

1 CARE POLITICS: AN INTRODUCTION

THE YEAR 2020

In the year 2020, four history framing events occurred: climate change–related fires and hurricanes, a spreading pandemic, massive demonstrations that called for an end to systemic racism, and an election that generated intense fears along with a palpable desire to either elevate or remove a president from the body politic.

As the year approached, in December 2019, representatives from 197 countries under the auspices of COP 25, the annual UN Climate Change Conference, met in Madrid. Yet despite the sense of urgency, no major agreements were reached to slow the warming of the planet. The United States and Australia, even after they had experienced their own recent firestorms and severe air quality problems, were most responsible, along with Brazil, for blocking any major action.

As the COP 25 meeting began to break up, several thousand miles away a novel coronavirus outbreak was unfolding that led to its first victims in the city of Wuhan, China. The outbreak in Wuhan quickly spread. Within a few months, by March 2020, it would be declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization. One immediate result, among its many disruptions, was that COP 26, the next climate change meeting scheduled for Glasgow in 2020, had to be postponed.

A few months later in May and after the COVID-19 cases had reached their first peak in Italy, Spain, and the United States, hundreds of thousands of people began to march under the banner of Black Lives Matter.

Over an intense next several weeks, more than two thousand street demonstrations took place in all fifty states in the United States, with additional protests around the world. Identifying a wide range of issues associated with systemic racism, demonstrators also noted how the pandemic and climate change had further underlined as well as intensified the enormous racial and economic disparities impacting those with the fewest resources to deal with the devastation that was occurring.

Among those impacted were the pandemic's "essential" workers in health care, food production and access, childcare and schools, and care for the elderly, including as many as 50 percent of those workers engaged in care work or care activities. While celebrated, the essential workers remained vulnerable, with only limited support, whether in the form of protective equipment or a livable wage. Yet the role of these workers—as well as the care they provided in the midst of a pandemic, climate change events, and protests about systemic racism—could not be ignored.

Climate change, economic and social turbulence, pandemic events, systemic racism, and deep inequalities have all underlined the importance of care in responding to disasters and daily life needs. Each of the events in 2020 that extended into 2021 have raised immediate and long-term issues about inequalities as well as economic, health, and environmental disparities; the role and purpose of governments and institutions, and unchecked power and resources of the wealthiest people and largest corporations; the plight of both urban and rural underserved and underresourced communities; and the interconnections as well as limits of a global politics and global economy. In responding to those issues, the need for mutual aid, social solidarity, trust, new social relations, reparations, reimagining work, and a new economy have pointed to the possibilities of a *care-centered politics*—a strategy for economic, social, and cultural change during a period of crisis and turmoil.

The cascading events of 2020 culminated in a November election that served as a referendum on whether to keep in office the most intensely anticare president of the past century and more. The immediate outcome of the election as well as the increased recognition of the import of the pandemic and climate change have made it clear that a care-centered politics

can no longer be considered marginal in assessing what happens next, and where we go from here.

DEFINING CARE

Care is a simple yet evocative word that has multiple reference points and meanings. These include:

Care is about processes and relationships, including between those who provide care and those who receive it. Such relationships can and should be mutual, supplying a bond between caregiver and care recipient that increases the knowledge and awareness of both. Such a bond, according to University of Minnesota professor Joan Tronto, constitutes a “caring with” rather than just a “caring for” approach that reduces power differentials and leads to greater equalities. Care is also a social construct and is about social relationships. These relationships can take place at a community, institutional, and global level, and can be experienced in race, class, and/or gender terms. They can be found in multiple cultures and histories.¹

Care is a form of labor, both paid and unpaid, and an economy. Paid care labor has become a rapidly growing labor segment, even as it remains marginal in the eyes of policy makers and economists for its contributions to the “real economy” as measured by the gross domestic product (GDP) and production of things. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the employment of home health and personal care aides alone will increase by 36 percent between 2018 and 2028, faster than all other occupations. Moreover, those who work in job sectors such as health, education, retail, and other daily need-based industries are increasingly understood as care workers. Paid care workers, many of them low income, are heavily represented by people of color, and have become a leading example of racial and gender exploitation as well as deep inequalities in the United States and globally.²

