives, such as the case of Royal Dutch Shell and the *Energy Diet Challenge* (but see Canadian Geographic Education, 2022), what does that say about collective forms of responsibility for climate action? Neglecting such nuances entrenches and normalises the structural nature of carbon intensive economies, framing carbon dependence as apolitical rather than constructed and structurally reinforced. Indeed, while youth are pulled into the fray of responsibility as it relates to anthropogenic causes of climate change by counting their coffee cups and lightbulb use, they are left without the tools necessary for systemic-level action.

2.4 | Youth-washing

Youth are not only bombarded with messaging around climate change, they are also used to 'youth-wash' local and international gatherings (Patterson & Linley-Mota, 2021). Young people are lauded for their involvement and action against climate injustice, while at the same time excluded from high-level conversations leading to change (Grosse & Mark, 2020). Youth have repeatedly reported that their perspectives in these large gatherings are not subsumed into the decision-making process (Foran et al., 2017; Grosse & Mark, 2020; Thew et al., 2020). The pattern of parading youth as the face of climate change and justice while simultaneously excluding them from meaningful conversations on climate action is widespread: from Conference of the Parties (COP) gatherings to local politics, youth are marketed for the future of our planet (Kiderlin, 2022; Patterson & Linley-Mota, 2021). Ultimately, tokenisation trends do not stop at youth-washing. Sultana (2022a) observes how 'a performance of diversion, delay, co-optation, and performativity without substance is repeated almost annually' (p. 2) at international climate change gatherings. 'Nonetheless' Sultana (2022a) continues, 'these are also spaces of opportunities to challenge the system, to utter necessary words for more people to hear, collectivize among young and old activists, learn from different positionalities, create new openings and possibilities of alliances—in other words, a repoliticization of climate instead of the depoliticized techno-economist utopias that never deliver' (p. 2). We agree with Sultana's optimistic yet realistic reading of global climate gatherings, such as COPs, and we additionally suggest that youth activists that have long been on the frontlines, in community, and in international dialogues for climate justice and action have been made invisible. This, we argue, is a symptom of power geometries that remain prevalent in decision-making spaces and one that extends beyond inclusion (Sloan Morgan, 2020).

2.5 | Exclusionary narratives

While youth actors such as Swedish activist Greta Thunberg have become household names, youth of colour and those in less privileged positions have not, despite long having rallied for environmental and climate justice in their home communities and on the global stage. Our commentary here and our youth-led research (see Sloan Morgan et al., 2020) have sought to address this tendency by foregrounding youth who are at times and quite literally cropped out as climate justice actors. Indeed, while the climate (justice) movement has gained unprecedented mainstream attention, support and momentum since Thunberg's commencement of 'school strike for the climate' in August 2018, youth activists with whom Thunberg has sought to stand next to and profile have been erased, such as when Black Ugandan youth advocate Vanessa Nakate was cropped out of a press photo with Thunberg and other prominent white youth climate justice activists in Davos, Switzerland (Evelyn, 2020).

The tendency to profile specific youth and specific narratives as climate justice has long been intervened in by Indigenous and scholars of colour. For instance, Kwakwaka'wakw scholar Sarah Hunt/Tłaliłila'ogwa (2022) observes:

> ...Greta Thunberg has not been the only, nor the first, youth leader of this movement. For decades, Indigenous youth around the world have led the way on climate justice, drawing connections between environmental degradation and Indigenous rights at local and global levels (see indigenousclimateaction.com for examples). (p. 135)

While Hunt points to the inspiring work of Indigenous Climate Action, youth manifestos before the 2018 'School strike for climate' have rooted the need for place-based action that is responsive to local conditions, such as Indigenous self-determination, intersectionality, and reparations for communities of colour and Indigenous communities (e.g., International Congress of Youth Voices, 2018). Additionally, as Hunt (2022) also points out, 'centring the leadership of Indigenous youth pushes back against colonial narratives [of erasure and exclusion] that depict Indigenous people solely as being among those who will "continue to suffer and die due to climate change"' (p. 135). Youth-led environmental and climate justice movements have long recognised the importance of solidarity that foregrounds place-based realities, such as Indigenous self-determinations, to decentre and counter various yet interlocking expressions of dispossession. Indeed, these nuanced connections are ones that youth activists have long identified, linking environmental actors, for instance, with reproductive and climate justice in the United States (Di Chiro, 2008). While youth are omitted from dialogues on meaningful change, their broader forms of solidarity and coalition that call to attention underlying colonial dynamics are also side-lined.

