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moosumi

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In times of war, peril, and despair, we find refuge in sanctuaries. A place of understanding and truth.

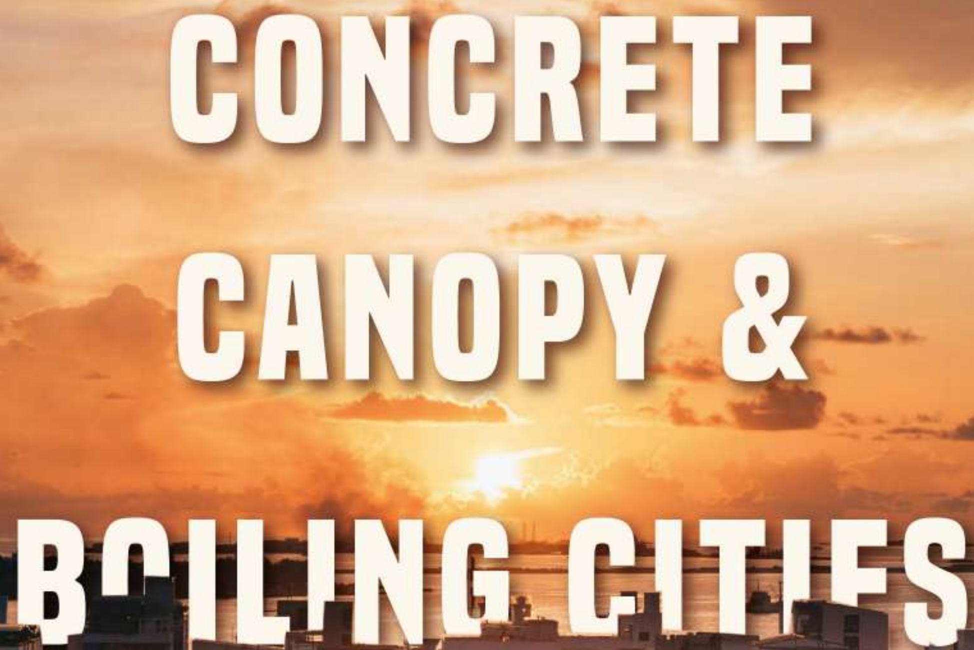
In refuge, we speak plainly and truthfully. We speak against injustice and violence inflicted on our bodies and the world.

In refuge, we express the ineffable beauty of this world through art, words, dance, and joy. An expression of love and creativity.

In refuge, we come home to ourselves, and we open our eyes to the interconnectedness of all life. Our world, actions, friends, family, and love all blend into one.

Moosumi's second issue, Sanctuaries, is a refuge for those who love and fight for the earth with lovingkindness.

Ijunad Junaid, Executive Editor



CONCRETE CANOPY & BOILING CITIES

By Maiha Hameed

A complex concern surfaces in the heart of Maldives — particularly in the capital — and it is one that may test the sustainability of our habitable environment. Relentless urbanization has transformed the capital Male' and surrounding landscape: wall-to-wall buildings, streets overflowing with vehicles, and nearly 80 thousand people densely packed per square kilometer — the balance between development and environmental sustainability is becoming increasingly fragile.

Amid this, Male' and adjacent Hulhumale' currently face an unexpected challenge: the urban heat island effect — a phenomenon where cities are significantly warmer than their surrounding rural areas. With low-lying cities seemingly surrounded by the ocean breeze and relatively small in size, one would think we were immune right? But the reality is contradictory, and this urban heat island effect makes the islands even more vulnerable to rising temperatures.

Ishan (unsplash)

Picture scorching pavements, buildings that stubbornly cling to the day's warmth, and a creeping discomfort that goes beyond mere inconvenience. More than just feeling hot, it is about the unspoken health risks that come with a city growing warmer by the day. Climate projections with a high level of confidence have hinted at a future where temperatures continue to rise, projecting a 1.5°C increase in the annual maximum daily temperatures by 2100 in the country.

Humid-heat stress introduces a layer of complexity to this challenge, going beyond the numbers on a thermometer to involve the humidity surrounding those rising temperatures. The air thickens with moisture, making every increasing degree feel noticeably hotter. It is a scenario where stepping outside becomes a challenge, a struggle against heat that not only blankets but can also suffocate. The recent IPCC Assessment Report reinforces the growing concern: South Asia is set to experience an escalation of humid heat stress, with more severity and frequency.

Heat index calculations — an indication of how heat affects humans — reveal that both Male' and Hulhumale' consistently fall within the heat index range of 'extreme caution', even past nightfall. This range indicates the possibility of fatigue from prolonged exposure or physical activity, and highlights the necessity to implement mitigative measures. Hulhumale' also experienced higher heat index values than Male', sometimes reaching dangerous levels, underscoring the need to address high outdoor humidity which could also seep indoors.

Ahmed Nishaath (unsplash)

Gilbert Pagunaling (Unsplash)

As we navigate towards the century's end, there is a possibility that significant potions of Earth may become inhospitably hot and humid for humans to regulate their body temperature.

Although certain optimistic scenarios offer some relief from these outcomes, the implications for society remain serious, particularly as densely populated regions near the equator are increasingly identified as highly vulnerable to humid heat challenges.

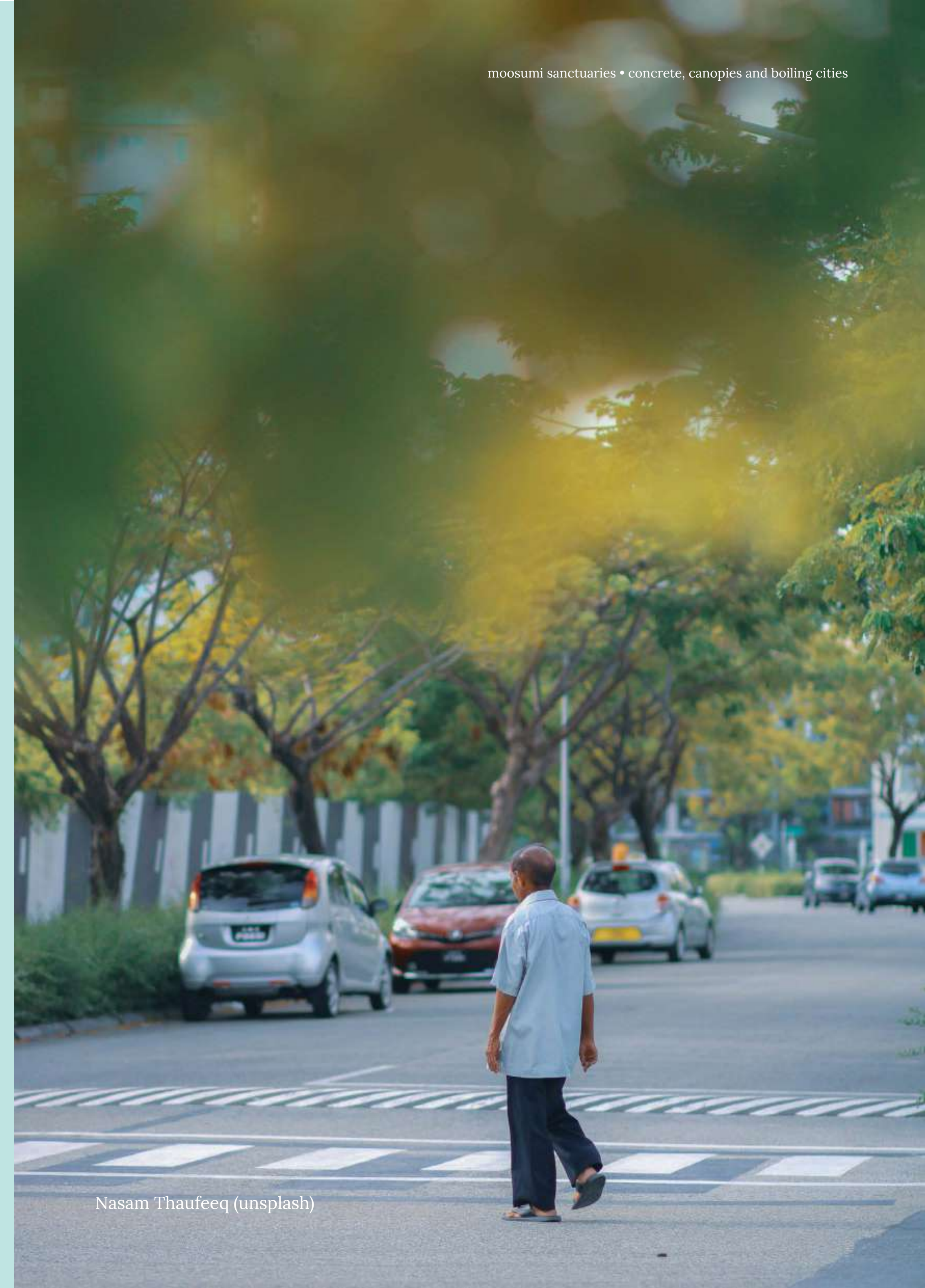
Pawel Czerwinski (unsplash) (1)

Ahmed Nishaath (unsplash)

The urgency for adaptive measures to cool these urban spaces then becomes not just a concern, but a necessity and a form of conservation. While it is widely believed that conservation is at odds with urban development, in reality, integrating conservation practices into urban planning can enhance the resilience of our cities against rising temperatures. Green spaces and climate-responsive infrastructure are not at odds with development; they are the cornerstones for a city to thrive resiliently.

We see that our planet is going through some big climatic changes, and that cities are significantly affected. But they also play a key role in contributing to this climate crisis. Urban conservation is crucial because it tackles both sides of the issue. Steps such as creating green shaded spaces and using heat-resilient infrastructure not only protect our cities from the effects of climate change like extreme heat, but also reduce the city's emissions by minimizing our reliance on energy for cooling.

Let's challenge the idea that conservation efforts are only about protecting faraway natural areas, and not something that concerns us in this heavily urbanized capital region. A walk through Sultan Park or a part of Sosun Magu at noon for instance, and we all appreciate how green spaces actively cool our surroundings. Urban conservation becomes a shield, protecting us from the impacts of a warming climate that knocks on our doorstep.



Nasam Thaufeeq (unsplash)

Ishan (unsplash)

From construction laborers to bridge commuters to school-goers, the consequences of a warming climate — particularly humid-heat stress — has crept into our daily experiences. Maldivians already rely heavily on air-conditioning and prefer this over outdoor areas to cope with the humidity, and the excessive heat has put a damper on the unique and valuable outdoor curriculum for students, especially in outer islands.

Confronted with this challenge, urban conservation emerges as a way forward. Far from being an abstract or far-removed concept, conservation extends its influence right into the city. It recognizes the importance of maintaining biodiversity, green spaces, and overall ecological balance amid the rapid development and expansion of our urban areas.

