

Challenges for the climate justice movement: connecting dots, linking Blockadia and jumping scale

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Introduction

A 2015 special issue of the journal Mobilizing Ideas – “Expansion, Evolution, and Impact of the Global Climate Change Movement”¹ – was introduced by Jackie Smith,

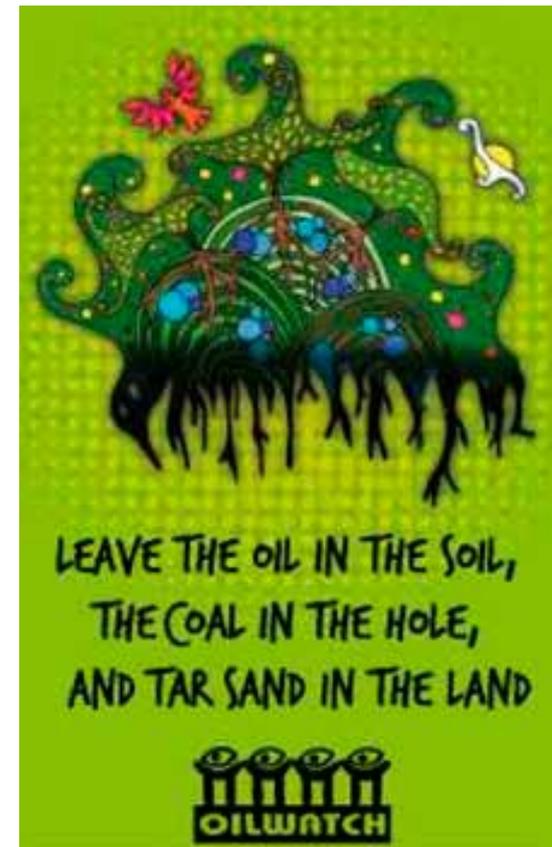
in the field of climate justice especially there has been a tremendous growth in organized anti-systemic resistance by low-income people of colour and people from the global South. From its origins in the early 1990s, the “environmental justice” movement has failed to gain the attention it deserves from social movement scholars...

One reason is the failure of global-scale advocacy as a result of the extremely atomistic nature of climate justice activism thus far. However, reasons Jen Allen,

fragmentation may be a good thing. In the absence of a global agreement, climate action depends on national and local responses. These newcomers to climate advocacy have mobilized new groups that can push for national and local climate action commensurate with science. Entering the arena of climate change governance, or “bandwagoning” to climate change governance, can be a difficult task.

Bandwagoning requires linking the activists’ traditional issue, be it justice or gender, to climate change in a way that will persuade those already working on climate change. The NGOs or social movements need to invest in information gathering and dissemination, relationship building, travel, and staff training. Moving between areas of global governance is costly, yet many have engaged in bandwagoning, and taken on climate change... For those who are bandwagoning, the goal is to advance their traditional issues as well as achieve climate action.

One site requiring more attention is Southern Africa, given the dangers of climate change for this region, but also given a profusion of bandwagoning opportunities that have so far gone unrealised. The strengths and weaknesses here allow insights into what can be done globally, with the aim of promoting stronger linkages and scale-jumping in the interests of climate justice. In 2015 the major opportunity to see the results of this process is the global climate summit in Paris. But it was in New York and then Lima in 2014 that we tested whether such a major activist initiative is possible, and what kinds of framing, strategies and tactics it can conceive and perhaps also implement. The central



¹ <https://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com/>

claim of environmental justice activism, to think globally and act locally so as to avoid reducing campaigns to Not In My Back Yard (Nimby), becomes yet more critical when the thinking globally must now become acting globally, integrating climate into all spheres of activism, and as for fossil fuel burning, demanding Not On Planet Earth! (Nope!).

Dangers of disconnections

When in mid-2015, less than a year after documenting the spirit of “Blockadia” with such enthusiasm, Naomi Klein offers this reality check, we need to take it seriously: “I’m continually amazed by the extent to which we fail to make connections between, for instance, a fight for affordable public transport and climate change.”²

Southern Africa’s leading environmental justice organisations struggling against injustices in the mining industry gathered in Cape Town to compare notes from February 9-12, 2015, as they do every year. The “Alternative Mining Indaba” (AMI) brought together more than 150 activists from vibrant African community organisations, another hundred or more NGO workers stretching from local to international, the most active advocacy networks, a phalanx of public interest lawyers, a few brave trade unionists and even some curious armchair academics like myself. It taught me the most sobering lessons about how even in a site well primed for climate justice activism, vastly more work is needed.

The kick-off day included a set-piece protest march to the gleaming Cape Town International Convention Centre. The target: the corporate “African Mining Indaba” attended by thousands of delegates from multinational and local mining houses plus a few of their side-pocket politicians.³ The AMI’s internal critics told me they felt the march was tame and predictable. It was.⁴ The march helped activists let off some steam, for they were angry at the blasé mood in both Indabas. Just beforehand in the opening AMI plenary, two charismatic keynote speakers – Zimbabwean democracy advocate Brian Kagoro and Matthews Hlabane from the SA Green Revolutionary Council – were joined by militants from several communities who raged openly against petit-bourgeois NGO reformism. Warned Kagoro, “We risk here, as the elite of civil society – civilocracy – becoming irrelevant. If you want mining to carry on, in just a bit more humane way, there will be another Alternative Mining Indaba happening in the streets.”