3 | YOUTH AS GLOBAL CLIMATE JUSTICE ACTORS

As mentioned at the outset of this commentary, in 2022 the IPCC named colonialism as a significant cause of the current climate crisis. In the IPCC's summary report for policy, the document that is often referred to when discussions take place at international forums such as COPs, the IPCC (2022) states:

> Vulnerability at different spatial levels is exacerbated by inequity and marginalization linked to gender, ethnicity, low income or combinations thereof (high confidence), especially for many Indigenous Peoples and local communities (high confidence). Present development challenges causing high vulnerability are influenced by historical and ongoing patterns of inequity such as colonialism, especially for many Indigenous Peoples and local communities (high confidence).
>
> (p. 12)

Above, we have highlighted how youth have long pointed to structural dynamics and inequitable outcomes as synonymous with climate injustice. Now, with even the IPCC identifying colonialism as a structural condition upholding our current climate crisis, one must wonder why frameworks of environmental and climate justice are being put forth without full transformative potential.

Our focus on youth as climate actors and those often tokenised on the international stage demonstrates that the tendency to shift discussions away from meaningful climate action also extends to excluding youth from meaningful engagement. While we recognise that youth inclusion in decision-making is not globally universal (Gasparri et al., 2021), we do reflect on the IPCC's (2022) explicit acknowledgement of effective, strategic and meaningful (versus tokenistic) partnerships in the face of climate change:

> Climate resilient development is facilitated by international cooperation and by governments at all levels working with communities, civil society, educational bodies, scientific and other institutions, media, investors and businesses; and by *developing partnerships with traditionally marginalised groups, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and ethnic minorities* (high confidence).
>
> (p. 32, emphasis added)

Indeed, Elders and knowledge holders who were significant in shaping our research activities repeatedly identified youth engagement and learning intra-generationally as key to, in this case, Dakelh forms of knowing. Instead, options to address climate change and injustice provided to youth are often deeply liberalised, putting forth the notion of a neoliberal subject whose consumptive actions seemingly address our climate crisis. However helpful climate challenges may be to build an understanding of complicity in extractivism, these initiatives are woefully inadequate to include youth meaningfully, let alone provide the skills necessary to assess entanglements of anthropogenic climate change with necessary system-level transformations. Yet, when we look to youth-led actions, we see youth making these links for change in their home communities even if they are locked out of the rooms where decisions are made. The literature outlines only a few of the many examples of the work that youth are doing on the forefront of climate justice action (e.g., *Connected Voices*, in Foran et al., 2017; *Australian Youth Climate Coalition*, in Hilder & Collin, 2022). Simultaneously, young people,

are used to 'youth-wash' global forums internationally without meaningful, equitable opportunities for participation. The IPCC's (2022) mention of the importance of 'developing partnerships with traditionally marginalized groups, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and ethnic minorities' is noteworthy (p. 32). As a scientific panel composed of global representatives, identifying youth as a group that should be included in partnerships for more just futures *and* colonialism as an underlying force of climate change is significant.

While we point to the recent shift of acknowledging youth as potential partners by bodies such as the IPCC, we note that the recognition and position of youth has institutionally shifted on the international level: 'In 2009, the UNFCCC [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change] secretariat extended constituency status to admitted youth NGOs' (United Nations Climate Change, 2023, n.p.). Today, YOUNGO, the official children and youth constituency of the UNFCCC, is one of the nine constituencies representing civil society and NGOs at international negotiations, such as COPs (see Sultana, 2022a for more on the COP gatherings). This recognition of youth is an important development towards integrating youth voices in advancing climate justice. Formally acknowledging youth as a relevant constituency, however, is only a first step towards genuine and equitable inclusion. At the same time, we do not place faith in international spaces, such as COPs, that uphold geopolitical entities that perpetuate exploitation and coloniality. Simultaneously, to demand increased accessibility for youth to decision-shaping spaces, we need to pay attention to the way existing spaces are constructed, restricted and framed. There are cultural and gendered considerations mitigating how youth can and do take place in such spaces, and how the active withholding of support for youth further perpetuates injustices. As literature and experience shows, youth delegates who are able to gain experiences on the exclusionary and disillusioning nature of such spaces have pointed out these necessary considerations (Foran et al., 2017; Grosse & Mark, 2020; Kiderlin, 2022; Thew et al., 2020).

