

Reimagining Climate Change  
*Edited by Paul Wapner and Hilal Elver*

Climate Change and the Anthropos  
Planet, people and places  
*Linda Connor*

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Responding to climate change has become an industry. Governments, corporations, activist groups, and others now devote billions of dollars to mitigation and adaptation, and their efforts represent one of the most significant policy measures ever dedicated to a global challenge. Despite its laudatory intent, the response industry, or “Climate Inc.,” is failing.

*Reimagining Climate Change* questions established categories, routines, and practices that presently constitute accepted solutions to tackling climate change and offers alternative routes forward. It does so by unleashing the political imagination. The chapters grasp the larger arc of collective experience, interpret its meaning for the choices we face, and creatively visualize alternative trajectories that can help us cognitively and emotionally enter into alternative climate futures. They probe the meaning and effectiveness of climate protection “from below” – forms of community and practice that are emerging in various locales around the world and that hold promise for greater collective resonance. They also question climate protection “from above” in the form of industrial and modernist orientations and examine large-scale agribusinesses, as well as criticize the concept of resilience as it is presently being promoted as a response to climate change.

This book will be of great interest to students and scholars of climate change, global environmental politics, and environmental studies in general, as well as climate change activists.

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## 9 Reimagining radical climate justice

John Foran

### Introduction

The science is not in question: climate change is here now, not in the future (IPCC 2013) and it is already having devastating effects on people's lives (IPCC 2014). That's the bad news, of course.

Even worse, the massive social, economic, and political inequalities already generated by neoliberal capitalism would seem to set the social and natural worlds on a collision course which the elites cannot win – even on their own terms – without destroying the basis for all human life. To put it bluntly, the climate crisis is perilous, our 500-year-old economic system cannot see us through it safely, the window for resolving this dilemma is closing inexorably, and the forces arrayed against our common survival are strong, *very* strong.

The good news is that there's a global climate justice movement that is growing in numbers, reach, strength, and inventiveness. This movement is impossible to encompass easily because it consists of literally thousands of organizations at every level – community, city, bio/region, nation, and the global – interlinked in a vast network of networks.<sup>1</sup> But *it is* here, and more crucially, represents a fundamental critique of business-as-usual global capitalism, what in this volume is referred to as Climate Inc. By placing justice at the center of climate change activism, it offers the possibility of addressing the root causes, rather than the symptomatic expressions, of climate change. Climate change is certainly a technological, economic, and governmental challenge but beyond this, and more fundamentally, it is a matter of widespread and deep injustice. From the mining of fossil fuels by low-paid workers performing dangerous tasks and the contamination that saturates extraction sites and power plants (usually visited upon the poor and politically marginalized), to the corporate encouragement of humanity's addiction to fossil fuels, the exploitation of the earth's commons, and the all-too-common pattern of having the most vulnerable suffer its most immediate and severe consequences, climate change exemplifies the exploitative character of contemporary structures of power. The climate justice movement aims to right these wrongs, and to dismantle and transform the

discriminatory and exploitative features of contemporary collective life. The quality and very viability of the future of life on earth may very well turn on its ability to do so.