Perhaps with this bracing threat in mind, the march was followed by three days of exceptionally rich presentations and debates. The break-out rooms were filled with campaigning tales and most carried the frisson of outright opposition to non-essential mining. For example, asked the leading-edge critics, do we really need to drink fizzy sugar water (Coca Cola products whose profits line SA Deputy President’s Cyril Ramaphosa’s gorged pockets) from the tin cans (smelted in Richards Bay, South Africa, at a wicked cost in terms of coal-fired electricity) that we immediately toss away into the AMI hotel’s (non-recycled)

2 http://www.climateandcapitalism.com/2015/05/10/naomi-klein-to-fight-climate-change-we-must-fight-capitalism-2/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+climateandcapitalism%2FpEtD+%28Climate+and+Capitalism%29

3 Money was the main reason no activists could make their case inside: the entrance fee was nearly \$2,000. For a taste of some of the grievances against the big mining houses, see the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre’s balanced fact sheet: <http://business-humanrights.org/en/mining-in-southern-africa-briefing-note>

4 The week’s best moment for confrontation was a small guerrilla theatre stunt just outside the convention centre. Pretoria’s Anglican Bishop Jo Seoka invited suited executives to drink the disgusting water that his grassroots allies brought from mining-affected communities. No one took the bait; and an amusing video resulted: <http://www.fin24.com/Economy/Mining-Indaba/Mining-bosses-dared-to-drink-toxic-water-20150211>

rubbish bin? To slow the awesome destruction caused by senseless mining, some activists suggested UN “Free Prior and Informed Consent” language as the best way for communities to deflect prospecting. Techniques to delay Environmental Impact Assessments were shared. Tax justice narratives came in handy, given the mining houses’ prolific capital flight and illicit financial flows. Still other progressive lawyers suggested routes into the jurisdiction of legal reparations. While most everyone complained of a Resource Curse in which multinational mining capitalists corrupt African politics, economics, environments and societies. Yet I had a clear sense that no one believed minor Corporate Social Responsibility reforms will ever treat, much less cure, the Resource Curse. Instead, the reforms discussed were practical handles for raising concerns, getting publicity, adding a bit of pressure, and giving mining-affected communities – especially women – a sense of hope and solidarity.

Still, the disconnects were obvious regarding the central issue of our day: climate change. To illustrate, there was a flashy red-and-white document produced about South African coal, containing explosive information and vivid photos of ecological destruction and human suffering. It is full of horrifying facts about the coal industry’s wreckage: of public and household health, local environments, and the lives of workers, women, the elderly and children (regrettably there’s no web link). This particular booklet does not hesitate to explain mining industry abuse via co-optation of the African National Congress ruling-party elites via

Black Economic Empowerment (BEE).⁵ The critique connects many dots, and certainly the particular agency that published it is one I consider amongst the half-dozen better international NGOs. Their grantees do amazing things in many South African, other African and global contexts. Yet the coal booklet offered only a token mention – a few words buried deep in the text – about climate change. Though coal is the major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, and although there is a vibrant world campaign against coal mining in favour of renewable energy, the climate crisis was completely lost amidst scores of other eloquently-described grievances.⁶

Drawing this disconnect to the agency’s attention, I received this explanation from one staffer: “While climate change is a great middle class rallying point, it has no relevance to people living in poverty beyond their empty stomachs, dirty water and polluted air.” As we learned the hard way at the civil society counter-summit during the United Nations COP17 here in Durban, this may be a brutally frank but true estimation of the hard work required to mobilise for climate justice.⁷ In the last comparative poll (done by Pew in 2013), only 48% of South Africans considered climate change to be a ‘top global threat’, compared to 54% of the rest of the world.⁸

Fortunately, the terrain is fertile, especially in the South African provinces – Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal – attracting the most militant and sophisticated attacks on big coal anywhere in Africa. They are carried out by a myriad of militant

5 Ramaphosa-style BEE translates into worse misery for the many, and enrichment for a very few such as South Africa’s deputy president. His billion-dollar net worth comes not only from that notorious 9% share of Lonmin and all that it entailed, but also from his Shanduka company’s filthy coal operations. With men like him at the helm, South Africa certainly isn’t going to kick the life-threatening Minerals-Energy Complex habit. See <http://monthlyreview.org/2014/04/01/south-africas-resource-curses-growing-social-resistance/>

6 <http://coalswarm.org/>

7 <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/durban-s-conference-polluters-market-failure-and-critic-failure>

8 <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/06/24/climate-change-and-financial-instability-seen-as-top-global-threats/>

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community and environmental groups, including Mining Affected Communities United in Action, the Green Revolutionary Council, Bench Marks Foundation (a progressive church-based research/advocacy network), periodic critiques by radical NGOs such as groundWork and Earthlife (the latter hosts a branch of the International Coal Campaign), legal filings by the Centre for Environmental Rights and Legal Resources Centre, supportive funders like ActionAid, and women's resistance organisations (supported by Women in Mining, Womin). Still, aside from communiqués by Womin feminists and occasional NGOs (mostly in passing), it is extremely rare that they connect the dots to climate change.⁹

Another good example of disconnecting-the-climate-dots emerged in March 2015, when South African Environment Minister Edna Molewa incited furious complaints from grassroots communities, NGO activists and progressive lawyers who fight prolific pollution by mining houses, petro-chemical plants and smelters. Molewa's job includes applying new Minimal Emissions Standards to 119 firms – including the toxic operations of Eskom, Sasol, AngloPlats, PPC cement, Shell, Chevron and the Engen oil refinery – whose more than 1000 pollution point sources are subject to the Air Quality Act. Ten years ago when the law was first mooted, these firms should have begun the process of lowering emissions. They did not, and as a result Molewa let 37 of them (mostly the largest) off the hook for another five years by granting exemptions that make a mockery of the Act. Yet notwithstanding their justifiably

vociferous complaints regarding these exemptions, South Africa's environmental NGOs (ENGOs) simply forgot to mention climate change. There was just one exception, Samson Mokoena, who coordinates the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance: "Not only has Eskom been granted postponements, but so has the largest emitter of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the country, Sasol."¹⁰ In contrast to Mokoena, one of the world's top campaigning ENGOs ignored CO₂ in predicting Molewa's decision will "result in about 20,000 premature deaths over the remaining life of the [Eskom] power plants – including approximately 1,600 deaths of young children. The economic cost associated with the premature deaths, and the neurotoxic effects of mercury exposure, was estimated at \$20 billion."¹¹ Add climate change (that NGO did not) and these figures would rise far higher.