4 | CONCLUSION

Our commentary has intervened in how youth are called into while simultaneously abandoned in decision-making and burgeoning actions towards climate justice. We examined how youth are engaged in literature on environmental and climate justice, before profiling how youth are propped up on the international stage. The contemporary departure in the literature from an emphasis on systemic racism—while such focus remains central in youth environmental justice initiatives—necessities a critical EJ framework (e.g., Naguib Pellow, 2017); as we highlighted, youth have an evidenced history of meeting this imperative, in part by calling attention to the need for system-level reform *and* transformation. Climate justice, although born from EJ tradition as it relates to international justice and climate change adaptation (Schlosberg, 2013), has emerged on the global level, at times obscuring the experiences of frontline communities.[6] Our attention to this literature with a specific focus on youth has highlighted that young people are publicly profiled as central to the current climate crises, yet side-lined as meaningful agents of and for change. To be clear, we are not arguing that nation-states and hegemonic decision-making structures should be depended upon to meaningfully engage youth in climate action, let alone justice-based initiatives that are often needed in the first place due to systemic racism and discrimination embedded in and maintained by these very structures. What we are arguing, however, is that youth have a demonstrated ability to put forth options for prefiguring and refiguring our collective futures that move beyond the current—and ineffectual—levers for change. To this point, we end with an excerpt put forward in 2018 by the International Congress of Youth Voices delegates.

In addition to 'aspire[ing] to leave our national ego at the door and enter the gates of our global communities with an open mind', one that 'use[s] an intersectional lens to self-reflect and be able to access connections and other views after acknowledging bias', youth delegates at the International Congress of Youth Voices (2018) shared their hope of mobilising youth beyond borders:

> We are committed to the mobilization of youth advocates and activists internationally through continuous community building, days of social action, and global initiatives. We believe that hope, resilience, and community must be the core of our mobilization.
>
> (n.p.)

We heed these words and encourage those taking part in climate action discussions to learn from the power of critical and youth-led environmental justice frameworks and their ability to respond to local needs while addressing systemic racism and gendered impacts, and to bring these lessons to current work on climate justice. In so doing, we hope that

the lessons learned will not be watered down, but leveraged to mobilise actions based on hope, transformation and community priorities, instead of favouring the interest of corporations and states causing the current need for climate justice in the first place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank and acknowledge the youth, Elders, Knowledge Holders, and colleagues across Dakelh territories whose words and actions as part of the 'Inheritors of the Future' research project contributed to this work in multiple ways. This manuscript draws on research supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Insight Development Grant, # 430-2019-00758).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

This commentary did not analyse nor generate datasets. All material that contributed to this work can be sourced through our references.

ORCID

Onyx Sloan Morgan https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1947-1991

ENDNOTES

[1] We use the term 'youth' to refer to young people who are involved in climate action. Our definition of youth here includes 'individuals who identify themselves as children or youth below the age of 35 years' (YOUNGO, 2023; but see Foran et al., 2017). This age-based definition is in line with 'youth' involved in research by scholars such as Gladwin et al. (2022), Grosse and Mark (2020) or Stapleton (2019). We recognise, however, that different communities and cultures have definitions for and understandings of youth that diverge from an age-based category. We also acknowledge that not all youth, for various reasons, have the same relation to or hold the same beliefs on the topic of climate change, nor do they all share the urge to act.

[2] We, the authors of this commentary, approach the topic we write about here from unique positions. A number of us identify as queer, and non-binary or as women. One of us identifies as Indigenous, whereas three of us do not; one as part of communities of colour, whereas two are white identifying. Some of us understand our ancestors as complicit in settler colonial processes that have created our current climate crisis, whereas others among us are visiting 'Canada' from an international context. Our ages differ as well, with three of us considered 'youth' in the age-based category employed in this commentary. We study geography, medicine, health and environmental science. We come together from these diverse positions and with our, at times, different perspectives to share this commentary with one collective voice.