The global climate justice movement is growing steadily, but it is still far too weak to lead the broader environmental movement, let alone mount a counterhegemonic challenge to the existing structures of power – at least for the moment. The next few years are thus crucial for its ability to scale up and transform the trajectory of climate change politics. In this period, it will be asked to mount irresistible pressure of all kinds on governments and on the corporations, banks, and all the institutions of neoliberal capitalism that they serve. It must *force* them to take decisive steps such as a fair and binding global climate treaty and a deeply sustainable post-capitalist society free of structured violence and run democratically by the ninety-nine percent. To rise to the challenge, the climate justice movement must be reimagined as a radical, revolutionary movement that aims ultimately at transforming the global capitalist system and its political, cultural, and economic coordinates. The status quo – characterized by private profit-making, unequal access to well-being, militarism, pervasive economic exploitation, and slow violence – needs to be confronted with an alternative vision, a “new political culture of resistance and creation” (Foran 2014c; Ellis *et al.* forthcoming). The global climate justice movement can usher in such a culture and encourage such transformation, but only if it is able to popularize and radicalize its activism. The movement has certainly demonstrated promise to date but it must deepen its commitments to radical social change if it is to marshal sufficient political power in the service of climate protection and social justice. By promoting horizontalism rather than hierarchy, active hope and joy rather than militant sadness, and – most importantly – justice rather than short-term benefits, the movement can reimagine a system that overcomes the ravages of global capitalism and achieves not only the minimal imperative of staying below 2° Celsius but our common dream of creating just, democratic societies. It seems evident that we will need to assemble the greatest social movement the world has ever seen to achieve these ends.

### The need for a radical climate justice movement

The need to radicalize the global climate justice movement rests on three observations. First, most mitigation and adaptation measures to date deepen the injustices that wrack the world. They rely on existing states and corporations to make small regulatory or engineering adjustments that remain tone-deaf to rampant inequality, exploitation, militarism, and other structural injustices. Indeed, they involve doubling down in an incremental effort to fine-tune the engines of the production and culture of consumption so as, at best, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They leave untouched broader and deeper causes that give rise to climate intensification in the first

place and fuel its acceleration. Conventional responses especially ignore the abuse of the weak and vulnerable who live on the frontlines of climate disruption; implicitly disrespect future generations who will experience climate change's increasingly disastrous effects; accelerate the mistreatment of the other-than-human world through extraction, pollution, and dwindling habitats; and in the end simply perpetuate the injustices that characterize present-day social life. In light of this, the climate justice movement adds a crucial missing dimension to climate mitigation and adaptation. To become more influential, however, the movement has to move even further away from those established mitigation and adaptation measures that more often than not support reforms compatible with existing socio-economic arrangements. The striving for compatibility and acceptance of current norms is precisely what hinders Climate Inc. efforts. The global climate justice movement must offer more.

Second, in December 2015, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) convenes the COP 21 meetings (the Conference of the Parties, in this case the twenty-first annual UN climate summit) in Paris to finalize the global climate treaty it has been working on for several years. The stated objective has always been to find ways to prevent earth from warming more than 2° Celsius, a target set by climate scientists more than a decade ago and agreed to by the governments of the world at COP 15 in Copenhagen in 2009 (it is now increasingly realized that the even more difficult target of 1.5° Celsius should be the Rubicon that must not be passed; see Anderson 2012 on the gravity of the situation). The treaty under negotiation may therefore represent one of the last best chances to contain the disruptive climate change that is coming our way and to preserve some dignity for individuals and societies. But every year that passes without action closes the vise more tightly on efforts to avert business-as-usual climate scenarios. The reason states cannot agree on international measures is their inability to appreciate how dealing with climate change is not simply a collective action problem or a technical challenge but fundamentally a matter of justice. Instead, the power of the corporations, banks, and free market-oriented private sector in general, so evident at the November 2013 COP 19 in Warsaw, has become that much greater.<sup>2</sup> The intense conflict between the interests of the global North and global South – with economic powerhouses China, India, and Brazil now lodged in between – remains as sharp and intractable as ever in a stand-off that makes the chances of finding pathways to a less than 2° Celsius world look vanishingly small.

Third, the fact that historically the initial efforts to address climate change came out of a white, middle-class, Northern environmental movement means they share the conceptual and political baggage of a centuries-old process of development that has systematically undermined the possibilities for social justice. Inspired in the US by the rise of environmental justice movements, the climate justice movement initially appeared as an external critique aimed at pushing environmentalism toward greater

sensitivity for the poor and underprivileged. More recently, mainstream activist groups, think tanks, and other elements of the broader environmental movement have embraced the term as a meaningful and inspiring goal. This is certainly to be welcomed but should also induce caution. The global climate justice movement must work against being coopted lest it see its core value of social justice diluted. The weight of white, middle-class environmentalism is heavy and not easily dismissed. The climate justice movement can do this by embracing further the energy and conceptual insights of youth, the voices of the global South and the marginalized populations of the global North, and the participation of women and other oppressed genders in its ongoing efforts. Such measures are requirements for both justice and political success.

