

Transcript

The view from Fiji and Aotearoa/New Zealand

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

STEVEN RATUVA: One of the situations now is that the Global North countries see themselves as saviours, who come in not only to save the planet, but also to save the Global South and the whole of humanity.

JOE BIDEN: Good evening, everyone.

STEVEN RATUVA: The Superman flying in help the poor. So that creates a different dynamic in terms of relationship where the Global South countries feel disadvantaged as being they're not capable of anything, as if they are in a situation where they have to rely on the Global North all the time.

My name is Steven Ratuva. I'm a distinguished professor here at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. And I'm originally from Fiji. So, I've worked in different universities around the world, in the UK and Australia, in the US, in Fiji, and now, in New Zealand. Knowledge is global.

So, you have to keep abreast with what's happening around the world.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

STEVEN RATUVA: Fiji was a former British colony. It became a British colony in 1874 at a time when the colonial powers were going around trying to take whatever piece of land is available. Since 1970, it has been independent. So, it's centred right in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

In fact, the 180 degrees meridian runs through Fiji. So, if you drill through planet Earth, straight, then you might reach London from Fiji. The main income now is tourism. It used to be sugar.

The impact of climate in Fiji has been amazing. Well, terrible, not amazing, terrible. The number of very strong cyclones category 4, category 5 has been frequent over the years.

The second strongest cyclone ever hit Fiji in 2016 called cyclone Winston. At the moment, Fiji is working on a relocation plan. That is the first systematic plan in the world for relocation.

The government has come up with a list of about 40 or 50 villages who are going to be relocated in the next 50 years or so simply because of the destructive effect of the climate change on the coastal areas.

Fiji is lucky. It's a high country. So, people can move towards the mountains. In some atoll countries, like Tuvalu and Kiribati in the Pacific, they don't have mountains. They don't have hills. The highest point is about two meters. That's about my height.

If something happens, if the whole country comes under water, then they would have no choice but to relocate to Fiji. But even Fijians want to relocate somewhere else, maybe to New Zealand. New Zealand is working through the process of relocation to New Zealand if something happens.

So, it's going to be a global issue, a massive global and regional issue at some point in the future.

INDIA LOGAN-RILEY: [SPEAKING MAORI]

So, my name is India. And I come from Ngati, Kahungunu, Rongomaiwahine, Rangitane on the East Coast of Te Ika-a-Maui, Aotearoa, colonially known as the North Island of New Zealand. And I am a climate change campaigner and activist with a background in Māori heritage.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

INDIA LOGAN-RILEY: New Zealand sits in the Global North. It is not geographically, but in terms of the empire relationships, as well. And it is complex being Indigenous within the Global North because there are synergies with experiences in the Global South.

And that we are treated as being extracted from or wholly eradicated as the aspiration was in the 1800s and continues to be implicitly today.

Yeah. The climate crisis is, for me, like the ultimate outcome of colonial capitalism. It is the biggest measure that the project has failed. And it was a bad idea. And for me, it is wholly about an injustice perpetuated over many generations now.

The Global North runs the narrative around climate change in lots of different ways. And so that's part of the struggle of pushing for climate justice is to say it's not actually just about lowering emissions. It is about people.

STEVEN RATUVA: Now narratives are very powerful. Narratives, by definition, has to do with the way we frame the language. We put together ideas to be able to explain something, whether it's the narrative around the weather, the narrative around the chicken next door neighbour, the narrative around your worst teacher in school, or the narrative around yourself.

So, it's a means by which we try to frame something. And certainly, in the area of climate, there are different narratives with the COP, the leaders of the world came together. It's not just leaders, other groups, which are associated with climate. The big corporations, they had their own representation. And of course, the narrative from the big corporations, particularly the fossil fuel companies. They actually pay for scientists to frame the narrative, the scientific narrative to push back. They were saying that there is no such thing as climate change and so forth.

Then you have the narratives by the majority of the scientists saying that it is happening. We are moving towards a critical stage. The IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, set up by the United Nations consisting of scientists from all over the world, the narrative has been we are into a situation of desperation now.

Then you have the narratives of different governments, which are very different. The narratives of the civil society organizations. The young people, increasingly, are driving the narrative that we have to act now, and the narrative is being articulated on the streets, not so much in the boardrooms. So, there are multiple narratives. So, the question is, how do you bring them all together? And how do you make sure that we become inclusive in the way we address the different narratives as a way forward?

