

# Principles FOR THE Climate Crisis

NOVEMBER 2022





# Birthing the New

Art by Asis Percales

The climate crisis is not fundamentally an engineering or environmental problem, it's a problem with dominant ways of thinking, of relating to each other and the dominant systems we have created. To survive and thrive, we must first name the underlying ways that othering got us here, articulate the worldview rooted in belonging that can get us out, practice radical repair, and collectively imagine and co-create new resilient structures.

The climate crisis exposes the need for transformation. In this way, it is a profound opportunity to create a better world. We have a choice: we can approach this moment as if preparing for a funeral or we can approach this moment as doulas and midwives working to birth a new world and new ways of being.



Art by Joana Campinas

# Othering is Fuel for the Climate Crisis

Othering describes the process of designating a social group as “the other.” Within dominant political, economic and cultural systems, our ecosystems and their elements — animals, plants, land, water — are also othered. This creates the foundation for extraction, domination, erasure and violence. This mechanism of group-based marginalization works across a range of differences, including race, age, gender, class, disability, sexual orientation, religion and so forth. Othering is fuel for the climate crisis.

Governments and markets are tools wielded for group-based othering at local and global levels today. While the fullness of our humanity and connection to ecosystems and each other is restricted, the current system facilitates the movement of capital and criminalization of people, and the defunding of our public investment mechanisms. Our glocal (global & local) economy requires the creation of local and global sacrifice zones and disposable

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communities. This means some people, places and ecosystems are othered and treated as worthy of sacrifice in the name of profit. Overwhelmingly, these sacrifice zones and their burdens follow lines of colonial history, anti-Black and anti-Indigenous prejudice, poverty, and patriarchy.

From communities like [Port Arthur, Texas](#) or [Sabah, Malaysia](#) to [Kabwe, Zambia](#) or [Napo province, Ecuador](#), local places have been treated as sacrifice zones to fuel a global economy. And while resource extraction creates sacrifice zones, we must also remember that waste disposal also creates sacrifice zones locally and globally: our air and waters are shared. A harm to one is a harm to all but the front edge of harm is unequally distributed through othering.



**Above:** Mamut Mine, an abandoned open-pit quarry mine in the state of Sabah, Malaysia. The mine, which primarily produced copper, closed in 1991. The water which now fills the quarry is highly acidic and toxic. [Photograph by CEphoto, Uwe Aranas / shared CC-BY-SA-3.0.](#)

**Below:** Lago Agrio oil field in the Sucumbios province of Ecuador. American oil company Texaco, Inc. began drilling oil here in 1967; it has since become the site of intense pollution and litigation. [Photograph by Julien Gomba / shared CC-BY-2.0.](#)



# The Climate Crisis is Fueling Othering

Art by Karla Čurčinski

The climate crisis is a multiplier that exacerbates unjust conditions and suffering. For example, people who already are living without housing are more exposed to smoke from wildfires. The costs of recovering from hurricanes and super storms are much easier to afford for people with higher incomes and savings. Agricultural workers — who have few workplace protections and benefits — are increasingly exposed to extreme temperatures. Frontline communities hit hardest by climate catastrophes are most frequently those dealing with legacies of racism, patriarchy, colonialism, ableism and extractivism. The climate crisis is gasoline on a fire. It is salt on a wound. It makes existing problems of othering more severe.

The climate crisis is already driving the largest human migrations in history. This only stands to increase. This movement within and across borders is manipulated by political leaders who stoke fears of the other in order to expand authoritarian and nationalist power.

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An illustration of several monarch butterflies with orange, black, and white wings perched on green, leafless stems. The background is a light yellowish-green. The text 'Climate Solutions Must Be Rooted in Belonging' is overlaid on the image in three white boxes with green text.

# Climate Solutions Must Be Rooted in Belonging

Art by Katty Huertas

A world where everyone belongs is a world without sacrifice zones. Sacrifice zones are those areas, including the people within them, who have been sacrificed to fuel the global economy and consumer-based ways of living. In a world where all belong, there are no sacrifice zones, everyone is within the circle of human concern. Othering has erased sacrifice zones from our collective view and removed them from the circle.

Instead, belonging reflects that we are each engaged in a complex set of relationships — bioregions — that sustain life. We belong to the earth and the earth belongs to us. We belong to watersheds that hold the water we drink and use. We belong to foodsheds that connect us to all food workers and the lands and oceans that sustain us. We belong to energy sheds that connect the lights in our house to the sources of that energy and the workers in those industries. These are our bioregions and we must take responsibility for them.