The excuse for giving Molewa a pass on the climate implications of her latest polluter-massage is that the Air Quality Act was badly drafted, omitting CO₂ and methane. That omission allowed one of the country's leading journalists to report, "The three pollution baddies that can cause serious health issues, are particulate matter (soot), sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides." Surely in such a list, other Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions such as CO₂ and methane qualify as baddies? More than 182 million Africans are expected to die prematurely by 2100 thanks to GHGs, according to Christian Aid.¹² But Molewa "seemed to have developed a 'massive blind spot', ignoring how air pollution is transported over very long distances to damage human health in places far removed from the

9 <http://thegreentimes.co.za/women-stand-their-ground-against-big-coal/> and http://www.bench-marks.org.za/research/policy_gap_9.pdf

10 At its plant in the small city of Secunda, Sasol squeezes coal and gas to make liquid petroleum, in the process creating the single greatest site of CO₂ emissions on earth, and Eskom is Africa's largest CO₂ emitter by far when adding up all its plants together. See <http://www.moneyweb.co.za/moneyweb-south-africa/environmental-ministers-emission-relieve-slammed>

11 http://groundup.org.za/article/polluters-let-hook_2747

12 <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/Images/climate-of-poverty.pdf>

source of emissions,” alleged another international ENGO. But just as big a blind spot exists when that very ENGO simply forgot about climate change, even though GHGs are co-pollutants with all the other airborne toxins, transported over very long distances, and wreak enormous damage.

There is, however, one thing worse than neglecting climate change when you have an excellent chance to raise consciousness: assimilation into the enemy camp. In some cases, civil society degenerates from watchdog to lapdog. Naming what may be some of the most notorious include a multinational corporate tool called the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), whose SA chairperson Valli Moosa also chairs AngloPlats.¹³ Following Molewa’s announcement, and a day after the SA finance minister yet again postponed introducing a carbon tax law, WWF’s Saliem Fakir “welcomed the government’s commitment to the mitigation of climate change and support which showed that South Africa was leading the way among developing countries in terms of policy measures towards easing the burden on the environment.”¹⁴ When WWF meets a toxic polluter or a captive regulator like Molewa, it seeks a snuggle-not-struggle relationship. It is long overdue that it changes its acronym to WTF.

Behind the disconnections lies divide-and-conquer capitalism

In Naomi Klein’s brilliant new book and her husband Avi Lewis’ forthcoming film, *This Changes Everything*, we find crystal-clear linkages between

climate (“This”) and practically all other areas of social struggle.¹⁵ For Klein, it is the profit motive that, universally, prevents a reasonable solution to our emissions of GHGs: from energy, transport, agriculture, urbanisation, production, distribution, consumption, disposal and financing. Through all these aspects of the world’s value chains, we are carbon addicted. In each sector, vested corporate interests prevent the necessary change for species survival. It is only by linking together our single issues and tackling climate as the kind of all-embracing problem it is, that we can soar out of our silos and generate the critical mass needed to make a difference. But in turn, that means that any sort of systemic analysis to save us from climate catastrophe not only permits but requires us to demand a restructured economic system in which instead of the profit motive as the driving incentive, large-scale ecologically-sound planning becomes the fundamental requirement for organising life.

Is it therefore overdue, in civil society, for “capitalism” to be spoken about openly, even if this occurs now for the first time in many generations, especially in those politically backward societies – e.g. North America and Europe – where since the 1950s it was practically forbidden to do so? In much of Africa, in contrast, grievances against colonialism were so fierce that when neo-colonialism replaced it over fifty years ago, many progressive activists found courage to talk about capitalism as the overarching, durable problem (worse even than the remaining white settlers). In South Africa, anti-capitalist rhetoric can regularly be heard in every township, blue-collar (and red-collar) workplace,

¹³ Moosa was responsible for what, five years ago, the SA Public Protector termed “improper conduct” when approving the world’s largest coal-fired power plant now under construction, Eskom’s Medupi. At the time, Moosa was serving as both Eskom chair and a member of the ruling party’s finance committee, and signed a dubious boiler-supply deal worth more than \$4 billion with a company, Hitachi, whose local affiliate was 25% owned by Moosa’s party. The Medupi boilers needed to have 7000 of the welds redone. (The ruling party led the liberation struggle and regularly wins elections... but really isn’t too experienced at making coal boilers.) <http://mg.co.za/article/2009-02-18-moosa-acted-improperly-in-awarding-of-medupi-contract>

¹⁴ <http://www.iol.co.za/dailynews/news/draft-carbon-tax-bill-proposed-1.1824418>

¹⁵ <http://thischangeseverything.org/>

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and university. Here, Moscow-trained presidents and even communists who were once trade union leaders have quite comfortably populated the highest levels of the neoliberal state since 1994.

Talking about capitalism and climate is more vital than ever. To do so, though, requires a somewhat longer-term perspective than the average activist and NGO strategist has scope for, in gatherings like the AMI. If we do not make that leap out of the silos in which all of us have sunk, we will perish. We are so overly specialised and often so isolated in small ghettos of researchers and advocacy networks, that even our finest extractives-sector activists and strategists are not being given sufficient scope to think about the full implications of, for example, where our electricity supply comes from, and why mining-smelting corporates get the lion's share; how climate change threatens us all; and how the capitalist economy makes these crises inevitable. The solution? A critical part of it will be to think in ways that intersect, with as much commitment as we can muster to linking class, race, gender, generational, environmental and other analyses of the oppressed. Action then follows logically.