A huge amount of labor, in the household and other settings, is also unpaid or outside formal market arrangements. Unpaid care work, especially in the home, represents, as economist Nancy Folbre argues, an “invisible’ domain, not counted as part of GDP and undervalued despite

the important contribution it makes to well-being, social development and the (re)production of the work force.” Unpaid care can take place in the home, or in response to a family or friend’s need, such as caring for older adults or children, or maintaining a household. The market economy, says Folbre, “provides only a small portion of the goods and services we rely on,” and she estimates that as much as half of all labor hours are associated with nonmarket work inside and outside the household. In evaluating the gender and class dimensions of care labor, particularly unpaid and household-based care undertaken by women, Oxfam asserts that it is “crucial to our societies and to the economy. . . . Without someone investing time, effort and resources in these essential [care-related] daily tasks, communities, workplaces, and whole economies would grind to a halt.”³

Care involves institutional and sectoral relationships, and can influence multiple issue areas. These areas may range from the environment and climate change to health and pandemics. Issues like care for the climate and health care have become more prominent among environmental and health researchers as well as researchers and advocates focused on care of the household, children, and elders. One group of care-related conference attendees identified care as “work that includes care for others, future generations, animals, and the environment, so as to move beyond the domestic labor debates and questions of monetary compensation.” A care perspective reframes the concept of “green” to incorporate “human well-being”—an approach essential to an environmental justice perspective.⁴

Care is an ethic. Care may involve an activity, such as how someone or some situation is cared for. A care ethic has the capacity to involve any or even all aspects of political, economic, social, and individual daily lives. Care is ubiquitous: everyone needs and receives care in some capacity, and most people provide care to others. Care relationships, as Tronto argues, “are part of what marks us as human beings.” An ethic of care signifies that “people are entitled to what they need because they need it; people are entitled to care because they are part of ongoing relations of care.” The Ethics of Care network has formed to promote that broader vision and create linkages with others engaged in different social movements. A care ethic in turn can help inform a food ethic, environmental ethic, health

ethic, climate justice ethic, right to housing ethic, social well-being ethic, and community or societal ethic.⁵

Care is a practice. Care practices can influence and frame relationships, institutions, and workplaces, such as parenting, gardening, K–12 classrooms, community health clinics, transportation providers and users, sanitation workers, and postal employees, among many other situations and settings. Care practices reference trust, connection, fairness, mutual aid, and empathy, among other community-building attributes. “In practices of care,” feminist philosopher Virginia Held contends, “relationships are cultivated, needs are responded to, and sensitivity is demonstrated.”⁶

Care is a form of solidarity and interdependence. “An injury to one is an injury to all,” “we are all in this together,” and “care for each other” have been expressions of solidarity and interdependence between as well as among individuals and groups, highlighted during the pandemic. It can also identify solidarity and interdependence between communities as well as between states and nations in response to meeting needs, such as during disasters. Care as solidarity and interdependence can help shape and inform attitudes and policies toward immigrants and refugees, and influence behavior, such as whether to wear a mask during a pandemic. As the authors of *The Care Manifesto* put it, a caring world is one where there is 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.”⁷

Care is a politics. Care-centered politics, the focus of this book, provides a framework for the vision, and establishes the linkages for the struggles to create a more care-centered society and planet. It informs a wide array of issues, whether a living wage, environmental hazards, military spending, incarceration, community food security, or recognition of the centuries of harm from racism along with the need for repair and reparations. It seeks to incorporate care as a component within all institutions and aspects of production and consumption, and engage the totality of environmental and social justice issues. Care politics is deeply engaged with questions of race, patriarchy, violence, ethnicity, immigration, and age relationships. It seeks to overcome inequalities and discriminatory practices, whether based

on race or class, or gender or sexual preferences and identities. It focuses on the public sphere and global as well as local issues. It challenges efforts to privatize care, and advocates for social and human rights, such as the rights to health, a clean environment, a living planet, a place to live, and well-being. As a politics, care can help inform and be incorporated into the Green New Deal, Medicare for All, and many other feminist, racial, ethnic, environmental, and class justice demands. It can guide climate change advocacy and the response to a pandemic, and provide a pathway for addressing centuries of racial harm and injustice. And it can supply the basis for new visions of sociability, even as struggles are waged to contest power, save human lives, and protect our world and planet from daily life assaults and unimaginable disasters.