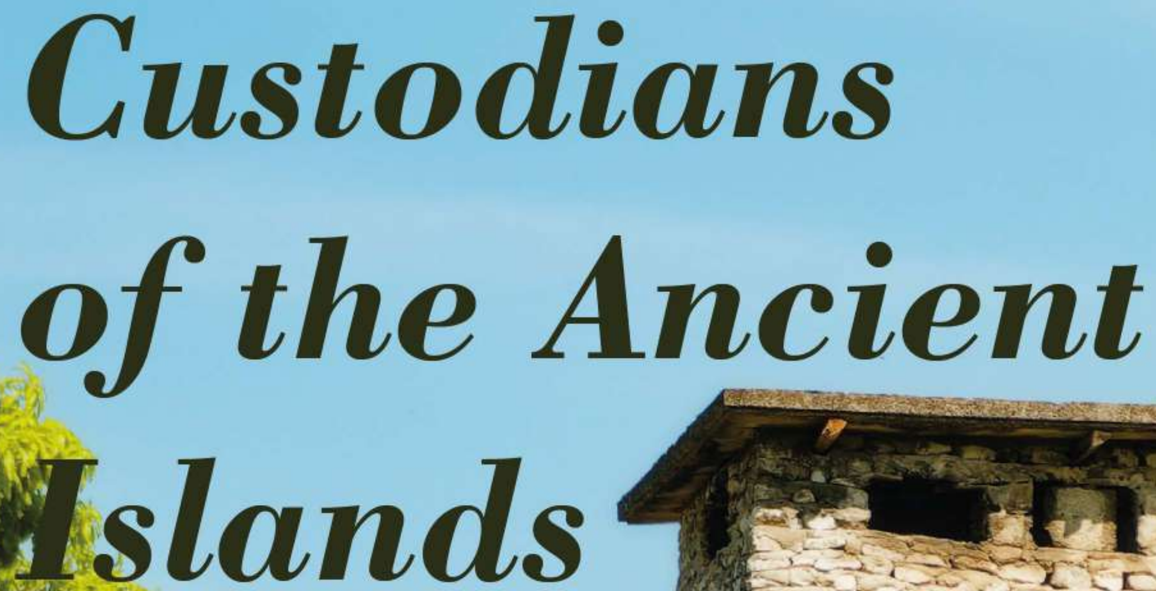
It's not just about aesthetics anymore,

it's about survival in a city that is becoming **too warm** for comfort.

Pawel Czerwinski (unsplash)

Custodians of the Ancient Islands

by Zara Athif

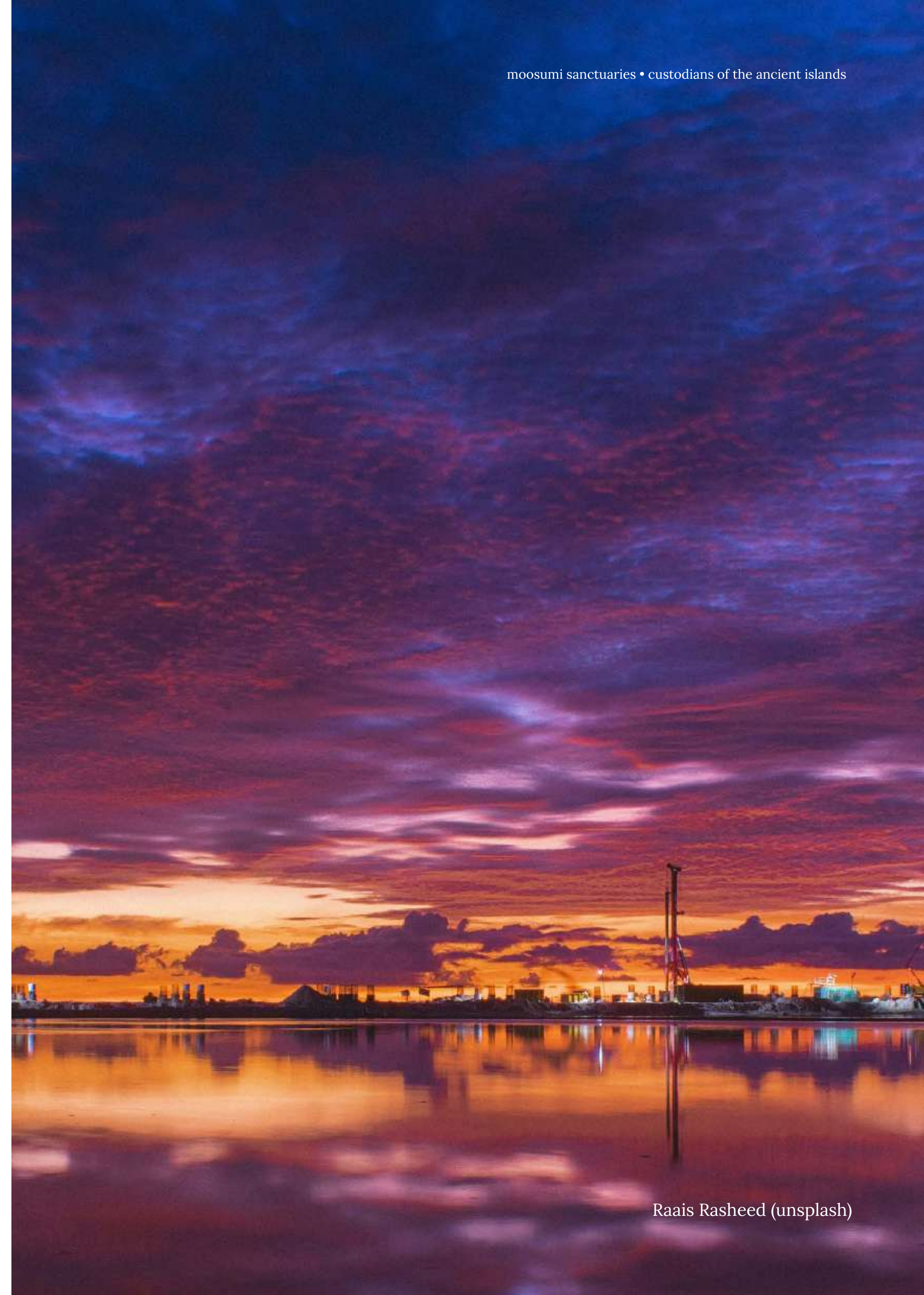


Saffu (unsplash)

Civilization in the Maldives started over two millennia ago: thousands of years of living, loving, breathing, and being on this scattered chain of islands. We are the surviving custodians of these ancient islands, well cared for by our ancestors. Lush greenery thick with coconut palms, sea hibiscus, beach gardenia, breadfruit trees, and ironwood. Mangrove lakes with interlinked roots snaking through the waters. The sea in blues of every hue with majestic kingdoms of coral life. The quintessence of natural beauty. Our ancestors respected our islands which gave us so much in return: food, water, shelter, and peace of mind — the islands nurtured us well.

The desire for "development" has now changed our island communities and our way of living. The natural resources we were blessed with have been largely depleted and degraded. With multiple recent bleaching events, it has become rare and exciting to stumble across a live coral reef when snorkeling. Island jungles are now replaced with concentrated city hotels. We crane our necks in high-rise buildings to get a glimpse of the coast. Reef fish stocks are slowly declining due to overfishing.

We bit the hand that fed us, and we're now dealing with the consequences.



Raais Rasheed (unsplash)

The push for environmental conservation has resulted in a variety of outcomes, such as passing an Environmental Protection and Preservation Act (Law no. 4/93); the designation of protected areas and natural reserves; tracking and monitoring of marine species populations; conducting Environmental Impact Assessments for "development" activities; and coral restoration. Previously, island communities had informal regulations and customary practices on how we sustainably use our natural resources. These practices varied greatly from island to island, given that the availability of natural resources and islands' geography can be quite different.

R. Angolhitheemu is a small island in the North of Maldives. An island resident, Faiz, describes Angolhitheemu as a gaamathee rah: an island where the distance between the beachline and the ocean is very short.

"Historically, we practiced pole-and-line fishing. Growing up, there were a couple of dhoani doing pole-and-line fishing for frigate tuna. Now, there are small dinghies. These vessels don't do commercial fishing. They only fish enough to feed their households and just sell the surpluses,"

he explained.

"Schools of Mushimas visit the lagoon in particular seasons. It was forbidden to use nets or live bait to catch them. It was believed that using live bait would drive the schools out. Though nets are now outlawed, even back then, we didn't use nets for these schools that entered the lagoon. If we used a net, we'd catch the whole school altogether, which isn't sustainable."

In addition to gear restrictions, there were time restrictions in place as well. In the lagoon, fishermen were allowed to practice from early morning until afternoon, not at night. "*When gathering kanamadhu (sea almond), there were specific days that were designated for this by the rashu office (island office). They'll make an announcement stating, for example, next Saturday is kanamadhu collecting day. So, the residents can prepare themselves for that day. There was a quota for this collection: each household can collect two dabiyaa (tin) maximum*," he added.

Schooling Powder Blue Tang by a degraded reef
Zara Athif

A similar practice was used for collecting fann, with specific days allocated for collection. Only fallen palm fronds were permissible to be collected, and people were not allowed to pick them directly from the palms.

"For dhandi, only branches of the tree were cut rather than the whole tree. This was only allowed for household use rather than commercial — so that we can avoid overuse, as some people may take trees that do not belong to anyone. We also had to show the rashu office the dhandi we take for approval."

He also shared how there were species restrictions in place for this: trees that were common in the island — such as dhigga — were allowed to be used, but not trees that were rare on the island.

David Clode (unsplash)

L. Gaadhoo is well-known for the highest recorded number of turtle nesting activity in the Maldives. Gaadhoo is surrounded by seagrass meadows, boasting a small mangrove on the island, fertile soils, and historic sites. The beachstrip at the south of Gaadhoo is a rare gem. It is the main turtle nesting site. This includes the endangered green sea turtle, and the critically endangered hawksbill turtle. Although it is now an uninhabited island, Gaadhoo was populated until 2016, when the island residents were relocated to Fonadhoo under a development policy from the Government. As a community, the locals had cared for their rich resources and were provided for by their natural surroundings.

"Turtle eggs were a good source of income, and we used it with regulations. When we took eggs, we always made sure that we took only a portion of the eggs — never more than half of them," according to a Gaadhoo resident. This practice was stopped when turtle egg harvesting was outlawed. The islanders also ensured that their beaches were well-maintained — the beaches were cleaned regularly and the vegetation was trimmed. This was done to encourage turtle nesting. The residents also played an important role in monitoring poaching of turtles, which was declared a protected species in 1995. They also carried out disciplinary actions against those caught in the act.

Zara Athif

Some of these traditions are still practiced and have become the basis for citizen conservation measures today. Pole-and-line fishing, a method used in Maldives for centuries, is still preferred by fishermen today. This practice is environmentally sustainable as it reduces the chance of bycatch through selective fishing and is incorporated with rich traditional knowledge.

For instance, fishers allowed other boats to fish tuna from the same school by using a particular technique to throw bait when there were multiple fishing boats at the same site. Currently, tuna is the primary goods export of Maldives and is well-known for the pole-and-line fishery employed. Furthermore, fishing using nets is prohibited in the Maldives (except for bait fishing), as practiced by generations past.

Ibrahim Faiz

Historical accounts — through folklore, oral history, and written documentation — reflect the deep connection Maldivians shared with the natural environment. The traditional conservation methods used by our elders are a valuable insight into the respect we had towards our surroundings. These regulations contributed to ensuring that by sustainably using our resources, our ancestors left our lands in a pristine state for the next generations.

We must recultivate the relationship with our ancient islands and learn from our ancestors before us. It is our imperative to embed their valuable knowledge into modern environmental conservation methods today to restore and protect the rich biodiversity and ecosystems of our homeland.

