

# Review: Protecting people from climate change harm (Cazzoli)

Theodor Borrmann

July 2020

The article by Lise Cazzoli explores how climate justice could be framed in terms of harm and protection. Drawing from her own field research in Guyana, Cazzoli argues that such framing might help to better apprehend and address the multiple connections between climate change and suffering.

In my opinion, the article would provide a very valuable contribution to *St Anne's Academic Review*. It presents a highly topical discussion of a novel pathway to address and redress the impact of climate change. The article is well-structured and explains the issues at stake in a clear and understandable way, inviting and motivating the reader to continue thinking about possible conceptualisations of the protection approach to climate change.

While I appreciate the article in general, I would like to suggest five minor points of correction.

First, the author argues on page 9 that ‘protection is [...] related to questions of justice because the existence of harm and victims derive from the existence of a perpetrator.’ I disagree with this statement. Natural hazards such as earthquakes or floods may for instance induce harm without a perpetrator existing.

Second, and also on page 9, the author suggests that the fact that climate change is a threat to human security ‘logically’ means that ‘states should do everything in their power to protect their citizens from its impacts.’ Again, I disagree with the statement, as policy spaces are multi-dimensional. It may for instance be considered more important to protect citizens from poverty than from potential weather events.

Third, on page 12, the author lists ‘reparative justice’ as fifth type of justice, next to corrective, substantive, distributional, and formal justice.

However, there seems to be a large overlap between corrective and reparative justice, and I would suggest to clarify their relation. The referenced paper outlines for example how reparations entail both corrective and restorative justice (Buxton, 2019, p. 210). Cazzoli draws a line between reparative and corrective justice without explaining their difference. Personally, I would suggest to combine these justice types into a single category.

Fourth, on page 13, the author employs the ontological turn in anthropology – in particular Kohn (2015) – to argue that moral judgment is embedded in ‘specific representations of reality itself.’ I would disagree with that statement, even though it’s not necessarily wrong (there are many interpretations within the ontological turn). I would recommend the author to provide a clearer depiction of ontologies, or to actually bypass this rather complex terminology altogether (by solely relying on the reference to Said’s (1978) and Gregory’s (2004) imagined/ative geographies).

In my reading of Viveiros de Castro, Descola, and Kohn, the ontological turn goes beyond the constructivist approach to nature and reality. Rather than arguing that reality is differently constructed and represented, reality as such is seen as different. Kohn supports for instance an interpretation of ontology as ‘different worlds instead of different worldviews’ (*How Forests Think*, p. 10).

As a side-note, Kohn’s understanding of ontology is also markedly different from the one of Heidegger (for whom it was indeed merely the study of being), who is also cited by Cazzoli.

Fifth, the author writes on page 15 that the climate change regime is ‘often considered new and emerging,’ in contrast for instance to the refugee regime. I think that a reference might be helpful at this point, especially as the term ‘new regime’ is not fully defined. I would actually argue that the climate change regime has had its predecessors in the environmental movement of the 70s and the resulting international regimes (e.g., Montreal Protocol, Convention on Biological Diversity, Basel Convention).

Besides these five points, it would be necessary to edit the text once more to remove very minor mistakes.

On page 3, the author writes at one point for instance of ‘humanitarianism’ instead of ‘humanity’ (when summarising Fassin’s distinction between mankind and humanness); on the same page, she also repeats ‘seen as a deprivation of basic capabilities’ in two adjacent sentences; on page 13, the author seems to translate ‘poetic’ as ‘made up’, whereas it etymologically only means ‘made’; on the next page, there is a comma instead of a fullstop

in the first sentence; on page 15, the last paragraph seems to have an ‘emerge’ too many in one sentence.

Further, the bibliography is still inconsistent: The journal and page numbers of O’Brien et al. are for instance given as ‘Disasters, 30: 64-80’, while for Paris, they are given as ‘*International Peacekeeping*, 21(5), 596-603.’ For Oliver-Smith, there are dots in the title; for Said, the publisher is missing; et cetera.

Apart from these minor points – which I would deem necessary to correct – there are further points which I would like to share with the author. Their consideration might help to revise the article, even though it might be unfeasible to tackle all of them within the scope of this journal article. For simplicity, let me note them down in a couple of bullet points:

- In my opinion, the author’s observations from Guyana do not feature enough in the article. Personally, I would delete the section on ‘methodology’ and would include the observations either in the introduction, or at the very end (in order to illustrate the issues raised in section 3).  
Further, I would suggest to take all examples from Guyana, rather than referring to hurricane Katrina or the Tuvalu nation. On page 11, for instance, the author could cite an example of an extreme weather event from Guyana, and could then evaluate whether the Guyanese health care system was sufficiently prepared.
- The author observed that Guyanese boat services would be affected by sea-level rise. However, she does not clarify whether such impact would be negative or positive. – If more places are inundated, boat services might actually expand and its owners might make more money than before.
- A map of Guyana might be helpful.
- As of now, the analysis of alternative approaches to the ‘protection approach’ is weak. The author refers at some points to existing literature, but hardly engages with it.