LES TREINTE GLORIEUSES AND THE ANTICARE NEOLIBERAL ERAS

The 2020 pandemic crisis that stretched into 2021 along with the cascading climate change events and predictions of future catastrophes can be considered bookends from two prior eras. The first included the thirty-plus years of post–World War II expansion (circa 1945–1975), also known in France and Europe as *les trente glorieuses*, or the Glorious 30. Celebrated as a period where a capital-labor compact and the expansion of a consumer culture (higher wages and more to consume) held sway, the concept of thirty glorious years was also something of a misnomer in the United States given the country’s continuing poverty, racial, and gender divides as well as imperial forays, dressed-up neocolonialism, and the rise of a military-industrial complex warned about by President Dwight Eisenhower in his farewell address in 1961. The second period involved the forty-plus years of a neoliberal ascendancy (1980–2020) where the huge concentration of wealth, expansion of market intrusions into everyday life, enormous income inequality, erosion of a social safety net, huge spikes in the incarceration of African Americans and people of color, forever wars, and promotion of individual (and acquisitive) rather than social (and caring) behavior became dominant.⁸

During the first period, the strike waves and militant actions right after World War II that pushed for new economic and social reforms gave way to labor peace and social contracts as well as modest efforts to develop the rudiments of a welfare state (far more developed in Europe than in the United States). The postwar vision of leading economists and politicians was of a new type of humanism based on increased productivity to be sheltered by agreements between labor and capital (higher wages and fewer worker disruptions), and an increase in levels of consumption made possible by those higher wages. Through the 1950s and into the early 1960s, for example, the top marginal tax rate remained high—as much as 90 percent during the Eisenhower years, and only lowered to 70 percent in 1964. Combined with higher wages, especially in unionized manufacturing sectors like auto and steel, income inequality was reduced to some of its lowest levels in the United States during the twentieth century.

The wealth, however, was not shared across the board. The 1960 presidential election identified significant parts of the country such as the Appalachia region with major pockets of hunger and poverty. Two years later, Michael Harrington's best-selling book, *The Other America*, placed poverty as a central policy issue, culminating in President Lyndon Johnson's 1964 rollout of his War on Poverty program. Although Black workers experienced modest wage gains, these increases were considerably lower than their white counterparts received, and were also undercut by a range of racist policies in housing, health care, and education. The civil rights protests of the 1950s and 1960s further revealed this deep-seated racism and extensive discriminatory practices, not just in the South, but in northern states.

Any labor gains among workers during this period was made possible and also disguised by the role of women in unpaid household labor—one aspect of *social reproduction*. This included caring for children, cleaning and cooking, taking care of elders, and otherwise making possible the ability of (mostly) men to join the labor force. Then as they entered the paid workforce, women experienced a double form of exploitation: lower wages for paid work and no wages for their unpaid work.

The presumed trade-off for a segment of workers with higher wages and engaged in labor peace as well as for women engaged in household

tasks was the greater availability of things to buy. Increased opportunities to consume goods like automobiles as well as lifestyles, travel, home amenities, entertainment, and more became the *raison d'être* for the labor peace and focus on wages leading to greater consumption. This was not just conspicuous consumption available for the rich (albeit working-class consumption had an element of the need to demonstrate what had been purchased). Rather, as Austrian-born, French radical intellectual André Gorz put it, this was “compensatory consumption,” the system of rewards for labor discipline and the unpaid household labor roles.⁹

Consumerism became a dominant ideology, furthered by marketing messages linking consumer brands to personal identities. Advertising, a relatively new method to enhance such messages, got a jump-start in the 1920s, extended its presence through the 1940s, and then mushroomed in the 1950s and 1960s with the near-ubiquitous penetration of television in US (and European and other developed country) households. Television, as one of its foremost historians, Erik Barnouw, argued, was the “perfect advertising medium,” and by extension the promulgator of the consumer culture. The television show delivered the audience to the advertiser.¹⁰

Yet similar to the anger directed at the stubborn persistence of poverty, continuing racial divides, and double exploitation of women, consumerism had its downsides and critics. An emerging New Left politics in the early and mid-1960s challenged the compensatory consumption model, maintaining that it resulted in a diminished quality of life, and disguised an imperialism that extracted resources and the material components that made consumerism possible.