Haim

The Nature of Nature

with

Mario Holder

Mario, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what inspired you to start painting?

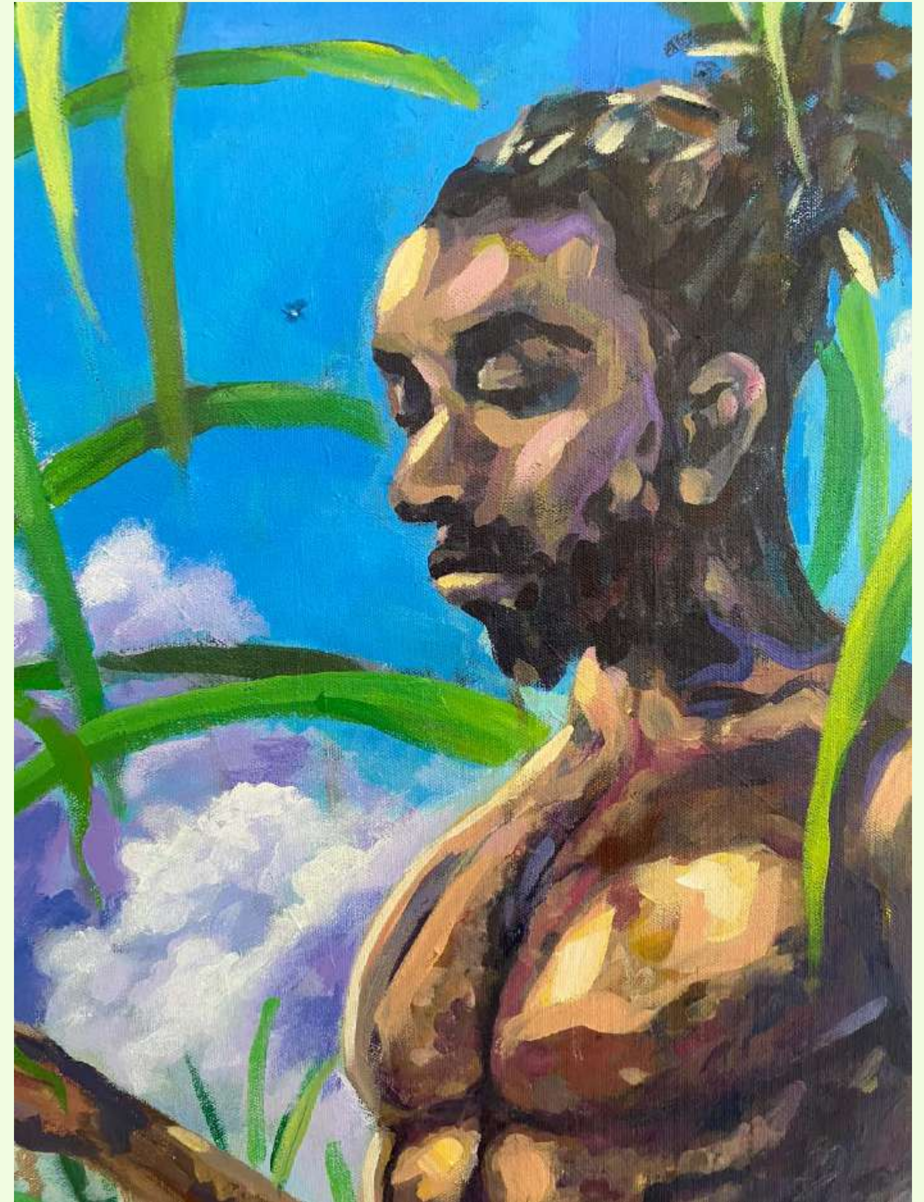
My name is Mario Holder, an artist from the Caribbean Island of Barbados. I remember always having an inclination towards creativity from a young age, but it only became apparent after a life-changing incident that occurred in my late teens that changed the trajectory of my life and career choices. Art, which first started off as just pencil drawings, began for me as a form of occupational therapy, and through that process, an avalanche of creations just started to unfold — and what was once just a prescription for my physical injuries healed me at a much deeper level.

Your paints often depict people in natural environments; what are the themes and significance of these paintings?

A recurring theme that often presents itself in my work is "humans amount to natural environments"; I believe that this is a reflection of my own desires to be more in a harmonious relationship with the natural laws of the earth, and that idea often manifests with human beings in gardens, intertwining with tropical botanicals, bodies of water. These are sometimes desperate attempts to create a sense of connection.

Mario Holder is a Barbadian artist inspired by the natural world and the relationship between humans and nature. Mostly through acrylic on canvas, Mario depicts a vivid and vibrant world full of awe and wonder.

M.Holder
2023



How does Barbadian nature, culture, and folktales inspire your artistic process?

As much as we have influence over our environment, our environment also deeply impacts our perceptions — from stories and myths that shape our beliefs and culture to religious and spiritual practices that still linger in our day-to-day lives. While some parts of my work are imaginary, the Barbadian life still finds its way through, in the form of colors, shapes, people, and the hopes and dreams we all share.

How do you think art can help people connect closer with nature?

When we talk about nature, humans often separate ourselves from it as if we are not a part of it, and to some degree, we may have become something different. Art, at least for me, takes me out of that intellectual heady state of being that may have been our downfall and into a more intuitive, more sensual process, wherein I believe lies our most natural state of mind. I feel by recognizing our interconnectedness and our interdependence via observing our similarities with the natural world, each of us can start bridging the divide between the two.

What do you think is the role of art in conservation?

Art as a whole can be used in many ways, both negative and positive. In my work I attempt to plant seeds of thoughts and feelings of our inherent goodness. Currently, we are living in a time where we are taking from this earth (which is just an extension of ourselves) more than we are giving back. The idea of reciprocity has been on my mind as of late — a system where we give back more to our planet than we take. Not like what we've been doing over the last 100 years. I think true and honest expression, which is an artistic process, helps bring awareness to what we change to positively to impact our environments.

Lastly, which artists inspire you?

This is a really good but very difficult question to answer, because I feel like I'm inspired by all the artists that I see — especially in the social media age that we are living in — my mind is often blown; but at this point in my life, my favorite artist is Trinidadian Artist, Che Lovelace.

You can find more of Mario's work on Marioholderartist.com

Echos of the Caribbean & Whispers of the Future

by Kwolanne Felix

Illustrations by Ijunad Junaid

While soaking up the beauty, abundance, sunshine, and culture of the Caribbean last year during my visit, the existential dread that global warming is transforming the climate and ecology of the region loomed in the back of my mind. I reflected on the horrifying events that brought my African ancestors to the region and the tragic climate reality that is currently displacing Caribbean people: both share the stench of imperialism. This common denominator deeply informs how Afro-Caribbean communities — and African Diaspora communities as a whole — come to relate to our current environments and the effects of the climate crisis.

The concept of a home for descendants of enslaved people has never been easy. Slavery itself created conditions of existential homelessness, alienation, and dehumanization. This is because the very process of enslavement strips people of their cultural heritage, familial ties, ethnic identity, and sense of self. Enslavement, particularly the Trans Atlantic Slave Trades, also robbed people of the rich, generational knowledge of their local ecology — a devastating loss that is often overlooked. My enslaved ancestors, when stolen away from Central and West Africa, were taken from their traditional lands, disrupting ecological traditions and relations between non-human beings, plants, and people. However, it was this very loss of ecological, geographic, and meteorological knowledge that slave owners depended on to maintain plantation societies.

The place we've come to love is vulnerable to the climate crisis.

Upon their arrival, the islands I now call home were my ancestors' prisons. The unfamiliar ecology, geography, and climate of the Caribbean made it much more difficult for enslaved Africans to escape. Slavers explicitly took into account the lack of familiarity with the geography in their decisions to shift away from primarily enslaving Native communities to Africans. I can only imagine how terrifying being confronted with such a different environment after months at sea must have been. The unfamiliar plants and animals overwhelmed them as they spent hours laboring under the scorching sun. They were forced to cultivate cash crops through a destructive system of monoculture. The arduous work wore down their bones and muscles, eroded the soil, poisoned waterways, and destroyed local ecologies.

500 years after the first enslaved Africans landed on a Caribbean island's shore, I have a very different understanding of the archipelago. My favorite place is the Caribbean Sea, which separated my ancestors from their homeland, making it impossible for them to return. The once unfamiliar animals my mother can name and share folktales about. My grandmother can readily identify local plants when she decides to forage for wild leaves and flowers from which to make tea, balm, or lunch. The Caribbean is no longer a plantation prison for us but a vibrant place of culture, tradition, and history.

The place we've come to love is vulnerable to the climate crisis. The Caribbean, comprised of small island nations and coastal countries, is bracing for impact. A few islands will likely completely disappear due to rising sea levels; others are paradoxically facing droughts. Every year, hurricanes intensify, raging through the region, leaving behind destruction and displacement in their wake.

While visiting Puerto Rico late last year, I discussed the effect of Hurricane Maria with various locals; it is a painful memory for most. A conversation with a cab driver struck me as he lamented how difficult the recovery process was and the migration that followed — with an estimated 200,000 Puerto Ricans, 6% of the population, fleeing the island. This is becoming a reality across the region.

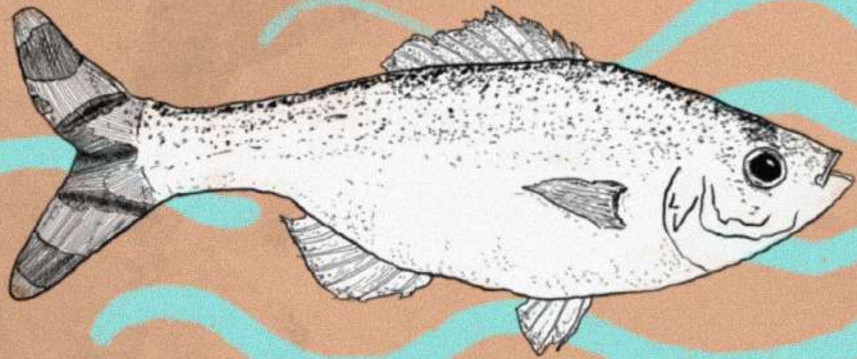
Yet, within this vulnerability, we are experts in creating a sense of identity and culture even when there isn't an option to return to a homeland. This is a phenomenon that billions of people across the world will have to reckon with as sea levels rise and intensified natural disasters force people to migrate and lose their land. From the Pacific Islands to South Asia, communities are asking what it means to be a "people" without a land. My ancestors had to answer this question, as they resided in the Americas on the traditional lands of the indigenous Tainos, Kalingos, Lokonos, Arawaks, Lucayans, Ignerians, Borequinos, and Caribs communities, with no way back to Africa. This is an important opportunity for cross-cultural conversations on cultural preservation and the realities of diasporic identity in a changing climate.

Even though we are resilient people, that doesn't mean governments and international agencies shouldn't invest in preserving Caribbean ecology and cultures. If anything, Caribbean history and our current climate realities add an important layer of complexity when considering what "climate reparations" and other climate policies mean for African Diasporic communities. Loss and damage funds, created by the United Nations, are intended to redistribute money from countries and communities disproportionately responsible for the climate crisis due to historically high emissions — particularly the U.S. and Western European countries — to vulnerable communities and countries.