Looming ahead in Paris at the end of 2015 is another Conference of Polluters, or COP (technically, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change - UNFCCC). The last twenty did nothing to save us from climate catastrophe. Judging by early rough drafts of the Paris COP21 agreement recently leaked, another UN fiasco is inevitable. The Coalition Climat21

strategy meeting for Paris was held in Tunis on March 23-24 2015, just before the World Social Forum. There was hope that this could be a breakthrough gathering, if indeed fusions were now ripe to move local versions of 'Blockadia' (as Klein calls it) – i.e. hundreds of courageous physical resistances to CO₂ and methane emissions at source – towards a genuine global political project. The diverse climate activists present seemed ready for progressive ideology, analysis, strategy, tactics and alliances. Between 150 and 400 people jammed a university auditorium over the course of the two days, mixing French, English and Arabic. It was far more promising than the last time people gathered for a European COP, in 2009 at Copenhagen, when the naivety of 'Seal the Deal' rhetoric from mainstream climate organisations proved debilitating.

Recall that leaders from the US, Brazil, South Africa, India and China did a backroom deal that sabotaged a binding emissions follow-up to the Kyoto Protocol. In 'Hopenhagen,' even phrases like 'System change not climate change' were co-opted, as green capital educated by NGO allies agreed that a definition of 'system' (e.g. from fossil fuels to nuclear) could be sufficiently malleable to meet their rhetorical needs. That precedent notwithstanding, the phrase "A climate movement across the movements" used seemed to justify an urgent unity of diverse climate activists, along with heightened attempts to draw in those who should be using climate in their own specific sectoral work. The two beautiful words 'Climate Justice' are on many lips but I suspect the cause of unity may

either erase them from the final phraseology or water them down to nebulosity.

Beginning at an August 2014 gathering in Paris, a great deal of coalition building is occurring in France and indeed across Europe. The proximate goal is to use awareness of the Paris COP21 to generate events around the world in national capitals on both November 28-29th – just before the summit begins – and on December 12, as it climaxes. There was consensus that later events should be more robust than the first, and that momentum should carry this movement into 2016 (See Chapter 3). (The December 2016 COP22 will be in Morocco, a site where civil society is in conflict with the rest of the progressive world regarding what is considered Morocco's repressive, colonial control of the Western Sahara, which local Social Forum activists often defend.)

The initial signs at the Tunis preparatory meeting were upbeat.¹⁶ Christophe Aguiton, one of Attac's founders, opened the event:

In the room are Climate Justice Now! (CJN!), Climate Action Network (CAN), international unions, the faith community, and the newer actors in the global movement, especially 350.org and Avaaz. We have had a massive New York City march and some other inspiring recent experiences in the Basque country and with the Belgium Climate Express.

But, he went on, there are some serious problems ahead that must be soberly faced:

- there is no CJ movement in most countries;
- grounded local CJ organisations are lacking;
- we need not just resistances but alternatives; and
- there are some important ideological divisions.

Still, he explained, "We won't talk content because in the same room, there are some who are moderate, some who are radical – so we will stress mobilisation, because we all agree, without mobilisation we won't save the climate." This unity-seeking-minus-politics was reminiscent of a process four years ago in South Africa known as 'C17', a collection of 17 civil society organisations that did local preparatory work before the UN's 2011 Durban climate summit, the 'COP17.' Actually, fewer than a half-dozen representatives really pitched in throughout, and the big moderate organisations expected to mobilise financial resources, media attention and bodies ultimately did not deliver any of these. South Africa's Big Green groups and trade unions failed to take C17 ownership, to commit resources and to add the institutional muscle needed.¹⁷ Thousands came but the messaging was vapid and virtually no impact was made on the COP or on South Africa's own reactionary emissions policy. The final rally of 10,000 activists midway through the COP17 gave UN elites and local politicians a legitimating platform. Nor did we use the event to build a South African climate justice movement worthy of the name. So my own assessment of the 'state failure, market failure and critic failure' in Durban strongly emphasised the problem of excessive unity, without ideological clarity, institutional responsibility or political accountability.¹⁸

The solution? A critical part of it will be to think in ways that intersect, with as much commitment as we can muster to linking class, race, gender, generational, environmental and other analyses of the oppressed.

¹⁶ Quotes that follow are from my personal notes of the meeting.

¹⁷ I watched that process fairly closely, and with growing despondency. The first choice for a university counter-summit venue close by the Durban International Convention Centre was found to be unavailable at the last moment, so my Centre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal became an instant host for the 'People's Space.'

¹⁸ <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/durban's-conference-polluters-market-failure-and-critic-failure>

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Maybe it will be different in France, because their movements are mobilising impressively, with projects like November 27-29 mass actions aimed at municipalities; a Brussels-Paris activist train; a 'run for life' with 1000 people running 4km each from northern Sweden to Paris; the 'Alternatiba' alternatives project with 200 participating villages from the Basque country up to Brussels which will culminate on September 26-27; and for getting warmed up, on May 30-31, an anticipated 1000 local climate initiatives around the country. Yet the local context sounds as difficult in 2015 as it was in South Africa in 2011. As Malika Peyraut from Friends of the Earth, France pointed out, national climate policy is "inconsistent and unambitious" and the country's politics are increasingly chaotic, what with the rise of the far right to 25% support in municipal elections." Worse, French society will be distracted by regional elections from December 6-12, and with national elections in 2017, "there is a high risk of co-optation," she warned. No politicians should have their faces near these mobilisations, suggested Mariana Paoli of Christian Aid (reporting from a working group), as COP21 protesters needed to avoid the celebrity-chasing character of the big New York march. Al Gore's name came up as one whose own corporate messaging was out of tune. But Avaaz's Iain Keith asked, "Hypothetically, what if the president of Vanuatu came to the march – should we refuse him?" Vanuatu is probably the first nation that will sink beneath the waves, and the recent Cyclone Pam catastrophe made this a twister question. Without a real answer, Paoli replied: "What we are trying to avoid

is politicians capturing the successes of movement mobilisation."