Until very recently, the broader climate movement has not taken justice seriously enough. That is, many activists, scientists, policymakers, and much of the general public have been conceiving the problem as an economic, technological, ecological, or conventional political challenge rather than a moral and human one, and thus their best efforts have failed to address the root causes of climate change. The emergence of the climate justice movement provides a necessary corrective. By centering “justice,” the fight against climate change can no longer be about environmental arguments, economic modeling, or the give and take of party politics, but must address the injustices at the center of our governmental, economic, technological, and cultural systems – injustices having to do with economic exploitation, racism, patriarchy, violence, and income inequality. The climate justice movement can reach out more successfully to environmentalism and pursue an agenda of genuine change to the degree that it embodies system change in the service of greater justice.

Of course, in doing this we must also ask about the deficits and blind spots of the climate justice movement. The challenge is not merely figuring out how to “scale-up” from local to global organizing of ever-increasing numbers. By asking if the climate justice movement is doing everything it can, or what it might do more lovingly to kindle the commitment of the larger climate movement to justice, we are looking for more creative ways to “reimagine” climate justice. This involves some serious playfulness with the various meanings and contextual applications of the idea of justice itself. Too often the movement merely invokes an ambiguous notion of justice assuming that it enjoys universal understanding and support. As such, justice appears as a mere call to make things nicer, fairer, more equal, and simply kinder. Such a generic, soft sense of justice can work against the movement since it lacks the ability to generate sufficient critical insight and momentum to actually transform societies. Put differently, the movement needs to clarify, intensify, and insist upon a commitment to eradicate the specific conditions that encourage exploitation, the exclusion of the underprivileged (including the more-than-human world), and gross moral blindness toward those on the receiving end of climate change.

### The present moment: an earth in crisis

One way to think of the present moment and the foreseeable future is as a collision of three large entities: capitalism, climate change, and all the movements for social and climate justice. This clash is itself nested inside a *triple crisis* consisting of:

- economic uncertainty and increasingly unequal access to well-being (*el buen vivir*<sup>3</sup>) in the age of neoliberal capitalist globalization and profound economic crisis;
- despite this, and indeed because of it, there has been a corresponding waning of public confidence in political parties (the “democratic deficit”);
- and because of both, we have economies and cultures saturated with militarism and endemic violence.

These are now bound together and exacerbated by the wild card of climate chaos, and all of this would seem to auger a perfect storm of crisis.

With climate change, we are faced with a “wicked” problem. Such problems are:

difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize ... Moreover, because of complex interdependencies, the effort to solve one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal or create other problems ... A problem whose solution requires a great number of people to change their mindsets and behavior is likely to be a wicked problem.

(Wikipedia 2015, citing the Australian Public Service Commission 2007)<sup>4</sup>

For wicked theorists like Kelly Levin and her colleagues, many social problems present challenges in the above sense. Climate change, on the other hand, is a *super* wicked problem, characterized by four further features. Three of these are:

- time is running out;
- those seeking to end the problem (humans, and more precisely, global elites) are also causing it; and
- it is a global collective action problem overseen by at best a weak central authority (as anyone who has ever witnessed a UN climate summit can attest).

All of which lead to the fourth obstacle:

Partly as a result of the above three features, super wicked problems generate a situation in which the public and decision makers, even in

the face of overwhelming evidence of the risks of significant or even catastrophic impacts from inaction, make decisions that disregard this information and reflect very short time horizons. It is this very feature that has frustrated so many climate policy advocates.