Simultaneously, several Caribbean islands intensified the rallying call for many of these same countries to pay reparations for slavery and colonialism. For Caribbean communities who are still demanding reparations from Western countries, climate change-related displacement and damages are just adding to the list. Tenants of Environmental Justice, pioneered by African American communities in the U.S., come to mind when describing the interplay of social inequities and the amplification of the climate crisis on marginalized communities. The Caribbean is seeing the compounding effects of racism, colonialism, the legacies of slavery — and now the climate crisis — shape our future. It's essential to have policy frameworks that empathize with that.

Even as our world's future grows grimmer with every degree our climate rises, Caribbean communities remain dedicated to protecting our homes. Caribbean countries remain at the forefront of demanding decisive and swift international political action, implementing innovative solutions, and environmental restoration. Initiatives working on agroforestry, coral reef restoration, and sustainable water systems are growing throughout the region. While traveling in Curaçao, it was exciting to visit the new urban mangrove forests they've implemented — a model they're sharing with other tropical communities.

As the Caribbean becomes a hot spot for international attention on the impacts of the climate crisis, people must recognise how histories of colonial rule, slavery, and current climate realities are deeply interconnected. In developing these links when working with frontline communities as we address the climate crisis, many lessons can be learned to build a strong foundation for policy, programs, and initiatives. In the Caribbean, this can touch on cultural resilience in an era of climate migration or preserving traditional ecological knowledge and sharing it among various communities. Communities facing the brunt of the climate crisis, particularly island nations, have so much to offer to the world as we all gear up to confront our future on this Earth.



Illustrations by Ijunad Junaid

Greeting swells and Depleting Wells

By Dhumya Ahmed

The lush Kinbi (Sea poison trees), among the earliest to greet settlers of Maldivian forests, remember the distant memories of families they sheltered. They echo the memories of children running after chicks — and the kids' tittering when the mother hen aggressively flew towards them. Parents toiling away in the scorching heat, tirelessly farming and reaping crops in the plantation fields. The trees remember the groundwater wells that resided in these fields that nursed their annual harvest. These bustling routines and rustling leaves chorus a melody in the echoing forests of the islands.

I remember collecting discarded tuna and tomato paste cans that washed ashore from the seas. We played the local game Pitu with these makeshift stacks of tuna cans. After a hot day in the sun, the losing team of Pitu (A variation of the traditional Indian game called Pithu) becomes the target of valhah lun (to place in a well/to bury): the losing members are carried and lowered down into the shallow groundwater wells where they must climb back on their own. The winning team would soak themselves with well water using a dhaani (A pole bucket). This is just one among many vivid memories I reminisce from time to time.

I also remember showering to my heart's content, free from the worries of its economic value. The water from the wells was as fresh as my memories of going to moodhu (the beach) to grapple kattafulhi (Barred flagtail). They would flitter in the hem of my dress as I ran barefoot in high spirits all the way home to introduce them into our wells. Sometimes, an unfortunate fish occasionally got ensnared in the dhaani while water was poured out.

I treasure the parts of my childhood spent traveling to islands during school break to visit family and friends. I remember swinging in the joali (locally woven swings with coir rope. Often found outside Maldivian homes) and conversing with my friends to plan the next moodhu session, which was almost always a must after study time. The seawater bathing always ended with showers from the groundwater wells near the beach so we could freshen up and clean our sandy feet before heading home.

From my joali talks with the neighbors and elderly locals, when asked about groundwater conservation in their days, they claimed they did not have to do much thanks to the surrounding vegetation that aided groundwater recharge.

Even with nature draping the islands with its green tapestry, island communities cleaned their wells before monsoons hit, and cleaned their septic tanks to avoid contamination.

In recent times, shock chlorination in the wells in addition to the utilization of oxygen pumps and reverse osmosis plants before use are often observed in island communities. Some island houses also have roof gutters and pipe systems connected to wells along with integrated rainwater harvesting systems due to inadequate recharging surfaces.

Today, many residents believe the main cause of groundwater contamination to be the establishment of septic tanks over the years due to the growing population and poor land-use plans in the islands. With increasing urbanization and diminishing vegetation, many islands need proper stormwater and aquifer management due to frequent flooding events and depletion of groundwater.

When I get the opportunity to island-hop — whether for work or leisure — I like sitting down with neighbors and chatting about their daily lives. In one such conversation, Sumayya dhaitha (endearing word that means aunty) living on an island in the south shared her concerns regarding the changes in groundwater textures and smell in her farm area. I hesitantly asked if she used pesticides for farming. She replied that it was a familiar and mutual practice among the farmers. She was unaware that years of using chemical pesticides in her farms likely caused contamination in groundwater.

In such islands, groundwater extraction can also be higher where farmers and fishermen in the islands greatly rely on groundwater for produce and haul. This causes increased saline conditions compared to islands using it only for their household needs like gardening, cooking, washing, and toilet use. With rainwater-harvesting stores running out in dry seasons, dependence on plant water has increased in recent years. Like Sumayya dhaitha's island, many still lack sanitation and water plant systems.

The 2004 Tsunami marked a turning point in many aspects of Maldivian life. The wounds of this nationwide catastrophe are still fresh both in our minds and the surrounding environment years later. Like many locals, Badhuru — who lives in one of the bandharu mathee (harbor area) houses — shared his experience with color and odor changes in his well after the tsunami. With saltwater intrusion into aquifers disrupting the freshwater lens, many locals like him stopped using groundwater for drinking and cooking.

Other natural events such as swells and tidal waves have also caused frequent floods and damage to the freshwater lens. I, too, often find myself near the beach, anticipating when the waves might swell and crash, even if it's not the usual season for it. As each Hulhangu Moosun (south-west monsoon) approaches, the nearshore area experiences its annual tidal swells. Often, if I see a seabird along the shoreline, I feel somewhat relieved that the waves are simply greeting us and not poised to wash us away. At the end of the day, from the horizon's view, both the seabird and I coexist by the ocean, seeking nourishment from its depths.

Over the years, many local news agencies and councils have also reported damages to households and coastal areas due to flooding. During the Southwest Monsoon of 2021, islands in the south reported flooding due to heavy rain, affecting 1500 people. The lack of systematic records of these events has inhibited our readiness for such events. While groundwater conservation and flood mitigation efforts are interlinked in many ways, blending developmental plans with sustainable aquifer management

In similar small island developing countries curbing the issue, experts expressed caution against a myopic approach, without addressing the root causes of groundwater depletion. The call for comprehensive aquifer management systems in development plans remains a crucial debate when tharaggee (economic growth) earns votes for our seasoned politicians in election cycles, owing to the rising demand for superfluous projects like land reclamation, airport construction, and road paving in islands even if it isn't socially, economically, or environmentally feasible. Just like how communities demonstrate their shared labor through the construction of concrete wells, they should also commit to building a resilient foundation through accountability.

In the past and recent years, Maldivian wells symbolize our collective determination, and our communities drew strength from these wells during challenging times. This was even more evident in 2014 when the water crisis in Male' suspended desalinated water supplies.

From childhood pastimes to the current dilemmas of developmental challenges, Maldivians have formed an intricate relationship with groundwater use. As the saying goes: "valhu kattafulhi dhaanyakah nusiheyne," i.e., "the kattafulhi in the well are not startled by the pole bucket." (this idiom tries to capture the spirit of resilience and resistance in the face of adversity)

Our generation can also embrace the spirit of the kattafulhi with local conservation practices anchored by our unique ecology to withstand the threats posed by metropolitan urbanization and the climate crisis. A balance between today's sustainable urban drainage systems and the echoes of our ancestors' practices should guide us and remind us that the conservation of groundwater is not only necessary for today, but for our future as well.

IN THE MANGROVES' EMBRACE

by Mariyam Malsa

Kyle Glenn (unsplash)

Plunging into earthy brown, green, and yellow-toned waters on a hot day, collecting shoots of wild vegetation to enliven home gardens, and extracting 'mashi' for Eid festivities. These are a handful of memories that might color in the nostalgia of a lucky few when it comes to the mangrove forests — one of the most biodiverse areas known to our islands.

Scattered across 150 islands, mainly concentrated in northernmost and southernmost regions, these wetland forests shelter 15 out of 17 mangrove species found in the Indian Ocean. Although research on these eco-rich sanctuaries is limited, Maldivian mangroves are home to impressive biodiversity. Crabs and nerites, along with numerous species of reef fish, seabirds, sharks, and rays depend on mangroves as nesting sites.

Our ancestors have coexisted with these primordial ecosystems since they first arrived on these shores. This proximity weaved the mangroves into our culture, economy, and history. Kuredi or ironwood from the mangrove species pemphis acidula was historically used in shipbuilding and construction. This was the timber source used to build the Kalhuohfummi, the fabled ship that carried Muhammad Thakurufaanu as he rebelled against the Portuguese invasion in the 1500s. Marine and floral ecosystems offered lifesaving food reserves to islands like Neykurendhoo and Kelaa during leaner seasons. Small leaf-orange mangroves or Kan'doo helped citizens of Kelaa survive Bodu Thadhu, the famine that hit Maldives during the Second World War.

While Maldivians reaped commercial benefits from resources like timber and edible plant species since antiquity, I believe that the imprints left by mangroves on our folklore and culture deserve to be honored. Beloved bird species from Maldivian folk literature like the Maakana and Fidhana nest in mangroves. In one idiom, ancestral wisdom urging us to finish what we start is neatly wrapped in the metaphor of Kan'doo and the painstaking process required to prepare it. The cautionary tale of Kuhlhavah Falu Raanee is still well-loved today — a reminder of our roots and humble beginnings.

In contemporary Maldivian society, the innate and deep significance attached to mangroves are overshadowed by more 'Instagrammable' locales like coral reefs, blue lagoons, and pristine beaches. Though these places iconify the Maldives in their own right, this trend speaks to how mangroves are often viewed as dark, overgrown, unpleasant, and even unnecessary. It hints at how several wetlands face issues from communal waste dumping and suffer ill effects from poor agricultural practices. Interferences from human activities like these can wreak havoc on mangrove species which exist at the edge of their tolerance limits after having adapted to extremely harsh natural conditions. This vulnerability was underscored by the mass mangrove die-off observed in 11 northern islands in 2019. Even though the phenomenon was linked to an overgrowth of a particular bacteria, state research has yet to be incorporated into a targeted effort to address the problem.

Mohamed Ibrahim (unsplash)

Muhammadh Saamy (unsplash)

Muhammadh Saamy (unsplash)

These mounting threats are only the backdrop of the Maldivian mangroves' plight. The final manmade nail in the coffin manifests as large-scale development projects seeking to pave over these eco-rich areas with concrete. One of the most horrifying examples is the 2017 ecocide of the vast mangrove in Kulhudhuffushi — an island named for its expansive wetland area. All concerns raised by a collective of NGOs, the local public, and international organizations were swept under the rug to construct an airport, summarily ignoring EIA recommendations to safeguard the surviving mangrove.

Saffu (unsplash)

The shift from idyllic coexistence with nature to the present-day status quo makes more sense in the context of our economic metamorphosis. In the past decades, the political machine has engineered immense public demand for lifting the Maldives into a 'middle-income' status within the timeframe of only a few decades. This desperation to haul Maldives into the 21st century's hyper-capitalist geopolitical theater as a so-called "emerging" market economy has muddled our priorities and definitions. "Progress" (i.e., tharaggee) is often viewed by policymakers — across all political parties and their myriad representatives — in terms of tangible infrastructure and financial inflows.