Behind that excellent principle lies a practical reality: there are no reliable state allies of climate justice at present and indeed there really are no high-profile progressives working within the COPs. It's a huge problem for UN reformers because it leaves them without a policy jam-maker inside to accompany activist tree-shaking outside. The UN head of the COP process is an oft-compromised carbon trader, Christiana Figueres. Although once there were heroic delegates badgering the COP process, they are all gone now:

- Lumumba Di-Aping led the G77 countries at the Copenhagen COP15 – where in a dramatic accusation aimed at the Global North, he named climate a coming holocaust requiring millions of coffins for Africa – and so was lauded outside and despised inside, but soon was redeployed to constructing the new state of South Sudan;
- President Mohamed Nasheed from the Maldives – also a high-profile critic at Copenhagen – was first a victim of US State Department's cables (revealed by Wikileaks) which documented how his government agreed to a February 2010 \$50 million bribe to support the Copenhagen Accord (just as Washington and the EU agreed that the "Alliance of Small Island States countries 'could be our best allies' given their need for financing") and was then couped by rightwingers in 2012 and, earlier this month, was illegitimately jailed for a dozen years;

- Bolivia's UN Ambassador Pablo Solon was boot-ed from his country's delegation after the 2010 Cancun COP16, where, solo, he had bravely tried to block the awful deal there, and not even the Latin American governments most hated by Washington – Bolivia, Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua – supported him thanks to Northern bullying;
- in any case a jungle road-building controversy (TIPNIS) soon divided Evo Morales' supporters, and in 2013 the COP's progressive leadership void grew wide after the death of Hugo Chavez and the battle by Rafael Correa against green-indigenous-feminist critics for his decision that year to drill for oil in the Yasuni Amazon (after having once proposed an innovative climate debt downpayment to avoid its extraction); and
- Filipino Climate Commissioner Yeb Saño had a dramatic 2013 role in Warsaw condemning COP19 inaction after his hometown was demolished by Super Typhoon Haiyan, but he was evicted by a more conservative environment ministry (apparently under Washington's thumb) just before the Lima COP in 2014.

If you are serious about climate justice, the message from these COP experiences is unmistakable: going inside is suicide. It is for this reason that the original protest narrative suggestions that CAN's Mark Raven proposed here were generally seen as too reformist. Acknowledging the obvious – "People losing faith in the broken system, corporations sabotaging change" and "We need a just transition" – his network

then offered these as favoured headline memes: "Showdown in 2015 leads to a vision of just transition to fossil-free world" and "Paris is where the world decides to end fossil fuel age." Yet with no real prospects of reform, the more militant activists were dissatisfied. Nnimmo Bassey from Oilwatch International was adamant, "We need not merely a just transition, but an immediate transition: keep the oil in the soil, the coal in the hole, the tar sands in the land and the fracking shale gas under the grass." That, after all, is what grassroots activists are mobilising for. Added Nicola Bullard: "This narrative is too optimistic, especially in terms of what will surely be seen as a failed COP21."

Bullard was a core Focus on the Global South activist in the 2007 Bali COP13 when Climate Justice Now! was formed based on five principles:

- reduced consumption;
- huge financial transfers from North to South based on historical responsibility and ecological debt for adaptation and mitigation costs paid for by redirecting military budgets, innovative taxes and debt cancellation;
- leaving fossil fuels in the ground and investing in appropriate energy-efficiency and safe, clean and community-led renewable energy;
- rights-based resource conservation that enforces Indigenous land rights and promotes peoples' sovereignty over energy, forests, land and water; and
- sustainable family farming, fishing and peoples' food sovereignty.

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Just as valid today, these principles were further fleshed out at the April 2010 World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Bolivia, to include emissions cut targets – 45% below 1990 levels in the advanced capitalist economies by 2020 – plus a climate tribunal and the decommissioning of destructive carbon markets which have proven incapable of fair, rational and non-corrupt trading. Dating to well before the CJN! split from CAN in Bali, that latter fantasy – letting bankers determine the fate of the planet by privatising the air – remains one of the main dividing lines between the two ideologies: climate justice or climate action. A unity project is by no means impossible, and these are extremely talented organisers.

The world was left with the impression of vibrant climate mobilisation in far more difficult conditions on September 21 2014, after all. Cindi Weisner from Grassroots Global Justice Alliance reflected on the New York march, reminding how broad-front building entailed surprising trust emerging between groups – leftists at the base, big unions, Big Green – whose leaders in prior years would not have even greeted each other. From Avaaz, Keith reminded us of the impressive New York numbers: 400,000 people on the streets including 50,000 students; 1,574 organisations involved including 80 unions; another 300,000 people at 2650 events around the world; three tweets/second and 8.8 million FB impressions with 700,000 likes/shares. The next day's Flood Wall Street action was surely the most dynamic moment, what with the

financial core of fossil capitalism under the spotlight of several thousand protesters. But with corporate and UN summits following the big New York march and without escalation afterwards, the elites' spin was dominant and ridiculously misleading. Barack Obama told the heads of state who gathered two days later: "Our citizens keep marching. We have to answer the call." Needless to say the UN summit's answer was null and void from the standpoint of respecting a minimal scientific insistence on emissions cuts.

Since the same will occur in Paris, concrete actions against the emitters themselves were suggested, including more projects like the Dutch 'Climate Games' which saw a coal line and port supply chain disrupted in mid-2014 (See Chapter 4). In 2015, protests are anticipated over coal in Germany's Rhineland and we will likely see direct actions at Paris events such as Solution 21, a corporate 'false solutions' event where geoengineering, Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS), and carbon trading will be promoted. Likewise, ActionAid's Teresa Anderson reported back from a Narrative Working Group on lessons from Copenhagen: "Don't tell a lie that Paris will fix the climate. People were arrested in Copenhagen for this lie. No unrealistic expectations – but we need to give people hope that there is a purpose to the mobilisation." Most important, she reminded, "There is Global North historical responsibility, and those who are most vulnerable have done the least to cause the problem."

