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Ina Gouveia

HOW DO WE TALK ABOUT CLIMATE, MIGRATION & BORDERS IN A HEATING WORLD?

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British politics and public discourse are being rapidly reshaped by economic, cultural and racial anti-migration narratives, which present multiple challenges:

- Far-right forces, aided by much of the British media, have created the perception of an extreme border crisis, which has generated popular panic, raising the salience of migration and reducing the salience of other priorities (including climate change).
- Rather than challenging these narratives, those in elected positions have essentially accepted the crisis narrative and promised to be tougher, thereby maintaining and further raising the salience of the issue.

The UK is in a state of stagnation, combined with deep mistrust in mainstream politics, and anti-democratic actors are the main forces appearing to offer solutions.

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH CLIMATE?

Across the UK and globally, genuine climate progress is being undermined—new airport runways and a weakened Green Deal coexist with a well-funded assault on climate legislation. Ignoring migrant justice in climate work jeopardises vital alliances, weakens messaging, reduces policy influence, and compromises the movement's ethical foundation.

Integrating migrant justice isn't optional; it's crucial for achieving durable, equitable climate outcomes, and framing climate action merely as a way to curb migration risks harming the broader vision of a just world.

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4 REASONS WHY THE CLIMATE AND MIGRATION NARRATIVE NEXUS MUST BE EMBRACED:

1. BRITAIN'S TOXIC MIGRATION DEBATE IS THREATENING CLIMATE ACTION

The radical right seeks to polarise Britain around migration as part of a wider strategy that includes reversing climate ambition. This is a critical moment for people and the planet. If civil society cannot work together to move the dial on migration whilst presenting and winning a vision for a better future that includes climate justice, we face a government by hardcore climate deniers, backed up by the closely-linked [border and surveillance industry](#) and [fossil fuel industry](#).

2. THE FAR-RIGHT PLAYBOOK ON CLIMATE AND MIGRATION IS SIMILAR

The radical right has captured the migration debate through simple and effective messaging, control of information ecosystems, and aggressive behind-the-scenes corporate lobbying. In response, mainstream politicians have acceded to many of their demands. They are now repeating this playbook in order to destroy climate action mechanisms such as the Paris Agreement. Working together, the climate and migration movements can avoid making similar mistakes and take back both narratives.