"tharaggee" paradigm has led to a dire economic reality in which eco-rich areas are paved over with concrete while several islands remain, to this day, without adequate sanitation systems. In 2017, it was this obsession that displaced 200 families living in the vicinity of the Kulhudhuffushi mangrove and destroyed a traditional coir-rope industry valued at approximately 9.3 million rufiyaa per annum. The displaced families and female rope weavers who utilized the mangrove for coconut husk preparation were neither consulted nor compensated.

The price of "tharaggee" continues to be paid with our biodiversity, environmental heritage, and the human lives connected to them. The Maldivian economic machine has propelled its masters into the geopolitical stage's "emerging" markets, but the machine's failure to acknowledge the sheer ecological and monetary value represented by healthy reefs, seagrass beds, and mangrove forests is a fatal flaw.

"There is no benefit to destroying our ecosystems," aptly stated Humaidha Abdul Ghafoor, a volunteer for Save Maldives. She emphasized the vital ecosystem services provided by mangroves that are collectively valued at up to 57,000 dollars per hectare every year.

These services range from boosting soil nutrient content to fortifying coastlines against erosion and supplying freshwater lenses. This is not to mention their central role in defending numerous islands from the brunt of the 2004 tsunami, and the fact that mangroves are highly efficient carbon sinks that could represent the Maldives' most impactful act of resilience against the climate crisis.

Saffu (unsplash)

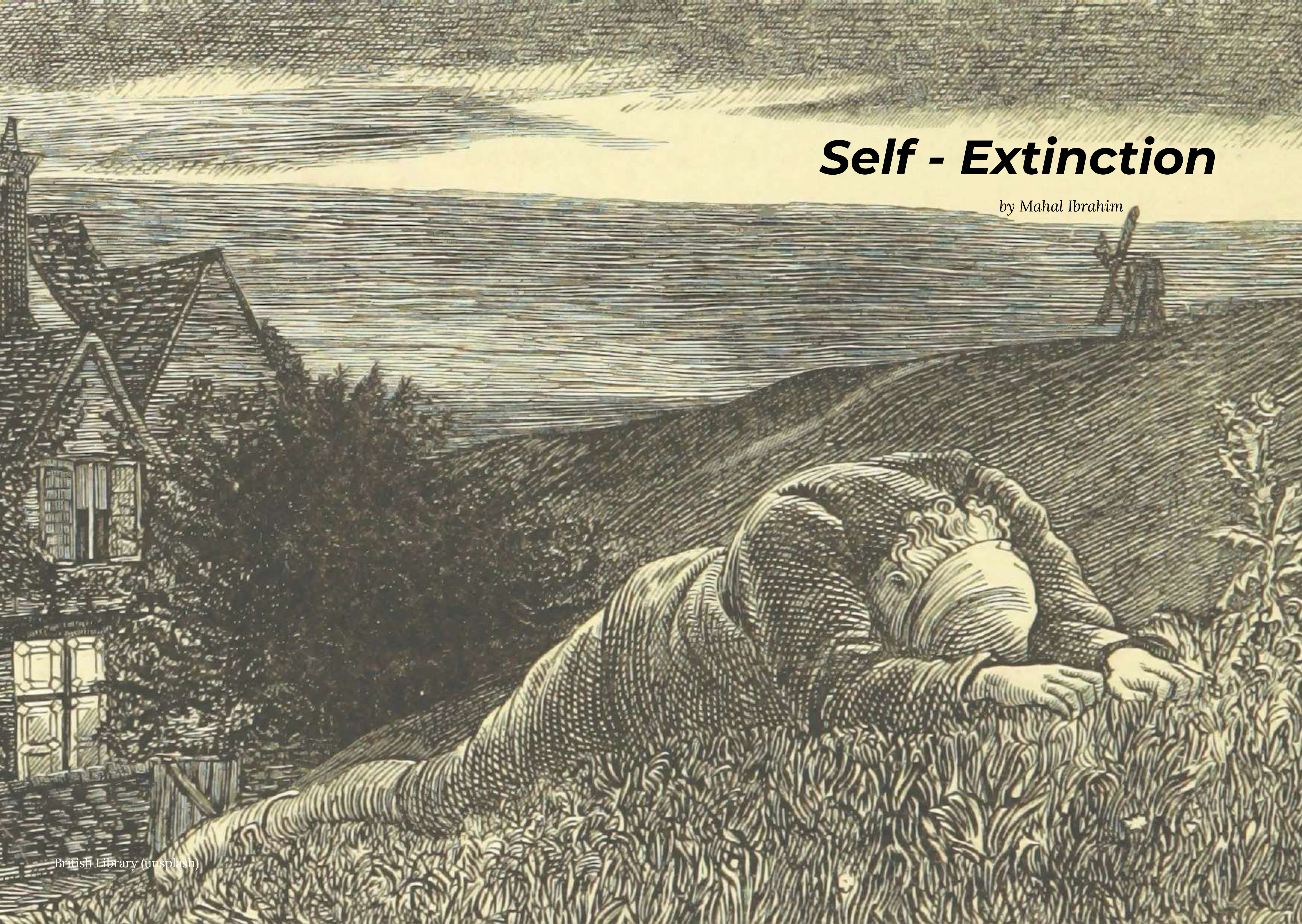
Husen Siraaj Kejr (unsplash)

Amid poor implementation of already meager measures to safeguard mangroves, I am left wondering whether my grief over not having experienced these sanctuaries before their degradation or complete destruction has any relevance. As we move through the day-to-day tedium of grappling with bigger concerns, I wonder if my sorrow has any value — and if it does, what currency could I possibly measure that with?

If our existentially validated advocacy for climate concerns as a nation — combined with an understanding of the mangroves' irreplaceable environmental value — has failed to materialize meaningful protection, perhaps the solution lies elsewhere. Placing our fingers on the deeper pulse that connects mangrove forests to the core of our ancient societies, cultural lineage, and bittersweet memories might serve as more potent fuel for our endeavors to safeguard them. Generations of coexistence with these ecosystems has left an imprint on Maldivian traditions, folklore, and identity — a cultural heritage our descendants have the right to inherit and experience.

Self - Extinction

by Mahal Ibrahim



British Library (unsplash)

Stories about the past, present, and future; stories about people, things, events, and places; and stories about our lives — stories transmit narrative. Narratives shape how we interpret our lives and what happens in them. The stories we identify with and reject form our communities' political core. The social, cultural, political, and personal choices we make stem from stories we accept.

Stories drive people to subjugate others, seek freedom, fight and abolish wars, make changes, preserve lifestyles, justify atrocities, advocate for peace, pursue dreams, fall in love, and pick friends and enemies. Stories shape our lives, personalities, and even collective experiences. Stories command power.

People accord power to stories through conviction. The more we identify with a story, the stronger its power grows — and the more influential its protagonists, ideals, and messages become.

The modern world's story setting is unique. An existential threat looms above us all: overshoot, rising tides, boiling temperatures, vanishing creatures, burning forests, melting glaciers, dying crops, and rapidly increasing disasters. This is our setting: it's undoubtedly where our stories are taking place today. When abnormal ecological crises keep rapidly breaking previous records and shattering previous predictions, their symptoms become our undeniable reality.

Climate change, climate crisis, global warming, global boiling…

…No matter what your intentions are and despite how adamantly you believe this is a political crisis, this framing inevitably depoliticises it. The language communicates symptoms over cause, describing the crisis as economic and technological externalities. Global boiling and climate crises are undeniably real symptoms, but this initial framing displaces the story's political nature. Our story is often narrated like so:

With the Industrial Era's advent, humanity began expanding rapidly and consuming greater energy for greater technology. The population expansion and excessive resource consumption has led to rapid changes to the climate and environment. Ultimately, we must find an alternative that can keep up with our socio-economic demands.

Idylls of the king, Vivien, Elaine, Enid, Guinevere

Do you see the trick here?

Let's deconstruct this framing,

as innocent as it sounds.

Deconstructing the Narrative

Think about the narrative discussed in the prior section: it places responsibility on our shoulders. Not the corporations, industries, institutions, and political powers, no; only we have to do something, apparently.

Forget the exploitative manufacturers, fossil fuel giants, industrial polluters, the automobile-infrastructural complex, and the actions of the billionaire elite. This is all our fault. The 'consumer' is responsible for what they consume — as dehumanising as that word is, although we seem to describe ourselves with it nowadays.

That's the first strategy: engineer the profitable myth of individual responsibility. "Everyone else should change, not us!"

The "climate change" story is one that the world has largely come to accept. Denialists aren't the key antagonists of this story anymore; we have already won that fight. The climate crisis itself is now a theatre of war in language and narrative — we are engaged in a battle for how we narrate climate change.

The second narrative strategy, though, is the most horrifying one: to frame the situation as an inevitability of the human condition. Recall this framing from the last section:

...we must find an alternative that can keep up with our socio-economic demands.

Das Welttheater, oder die allgemeine Weltgeschichte von der Schöpfung bis zum Jahr 1840

This is where the wicked ingenuity of this narrative lies. In other words, our socio-economic demands necessitate excessive energy supply. How can we ever replace fossil fuels without a complete societal breakdown?

This is the moral expressed with this story: “we can’t stop fossil fuels because our economy will collapse, so we must wait for miraculous technological solutions first — and do nothing about manufactured demand for excessive resource/energy consumption because it is too expensive (for us, the ruling class)”.

This sounds like a ridiculous strawman until you factor in how convenient this narrative is for the corporate world as it pushes for green growth: decoupling GDP growth from emissions, that is. Never mind that GDP is a horrible index to measure social progress with.

Economic Growth: The Invisible Character

I mean, sure, it sounds noble — let the economy grow and reduce emissions…but the fact this sounds innocent is precisely why deconstructing how we use language is so important.

Let me be clear from the start: green growth — “decoupling” GDP from emissions — is an empirical impossibility: you just can’t do it effectively enough quickly enough, even in the best possible circumstances. That is also notwithstanding the sheer humanitarian and environmental costs of the ecomodernist green-growth future, like lithium colonialism in the global south [1][2][3].

Should we, for example, keep vainly cleaning up after plastic polluters, or should we diminish plastic manufacturing and scale down supply chain logistics systems that rely on plastics? Not that cleaning up is bad; the point is that we need to stop the source of pollution.

This is but one facet among the many where our efforts to mitigate the destructive externalities of the capitalist obsession with growth are hindered by the fact that the root causes of said externalities — owing to the pursuit of endless “economic growth” — are left unaddressed. Even though mitigating these externalities is an important task, what we’re doing is the figurative equivalent of putting out fires while an active arsonist is still on the loose. Putting out fires is good, but…maybe catch and stop the arsonists too?

The façade of growthism only benefits industrial and corporate powers — not anyone else, let alone the world. It tells us that we cannot stop fossil fuels immediately until we replace our current economic consumption demands and infrastructure with technological solutions that we will never arrive to in time and cannot afford.

The antithesis to that is simple: degrowth.

In other words: reduce excess energy and resource demands in the global north; reduce inequality by redistributing the global north's disproportionate wealth (hoarded by its billionaires) proportionately to the global north's working class as well as to the nations in the global south; prioritise human and ecological growth over industrial profits and 'economic' growth; and generally, reduce excess consumption.

