THE CARE COLLECTIVE

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THE POLITICS OF INTERDEPENDENCE

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Contents

6

Caring for the World

Our Extensive Interdependence

How can we create a more caring world, one capable of sustaining and nourishing all forms of life?

Addressing the problems of carelessness on a global scale returns us to a 'politics of interdependence', to the inescapable fact that we live in an interconnected and complex world. This has been demonstrated abruptly and devastatingly by the Covid-19 pandemic that moved so rapidly across borders. After all, different decisions made at state level and shaped by distinct national priorities – whether the protection of capitalist wealth or concern with healthcare workers – have affected both the global life of the virus and our own life chances. Simultaneously, the global lockdown has paradoxically given us sudden, fragmented glimpses of how we *could* create better worlds. We have witnessed the sharing of equipment between nations, improved air quality, local mutual aid practices, and reduced working hours. We have also witnessed grateful recognition of the value of hands-on care and other forms of essential work.

The pandemic, in short, has dramatically and tragically highlighted many of the essential functions that are crucial for our web of life to be sustained: the labour of nurses and doctors, delivery drivers and garbage collectors. But it has also exposed how vital transnational alliances and co-operation are.

To bring our world back from the brink of catastrophe, care needs to be prioritised and worked through on all scales, levels and dimensions: from

kinships to communities, from states to transnational strategies – currently the arena of global corporations and financial capital. It is the realities of global inequality that underlie so much devastation in our world today. Thus, in order to 'scale up' our model of universal care to the global level, we need to foster transnational institutions, global networks and alliances based on the principles of interdependency and sharing resources, while embracing a democratic cosmopolitanism.

Transnational Institutions and the Global Valuation of Care

Caring capacities are shaped by nation states, but also transgress and extend beyond them. This means building new transnational institutions and intergovernmental organisations, agencies and policies whose organizing principles are based on care and caretaking and which can be reshaped according to care logics, not neoliberal capitalist logics.

So, caring for the world means nation states together rolling out a Green New Deal. Over recent decades, this has evolved as a multifaceted social justice strategy to deal with climate crisis through joined-up policies restructuring work, energy and financial systems. The evolution of the idea is itself intra- and transnational. It appeared in different manifestations in the UK in the 2000s, when a particular, internationalist version was codified by a group including environmental NGO workers, trade unionists and economists. In the 2010s, a more domestic variant was reignited in the US by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and her team.[1]

Today the Green New Deal is a crucial part of the imaginary of the international left because it is rightly understood as a humane, feasible, affordable and achievable way to address the nightmare of planetary climate crisis. Fundamental to its programme is the decarbonising of energy systems: leaving fossil fuels in the ground and investing in renewables on a massive scale. The Green New Deal involves changes in patterns of work, both with the creation of more 'green jobs' – through the vast expansion of renewables, conservation, tree planting and re-wilding – and the reduction of the working week to lower emissions and expand our time and ability to care.

But the Green New Deal alone is not enough. We urgently need the creation of global left alliances that will directly counter the current authoritarian front. The Progressive International, an initiative led by Bernie

Sanders and Yannis Varoufakis that aims to unite progressive left-wing activists and organisations, is just one potentially good example. We also need an array of transnational institutions and agencies whose organising principles are based on care and caretaking. Whatever its current limitations, we see this in the World Health Organisation, whose transnational remit Donald Trump has been desperately trying to undermine. We also see certain aspects of global progressive alliances in the sustainable development projects focusing on the needs of poorer countries supported by the educational wing of the UN, including the World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER), in which the Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen has played such a prominent role. It was in WIDER that Sen first developed his influential 'Capability Approach' in the 1980s, redefining 'poverty' in terms of the deprivation of the capacity to live a good life, while broadening the notion of 'development' beyond the economic to include expanding the capabilities of people, wherever they live, to participate in social life. This capabilities approach is now being embraced by progressive networks worldwide.

We need to build on these existing progressive transnational institutions so that they reflect the needs of all populations around the globe, rather than do the bidding of the most powerful. Indeed, it is global corporations and financial institutions, loosely tied to powerful nation states, that have been responsible for so much environmental wreckage up until now. Environmental devastation, as we know, disproportionately affects the world's poorest economies and populations. These struggling economies are frequently the legacy of Western imperialism and neo-colonialism, former colonial territories that have for decades been sapped by debt repayments, undermining their service infrastructures and leaving so many destitute. Prioritising global care necessarily means tackling global inequality.