On page 7, the author for example reports that news ‘usually’ report the climate emergency as the reason for vulnerability, but does not provide any reference for that claim. If that was indeed the case (which I am not sure of), it would go against the grain of current research in disaster

risk reduction (where it is clear that vulnerabilities create disasters, not the other way round).

On page 16, the terms ‘climate change adaptation,’ ‘preparedness,’ or ‘disaster risk reduction’ are mentioned, but not properly defined. To my surprise, ‘resilience’ was not mentioned at all, even though I would have considered it to be most promising alternative to a ‘protection approach.’

- I do not share the author’s optimism concerning ‘protection approaches’ in general, and the author might wish to include a more critical engagement with ‘protection.’ In comparison for instance to a ‘resilience approach,’ the term ‘protection’ seems more prone to processes of victimisation and securitisation. The author’s reference to the ‘responsibility to protect’ could for instance also include an overview to its critiques (which argue for instance that R2P can be abused to improve one’s own geostrategic position).

She could further engage with the critical literature on disaster risk management. Papers like *On shaky grounds* by Zeiderman (2012) show for instance that ‘protecting’ people from earthquake risk is not always in their best interest, and similar observations have been made with respect to most hazard risks.

- In section 3.2., the author asks ‘who should be responsible for providing [...] protection,’ but then merely considers the state and the international community as options. However, the responsibility might also lie with individuals, civil society, transnational organisations, or private companies, and it might accordingly be good to discuss these options.
- It might be helpful to further elucidate the notion of ‘the state.’ The author writes for example on page 9 that climate change ‘has been caused by human activity including, presumably, that of the state itself,’ and that the states are thus perpetrators of the harm induced by climate change.

But it is unclear to me how ‘the state’ would cause climate change. Is it because the institution of the state has accelerated industrialisation? Or because the state has incentivised private companies to pollute the environment? Or because it has failed to set the right policies? And,

in any case, would it really be the state that has contributed to climate change, and not rather the politicians? – I think that the claim itself can be defended, but further elaboration seems advisable.

- On page 4, the author writes that ‘deprivation is conceptualised as relative’ and adds in parentheses that ‘hence, some deprivations can be considered absolute.’ I disagree with that conclusion, but this may be because my idea of ‘absolute’ is different from the author’s.
- On page 6, the author writes that villagers associate climate change impacts ‘with unsustainable patterns of resource use that are not directly related to the state of the climate.’ Examples for such resource use patterns might help the readers to better understand the Guyanese situation.

Quotes from villagers and more details on why the protection approach is to be preferred in Guyana might also prove advantageous in general.

- On page 8, the author uses ‘migration or starvation’ as instance of harm. This might give the impression that migration is harmful. The author might wish to rephrase that part.
- Also on page 8, the author uses the term “‘legitimate’ victims,” which seems to be an unfortunate wording. What does it actually mean for a victim to be legitimate or illegitimate?
- On page 9, the author summarises the conceptualisation of individualised victims as asking ‘epistemological questions’. However, there is also an ethical dimension to it (not only an epistemological one).
- On page 16, the author writes that ‘the current government response is mostly dictated by politics.’ I would argue that it is dictated by politics and economics.
- As the author recognises herself in the conclusions, her preliminary account of a protection approach to climate change entails a wide range of theories from different contexts and disciplines (e.g., Sen, Kohn, Said). For that reason, some very profound ideas are unfortunately merely sketched. – Of course, the chosen approach of the author has the benefit that the reader is provided with much inspiration for further readings.

- Stylistically, the text is ‘too honest’ at times. I completely understand and sympathise with the author’s urge to use qualifiers, such as ‘one could argue’ or ‘presumably.’ However, in some cases it seems advisable to exclude them.

On page 6, for instance, ‘sea-level rise [...] could *hypothetically* affect both fauna and flora’ might be rephrased as ‘sea-level rise [...] could affect both fauna and flora’. And on page 10, it seems fair to write ‘However, not all redress from injustice needs to come from the perpetrator’ instead of ‘*One could argue*, however, that redress from injustice does not *necessarily* need to come from the perpetrator.’

My points of critique notwithstanding, Cazzoli’s article on *Protecting People from Climate Change Harm* has been a very pleasant and interesting read. Its publication in *St Anne’s Academic Review* is highly commendable, as the article engages the reader with an important topic in a very refreshing and inspiring way.

## General feedback:

- The conclusion is excellent and reads really well. Use it as the main reference point when rewriting the paper.
- Tidy up the text grammatically and linguistically for greater clarity
- Specify and clarify some minor elements in the main text indicated in my comments to streamline the arguments.
- In the introduction, explain the analytical lens of protection, and say a word or two about the methodology (including field work)
- Expand a little on the rise and characterisation of 'humanitarian government.'
- Add one concluding paragraph to section one that summarises what a theoretical approach to protection means. The section has great content, but needs to be tied together a little.
- Explain why/how the R2P principle applies to climate change harms (given its very specific origin and legal interpretation).
- Engage with the critical literature on Kantian Universalism and R2P.
- Instead of taking recourse to the R2P principle, it would make more sense to use the environmental justice literature to call on the state for protection measures. Lise can ask me for suggestions if needed.
- Move the methodology section up and expand it a little.
- Change the citation style by moving in-text citations to the end of sentences for consistency and increased reading comfort.