Perhaps most challenging for the social compact of the postwar years was the eruption of domestic racial conflict and the turmoil of the Vietnam War that exposed the lack of a consensus regarding the US imperial role. An expanding environmentalism further questioned the assumptions and outcomes of the growth models associated with the social compact. For a brief period during the late 1960s and early 1970s, not only the social compact, but the very foundations of a capitalist world order seemed to be challenged.

At the end of this era, especially by the late 1970s, a political malaise had set in. Stagflation, higher oil prices, and a push to deregulate and

undercut the role of government led to a political and market-centered counteroffensive that brought together think tanks funded by the right wing and a more aggressive pushback by newly organized corporate bodies such as the Business Roundtable. Together these trends of the late 1970s began to eat away at the more care-friendly social welfare policies put in place during the postwar years. This counterrevolution extended to the reassertion that women's care roles were unique and the unpaid household labor needed to remain intact, even as women continued to enter the paid workforce and thus were obliged to perform their double duty. Though no longer the sole breadwinners, men were nevertheless not seen as needing to participate in this aspect of the care economy. With Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan's ascendancy in 1979 and 1980 in the United Kingdom and United States, respectively these antigovernment, gender-biased, antilabor, austerity policies and market-promoting politics established the neoliberal capitalist regime—a politics fundamentally hostile to the role of care in the workplace, and as an ethic and practice.

The ravages produced by neoliberalism in developed and lesser-developed countries alike as well as within the United States began to immediately undermine the limited social compact established through the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. As Marxist geographer David Harvey and others have described it, neoliberalism became a political project seeking to undermine the ideas and policies stimulated by the social movements of the 1960s and early 1970s, such as environmentalism, antiracism, anti-imperialism, and a feminist movement that started to articulate a critique of women's work with the beginnings of a new care politics. Neoliberal politics countered with its own ideas and policies, which became the foundations for the savage austerity that decimated community and indigenous networks and social safety nets; produced deep inequalities that rivaled even the most unequal periods like the Gilded Age of the 1890s; led to a financialization of the state and economy, where the circulation of money supplanted the production of things; and established an expulsion regime that led to a loss of housing, food security, and other basic daily needs, while expanding the numbers of migrants escaping wars, economic collapse, climate change, and political violence. Neoliberalism also led to

privatization raids and takeovers of countless institutions and sectors that cut deep into the social as well as economic fabric. Daily life experiences came to be subsumed under market forces, enabling them to penetrate much of daily life, from birth to death. Neoliberalism, essentially a more draconian form of capitalist relations, took on and extended the mantle of anticare, from its political project to the realm of ideas and conditions of daily life.¹¹

AN EMERGING POLITICS OF CARE

Despite the ascendance of the neoliberal order and its oft-mentioned slogan that there was no alternative, political challenges and contending ideas continued to surface through the neoliberal years. New Left thinkers like Gorz wrote, as early as the 1960s and 1970s, of the ambiguous role of technology and automation with its potential to liberate work, in contrast to the market-driven upending of the workforce and realities of precarity. Given those changes, Gorz argued that new types of social relations needed to be created based on the “new ways of producing, associating, working and consuming [that would be] the fundamental precondition of any political transformation.” The joining of work and consumption, or rather the pitfalls of *work for the purposes of consumption*, Gorz asserted, undermined the very basis of working-class identity, long associated with the sphere of production.¹²

Traditional notions of working-class identity were also enjoined by those focused on the sphere of social reproduction, a Marxist concept turned on its head by an increasingly vocal set of civil rights and feminist activists and theorists. In spring 1972, the inaugural issue of *Ms.* magazine featured an angry polemic by Johnnie Tillmon, the head of the National Welfare Rights Organization, that linked antiracist and feminist arguments. Tillmon savaged the racist attacks against welfare moms and the presumption that they were not doing “real work” but instead gaming a system through welfare payments. Subsequently characterized as “welfare queens” and “lazy Black con artists,” welfare recipients were continually subject to verbal and policy onslaughts during the 1970s, 1980s, and

early 1990s. It included Reagan's 1976 and 1980 presidential campaign pronouncements and culminated in President Bill Clinton's 1996 "ending welfare as we know it" legislation that forced the transition of welfare recipients into what the neoliberals considered real labor market work. This was work all too often associated with subminimal wages and lack of child-care. Women's unpaid work in taking care of their children, elders, and households, Tillmon proclaimed, was indeed real work that required sufficient compensation in some form, above and beyond the minimal support of programs like Aid to Families with Dependent Children, which was restructured through Clinton's legislation. What we need instead, Tillmon declared, was a *guaranteed adequate income*. Such an approach called for sufficient support and true recognition, a bread-and-roses appeal against a racially inspired, antifeminist counterrevolution.¹³