This is vital because in Durban, UN delegates began the process of ending the "common but differentiated

responsibility” clause. As a result, finding ways to ensure climate “loss & damage” invoices are both issued and paid is more difficult. The UN’s Green Climate Fund is a decisive write-off in that respect, with nowhere near the US\$100 billion annually promised for 2020 and beyond by then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. And, said Anderson, given the tendency of Third World nationalists to posture on this point, “Elites in both North and South are to blame, so it’s not a matter of pure geographical injustice. It’s the economic system that is driving climate change.” Looking at more optimistic messaging, she concluded in the report-back: “Powerful positive actions are in play. We are life – fossil fuels are death. Paris is a moment to build movements, to show we are powerful and will fight into 2016 and beyond to solve the climate crisis. It takes roots to weather the storm ahead.” Responding, former Bolivian negotiator Solon (now Bangkok-based director of Focus on the Global South) stated:

I think we need a clearer narrative: let’s stop an agreement that’s going to burn the climate. We already know that agreement exists. If China peaks emissions only by 2030 or if we accept Obama’s offer to China, we all burn. The Paris agreement will be worse than the draft we’ve seen. The point is not to put pressure for something better. It’s to stop a bad deal. We are against carbon markets, geoengineering and the emissions targets.



But perhaps the clearest message came from veteran strategist Pat Mooney of the research network called the etc group, describing to the mass meeting what he wanted to see in Paris: “It should start like New York and end like Seattle. Shut the thing down.” Back in 2009, just weeks before he died, this was what Dennis Brutus – the mentor of so many South African and international progressives – also advised: “Seattle Copenhagen!” The Paris Conference of Polluters also needs that kind of shock doctrine, so that from an activist cyclone a much clearer path can emerge towards climate justice in the months and years ahead.

In my experience, the world's most visionary CJ, post-capitalist politics are fused when Ecuador's Accion Ecológica eco-feminists find Indigenous movement allies and solidarity activists across the world.

Scale jumping

Global pessimism and local optimism: that's how to quickly explain CJ 'scale politics.' Or, better: paralysis above, movement below. This combination was on display again in Lima, Peru, in December 2014, at the COP20. That event provided an opportune time to re-assess global environmental governance as a site of struggle, one that has proven so frustrating over the past two decades. It was a moment to ask again, specifically, can hundreds of successful episodes in which communities and workers resist local GHG generation or seed local post-carbon alternatives, now accumulate into a power sufficient to shape climate negotiations? Will they be ready for Paris? Judging by even the remarkable events of 2014, my answer is, unfortunately, not yet. We need to become much stronger and more coherent in rebuilding the CJ movement, once so full of hope, from 2007-09, but since then in the doldrums – even though individual, mostly disconnected activist initiatives deserve enormous admiration, nowhere more so than in the Americas.

Lima came on the heels of two world attention-grabbing policy events: a United Nations special summit in September just after the New York People's March and Wall Street blockade, and the Washington-Beijing deal on a new emissions-reduction timetable. The COP20 offered a chance to gauge the resulting balance of forces, especially in the critical Andean countries where melting mountain glaciers and shrinking Amazonian jungles meet. Here, combinations of the world's most radical conceptions of nature's integrity

('Rights of Mother Earth', *sumak kawsay* and *buen vivir*) combined with concrete struggles to transcend the destruction of nature and its commodification.

In my experience, the world's most visionary CJ, post-capitalist politics are fused when Ecuador's Accion Ecológica eco-feminists find Indigenous movement allies and solidarity activists across the world. The Quito-based NGO had long argued the case for collecting the Global North's 'ecological debt' to the South and to the planet. But it was only when oil drilling was proposed in the Yasuni National Park – on the Peru border, deep in the Amazon – that the stakes were raised for both Accion Ecológica and the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities. They lost the first rounds of the battle: first, shaming Germany and Norway into making payments to leave the oil in the soil (an initial \$3.5 billion was demanded, as a down-payment on the North's climate debt), and second, once the money was deemed insufficient, a national referendum to protect Yasuni (regardless of payments) was not treated fairly by Ecuador's extractivist ruling class. But international outreach continues. As Ivonne Yanez of Accion Ecológica explained,

Now we are trying to join with the movements to reclaim the commons, in an effort to start a dialogue with people across the world. We want to see anti-capitalist movements fighting together in a new internationalism, beyond the solidarity with affected peoples in the way it is traditionally understood.¹⁹

¹⁹ <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/opinion/Is-the-Climate-Justice-Movement-Ready-to-Scale-Jump-Our-Politics-20141204-0065.html>

The Yasuni struggle and others like it – e.g. Bolivia’s notorious proposed forest highway, TIPNIS – force onto the progressive agenda this uncomfortable dilemma: are the ‘pink’ governments of Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Nicolas Maduro in nearby Venezuela capable of generating serious eco-socialist policies consistent with their leaders’ rhetoric? Or instead, are the new elites irretrievably petro-Keynesian, petro-Indigenous and petro-Socialist, respectively, with radical climate politics foiled by their economies’ carbon rentiers?

In more conservative Peru, the regime of Ollanta Humala swept into power in 2011 on a pinkish electoral platform. Yet the mining sector has since boomed, with disastrous impacts in the highlands and Amazon alike. Recall that in 2009, the Awajun and Wampis Peoples and the Interethnic Association for Development of the Peruvian Jungle (Aidesep) blockaded roads in Bagua, leading to a confrontation with the military that left 38 dead and 200 wounded. As Aidesep’s leader Alberto Pizango put it, “Thanks to the Amazonian mobilizations I can say that today the indigenous agenda is not only inserted in the national level and within the State, but on the international level.” Yet Pizango and 52 others are in the midst of being prosecuted for that protest.

To his credit, Peruvian Environment Minister Manuel Pulgar-Vidal admits that thanks to the threat of the “forestry market of carbon, people are losing trust and confidence around that mechanism. People are thinking that it can create conditions to lose their land.”