When it comes to how we relate to each other, **belonging** describes values and practices where no person is left out of our circle of concern. Belonging means more than having just access, being seen, or feeling included. It means that every member of society has a meaningful voice, that their well-being is

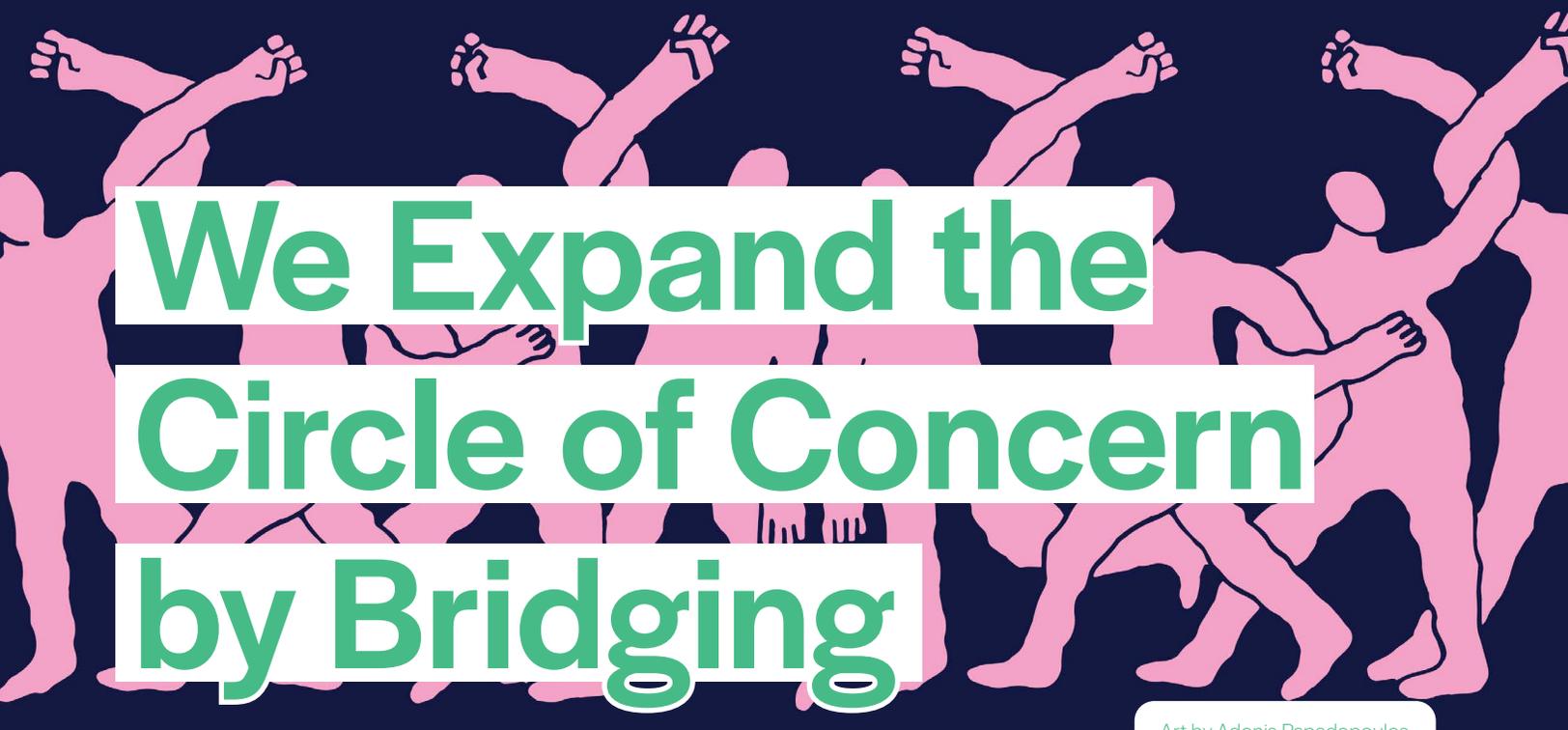
**“ All people belong in a future with climate justice. Nobody can be left behind. No places or natural systems can be left behind.**

cared for, and that they have the opportunity to participate in the design of political, social, economic and cultural structures. Belonging includes the right to both contribute to, and make demands upon, society and political institutions.