These contentions resonated with a growing group of Marxist feminists, whose writings first appeared in Italy in the late 1960s and then began to be articulated by US feminists during the 1970s. It had become increasingly apparent that the advocacy of second-wave feminists to enable women to enter the paid labor market had highlighted that proverbial double bind: women were paid less than men for equivalent work, while they continued to do almost the entire workload in the household economy of childcare, eldercare, and household maintenance. Moreover, this household economy work was not compensated nor were the additional hours required to fulfill it included in any assessment of what constituted women's real-time labor.

During the 1970s and 1980s, these feminist arguments about childcare, household care, and eldercare work constituted the beginnings of a new politics as well as a developing theory of care. Care theorists reframed the Marxist concept of social reproduction, or activities that made labor participation in production possible, as not just the reproduction of labor in the Marxian sense but rather biological reproduction (giving birth, and caring for infants and children) and social practices (associated with socialization and the fulfillment of human needs). Social reproduction was thus linked to "life-making activities," asserted Purdue University professor Tithi Bhattacharya.¹⁴

Silvia Federici, one of the leading Marxist feminist critics, maintained that the capitalist focus on production of commodities contrasted with the social reproduction focus on everyday life, particularly at a community and neighborhood as well as individual level. In countering the neoliberal argument that there was no such thing as society, just individuals and families, to paraphrase Thatcher's widely cited remark, Marxist feminists like Federici emphasized the *social* dimension of social reproduction. By doing so, they sought to incorporate institutions like schools, the environment, health care facilities, and health workers as part of social reproduction, and thereby asserted that a care workforce and care institutions extended beyond the household/care economy into the broader arena of social reproduction. These were institutions, work, and activities basic to human life, and available for a transformative view of social relations. Such a view countered the invidious and market-dominated penetration of daily life characteristic of neoliberalism. Against a capitalism that asked, "How many things can we produce, because things make profit?" social reproduction champions held that human needs along with social, household, and daily life concerns needed to be incorporated into any care-centered politics approach toward the systems of production and consumption.¹⁵

The focus on care politics with its relationship to social reproduction and transformative potential led care politics advocates to champion new forms of community and social solidarity as well as an overall politics of care. This conflicted and contrasted with the austerity-imposed, debt-laden, anticare assaults on communities, nation-states, and the young and elderly through such policies as structural adjustment that became the hallmark of the neoliberal capitalist regimes. Even during the darkest periods of austerity imposed on countries like Greece and Spain by the European troika (the European Commission, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund) following the 2008–2009 Great Recession, grassroots cooperatives and social solidarity initiatives sprang up in those countries, linked at times to the support and care for refugees and displaced migrants.¹⁶

The Great Recession also made visible the stark disparities in wealth and income that had been increasing during the neoliberal period. The favoritism toward the rich during the Great Recession extended into the

subsequent limited and tepid recovery period that failed to address the needs of those at the bottom, memorialized by the slogan of the 1 versus the 99 percent and taken up by the 2011 Occupy movements in the United States as well as their counterparts among the Indignados in Spain, Greece and other antiausterity movements.

While the Occupiers highlighted those huge wealth disparities through their slogans about the 1 percent, their actions sought to identify direct democracy practices and cooperative arrangements that turned Occupy encampments and Indignados movement protests into a revival of alternative living experiments. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, experiments in communal living and cooperative forms of organization had gradually diminished as the neoliberal celebrations of the market and individual gain took hold during the 1980s and 1990s. Then with the Great Recession and subsequent protests, cooperative and care-based initiatives reinvented themselves through new forms and stronger links to social movements. When the COVID-19 pandemic swept through countries in 2020 and 2021, including its most widespread reach in the United States, and earlier climate events such as when Superstorm Sandy in New York and Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico decimated infrastructure and people's livelihoods, grassroots efforts to respond cooperatively and through a care-centered lens became magnified and inspirational as a response. A crisis of care was making possible an alternative care-centered politics.¹⁷

THE ELEMENTS OF A CARE-CENTERED POLITICS

There have been differing interpretations among care researchers and activists about how to best situate care, including its political dimension. Care for some largely falls within the domain of parenting and the family, and suggests that care is intrinsically “relational,” involving primarily two people: caregiver and care recipient. Others situate care in a social and individual context, identifying care as an essential component of social justice as well as care for the environment and social well-being.