Still, Pulgar-Vidal believes safeguards will be sufficient. At an Indonesian forest debate in May, he asked, “What kind of incentives can we create to bring the business sectors to the forest?” He praised Unilever as “a good example of how a private sector [firm] can play a more active role regarding the forest.” Expressing faith in the ‘green economy’, Pulgar-Vidal continued, “What we need to do is to address the problem of the value of the carbon bond around the forest. The current prices are creating a lack of interest... disincentives to have the business sector and the investor more close to the forestry sector.”

This sort of vulgar-capitalist COP hosting is not a coincidence. The four preceding COPs, in Poland, Qatar, South Africa and Mexico, witnessed dominant local state actors co-presiding alongside UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) secretary Christiana Figueres. Following the power logic within their regional power blocs, they remained universally addicted to hydro-carbon exploitation, with one common, logical COP result: total failure to move world capitalism away from the cliff-edge. Likewise, the UNFCCC appears addicted to market mechanisms as alleged solutions to climate chaos, even after the breakdown of the two main carbon trading schemes: The European Union Emissions Trading System (EU-ETS), which has suffered an 80 percent price crash since 2008, and the US where the Chicago Climate Exchange (self-interestedly promoted by Al Gore) suffered a fatal heart attack in 2011.

Nevertheless, the UNFCCC and World Bank express high hopes for a new generation of carbon trading and

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²⁰Thanks to Edward Snowden's revelations about Washington's surveillance capacity, we learned how Stern and US President Barack Obama cheated their way through the Copenhagen climate summit in 2009 by listening in on the competition's cellphones, rendering hopeless a genuine deal that would enforce emission cuts. And thanks also to Chelsea Manning and WikiLeaks providing us those 250,000 confidential State Department cables, we know that the weeks after the Copenhagen fiasco were spent by Stern and his colleagues cajoling, bullying and bribing. They did so with such gusto that they even purchased (for a lousy \$50 million in aid) the tough-sounding Maldives Island leadership whose famous scuba-gear-adorned underwater cabinet meeting stunt in late 2009 dramatised that sinking feeling.

offsets in California, a few major Chinese cities and a layer of middle-sized economies including South Korea, Brazil and South Africa. In other words, ruling-class personalities still shape global climate politics far more than CJ activists, as witnessed in the futility with which the latter have attempted to influence the UN's Green Climate Fund (See Chapter 2). Between the coal, oil and mining barons who rule over recent COP hosts on the one hand, and a former carbon trader (Figueres) who rules the UNFCCC on the other, there has never been any possibility for getting the CJ perspective a seat at the global table.

The structural problem is simple: each national delegation comes to each COP with the agenda of maximizing the interests of its own corporations, which tend to prominently include those with industrial or fossil fuel assets. Hence their need to emit more and more

gases, and prevent a CO₂ ceiling from being imposed. A Conference of Polluters it will remain until that flaw is solved, or until the world elects governments possessing even minimal awareness of the climate threat and the political will to address it (the way they did in 1987 when the ozone hole's expansion was halted by the UN Montreal Protocol that banned CFCs). The COPs are also stymied because the US State Department's main negotiator, Todd Stern, looms over the proceedings like a smug vulture during a deadly drought.²⁰ With men like Stern at the helm, the COP20 broke the 'Climate Action Network' (CAN) and other NGO reformers' hearts, as have all others since Kyoto in 1997.

The UNFCCC's irrelevance at the time of its greatest need and responsibility will be one of our descendants' most confounding puzzles. After Copenhagen, illusions promoted by stodgy CAN member groups were dashed. As Bill McKibben put it, the presidents of the US, Brazil, China, South Africa and India (the latter four termed BASIC) 'wrecked the UN' by meeting separately and agreeing to eventually make merely voluntary commitments. Now add (Kyoto-reneging) Russia to the BASICs and, as the BRICS, the economic agenda signalled at their Fortaleza, Brazil summit in July 2014 boils down to financing infrastructure to ensure more rapid extraction; climate be damned. Still, the insolence of the Obama Administration outshines the BRICS, when cutting another exclusive side deal so soon before Lima and Paris. The November 12 climate pact with China clarified to activists just how much more pressure is needed from below if we are

to maintain warming below the 2 degrees danger threshold (not the 3+ degrees that Barack Obama and Xi Jinping settled on). Yet the bilateral deal actually reduces pressure to hammer out a genuinely binding global agreement with sharp punishments for emissions violations, plus the needed annual climate debt payments of several hundred billion dollars from polluters to climate victims.

As a result, rising activist militancy is ever more vital, as the window for making the North's (and BRICS') needed emissions cuts begins to close tight. I've been most surprised by the militancy emanating from what is probably the most difficult place to organise on climate outside China, the US. There, three networks – Climate Justice Alliance, Global Climate Convergence and System Change Not Climate Change – did an impressive job radicalizing the previously bland (Avaaz) discourses just before the People's Climate March in New York in September 2014. Two days later, 120 of the world's political leaders – with the notable absence of the Chinese and Indians – gathered 25 blocks away at the United Nations. The message they got from society was symbolised by the march route: instead of heading towards the UN building, the activists headed the other way, west. This directional choice was meant to signal that hope for action on climate change comes not from the apparently paralysed heads of state and their corporate allies, who again consistently failed on the most powerful challenge society has ever faced: to make greenhouse gas emissions cuts necessary to halt certain chaos.

Instead, momentum has arisen largely from grassroots activists, even those fighting under the worst conditions possible, amidst denialism, apathy, corporate hegemony, widespread political corruption and pervasive consumer materialism. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the place which according to Pew Research polling of major countries, suffers the second most poorly educated citizenry on climate (only 40 percent acknowledge it is a crisis): the US itself. (Keep travelling west and the country with the least knowledge of climate – only 39 percent are informed – emerges on the horizon: China. In Brazil, awareness is 76 percent.)²¹ So the main encouragement offered by the New York march came from the harsh terrain crossed, especially at gaudy Times Square: amongst the most culturally insane, ecologically untenable and politically barren on earth. The US not only suffers a congressional science committee led by Republican Party dinosaurs who deny climate change, but its civil society is populated by far too many single-issue campaigning NGOs unable to see outside their silos, defeatist environmentalists – many of whom are coopted by big business, and mild-mannered trade unions scared to engage in class and environmental struggles.