(Levin *et al.* 2012)

The interdependency of the several crises besetting us is significant; it means that we need to learn to connect the dots in confronting the climate crisis, and that the many intersecting struggles that call for justice must somehow be understood and acted upon together. The upside of dealing with such a complex crisis is that progress in any sphere of it can alter the balance of forces for the better in others, and that synergies among movements can emerge if they form strong alliances.

Another upside of wrestling with a super wicked problem is that one can identify centralized strands that animate the problem. The climate justice movement does this by focusing attention on how injustice courses through neoliberal capitalist globalization, the democratic deficit, and militarism and endemic violence. It provides, in other words, an interpretive frame to understand the triple crisis and uses this frame to explain and mobilize people on behalf of climate protection. Climate change is at once expression, symptom, cause, and accelerator of the triple crisis. The climate justice movement provides an activist articulation of this insight. In its more radical – and therefore promising – efforts, it aims not to diffuse or mitigate the crisis but to transform it. Ultimately, it seeks not the minimization of economic disruptions, undemocratic politics, or violence but their wholesale eradication. Nothing less will sufficiently address the climate crisis. As we shall see, this is the essential insight of Naomi Klein’s key climate justice text, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus the Climate* (Klein 2014).

Humanity’s future, then, looks increasingly set to be a race. On one hand, stand the perpetuation and acceleration of widespread injustice, bringing more intensified storms, higher temperatures, sea level rise, and every other ill associated with climate change. On the other, stand the efforts and ability of the climate justice movement to unpeel or “crack” (Holloway 2010) and eventually transform the structures that reproduce and drive the obscene levels of inequality, exploitation, and hierarchical abuse that generate climate change. To advance its prospects, the movement must, at a minimum, defeat the economic and political one percent at the ballot box, in the streets, at places of work and consumption, and in the very carbon-saturated culture and media in which we live, work, and dream. Beyond this, it must create more equal, compassionate, and fairer societies that take social and ecological interdependence seriously and work toward a more just, democratic future.

## A sociology of the climate crisis

I'd like to make two observations that for me underpin the climate justice movement but have yet to become part of popular understanding: first, that the climate crisis is far more profound and daunting than most of us realize; and second, that the planet cannot stay below the bottom-line warming target of 2° (let alone 1.5°) Celsius under capitalism as we know it.

In his powerful essay "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math" (2012), prominent US climate activist Bill McKibben argues that to have a reasonable chance to stay under a 2° Celsius temperature rise in this century, we can only burn a given amount of fossil fuels (as he points out, in this case, "reasonable" means four chances in five, or "somewhat worse odds than playing Russian roulette with a six-shooter"). Science tells us that this means the world's largest fossil-fuel producing corporations and countries must be compelled to leave eighty percent of their proven reserves (worth as much as twenty-seven trillion dollars by some estimates,) in the ground. This is the inescapable physical and political economic logic of salvaging a livable planet for future generations.<sup>5</sup>

In 2012, McKibben estimated the cap for maximum future atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at 565 gigatons as the upper limit for staying at or below a 2° Celsius temperature rise. With annual global emissions currently running around 34 gigatons a year, and rising about three percent per annum, this cap is roughly equal to a fourteen-year supply – till about 2026 – if business-as-usual trends of economic production and growth continue.<sup>6</sup>