This would materialise in ways like building walkable cities with good public transit, ending planned obsolescence, scaling down energy demands for pointless consumer industries to ease the transition into clean energy, implementing universal basic income, and scaling down the size of our economies to prioritise social wellbeing and harmony with the environment.

page 537 of 'British Battles on Land and Sea'

Therein lies the double-objective of democratic eco-socialism: to simultaneously address intersecting ecological and social issues. The social, political, and ecological are inextricably linked. Like Chico Mendes said, "environmentalism without class struggle is just gardening."

Degrowth is a hard framework to sell because the first criticism anyone conjures up is that "it sounds negative", but advocates have already addressed this: the framing is deliberately negative because the underlying message is to challenge how we currently define growth and encourage a paradigm shift therefrom. The whole point is to generate dialogue.

Reframing Our Narratives: How This Story Ends

While there certainly is a wealth of discussion we can have about degrowth, the message of my writing is to reassess how we talk about this crisis, its source, and its solutions.

Realistic solutions do exist to this crisis — there is hope, but that all depends on how we see ourselves and others in this story.

The Earth is our only sanctuary, so it matters how we describe its destruction and what we attribute that to. If we tell this story carelessly, we will spend our already limited time pursuing vain endeavours — and one such endeavour is our obsession with 'economic' growth at all costs, filtering the fight for our planet through those miserably hollow lens.

With this writing, I wanted to point out the invisible villain in our story.

As writers, activists, creatives, and artists, it is our duty to paint this picture as accurately as possible — to tell this story in earnest without severing the undeniable links between the political and ecological. As the new adage goes: "the role of the artist is to make the revolution irresistible."

People are already contriving new descriptions aplenty, so here's my little contribution to that stream:
By allowing the ruling class in the global north to disproportionately consume our resources in pursuit of infinite growth — and by neglecting feasible political solutions we can implement because of their obsession with 'growth' — our species is effectively committing murder-suicide, taking many others with us.

It is time we moved beyond describing this — in the news, in conversation, in political dialogue, in academia — with terms like "climate crisis" or "environmental destruction." These are the symptoms and causes. Let's use terms to describe this phenomenon by the outcome and its perpetrators too:

Self-extinction.

MADI MIYARU KANMATHI

by Haim Hassan

Shark.

What is the first mental image the word shark conjures up? A bloodthirsty killer lurking in the depths of our oceans waiting for the next unsuspecting victim? Sharks are often portrayed through sensational hyperboles in popular media — as frenzied monsters lurking below, hungry for blood. While this may surprise some, this vilification has resulted in negative real-world consequences for sharks, affecting social vectors like funding appeals for shark conservation. This perspective, however, is changing across the world.

I have had several encounters with some of the world's "deadliest" sharks — each encounter was incredibly fascinating. The thrill of it leaves me seeking more.

Madi Miyaru Kanmathi, located outside the entrance to the Hulhumalé harbor in the Maldives' capital is an unlikely place to find such a diverse variety of life. However, tiger sharks, bull sharks, great hammerhead sharks, spinner sharks, lemon sharks, nurse sharks, white-spotted guitarfish, stingrays, and eagle rays frequent the spot year-around. Every morning, fishing vessels dump multiple barrels of fish guts, bones, and heads into this spot. This conjures up a shark feeding frenzy unlike anywhere else in this region. It is surreal to witness a tornado of stingrays underwater whenever a barrel is dumped overhead. Bluefin trevally, schooling bannerfish, surgeonfish, and triggerfish pick up the remains. Afterwards, the showstoppers appear: the sharks.

Photography by Mohemed Shafeeq

It was somewhat different when we first started diving at this spot. We descended by the pole used to mark the entrance to the harbor and stayed close to the reef as we descended down. To keep the dive safe, we went in with small groups to ensure nothing sneaked up from behind us. However, the dives were usually a hit or miss.

The diving procedures changed over the years to increase the possibilities of witnessing the sharks. We timed our dives to when the fishing vessels dumped their barrels. Instead of staying close to the reef, we jumped further out into the blue, closer to the fishing vessel. We had to constantly look around to ensure we knew where the sharks were. Inevitably, some dive centers and liveaboards took on the mantle to feed the sharks themselves. The methods were endless: hiding fish heads under rocks, using cages, and even dumping buckets full of kalhumas right above the divers.

Madi Miyaru Kanmathi was special. Sometimes, there were so many sharks and rays at once that it was impossible to keep count. We would see two of the most fearsome sharks up close: the tiger shark and bull shark. Despite their reputation, the sharks seemed mostly uninterested in our presence. They would sometimes encircle us a few times from a distance, making for some phenomenal pictures and videos. After they had satisfied their curiosity, they always returned to scouting for chunks.

The great hammerhead was always a crowd favorite, since they are becoming increasingly rare to locate elsewhere in the world. The divers at Madi Miyaru Kanmathi shared a certain camaraderie with each other. We would flash hand signs to our friends on other dive boats, letting them know the type of sharks we'd seen on the dive. Two fists near the head for hammerhead sharks, bull horns for bull sharks, and stripes on the arm for tiger sharks. The dives were special because divers and non-divers were learning about these animals threatened with extinction — through the pictures, videos, and stories that the divers brought back home. Madi Miyaru Kanmathi helped dispel the notion that sharks are aggressive. We are a bigger threat to them than they are to us.

However, Madi Miyaru Kanmathi was far from perfect.

The spot is a high traffic area for vessels. Visibility on most days was terrible, to the point we couldn't see the sharks until they were just a few feet away from us. Further away from the reef, the average depth at the bottom is about 45 meters. While it's illegal in the Maldives to conduct recreational dives below 30 meters, it was common to see divers intentionally or unintentionally exceed their depth limits trying to hover midwater in the blue. We had a far more limited time in which we could stay underwater at these depths due to faster air consumption and shorter No-Decompression Limits compared to shallower depths. Exceeding these limits would require a decompression stop before surfacing to avoid decompression sickness.

Madi Miyaru Kanmathi casts a strange spell on those who dive therein. Some divers would chase predatory sharks twice the length of their body to get a better picture, touch the tail of a bull shark just to say they did, or dive right under a boat throwing enough chum to summon hundreds of frenzied sharks. Maybe it was the adrenaline. Maybe it was the gas narcosis at those depths. For whatever reason, we seemed to want to put ourselves in extremely dangerous situations without any forethought about the consequences.

During one of our dives, the boat captain informed us that the fishermen had not discarded any fish waste in the water in two days. So, we lowered our expectations of seeing any sharks. But fatefully, two large tiger sharks greeted us at the bottom. Everything seemed normal at first, though they were more curious than usual. They kept circling us, until the circle slowly kept shrinking smaller and smaller. Eventually the larger of the two sharks made an approach straight towards us. None of us were trained to respond to a situation like this.

The sharks swam inches above us before going on their way. It was sheer luck and nothing else. If the tiger sharks had chosen to go into active hunting mode, no amount of redirecting or shark safety training could have stopped a half-ton animal swimming at up to 20km/h with a bite force of a ton.

It was a humbling reminder that we are mere guests in their home. Only that we were never invited.

Madi Miyaru Kanmathi gave us a lot to feel grateful for. A mere five-minute dhoni ride from the city, and we are suddenly immersed in a world unlike any other. We've grown to truly love and admire the animals at this spot. Though it deeply saddens me to say that we have also lost some of the respect that predatory sharks deserve. Their importance in the ecosystem is immeasurable. All it takes is one fatal accident for the media to cast them in a negative light. People underestimate the risks of diving with these animals simply because there has never been any fatality from a large predatory shark in the Maldives. The responsibility falls upon us to ensure our encounters are respectful towards the sharks and their space.

Diving with sharks and encounters with other predatory animals also reveal a strange facet of our relationship with the natural world. These animals have become a 'spectacle.' Merely witnessing them has become a recreational activity. I wonder about the limits of our relationship with these animals and the dangers of these interactions. Voluntarily swimming with these predatory animals for no reason other than recreation is relatively new in human history. We are still in the early stages of this relationship, and we do not know what it will look like in the years to come.

The diving community has managed to portray sharks in a completely different light to the world. This plays a crucial role in protecting these species for coming generations. I imagine a future where the behavior of these animals are studied further, and the dives to sites like these are regulated and supervised. I hope that when people hear the word "shark", they'll feel a little bit more empathy towards them, and understand their critical role in the balance of our ecosystems.

A Changing Archipelago

with Ashwa Faheem

Ashwa Faheem is a passionate photographer based in Maldives. With a Master's degree in Photography from Leicester, United Kingdom, Ashwa is incredibly talented in capturing powerful narratives through her work. From political landscapes, social issues, and ecological stories, Ashwa's work features diverse themes and narrative landscapes. She recently launched her own production house based in the Maldives called Sailt Studio, dedicated to telling compelling stories.

Hi Ashwa, what inspired you to start taking photos?

I was both intimated and fascinated with the camera since I was a kid. I remember looking at this square-shaped metal box with countless buttons. I was never really able to hold it long enough as a child but when I finally did I couldn't stop.

I think I was inspired at what the camera was able to achieve simply with a click of a button. I remember arranging random objects in the house (chairs, shoes, spoons, etc.) to take photos of them — and then to have that unremarkable moment captured permanently was mind blowing. That is when I started to take portraits of my grandparents.

Because what if I captured moments of value instead? What power did it hold? This is what inspired me to photograph. To capture moments of value and because we needed to capture them.

Photography by Ashwa Faheem

Since you have been taking photos in the Maldives for a long time, you must have a keen view of how the islands have transformed over time. Could you share some of the major changes that you have observed?

After traveling to more than 100 islands over the past 9 years, I'd need to sit down with a cup of coffee and watch some clouds pass by to reflect and refresh my memory on the changes that have occurred in the Maldivian islands.

As you approach any island in the Maldives, it might not seem like it as its beauty and the colors of the sea conceal its damage, usually. I'd say that these geographically isolated islands had faced major soil erosions over the past decades. The elderly are watching as their childhood beaches along the seas and the trees that provided for their parents drift away. Islands are growing smaller in size due to soil erosion, and as population increases, more trees are cut down to make space for infrastructure.

Speaking of the trees — it is also important to highlight that deforestation in the islands has grown common as the demand for space increases in these islands. These trees are incredibly valuable as it has protected and is still protecting the island and its people against the effects of climate change.

What are some of the most interesting scenes you've seen as a street + environment photographer?

Even though my story in photography started from photographing spoons on the kitchen table at my house, it somehow led me to photographing some extraordinary moments in Maldives and around the world. The camera has led me to many countless interesting people, places, and even "history-in-the-making" moments. From photographing ice glaciers in Iceland to volcanoes in Indonesia to virgin forests in Borneo to the streets of Maldives that fought violently for their rights. Maybe I was at the right place at the right time, but if it wasn't for the camera, I would be at home trying to figure out how an air fryer worked.

Do you think photography can inspire a sense of nature-connectedness? If so, how?

Photographs are universally understood. It doesn't matter which language you speak or what your education background is, you are able to interpret a photograph regardless. This makes it a very effective and powerful medium for communication, and even more so, for communicating information in the environmental context. Everybody has a camera in their pockets now, and we usually have the instinct to photograph beautiful sceneries which are also extremely vulnerable. Perhaps the more we share these beautiful places through photography, the more people feel the need to protect them. Once we capture these beautiful places, we preserve their integrity on the frozen images, and perhaps it is easier to notice how the place loses its beauty when you revisit the image years later. Maybe people will realize that we need to save the Earth before all its beauty exists merely only on images.