Oxfam's recent report *Time to Care* highlights the need to deal with the care crisis by addressing global inequalities of wealth and value through progressive taxation. We need immediate debt cancellation as well as politicians and policies that will tax the billionaires and recognise that 'every billionaire is a policy failure'. It means combating the likes of Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, who has amassed an extra $24 billion during the pandemic, even as he refuses to pay sick leave to his employees. Dealing with global inequality therefore involves radically restructuring our national but also international financial institutions, so that they do not channel

money to the offshore global elite but instead invest in the care of people, communities and the planet.

Currently, financial deregulation stimulates expansive credit and environmentally unsustainable consumption; financial fraud has effctively become decriminalised; and the hegemony of the US dollar boosts both. A third of the world's wealth is currently held offshore. Just as we need to *insource* rather than *outsource* at local and community levels, so too do we need to 'reshore' finance in order to bring these unaccountable billionaires back to regulation by nation states. This also means, as we've already shown, engaging with the ideas of feminist economists and degrowth and environmental activists who model ways of both regenerating the biodiversity of our planet and redistributing global wealth. Nation states can and must put 'sand in the wheels' of the global elite, through, for instance, an international financial transactions tax that redistributes their revenues, as proposed by the US economist James Tobin, and currently supported by many European states. Caring for the world involves remaking and democratising all international institutions and networks, so that they facilitate the redistribution of the world's resources, enabling all states and their populations to build the caring and sharing infrastructure that they need to thrive.

A Global Alliance of Caring Connections

Progressive transnational networks can also build upon those that currently exist. After all, progressive change will not just happen without huge numbers of us pushing for it in all kinds of contexts, even though tackling the carelessness with which we have treated the planet cannot simply be undertaken at the neighbourhood or individual level, but requires state and international intervention.

Caring for the world, then, means rebuilding and democratising social infrastructures and shared spaces across all scales, expanding support of and alliances with progressive movements and institutions in the process. The demand for such transformation often begins from combative grassroots resistance, as we saw in the recent explosion of activism against climate change and the loss of biodiversity, most dramatically in the confrontations and occupations organised by Extinction Rebellion (XR) during 2019. These actions contributed towards parliamentary decisions in several

countries (including Bangladesh, the UK, Portugal, France and Argentina) which declared a climate emergency a few months later.

Historically, grassroots resistance has often produced quite surprising results, at least temporarily, whether toppling oppressive regimes, as in the Arab Spring of 2012, or holding back the environmental hazards stemming from pipeline installation, mining, fracking, deforestation or dam building. As Rebecca Solnit suggests, 'every protest shifts the world's balance', or has the potential to do so. Modes of resistance in one place, even when repressed, can leap borders, sprouting up in other forms in a different locale or even in another part of the world. For instance, recent popular uprisings in South America, especially Chile, were inspired by those in the Arab world. Resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline to transport oil and cut across native land at Standing Rock inspired Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to run for office. While activism on the ground, like Standing Rock, has brought new hope and power to Native Americans in protecting their land, it has also helped to inspire those working to create legislation around Green New Deals at government levels.

Thus, we need to build on all the progressive transnational networks that currently exist, from radical municipal movements like Fearless Cities to global workers' coalitions, such as the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and other global union federations (GUFs). There are also numerous transnational feminist justice and peace networks, most prominent recently being the Women's March and Women's Strike movements. The Global Women's Strike was prompted in part by the October 2016 Polish women's nationwide strike on 'Black Monday', against the right-wing Polish government's consideration of criminalising abortion, and the #NiUnaMenos ('Not one woman less') protests against femicide, the killing of women, in Argentina, Mexico, Chile, El Salvador and Brazil. The UK and US branches clearly link their actions to other mass mobilisations across the globe organised by women, while focusing particularly on the world's dependence on women's unpaid or low-paid caring activities. We can also learn, and celebrate, whenever we see the integration of progressive ethics into state policy. Countries such as New Zealand and Finland have taken the lead by integrating educational materials on climate change and environmental protection into the school curriculum.

Recalling past and acknowledging recent transnational fertilisations at the level of social movements are then crucial, because they highlight the need to build upon the ties that already bind us. But to understand the planetary dimension of care and shared global ecologies we also need to transform the way in which we understand borders, as well as cultivate a radically democratic everyday cosmopolitanism. This is particularly urgent during a period which has seen a rise in racist and xenophobic right-wing populism.

Borders

At the heart of *The Care Manifesto* is the demand to distribute the world's resources not only in an environmentally sustainable fashion but also in ways that more equitably sustain populations and diminish the resentment between them to create connections across difference.

Not only do nation states need to care about their own citizens, they also need to attend to others: asylum seekers and migrants. More porous borders between nation states are therefore vital to achieve a more caring world. In its own skewed way, neoliberalism seeks to eliminate borders, albeit in a fashion favouring capital over labour, which in turn has caused the highly uneven, hostile and racialised border regimes we see today. However, if we want democratically accountable, caring states to replace financial markets as the privileged site of resource distribution, then we need fundamentally different kinds of borders.