In an influential 1990 essay, Berenice Fisher and Tronto highlighted care as an activity that includes “everything that we do to maintain,

continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.” Their argument was also directed at economists and politicians who often saw care as a marginal economic category, with its low-wage sector and “non-productive” nature. What needs to be valued, Tronto asserted, in seeking to link care to democratic values, “is not making money or making stuff, but caring. If we prefer to use this metaphor of making, then let us speak of ‘making livable lives’ . . . and sustaining the world, and let us act to create a politics to move us toward such a world.”¹⁸

That approach resonated with social justice and environmental advocates—particularly those focused on climate change—who had not previously engaged in the decades of feminist-led discussions about the importance of care in daily life. Writer Naomi Klein, a leading climate and social justice activist, became one of the first to embrace the concepts of “care and repair” as central to the climate arguments.¹⁹

In addition to the climate change issues, the focus on care as a social and political construct expanded significantly during the 2020–2021 COVID-19 pandemic with the recognition that care workers and an ethic of care was shared by a wide range of people engaged in providing essential daily life services. Care became a widely used reference point for discussing how these workers were responding to crucial health needs and other everyday concerns. Care politics, however, had yet to fully emerge as a more comprehensive form of political advocacy, even though targeted measures such as living wages and sick time benefits for the care workers were widely supported. The outcome of the 2020 election helped to change that dynamic, as more care issues and a language of care worked their way into pandemic and climate change political discourse as well as policy and legislation, such as the new Biden administration’s March 2021 stimulus, recovery-related American Rescue Plan Act.

Even prior to the 2020 election, both climate change events and the COVID-19 pandemic had already begun to lay the groundwork for a care-centered politics. Arguments by a number of young radical researchers and activists such as Kate Aronoff, Gabriel Winant, Daniel Aldana Cohen,

Alyssa Battistoni, Sarah Jaffe, and Thea Riofrancos linked social and environmental justice as well as a care economy as a necessary response to climate change and the need for social transformation. The demand for a universal basic income, frequently cast as unrealistic and hostile to a work ethic, quickly became a possible and popular option in the form of those stimulus payments during the pandemic to address the collapse of institutions and employment. To make such changes central to policy agendas, however, still required a political leap in how social movements, progressive policy makers, and care advocates could more fully translate their agendas into a more comprehensive social and environmental justice language coupled with a politics of care.²⁰

This book seeks to identify that agenda and language by identifying the elements of a care-centered politics. This includes the discussion of *care work*, whether paid or unpaid, defined in market terms, or *care activity* as an essential part of life. The care workforce is largely, though not entirely (depending on the type of work), female, people of color, and immigrant. It is for the most part highly exploited and poorly recognized for its value in everyday life.

Care work is nevertheless expanding rapidly and will likely grow even further in the wake of COVID-19, despite workplace conditions becoming even more hazardous. Eldercare is especially experiencing some of the fastest growth *and* increased hazards and stress among those who care, whether in the home as unpaid labor or at in-home care facilities. The COVID-19 and climate change events have further extended the debate about what constitutes care work, even within the health care, eldercare, and childcare sectors. As care work changes and expands, including becoming part of new labor market sectors, it has the potential to further change the nature of work itself.²¹

A care politics has also started to be incorporated into *environmental discourse*. This is particularly the case among environmental justice groups that have identified a politics of daily life (the environment is where we live, work, play, worship, or eat) as central to the environmental justice argument. Care and healing work along with care activity and politics can also be central to a low-carbon, green economy transition, as Klein and

others have argued in supporting, although pointing to the limits of, the Green New Deal concept.²²