All people belong in a future with climate justice. Nobody can be left behind. No places or natural systems can be left behind. This means solutions are not real if they only work for some people or places. Everyone should have the right to meaningful climate education. Everyone should have access to meaningful employment that doesn't ask us to sacrifice our health, the environment or the rights of future generations. Everyone should have access to healing and the righting of historical harms that have created inequity today. Everyone should contribute to the design of collective adaptation strategies.

We belong to each other. We must co-create our future. The pandemic has shown us our interdependence. We know that our solidarity with each other is what ultimately keeps us safe. In the face of climate disasters, mutual aid workers from Red Hook, Brooklyn to Comerío, Puerto Rico, respond quickly and with care. Many have already called on their neighbors and strangers in times of crises. Our neighbors need us when the fire or hurricane comes. We need them. We care for each other. Others will and have cared for us.

**We belong to each other. We must co-create our future.”**

An illustration of a crowd of people in shades of pink and purple, with many raising their fists in a gesture of solidarity or protest. The background is dark blue.

# We Expand the Circle of Concern by Bridging

Art by Adonis Papadopoulos

**Bridging** is a strategy for expanding who and what counts in creating and implementing solutions for the climate crisis. The crises will affect many — if not all — of us across our differences. We must identify the points of interdependence and mutual concern as opportunities for bridging.

The problem is systemic and involves interdependencies across borders and sectors. To solve it we cannot take action in isolation. To design new systems, we need to build bridges between people who have been situated differently in the old systems: refinery workers and fenceline residents; farm workers and food consumers; urban water users and rural watershed stewards. We must build these bridges to design regenerative systems that reflect our interdependence and mutual concern as well as healing and repair from multi-generational hurt and exploitation. These bridges necessarily also include people's relationships to other species and ecosystems, for example farm workers and protection of watersheds, food consumers and animals in factory farms.

The building of these bridges expands our circle of concern and ensures that we leave no one, no place and no natural system behind.



# All Our Labor is Needed

Art by Kayan Cheung-Miaw

KAYAN CHEUNG-MIAW

**We must reclaim our labor** and put it towards the beautiful, meaningful work of building an economy that rejects sacrifice zones and othering as fundamental components of successful growth. To restore the damaged systems we have inherited and to build new living systems will require great labor from all of us. This is a good thing, the creativity and time of all of us is needed. Each of us can contribute across these seven essential strategies:

- 1** We must act in **global solidarity** so we don't leave anyone behind. This means taking action across borders (national, neighborhood, identity-based) that follows the lead of communities hit hardest by climate disasters. It means no more sacrifice zones.
- 2** **Build new systems** for bioregions that are resilient and equitable. This includes renewable energy infrastructure, watershed governance, green infrastructure, regional food systems, and much more.
- 3** We must **rewrite rules and laws** for climate justice. This includes legal status for climate refugees, transforming agriculture and food regulations, and rewriting international trade agreements and national development plans.

- 4 We must **shift resources** into a regenerative economy. This includes new mechanisms for public and private financing for climate resilience and climate reparations, green new deals, and shifting pensions and other funds out of the othering economy.
- 5 We must **block the expansion** of, and continue shutting down the existing fossil fuel economy. This means keeping oil in the ground, blocking new pipelines, and shutting down and transitioning refineries. It means rejecting solutions that offer new or different forms of extraction, or the trading of one community's future for another's.
- 6 We must prepare and **respond to disasters in real time** with compassionate and effective solutions. This includes welcoming climate refugees, providing housing and essentials, and building community capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters.
- 7 We must **bridge types of knowledge**, particularly between knowledge that is viewed as expert and Indigenous knowledge. Cultural and everyday knowledge must guide and shape conventional science. Solutions must come from collaborations of different types of knowledge and we must share power in who governs and enacts the resulting solutions.

**This document is published by the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley. The Othering & Belonging Institute brings together researchers, community stakeholders, and policy-makers to identify and challenge the barriers to an inclusive, just, and sustainable society in order to create transformative change.**

Read a web version of this publication, find more resources on climate justice, and learn more about our work towards building equitable climate futures at [belonging.berkeley.edu/climate-justice](https://belonging.berkeley.edu/climate-justice).

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