INDIA LOGAN-RILEY: I think in order for Indigenous communities to reclaim our narratives and to take our spaces back runs a whole range of strategies and tactics. First and foremost, we tell our own stories. We make our own documentaries.

We write our own books. We have our own podcasts, that kind of thing, particularly in our own language. So, they're accessible to our people and they're told from our place of power. There's a lot of nuances within that.

I think it also depends on who you're listening to and where you're listening from. Because amongst my communities, we're really clear this is bad. We're really clear on what the solutions need to be. But that's something that doesn't necessarily make it into Western media.

STEVEN RATUVA: At the University of Canterbury, together with the University of the South Pacific, are working on a joint project. Doing an assessment of the impact of climate crisis on 16 countries in the Pacific region. And it's an interdisciplinary approach.

At one point in the past when talking about climate, talking about climatologists, you're talking about environmentalists, you're talking about biologists, you're talking about physicists. But now, because the impact goes beyond just the traditional sphere of impact and influence, the impact of climate is social, is cultural, is political, is economic.

So yeah. So, it's interdisciplinary, natural science, social science, humanities and Indigenous knowledge. Often, the narrative of climate is by experts over here at the top level. The IPCC, for instance, report, which is quite big, is largely driven by the narrative from the Global North scientists, natural scientists mostly.

And the human being is missing from when scientists do their laboratory work and do their formulas and analysis. What we're trying to do is put humanity in the middle and say, hang on. The climate impacts on all of us.

We have to take responsibility because since what anthropologists call the age of Anthropocene, and that is when human beings started impacting on the environment. That is when we began to transform the world around us.

We began to transform the ecology, the waterways, the ocean, the skies. When the first space people - astronauts took photos of planet Earth, it was a beautiful, but fragile as well. So, if we shift the centre of focus on humans, then we take responsibility for that.

And secondly, the solution is with us, not with science itself. Science, on its own, can't solve anything. We have to use science. After all, we came up with science. That's something which scientists themselves forget. So that's why recentring the narrative towards humanity is very important. Welcome to press conference by Commissioner Arias Canete, following the COP 21 climate conference in Paris.

INDIA LOGAN-RILEY: 21 years old, I was at the Paris Climate talks when a study was released looking into the impacts of sea level rise on coastal Aotearoa. And it named Napier, the nearest city to where my family lives, would be underwater in the next, I think, it was 20 or 30 years. And so being able to then calculate, OK, yeah. My mom's house is separated from the ocean by a road and a pond. What does that mean for us?

STEVEN RATUVA: So, the impact is not just economic and social things, which we can see, but it's very deep as well in terms of cultural psychological and the trauma, which people go through. If you're in the middle of a category 5 cyclone in the middle of the Pacific, and the category 5 cyclones has just become pretty frequent, then it's the end of the world for you. A lot of research done, shows that the traumatic events can actually lead to long term intergenerational trauma.

We're looking deeper, not just the visible scientific, measurable aspects, but the deeper aspects of impact on people's well-being and people's lives. And the way in which we can address some of this in terms of policies, in terms of strategies, as well as looking for mitigation and adaptation and resilience strategies for the future.

INDIA LOGAN-RILEY: It's really hard to put into words the-- I guess, like bone shattering sense of intergenerational trauma, staring down that pain that is being done to people in place, time and time again while trying to meet the mundane goals of paying rent and putting food on the table.

It is this heartbreaking cognitive dissonance and disalignment with how we would do things if colonization hadn't happened. And so, I think for me it's just yes, it's that deep sense of injustice that we were raised with and a rage and a conviction that this can't keep happening.

STEVEN RATUVA: One of the legacies of colonialism is the way it fractures fragments people. Of course, the British were very good in divide and rule. You divide them up and rule them. It's much easier to do that. They did that in Fiji and India and everywhere else.

And also, what the colonial system did was to stratify everything. So, there's a whole lot of hierarchies, hierarchies of knowledge, of economics, of politics, and so forth.

So, moving forward, basically, broadly, humanity, generally, is how we address some of these for making sure that people are able to see each other as equals. So that when we apply the principles of equity, of diversity, of inclusion, it's meaningless when the structures actually do the opposite.

So, we have to address those structures, which keep people apart, whether the structures are ethnic or they're political, they're social, or cultural, or whatever.

We take away some of the colonial values and institutions which gave rise and which support those differences. I think it's important for the future of humanity for us to learn from each other. The North can learn from the South. The South can learn from the North, or decolonizing differences.