Environmental discourse is often care centered. Care for the land, care for the planet, and care for living things are central to an environmental ethic and ethic of care. Gardening and the growing of food represent a type of care-centered work and activity along those lines. Beyond caring for the land, gardening can become health enhancing and a healing activity, such as through horticulture therapy, for those who do the gardening as well as those who reap its rewards. Growing and producing food as care centered also contrasts with fossil-fuel-based (and corporate-dominated) food-related production with its massive environmental and occupational hazards. A care-centered politics approach to food extends to an eater's ethic as well as a producer's care for how food is grown and accessed. Other food sector workers such as school food service employees (e.g., the "lunch ladies" in school cafeterias) can become care-centered healthy food advocates, if given the opportunity and healthier food fare is available. Farm-to-school programs have been especially effective when the food service staff become part of its development and implementation. The "farm-to-table" concept, moreover, has represented a form of resilience in the wake of a pandemic or climate change event, as exemplified by the reworking and expansion of the community-supported agriculture (CSA) model, or interest in gardening as a form of food provisioning as well as healing during a crisis.²³

Similarly, the language of a care politics has helped frame the arguments for a different type of economy in the era of climate change. Harvey, for one, has contended that a climate politics especially needs to address the hypergrowth strategies embedded in capitalist economies, led by the two largest carbon emitters, the United States (the second largest by volume and largest per capita) and China (the largest by volume, based on its own version of state-driven capitalism and likely to become the largest per capita in the near term). A care-centered politics, in challenging the hypergrowth model, seeks to be grounded in the notions of a social commons and sufficiency, or what Gorz characterized as "less is better."²⁴

This concept of a *care economy* includes a system of production based on the infrastructure of daily life and a form of consumption based on the

idea of sufficiency. Such an approach counters the capitalist logic of hypergrowth, deep inequalities, and what ecofeminist economist Mary Mellor calls the “careless and reckless accumulation economy.” A care economy seeks to sustain lives and living things. Its notion of well-being contrasts with the dominant focus on economic growth as the all-encompassing goal of all climate-impacting systems, whether neoliberal or state capitalist. Even for the Green New Deal, whether its US, European, or UK versions, economic growth, albeit *green* economic growth, remains an underlying objective. A care economy perspective reverses that objective in favor of the notion of sufficiency—to have enough for all as well as understanding “what is enough,” as Buddhist wisdom would have it. The social justice dimension of sufficiency in a care economy requires an agenda of redistribution for those who lack an essential livelihood, whether at the local, national, or global level. A care-centered politics thus seeks to establish universal well-being (enough for everyone), and value and care for the environment and the earth, which demand a voice as part of a care economy. “Enough should be a human right, a floor below which no one can fall; also a ceiling above which no one can rise. Enough is a good as a feast—or better.” Kim Stanley Robinson writes in *The Ministry for the Future*.²⁵

The continuing capitalist pursuit of hypergrowth is further bound up with the notion of making and consuming things. Economists and the mainstream media frequently assert that consumption drives the economy—a perspective that initially led to panic as the COVID-19 pandemic in its first months shut down the consumption/hypergrowth economy. Yet the concept of consumption is a relatively recent invention. In his book *Keywords*, cultural critic Raymond Williams wrote that in early English and French preindustrial capitalism, to consume meant to “completely devour, waste, spend” and “to destroy, to use up, to waste, to exhaust.” Williams also distinguished the term *customer*, which implied some degree of regular and continuing relationship to a supplier, whereas *consumer* indicated a more abstract figure in a more abstract market.²⁶ The consumer and the primacy of consumption as a central economic driver became preeminently US concepts, thanks in part to the rapid rise from the 1920s onward of the use of advertising and other consumption-inducing strategies that

heralded as well as helped manipulate the idea of an individual's free "choice" in selecting what and how much to consume as central to capitalist ideology.

Prior to the pandemic, the idea of sufficiency and an ethic of care had already begun to challenge the assumptions of endless growth and compulsive consumption. In a climate change and pandemic era, the development of new forms of sufficiency and connections between cooperation and care have taken on more urgency as they start to be explored in urban places and multiple institutional settings. The 1960s' New Left argument for a "long march through the institutions" will need to be revised in order to identify how best to restructure patriarchal systems as well as market-dominated institutions and sectors in *immediate* as well as longer-term trajectories. Such restructuring begins with institutions available for a care-centered politics. As part of any such shift, the relentless push for inequitable economic growth along with its increasingly dire environmental and climate consequences will need to be challenged.