[3] For a summary report of our 2018 youth-led research design workshop, see Sloan Morgan (2018). For a report on the outcomes and activities of our 2019 research workshop, see Sloan Morgan et al. (2020).

[4] Schlosberg (2013, p. 46) identifies 1991 as the year in which the term 'Environmental Justice' was utilised by communities of colour. Based on our reviews, however, we have found that the language of Environmental Justice predates 1991. In this commentary, we are not interested in debating the date for the emergence of 'Environmental Justice' as a term per say, but rather, identifying the long-standing actions and ethos that communities of colour have mobilised for over four decades as a direct response to racially and socioeconomically discriminatory environmental decision-making. As Bullard and Johnson (2000, p. 573) demonstrate: 'The poisoning of African Americans in Louisiana's "Cancer Alley," Native Americans on reservations, and Mexicans in the border towns all have their roots in the same economic system, a system characterized by economic exploitation, racial oppression, and devaluation of human life and the natural environment'.

[5] Select EJ programs led by or involving youth that demonstrate significant impact and opportunities for systems change include: the Richmond, California, USA Youth Air Quality Initiative (2018), which involves youth and researchers collaborating about asthma burdens in a community with socioeconomic vulnerabilities; the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project's (n.d.) in California, USA that trains both adults and youth to become environmental change-makers in their shoreline communities; the Comite Civico del Valle Inc. (2023) Youth Environmental Health Leadership Training Institute, whose purpose is to prepare high school students to become leaders in environmental health, as is the WE ACT for Environmental Justice's (2022) Environmental Health and Justice Leadership Training; and New York City's 'Camp EJ', which is a community-based participatory research project that empowers youth to collect then leverage data to improve air quality and advance environmental justice in their communities (New York City Environmental Justice Alliance, 2021).

[6] The University of British Columbia's (UBC) 'Centre for Climate Justice' was formed in 2020 and seeks to address the tendency by instead centring the experience of frontline communities in research, action and policy work on climate justice/change. See: https://climatejustice.ubc.ca/.

REFERENCES

Bullard, R.D. (2000) *Dumping in Dixie: Race, class, and environmental quality*, 3rd edition. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Bullard, R.D. & Johnson, G.S. (2000) Environmentalism and public policy: Environmental justice: Grassroots activism and its impact on public policy decision making. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 555–578. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00184

Canadian Geographic Education. (2022) Take-home. *Classroom Energy Diet Challenge*. Available from: https://cge-media-library.s3.ca-central-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/03110015/SHE-CEDC-TakeHome-Lesson-Plan-EN.pdf [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Comite Civico del Valle, Inc. (2023) *Youth Environmental Health Internship (YEHI)*. Available from: https://www.ccvhealth.org/programs-single.php?program=5 [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Davies, T. (2022) Slow violence and toxic geographies: 'Out of sight' to whom? *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Spaces*, 40(2), 409–427. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654419841063

Dembicki, G. (2018) Lawsuit accuses trudeau of selling out millennials on climate change: Young plaintiff claims feds have "decided to protect the oil inductry". *The Tyee*, 3 December. Available from: https://thetyee.ca/News/2018/12/03/Trudeau-Lawsuit-Climate-Change/ [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Di Chiro, G. (2008) Living environmentalisms: Coalition politics, social reproduction and environmental justice. *Environmental Politics*, 17(2), 276–298. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010801936230

Evelyn, K. (2020) Outrage at whites-only image as Ugandan climate activist cropped from photo. *The Guardian*, 25 January. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/24/whites-only-photo-uganda-climate-activist-vanessa-nakate [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Foran, J., Gray, S. & Grosse, C. (2017) "Not yet the end of the world": Political cultures of opposition and creation in the global youth climate justice movement. *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements*, 9(2), 353–379.