Like McKibben, radical climate scientists Kevin Anderson and Alice Bows (now Bows-Larkin) are doing what more scientists need to do: they are not only analyzing the climate problem, but are mobilizing their knowledge to identify the larger political problem that underlies it (Anderson 2012; Anderson and Bows 2011, 2012). Their assessment is that emitting another 1,000 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>, allowing for a 66 percent chance of staying under 2°, would mean that we have roughly twenty-one years at current rates of extraction before we exceed the limit (but now we would be playing Russian roulette with the planet with *two* bullets in the gun we're aiming at it). What makes Anderson and Bows true heroes within the climate science community is their bold articulation of the policy implications of our predicament. They argue that we need to avoid 4° *at all costs*, as even the World Bank (2012) now agrees – or as Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, director of the Potsdam Institute of Climate Impact Research, puts it: "The difference between two and four degrees is human civilization"<sup>7</sup> – and that the global North needs to cut 70 percent of its emissions *over the next decade*. As Anderson and Bows (2013) note, "we're not short of capital, just the initiative and courage." Even more damning are the political consequences that Anderson drew just before the COP 19 talks: "Today, after two decades of bluff and lies, the remaining 2° Celsius budget

demands revolutionary change to the political and economic hegemony" (quoted in Clarke 2014a).

Following from this, the question the global climate justice movement confronts is: What are the corresponding *social and political* implications of McKibben's argument? In other words, just how *do* we keep warming in the 1.5–2° range, with the might of the world's largest corporations and richest governments united in a suicidal lockstep against us?

Here we come to the economic bedrock of the current situation named by Naomi Klein in the title of her landmark book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014). Neoliberal capitalism is undergoing multiple crises, mostly the effects of its "normal" operations. In the last twenty years, the rampant privatization of public goods and services has generated obscene inequality and unparalleled concentrations of wealth and power: while just ninety corporations and fossil-fuel exporting countries are responsible for fully two-thirds of all the carbon emissions discharged since the dawn of the industrial revolution, so the richest eighty-five individuals in the world now possess as much wealth as the poorest half of humanity – three and a half billion people (Weardon 2014; Oxfam 2014).<sup>8</sup> To this we may add what Rob Nixon (2011) refers to as the "slow violence" of resource depletion and the violence and militarism that accompany the attempt of the United States to secure its global primacy by massive spending to fight wars and maintain military bases all over the world. Combined, and with climate change now in the ascendant, we are entering the stage of the coming crisis of capitalism.

Because its economic logic is based on literally endless growth and places ever-rising demands on the planet's finite natural resources, life under capitalism will become unviable as resources are increasingly depleted, overworked, or made scarce by the impacts of climate change.<sup>9</sup> The problem in the medium-term future of capitalism (e.g. the next 25–50 years) is that the natural resource base necessary for producing what humans require to survive will no longer be dependable. Naomi Klein puts it this way:

The bottom line is what matters here: our economic system and our planetary system are now at war. Or, more accurately, our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life. What the climate needs in order to avoid collapse is a contraction in humanity's use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it's not the laws of nature.

(Klein 2014, 21)

It simply doesn't appear realistic to imagine that capitalism can be radically reformed, even with all the political will in the world (currently conspicuous by its absence) in the necessary time frame by 2050, by which point climate science tells us the vast majority of emissions must have ended.

While some excellent advocates of sustainable development, notably British ecological economist and University of Surrey professor Tim Jackson (2011), have advanced the important idea that an ecologically-guided “degrowth” economy is a solution to this contradiction, what’s missing is a convincing case that this could be delivered under the political economy of capitalism as we know it. Australian journalist Renfrey Clarke (2014b) notes that in order to address climate change we require massive investments in renewable energy, possible only through determined state spending, and financed only by taxing the wealthy. He rightly asks: “Can anyone imagine the world’s capitalist elites agreeing to such measures, except perhaps under the most extreme popular pressure?” and closes by quoting Noam Chomsky: “In the moral calculus of capitalism, greater profits in the next quarter outweigh the fate of your grandchildren” (he might have said even their own grandchildren).<sup>10</sup>

Both the depth of the current crisis, and the central role played by the climate disruption that exacerbates it, suggest that our activism around climate change may open a window to moving beyond capitalism in our lifetime. It seems increasingly evident that only a *strong and vigorous climate justice movement on a global scale* has the capacity to force governments to stand up to the economic and political forces of carbon capitalism. At the heart of such effort is a commitment to social justice. Capitalism provides so many of its own justifications. It can organize production, distribution, consumption, and all the rest for those with financial means and this, it must be admitted, is a remarkable feat. Its justifications fail mainly when one questions who benefits and who loses from a capitalist organization of the economy – who gains from capitalism’s gifts and who suffers its violences. The global climate justice movement can only go up against capitalism if armed with such a critique. This is the basis of its conceptual and moral power to galvanize and mobilize that irresistible force.