Borders should return to the edges of nation states, and be radically reduced, rather than create internal divisions that feed into our ultra-nationalist moment. This means an end to using citizens as border guards, as well as the elimination of 'grey zones' in which refugees and other migrants exist in a liminal state of seemingly perpetual statelessness. Borders should be permeable to all who wish to cross them, and co-ordinated transnationally to ensure migration does not drain certain parts of the world of a needed population while overcrowding others. This will only be possible if the conditions that force people to flee their homes due to penury, war or climate events are significantly diminished – returning us full circle to the Green New Deal, in order to address inequality and create an equitability of care. Indeed, this brings us full circle to our ineluctable

interdependencies, if we hope to encourage fulfilling lives in a sustainable world.

The Interdependence of Care

Building a caring world thus returns us to where our manifesto began: from acting upon the understanding that as living creatures we exist alongside and in connection with all other human and non-human beings, and also remain dependent upon the systems and networks, animate and inanimate, that sustain life across the planet. We recognise that we are all inevitably steeped in ambivalence and even aggression towards others. This is particularly likely to be true in relation to those who are most distant and unknown to us, but it may also apply in relation to those who are closest, even if such ambivalences are often suppressed. Yet, as Judith Butler argues, this is precisely why it is only once we recognise our shared entanglement in conflict – along with its powerful corollary, an awareness of our shared vulnerability and interdependence – that we can begin to develop new caring imaginaries on a global scale.[2]

Creating such a caring world means first and foremost avowing our interdependences and cultivating a far-reaching ethics of care and solidarity in all our relationships: from our social movements, through relationships between nation states, to non-human life and the planet. Caring societies can only be built by overcoming care*less* nationalist imaginaries and fostering truly transnational outlooks among radically democratic cosmopolitan subjects, people who care across difference and distance.

A truly global politics, then, requires embracing what we call an everyday cosmopolitanism – promiscuous care on a global scale – that moves our caring imaginaries beyond kinship structures, communities and nation states to the furthest reaches of the 'strangest' parts of the planet. Cosmopolitan subjects who are, literally, 'citizens of the world', have care for the world in their hearts.

While care for strangers may seem a hard emotion to cultivate, developing a comfort with the foreign or alien is not actually beyond us. Forms of everyday cosmopolitanism emerge quite spontaneously in the lives of cities, where people historically considered strangers to one another

intermingle and combine in the course of their daily lives. Paul Gilroy calls this ‘convivial culture’, Mica Nava ‘visceral cosmopolitanism’.[3]

The *caring* cosmopolitan subject is precisely not the wealthy person moving across the globe with little care for the people or places they encounter, but one who sees through the hollow certainties of nationalism and cultivates a transnational orientation of care towards the stranger. Being cosmopolitan means being at ease with strangeness; knowing that we have no choice but to live with difference, whatever differences come to matter in specific times and places.

Afterthoughts

The Care Manifesto offers a queer–feminist–anti-racist– eco-socialist political vision of ‘universal care’. Universal care means we are all jointly responsible for hands-on care work, as well as engaging with and caring about the flourishing of other people and the planet. It means reclaiming forms of genuinely collective and communal life, adopting alternatives to capitalist markets, and reversing the marketisation of care infrastructures. It also means restoring and radically deepening our welfare states, both centrally and locally. And, finally, it means creating Green New Deals at the transnational level, caring international institutions and more porous borders, and cultivating everyday cosmopolitanism.

We conclude our manifesto at a time of unprecedented worldwide lockdowns. As we’ve shown, the Covid-19 pandemic has certainly laid bare the horrors of neoliberalism. But it has also revitalised a conversation about care, however limited it may still be.

The current global calamity is clearly a moment of profound rupture. Historically, ruptures have paved the way for radical progressive change, as happened in the wake of World War II with the growth of welfare in many Western states, and successful independence struggles in former European colonies. But ruptures have also triggered the growth of nationalism, authoritarianism and a rebooted capitalism, as in the wake of the 2007–08 financial crisis.

The challenge today is to build upon earlier moments of radical change. Achieving the vision we’ve laid out in this manifesto necessarily means organising to ensure that the legacy of Covid-19 is not an intensified

neoliberal authoritarianism but a new politics, where care is central at every level. We know this vision of universal care is as daunting as it is pressing. But in our current moment of rupture, where neoliberal norms are crumbling, we have a rare opportunity. Awareness of our systemic carelessness across all social hierarchies has begun to appear everywhere. Let's begin by avowing care, in all of its ubiquitous complexities, and by building more enduring and participatory caring outlooks, contexts and infrastructures, wherever we can.

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