Funes, Y. (2022) Yes, colonialism caused climate change, IPCC reports. *Atmos*, April. Available from: https://atmos.earth/ipcc-report-colonialism-climate-change/ [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Gasparri, G., El Omrani, O., Hinton, R., Imbago, D., Lakhani, H., Mohan, A. et al. (2021) Children, adolescents, and youth pioneering a human rights-based approach to climate change. *Health and Human Rights*, 23(2), 95.

Gladwin, D., Karsgaard, C. & Shultz, L. (2022) Collaborative learning on energy justice: International youth perspectives on energy literacy and climate justice. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 53, 251–260.

Grosse, C. & Mark, B. (2020) A colonized COP: Indigenous exclusion and youth climate justice activism at the United Nations climate change negotiations. *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment*, 11, 146–170.

Hilder, C. & Collin, P. (2022) The role of youth-led activist organisations for contemporary climate activism: The case of the Australian youth climate coalition. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 25(6), 793–811.

Hunt, S. (2022) Unsettling conversations on climate action. *The Professional Geographer*, 74(1), 135–136.

Indigenous Climate Action. (2020) *Indigenous climate action: Youth needs assessment*. Available from: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e8e4b5ae8628564ab4bc44c/t/5fa966e1116faf366cff2766/1604937447256/youth_report_FINAL_2020-10.pdf [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Indigenous Climate Action. (2021) *Decolonizing climate policy in Canada: Report from phase one*. Available from: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e8e4b5ae8628564ab4bc44c/t/6061cb5926611066ba64a953/1617021791071/pcf_critique_FINAL.pdf [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Inheritors of the Future (Director). (2020) *Inheritors of the future video-January to June 2020*. Available from: https://vimeo.com/443509034 [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

International Congress on Youth Voices. (2018) 'By the youth, for the youth': A manifesto for tomorrow's activists. *The Guardian*, August. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/aug/12/international-congress-youth-voices-manifesto-activism?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

IPCC. (2022) Climate change 2022: Impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability. In: Pörtner, H.-O., Roberts, D.C., Tignor, M., Poloczanska, E.S., Mintenbeck, K., Alegría, A. et al. (Eds.) *Contribution of working group II to the sixth assessment report of the intergovernmental panel on climate change*. Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, p. 3056.

Jafry, T., Mikulewicz, M. & Helwig, K. (2018) *Routledge handbook of climate justice*, 1st edition. New York, NY: Routledge.

Kiderlin, S. (2022) Young people just got a louder voice on climate change—And could soon be shaping policy. *CNBC*, November. Available from: https://www.cnbc.com/2022/11/23/young-people-just-became-official-climate-policy-stakeholders-at-cop27.html [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Lausanne Climate Declaration. (2019) *Uncategorized files*. Climate Strike Switzerland. Available from: https://pool.climatestrike.ch/w/images/7/78/Lausanne_Climate_Declaration_Final.pdf [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Loh, P. & Sugerman-Brozan, J. (2002) Environmental justice organizing for environmental health: Case study on asthma and diesel exhaust in Roxbury, Massachusetts. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 584(1), 110–124.

Loss and Damage Youth Coalition (LDYC). (2022) *COP27 Demands*. Available from: https://ldyouth.files.wordpress.com/2022/12/cop27-full-demands.pdf [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Martiskainen, M., Axon, S., Sovacool, B., Sareen, S., Furszyfer Del Rio, D.D. & Axon, K. (2020) Contextualizing climate justice activism: Knowledge, emotions, motivations, and actions among climate strikers in six cities. *Global Environmental Change*, 65, 1–36.

Naguib Pellow, D. (2017) *What is critical environmental justice?* . Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

New York City Environmental Justice Alliance. (2021) *Camp-EJ: Community air mapping project for environmental justice*. Available from: https://nyc-eja.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/CAMP-EJ-2020-Report-Final-021821-Reduced.pdf [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Patterson, C. & Linley-Mota, F. (2021) Youth power and 'youth washing' at COP26. *The Tyee*, 15 November. Available from: https://thetyee.ca/News/2021/11/15/Youth-Power-Youth-Washing-COP26/ [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Richmond Youth Air Quality Initiative. (2018) *Richmond youth air quality initiative*. Available from: https://cerch.berkeley.edu/research-programs/richmond-youth-air-quality-initiative [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Ritchie, J. (2021) Movement from the margins to global recognition: Climate change activism by young people and in particular indigenous youth. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 30(1–2), 53–72.