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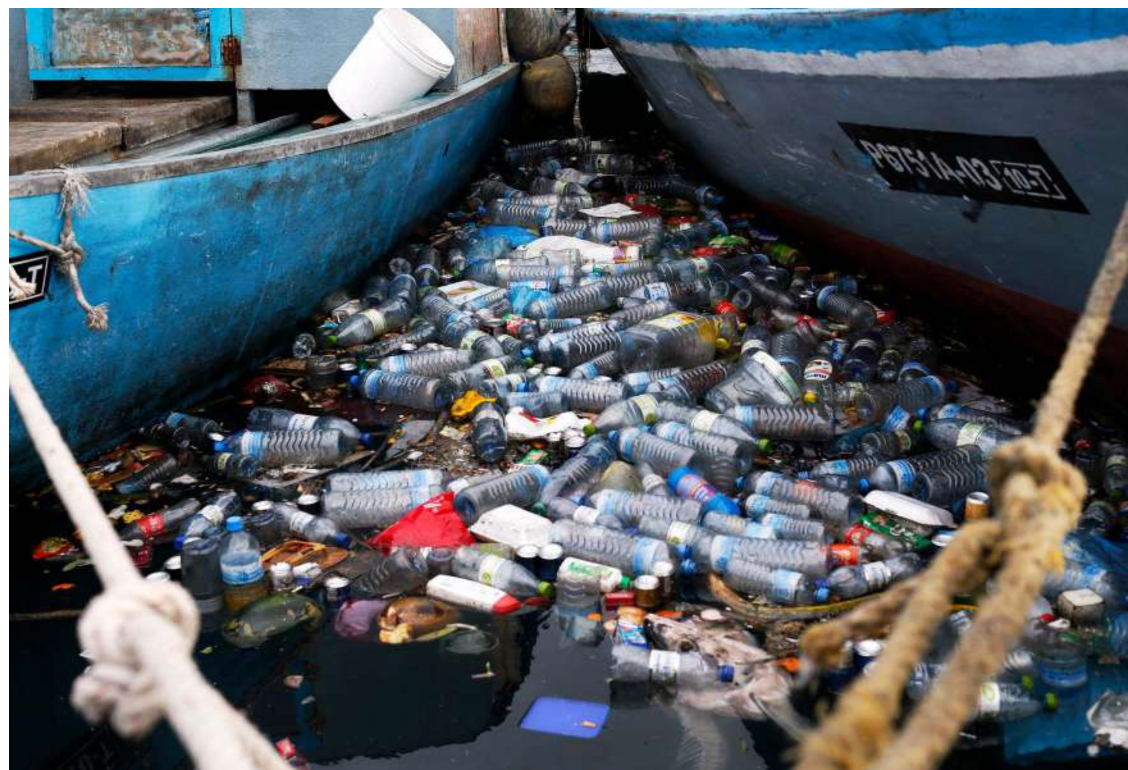


Which photographers inspire you the most?

During my teens, I was very inspired to photograph people and the stories they inhabit because of images brought by photographers in the National Geographic Channel. I learnt of an outside colorful world through the photography of Steve McCurry and I learnt the need to photograph stories of people through the works of James Nachtway. But I also didn't need to look further, as growing up in this congested city, the photography of my cousin Shifaan Thaufeeg always gave me hope and assurance that anything is possible.

Protection of Life must Defy Systems of Exploitation

By Princess Avianne Charles

Collage art by Ijunad Junaid

Hyper-capitalist labor exploitation has a powerful place in conservation discourse — from fast-fashion's sweatshops to the lithium mines of South America. Conservation should not just be about mitigating symptomatic externalities. Honest discourse on conservation must factor in the role of the capitalist machine. It must interrogate the machine's myriad gears, among which the global north's consumerist demands and the resulting labor exploitation in the global south are included.

The global north's public — the consumer sovereign, as the economists would call them — must reflect on where their luxuries come from. They must reflect on consumerism's heavy toll on the laborers and environment in the global north and south alike. This article endeavors to highlight labor exploitation and demonstrate how it isn't mutually exclusive with environmental degradation. In order for conservation efforts to become truly substantial, we must explore this intersection.

The topic of conservation has led to an array of discussions and decisions that quite often exclude the dynamics of capitalism that are imposed on today's society. Exploitation affects the worker, other beings, and the environment, and exacerbates climate change. The harmful and hazardous effects associated with exploitation aren't exclusive. As it imposes threats to the worker, so does it for the environment and all else that exists. Due to this, conservation efforts are inhibited by systems that prioritize financial profits by any harmful means. For conservation efforts to center the protection of all forms of life, the systems that center exploitation must cease.

Capitalist efforts require exploitation to persist to acquire as much financial profit as possible. This includes environmental exploitation and labor exploitation. Through the harmful practices reinforced, there are dire effects on the earth and all that inhabit it. Capitalist efforts center work systems that heighten the risks of pollution, environmental degradation, injury, and even death.

There continues to be a lot of coverage on how exploitative practices cause severe harm. Through Occupational Safety and Health, I've observed that workers remain at the forefront of harm. Such practices have led to workers facing musculoskeletal disorders, several injuries, disenfranchisement, workplace stressors, burnout, and death in some instances. Quite often, they don't have anyone but themselves to speak out against and resist these issues. This is evident in the current state of union-busting efforts that workers are fighting against. Through centering conservation on their terms, corporations are actively working to dissuade their decisions.

If the worker is not protected, how can anything else be? When management enforces practices that lead to high rates of pollution, fossil fuel extraction, and mining to name a few, these actions take a toll on all that exist in these spaces. This is evident amidst climate and environmental conservation efforts globally. Environmentalists, climate advocates, and eco-feminists have recognized the ways that exploitation inhibits their conservation efforts. There is a connection between exploitative work practices and the high emissions of greenhouse gasses that affect sea-level rise and extreme heat temperatures. Corporations continue their extraction at the expense of worker exposure and the environmental effects.

How can we evoke change? Knowing what we're up against, how can we collectively work towards safer and equitable systems?

2023 has shown many great strides in the intersection of labor, environmental, and climate justice, such as developing a Just Transition Work Programme. The sentiment remains that until the current state of exploitation ceases, this cycle will continue and even worsen in years to come. This realization has created immense concern about being a catalyst for change through Occupational Safety and Health initiatives.

Similarly to global constraints, the Caribbean experiences expansion of corporate greed and destruction. The desire to further generate and hoard wealth has taken an unfathomable toll on vulnerable communities. For a region that remains at risk for drought, ecological destruction from climate disasters, and human rights violations, the prevalence of exploitation precedes conservatory initiatives.

Amidst this, conservation efforts are more than just the worker. I believe that this is a continuous effort of conservation through understanding all that is at risk, whilst providing risk reduction strategies in the process. In essence, centering workers' rights must coincide with amplifying the rights of all life and the environment. To further engage in conservatory practices, addressing worker exposure to hazardous labor must take precedence.

This is where Occupational Safety and Health comes in, by being a guide for legislative obligations by the employer and employee to reduce risk and avoid harmful work practices. This defies exploitation as the concept itself is antithetical to a safe environment. While understanding the urgency to advocate for such initiatives, I've noticed that many working environments either do not have such regulations in place or do not have the necessary legislation to reinforce safe practices.

By acknowledging the gaps in worker safety and the effects, safety legislations, and policies account for how severely these impact one's life and the spaces they inhabit. Without them, corporations can continue harmful practices. More so, even with such legislations in place, many organizations still disregard them for their own agendas. We need a systemic change that significantly contrasts with the exploitative one that persists.

As I reflect on what conservation can become, I think about the worker and all forms of life that are negatively impacted by capitalist exploitation. Work is a part of many of our lives and is tied to our survival. As long as we are required to navigate workspaces to sustain our needs, such spaces must be safe. We must engage in work with the account for how our practices affect the environment and climate. It is a holistic approach that requires everyone to look beyond exploitative systems of labor.

Furthermore, at a rudimentary level, the global north's public must thoroughly reflect on their collective demands and lifestyles. While these problems are systemic and require changes at political and institutional levels, it is the global north's duty to interrogate where its privilege stands and what form of exploitation it legitimizes.

The Inner World

with Danielle Boodoo-Fortune

Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné is an artist and poet from Trinidad & Tobago.

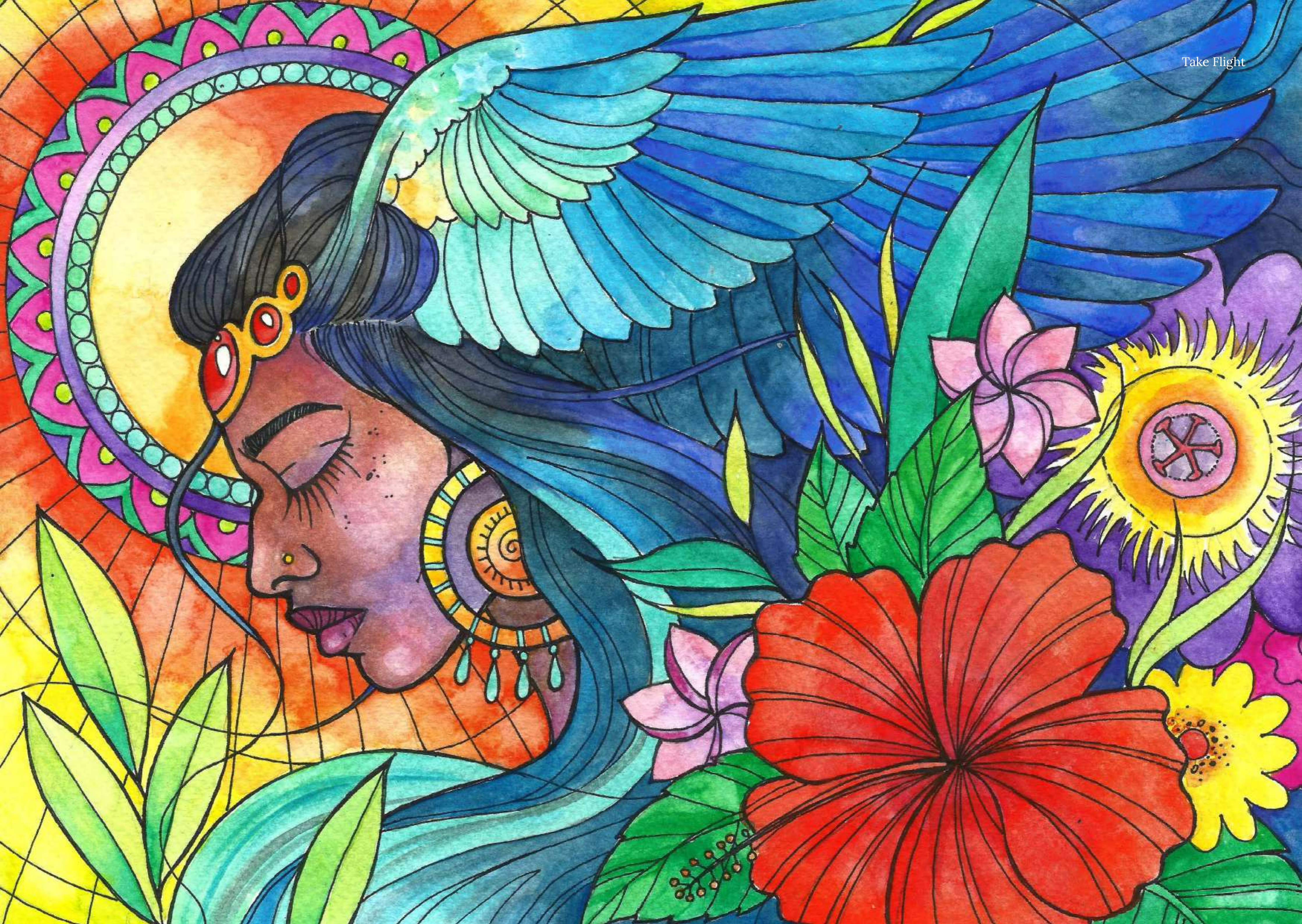
Her writing and art have appeared in several local and international journals such as POETRY Magazine, Poetry London, The Rialto, the Prairie Schooner, The Asian American Literary Review, Bim: Arts for the 21st Century, the Caribbean Writer, Small Axe Literary Salon, Poui: Cave Hill Journal of Creative Writing, Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal, Dirtcakes Journal, Blackberry: A Magazine, Room Magazine and several others.