Nevertheless, it is in the US that the most extraordinary victories have been won by climate activists against coal-fired power plants (300 have either been shut or prevented from being constructed). In addition to a huge battle against Canadian tar-sand oil imports, which included 1,200 arrests at the White House in 2011, there are countless micro-struggles against

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²¹ <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/06/24/climate-change-and-financial-instability-seen-as-top-global-threats/>

22 That was surprising because the social media campaigning group Avaaz had paid for signs plastering New York subways in prior weeks, hinting at corporate greenwashing. "What puts hipsters and bankers in the same boat?," one Avaaz advert asked, on a backdrop of ocean water, illustrating the commonality of our plight. This was also a reference to the October 2012 flooding of Wall Street by Superstorm Sandy, shutting off the subway as waters rose to the tune of \$60 billion in damages – a profound wake-up call to the climate-sleepy, politically backward island of Manhattan. In my experience nothing but trouble comes from inviting bankers into coalition. After all, they cannot even sort out their own industry's messes, and evidence of their involvement in climate politics is appalling. Banker logic promotes carbon trading, in which the air itself is privatised and sold to the highest bidder. It has been a disastrous experiment in the European Union since 2005 where carbon credit prices fell nearly 90 percent amidst persistent scamming.

23 <http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/09/19/how-the-peoples-climate-march-became-a-corporate-pr-campaign/>

fossil fuel extraction and refining sites, whose activists made up the most vibrant delegations at the march. Many of the battles involve black, Native American, Latino and low-income people, who because of an exceptionally wicked history of environmental racism have had to take leadership where the 'Big Green' NGOs comfortable in Washington DC have failed miserably: insisting on justice as a central component of social-ecological harmony. This movement named itself 'Environmental Justice' in 1982 when deadly toxins were dumped in a North Carolina landfill and African-American communities fought back. In earlier times, the cry was 'Nimby' – but as critical mass emerged and links became clear between oppressed people who saw that their plight was not just local racism but systemic ecocide, it became 'Nope!'

In New York, a renewed Climate Justice Alliance was the main network connecting dozens of these struggles by people of colour, especially Indigenous Peoples, across North America. They offer a vision that includes a fairer distribution of costs and benefits of climate policy, and a transformative view of a world economy that must go post-carbon and post-profit if our species and countless others are to survive. What the march did, better than any other event in history, was demonstrate the unity of activists demanding genuine emissions cuts and government funding of an alternative way of arranging society. Whether public transport, renewable energy, organic agriculture oriented to vegetarian diets, new production systems, a shift in our consumption norms, new ways of developing cities (so as not to

resemble ghastly US suburban wastelands) and even 'zero-waste' disposal strategies, the huge crowd showed support for genuine post-carbon alternatives. Public health activists in the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power warned of resurgent opportunistic infections thanks to climate change. Anti-war activists connected the dots between global warming and Middle East and African oil, as well as renewed water wars. Democracy activists noted the Koch brothers' and other fossil fuel corporations' malign influence in Washington and state capitals. Dozens more such groups related their particular concerns to our more general survival.

Not a single sign I witnessed over six hours traipsing back and forth from start to finish promoted establishment 'fixes'. Society has been bombarded with 'false solutions' by business and governments in climate policy debates: carbon trading, CCS ('clean coal'), lacing the air with sulphur as a coolant, dropping iron filings in the ocean to create algae blooms (to suck up CO₂), biofuels which cause landgrabbing, nuclear energy, genetically modified organisms and other geo-engineering frauds.²² Many feared that for-profit 'Green Economy' gimmicks like carbon trading – resurgent now in California, China, South Africa, Brazil and Korea – would result from a big march lacking a central demand. As activist-writer Arun Gupta put it the day before the march, in Counterpunch ezine:

This is one of those corporate-designed scams that in the past has rewarded the worst polluters with the most credits to sell and creates

perverse incentives to pollute, because then they can earn money to cut those emissions. So we have a corporate-designed protest march to support a corporate-dominated world body to implement a corporate policy to counter climate change caused by the corporations of the world, which are located just a few miles away but which will never feel the wrath of the People's Climate March.²³

It was a valid fear, yet Gupta's critique proved excessively cynical. The prevalence of eco-socialist and anarchist marchers generated repeated anti-capitalist slogans. No one believes that the UN promise to 'put a price on carbon' can incrementally address the crisis, given how erratically the trading mechanisms have so far set that price, in a world continually battered by financial speculation. So the following day, several more thousand hard-core activists turned out at "Flood Wall Street," which the Occupy Wall Street movement helped prepare. The planning session I attended was beautifully illustrated by activists using the water metaphor as a way to show participants the ebb and flow of people, attempting to block roads and access to the stock market and nearby banks, amidst an anticipated police crack-down. Even though New

York City had a progressive Democratic Party mayor, Bill de Blasio, there continued to be persistent police abuses, what with the return of the notorious Police Commissioner, Bill Bratton. But on the Monday after the march, from 9am-6pm, around 3000 activists took first Battery Park at the island's southern tip, then achieved a seven-hour long occupation of Broadway at the site of the Wall Street raging bull statue. Though police ultimately arrested 100, what with the world's media glare they were under pressure from de Blasio not to bust heads in the process. From Cape Town, so too did Archbishop Desmond Tutu again call for divestment from fossil-fuel corporations, and reinvestment in post-carbon technologies.

But it was the surprise gift from New York to the world's climate justice movement that will be remembered longest: the hundreds of thousands who turned out plus a hundred thousand more across the world who had solidarity marches, showing conclusively that while there remains paralysis above, there is movement below. Climate justice received a new lease on life. What the movement does with this into the Paris COP21 and beyond is up to the creativity of the base, as it connects the dots to other issues, links Blockadia experiences, and scale jumps from local to global.

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