Care-centered places like libraries and schools, or potential care institutions such as postal operations, will need to be supported and allowed to redefine themselves as essential care-related services. Activities like walking, biking, or gardening and the growing of food will need policies along with institutional support mechanisms to make them accessible to all individuals and communities. At the same time, the financial and time pressures as well as outcomes of the neoliberal order that have led to endemic problems, such as homelessness, mental health challenges and crises, precarity, and uncertainty about daily life needs, will require a transformative approach to how our institutions, economies, and politics need to be challenged as well as remade. Internet-based services, now beholden to a market orientation and assuming an oligopolistic form, will need to be remade from a care politics approach into a type of public utility and operate in the public trust. Expulsions from homes and withdrawal from daily life services, and creating barriers against migrations and refugees fleeing from violence and climate change, will need to be reversed and replaced with the embrace of a right to place along with a celebration of difference and diversity, all of which need to become part of a care-centered politics agenda.

The importance of a care-centered politics and its related need to remake our institutions is most pronounced when it comes to climate change, pandemics, and the need for system transformations, including undoing centuries of racial and sexual harm as well as violence against African Americans and women, among others. Climate change does not respect enforced boundaries. It requires public action at a local, national, and global scale. It deeply impacts the most vulnerable, whether individuals, communities, regions, or nation-states, while increasingly affecting everyone throughout the world. It requires collective action and changes in daily life. It needs to overcome the still-potent ideology of maximizing individual economic gain and instead assert the shared value of community, and a green, care-centered commonwealth of diverse peoples, communities, regions, and nation-states.

A care-centered politics is most important and valuable in addressing the enormity and longevity of the climate crisis. Many of the climate mitigation and adaptation initiatives promoted by individuals such as business magnate Bill Gates, and policy makers, industries, and the media, including in the United States and China, have emphasized the role of technology and scale. These initiatives are often an extension of the powerful hold of the market and GDP-type, production-oriented growth strategies in fashioning such initiatives. For example, vast solar farms established by large investors working with the investor-owned utilities are favored over small-scale solar projects that serve and can be controlled by communities and neighborhoods.²⁷

A care-centered politics needs to address mitigation as an opportunity to change dependence and create alternatives to the major contributors to climate change—an approach that requires a different set of institutional arrangements, a focus on their relation to inequality, and a different sufficiency and care paradigm to reverse the logic of hypergrowth. In relation to climate adaptation issues, a care-centered politics seeks to restructure existing infrastructure to meet social and environmental needs that are also designed to respond to the intensity and unpredictability of climate change. Such unpredictability will substantially increase until and unless far greater efforts toward prevention and mitigation take place. Radical

restructuring then extends beyond technical solutions to daily life and institutional transformations, the centerpiece of a care-centered politics.

While climate change represents an unfolding series of challenges, COVID-19 created an immediate need for change as the global economy, reliance on compensatory consumption, and promise of unending hypergrowth all faced potential collapse during the uncertainty of the first months of the pandemic. The early wisdom during those months was that a return to normalcy meant a rapid increase in consumption levels too, and eventually greater fossil fuel use and increased carbon emissions, as happened in the years following the 2008–2009 Great Recession. The recovery from the pandemic was predicated on such a return to normalcy, which meant a return to the hypergrowth model, albeit a green hypergrowth. The events of 2020 and 2021 nevertheless created uncertainty about future trends, including the response to the huge numbers of unemployed and return of poverty levels not experienced since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The possibility of hitherto-unimaginable transformations, including an ascendant care politics, seemed incredibly difficult yet more necessary than ever.

It also became clear in 2020 and 2021 that a care-centered politics needed to be part of challenging the system-wide and historical forms of racism as well as social, economic, and environmental inequalities. By doing so, a care-centered politics approach could counter prevailing beliefs, attitudes, and language, create a call to action, and become a guide to transformative change too. And it could provide some modest yet essential hope in the midst of a world in turmoil.

“To be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing,” Williams once argued.²⁸ Those thoughts have become a necessity in a climate change and pandemic era, and where racial, social, economic, and environmental injustices require immediate as well as long-term structural change. Such transformations are also integral to a care-centered politics. And as 2020 came to an end, the outcome of the US election reinforced the idea that hope was indeed a radical idea, and care could help facilitate it.