Danielle is the illustrator of Lost! A Caribbean Sea Adventure (CaribbeanReads) and The Jungle Outside (HarperCollins Publishers) both written by Joanne C. Hillhouse. She has illustrated several other projects, most recently the EarthCraft Oracle Deck, to be published in 2021 by Hay House Publishers. Her first collection of poems, Doe Songs was published by Peepal Tree Press in 2018. Doe Songs was awarded the 2019 OCM Bocas Prize for Poetry.

I am Rooted yet I Flow

Danielle, could you tell us a little bit about yourself and what inspired you to start painting?

Art has been an important part of my life for as long as I can remember. I've been drawing as long as I could hold a pencil, and started painting a few years after that. I don't think there was any specific catalyst, because it was always present, always a part of me… always something I needed to do. I was a quiet, introverted child, and there was always so much that I could not bring myself to say. I was never quite able to put everything that I felt into words. Art became the only way I could express myself. It still is my most true language, the way I can speak the most honestly and fearlessly.



Take Flight

In the Sun

Your paintings often depict women entangled in the natural world. What is the significance of nature in your art?

I grew up in a quiet, rural part of northeast Trinidad. We were close to the forest, and some of that deep, unknowable energy was always present in our everyday lives. There was always a sense of mystery, and our lives were full of stories. I've always had that understanding that I am not separate from the natural world, that I am part of the body of nature, and part of everything that grows. I try to explore that in my art in ways that I would not otherwise be able to express.

What is your personal relationship with the natural world?

For me, nature is sacred, and it is medicine. It helps heal and inspire me. I keep a small garden, and I spend as much time in it as possible. I try to remain open and receptive to the wisdom of plants and small creatures, and to the quiet magic of the natural world.

Let Me Be Free

How does the culture and ecosystems of Trinidad and Tobago influence your art?

My work is deeply rooted in Trinidad and Tobago, in its culture, its flora and fauna, its myths, its history, in the lived experience of being born and raised in these islands. I draw upon this rich source for inspirations, for symbolism, and even for colour and imagery.

Do you believe that art can be used as a tool to inspire a sense of love and wonder for the natural world? If so, how?

I do. I think art can show us things in an entirely different way, and helps us see the extraordinary in the ordinary. My own experience of falling in love with art changed my life completely. Reading poetry, looking at paintings, listening to music... all these things transformed the way I saw the natural world, and continues to enrich and deepen the way I live in the magical place I call home.

What are some of the main themes running through your artwork? Do you have a particular favorite theme that you focus on?

I keep exploring the same main themes: landscape, womanhood, flora and fauna, myth, memory, magic.... And then there are the other themes I return to as well, like freedom, reproductive justice, motherhood and conservation. I like to think of it as a kind of spiral: returning over and over again to the themes that are close to my heart, journeying deeper into these ideas, and coming to different insights, meanings and visuals.

On Mornings Like This

The Light that Shines Through

Which artists inspire you the most from the Caribbean?

This is always a hard question, because there are SO many artists hailing from different backgrounds in this rich and diverse region whose work has inspired me along the journey. The ones who come to mind immediately: James Hackett, Wendell McShine, Shalini Seereeram, Tessa Alexander. And there are soo many others. It's hard not to absorb and be inspired, whether consciously or not, living in a region like this one. This is not at all limited to the visual arts. Lately I've been inspired by the incredible artistry of Moko Somokow, and the photography of Maria Nunes. I've been continuously inspired by musicians and writers as well. Caribbean poetry has been one of my greatest influences. The work of Lorna Goodison, Jennifer Rahim, Nancy Morejon, Olive Senior, Martin Carter, Wilson Harris… poetry has always inspired and nourished not only my own writing, but my visual imagination in my painting as well.

Find Danielle's work on Instagram @dboodoofortune

When She Speaks

Aishath Laisha Faheem

the colorful ecosystems
and the many life
of our tropical haven
raises her delicate voice,

daring and daunted
inevitably,
she pours and pours
into the hands of the blind,

clinging on to the hope
that love and kindness be reflected
yet growing into a broken world

there is so much beauty
in her ineffable nature,

the ebb and flow of the tides,
graceful dance of the flora and fauna,
the assurance that our home
is magnanimous even against all odds

surrender to the sonnets
sung by our mother nature
united by one purpose,

I plant a seed
that would grow into horizons,
resolute and pertinacious

So what are you waiting for?
after all, we Maldivians
Blessed with these islands
can be her guardians,
Let our islands live
when the hourglass is still running

Photography By Aishath Laisha Faheem

A Labour of Love From:

The Writers

Maiha Hameed Maiha is an urban climatologist by training and a science communicator at heart. An Erasmus Mundus scholar, she works in environmental policy and planning at the Ministry and takes an interest in issues linking the built environment to air quality, human health and climate change.
Writing: Concrete, Canopy and Boiling Cities

Zara Athif The vast ocean and unique island geography of the Maldives fascinated Zara from a young age. Inspired and curious, Zara developed a love for exploring the natural surrounding; the mangroves, reefs, and the beaches. Witnessing the unique marine biodiversity inspired Zara to document the environment through words and other mediums. Currently based in Malè, Zara works in environmental research at Small Island Geographic Society after graduating with a BSc in Psychology.
Writing: Custodians of the Ancient Islands

Mario Holder Mario Holder is a Barbadian artist inspired by the natural world and the relationship between humans and nature. Mostly through acrylic on canvas, Mario depicts a vivid and vibrant world full of awe and wonder.
Interview: The Nature of Nature with Mario Holder

Kwolanne Felix Kwolanne Felix is a writer, historian and climate and gender equality advocate from Port-au-Prince, Haiti. As a recent graduate from Columbia University, Kwolanne's writings explore international politics, environmentalism, gender and equality advocacy. She's worked with organizations such as the United Nations, the Malala Fund, and the Mellon Foundation. She has spoken on panels at COP27 and at the UN headquarters, where she discussed gender-responsive climate policy. Kwolanne currently works at the Climate Justice Resilience Fund and Black Girl Environmentalist. Kwolanne is excited to find new and creative ways to advocate for a just and sustainable transition
Writing: Echoes of the Caribbean and Whispers of the Future

Dhumya Ahmed Dhumya has contributed to the development sector, volunteering and working on projects primarily focused on the environment and governance. During her undergraduate internship, she contributed to groundwater aquifer projects focused mainly on socio-economic studies, further sparking her interest in environmental conservation work despite my educational background rooted in international business. Outside of work, she enjoys island hopping and channeling her love for community work wherever and whenever she can.
Writing: Greeting Swells and Depleting Wells

Mariyam Malsa Malsa is a writer from the Maldives. Her pieces are eloquent, descriptive, and blends powerful social commentary with themes of ecology.
Writing: In the Mangroves' Embrace

Mahal Ibrahim Mahal is a writer, artist, musician, and aspiring social scientist. He has prior experience in project management, editorial work, tutoring, and junior administrative work. He has also worked in university as a course representative in his first year. His goal is to become a university researcher — to eventually settle down and live a quiet life. His current research interests are political communication, social psychology, and the degrowth paradigm
Writing: Self-Extinction

Haim Hassan Haim is a seaplane pilot, divemaster and environmental advocate. Haim believes storytelling is the spearhead for change required to preserve the natural and cultural richness offered by our beautiful country.
Writing: Encounters with Predatory Sharks at Madi Miyaru Kanmathi

Ashwa Faheem Ashwa Faheem is a passionate photographer based in Maldives. With a Master's degree in Photography from Leicester, United Kingdom, Ashwa is incredibly talented in capturing powerful narratives through her work. From political landscapes, social issues, and ecological stories, Ashwa's work features diverse themes and narrative landscapes. She recently launched her own production house based in the Maldives called Sailt Studio, dedicated to telling compelling stories
Interview: Changing Archipelago with Ashwa Faheem

Princess Avianne Charles Princess Avianne Charles is a Trinbagonian writer with articles on human rights, labor laws, climate and environmental justice, and occupational safety and health.

Princess holds a degree in Occupational Safety and Health and is the recipient of the inaugural Peggy Antrobus Award of Excellence from the GirlsCARE Mentorship Programme. Her work centers providing safer spaces and risk-reduction strategies for communities and the environment.
Writing: Protection of Life Must Defy Systems of Exploitation

Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné is an artist and poet from Trinidad & Tobago.

Her writing and art have appeared in several local and international journals such as POETRY Magazine, Poetry London, The Rialto, the Prairie Schooner, The Asian American Literary Review, Bim: Arts for the 21st Century, the Caribbean Writer, Small Axe Literary Salon, Poui: Cave Hill Journal of Creative Writing, Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal, Dirtcakes Journal, Blackberry: A Magazine, Room Magazine and several others.

Danielle is the illustrator of Lost! A Caribbean Sea Adventure (CaribbeanReads) and The Jungle Outside (HarperCollins Publishers) both written by Joanne C. Hillhouse. She has illustrated several other projects, most recently the EarthCraft Oracle Deck, to be published in 2021 by Hay House Publishers. Her first collection of poems, Doe Songs was published by Peepal Tree Press in 2018. Doe Songs was awarded the 2019 OCM Bocas Prize for Poetry.
Interview: The Inner World with Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné

Laisha Faheem Laisha is a writer and poet from the tropical paradise, Maldives, Aishath Laisha Faheem aims to share her words to create a meaningful impact and inspire someone out there on the far side of the blue expanse. She is passionate about visual storytelling, capturing the timeless beauty of life through film photography. Beyond that, she is studying and working in the tourism industry, focusing on sharing her stories and experiences.
Writing: When She Speaks

The Editorial Team & Design

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Mahal Ibrahim	Managing Editor
Olivia Persson	Assistant Editor
Mansha Madih	Designer

About Moosumi

Moosumi is a publication that shares tales of culture, ecology and liberation from small islands amidst the climate crisis.

In our fragile era of violent environmental degradation, we turn to stories of joy and hope. We want to reconnect with ourselves, our loved ones, and the Earth on which we stand.

Moosumi is an ode to the rhythms and cycles of Earth and a love letter to those who revere our water, air, and soil.

Gratitude to the Iris Project and CoalitionWILD
for the support and guidance.