Schlosberg, D. (2013) Theorising environmental justice: The expanding sphere of a discourse. *Environmental Politics*, 22(1), 37–55. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2013.755387

Sloan Morgan, O.V., Thomas, K. & McNab-Coombs, L. (2022) Envisioning healthy futures: Youth perceptions of justice-oriented environments and communities in northern British Columbia Canada. *Health & Place*, 76, 102817. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2022.102817

Sloan Morgan, V. (2018) *Inheritors of the future: Rural and northern community-driven voices of youth contemplating resource extraction in the Nechako Valley/Dakelh Territories* [Summary Report]. Available from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1V2gI_ipSpjofHQQL8CEhkJUAk7-0srY2/view?usp=sharing

Sloan Morgan, V. (2020) "Why would they care?": Youth, resource extraction, and climate change in northern British Columbia, Canada. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, 64(3), 445–460. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12605

Sloan Morgan, V., McNab-Coombs, L. & Thomas, K. (2020) *Inheritors of the future: Final summary report [Winter 2020]*. Available from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PtVDh-kQ_PAgFumtVd7Y2gplc4tJlT78/view?usp=sharing

Stapleton, S. (2019) A case for climate justice education: American youth connecting to intragenerational climate injustice in Bangladesh. *Environmental Education Research*, 25(5), 732–750.

Steinberger, J. (2022) The kids are not okay. *Medium*, May. Available from: https://jksteinberger.medium.com/the-kids-are-not-ok-c518fffb475 [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Sultana, F. (2022a) The unbearable heaviness of climate coloniality. *Political Geography*, 99, 102638. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102638

Sultana, F. (2022b) Critical climate justice. *Geographical Journal*, 188, 118–124. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12417

Thew, H., Middlemiss, L. & Paavola, J. (2020) "Youth is not a political position": Exploring justice claims-making in the UN climate change negotiations. *Global Environmental Change*, 61, 1–22.

Thomas Black, S., Anthony Milligan, R. & Heynen, N. (2016) Solidarity in climate/immigrant justice direct action: Lessons from movements in the US south: Solidarity In climate/immigrant justice direct action. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 40(2), 284–298. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12341

UBC Blog. (2022) *Fossil fuel-sponsored curricula in Canadian classrooms are at odds with commitments to climate action*. Available from: https://blogs.ubc.ca/openletterrgsc/?page_id=29 [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

United Nations Climate Change. (2023) Youth. YOUNGO. Available from: https://unfccc.int/topics/education-youth/youth/youngo. [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

WE ACT for Environmental Justice. (2022) *Environmental health and justice leadership training*. Available from: https://www.weact.org/home-3-2-2-2/getinvolved/education/ehjlt/ [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project. (n.d.) *Oakland shoreline leadership academy*. Available from: https://woeip.org/featured-work/oakland-shoreline-leadership-academy/ [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Whyte, K. (2020) Too late for indigenous climate justice: Ecological and relational tipping points. *WIREs Climate Change*, 11, e603. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.603

Whyte, K.P. (2018) Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 1(1–2), 224–242. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848618777621

Women's Earth Alliance & Native Youth Sexual Health Network. (2016) *Violence on the land, violence on our bodies: Building an indigenous response to environmental violence*. Available from: http://landbodydefense.org/uploads/files/VLVBReportToolkit2016.pdf [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Yesno, R. (2018) What a letter about a pipeline taught me about ageism. *Maclean's*, 19 July. Available from: https://macleans.ca/opinion/what-a-letter-about-a-pipeline-taught-me-about-ageism/ [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

YOUNGO. (2023) About us. Official Youth Constituency to the UNFCCC. Available from: https://youngoclimate.org/about-us/. [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

Youth4Climate. (2021) *Youth4Climate Manifesto*. Available from: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Youth4Climate-Manifesto.pdf?download [Accessed 22nd September 2023].

How to cite this article: Sloan Morgan, O., Melchior, F., Thomas, K. & McNab-Coombs, L. (2024) Youth and climate justice: Representations of young people in action for sustainable futures. *The Geographical Journal*, 190, e12547. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12547