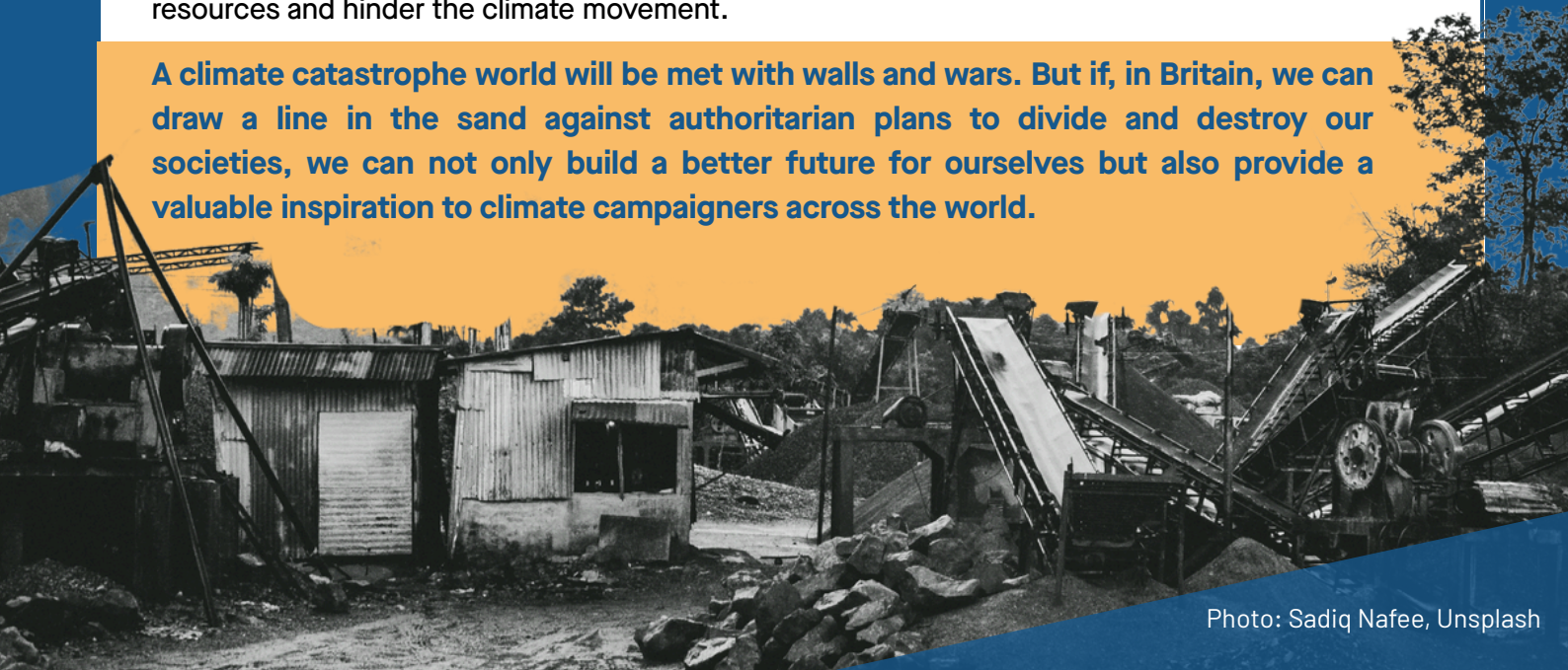
3. SOLIDARITY CAN SHIFT SALIENCE

Channel crossings and immigration are currently the second biggest issue for Britons, behind the cost of living. The radical right are manufacturing the Public perception of migration as “a threat” through exaggerating and focusing on the impact of issues like maritime arrivals and asylum hotels. [Public concerns about climate change are decreasing](#) despite climate change becoming more of a threat. Civil society as a whole is under threat and the climate movement needs allies to regroup and build power, creating a unified front for people and the planet.

4. ALL OUR FUTURES ARE AT STAKE

The climate crisis is already straining food and water supplies, driving up prices and widening inequality. As climate-related scarcity worsens, it fuels nationalist backlash and anti-migration sentiment rather than motivating climate action. Fear of migration—especially climate-driven migration—fails to persuade conservatives to back climate policies and instead leads to [larger border-militarisation budgets](#) and authoritarian curbs on civil liberties, both of which divert resources and hinder the climate movement.

A climate catastrophe world will be met with walls and wars. But if, in Britain, we can draw a line in the sand against authoritarian plans to divide and destroy our societies, we can not only build a better future for ourselves but also provide a valuable inspiration to climate campaigners across the world.



BORDER MILITARIZATION AND VIOLENCE IS:

A CLIMATE ISSUE

Climate change is increasingly a factor behind displacement and migration. People who move due to climate-linked migration often remain in their own country, but a number will cross international borders, and this is likely to increase as climate-change impacts on entire regions

A [“Global Climate wall”](#) is perceived by governments and industry as a way to control climate impacts, and is going to play an increasingly important role as economies come under severe strain. The world’s biggest emitters of greenhouse gases are spending, on average, 2.3 times as much on arming their borders as they are on climate finance.

A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

because of the direct treatment of migrants and refugees, e.g. family separation, physical and mental abuse, denial of food/shelter/rights, and the broader impact of surveillance and control on all of us.

A RACIAL AND GENDER JUSTICE ISSUE

because of how migration systems are structured by the legacy of colonialism and inequality between countries, disproportionately affecting women and people of colour.

A LABOUR RIGHTS ISSUE

because immigrants with insecure migration status or whose status is tied to their job can be exploited by employers, pushing down pay and conditions for all.

A CORPORATE POWER AND ABUSE ISSUE

because of the cosy relationships between profiteers and states that shape the border system, and the unaccountable behaviour of corporations involved in policing the system.

A GLOBAL JUSTICE ISSUE

because the factors that cause displacement, such as wars, persecution, and extreme inequality, are often contributed to by the powerful states, who then refuse responsibility for the consequences.

A DIGITAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES ISSUE

because of the unaccountable and runaway usage of dangerous surveillance, monitoring and data capture technology against migrants, refugees and racialised populations and ultimately all of us.