### The trajectory of the global climate justice movement

Let’s consider the historical arc of this movement so far. One dividing line straddles the end of 2009, when the COP 15 climate summit met in Copenhagen amid great public fanfare and media attention in anticipation of a deal on climate. The global climate justice movement had announced its existence two years before,<sup>11</sup> at the 2007 COP 13 meeting in Bali, when the radical network Climate Justice Now! formed, forcefully criticizing the market-based solutions favored by many of the Northern negotiators and institutionalized environmental organizations as false. In their place, CJN! proposed that the only path toward a low-carbon, post-capitalist, democratic future would be an emissions reduction plan adequate to what climate science tells us to do.

In Copenhagen, climate justice advocates and activists had support inside

the negotiation halls, as well as outside on the streets, where 100,000 people marched for the planet. Their allies included Mohamed Nasheed of the Maldives and much of the forty-plus member nations of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS); Bolivian president Evo Morales, Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez and the ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance) left-of-center countries of Latin America’s Pink Tide; and a less radical but important part of the Global North, most notably the European Union, led by Gordon Brown in the UK, Germany, and some of the Scandinavian governments.

When the United States and China, the world’s two biggest emitters of greenhouse gases, failed to find any common ground, the talks collapsed. In reality, neither they nor any of the other large emitting countries were willing to curb significantly the burning of fossil fuels on which their economies ran. With the economic collapse that triggered the Great Recession in the same year, the balance of forces shifted decisively away from the positions of AOSIS and ALBA, while the EU aligned itself more and more with the rest of the global North.

### Building a radical climate justice movement

After the initial failure in Copenhagen, the global climate justice movement regrouped and built new momentum in Cochabamba, Bolivia in April 2010 to deliver its manifesto, the Universal Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth (Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature 2010). Meanwhile, some of the most active organizations, from 350.org to Friends of the Earth International and others withdrew energy and attention from what they saw as a hopelessly compromised process in the COPs, and focused instead on local and national-level campaigns building a network of global connections. These efforts have paid dividends in the struggles of recent years, from the many-sided battle over the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline to the ongoing movements against fracking gaining ground across the United States to community fights such as that waged to stop the expansion of the port in south Durban, South Africa.

Alongside these struggles a new front inside and around the COP has emerged in the form of a strengthened and increasingly vocal global *youth* climate justice movement, which has been equally active in many local campaigns (Ellis *et al.* 2014). They’ve mounted the fossil free divestment campaigns in the US and the UK, played an important role in the movement against the Keystone XL pipeline in Canada and the US by working alongside a revitalized Canadian indigenous movement in the form of Idle No More, and energized the anti-fracking movement in California and elsewhere. They have brought to the movement a new generation influenced by the moment of Occupy and other movements with a strong emphasis on consensus decision-making and non-hierarchical, horizontal organizational structures. Additionally, they’ve brought along some new ways of organizing that have real promise: PowerShifts (annual youth conferences across

the world), social media of all kinds, and vast reserves of imagination, energy, openness, and hope.

Meanwhile, parts of the radical left have turned their attention to climate change, while the more radical wing of the climate justice movement has begun to understand that its aims run parallel to other movements for social justice from #BlackLivesMatter in the US to the rise of Syriza in Greece and solidarity with immigrants' rights movements across the globe. At the same time, the Big Green environmental organizations (especially the Sierra Club), the mainstream global climate justice movement (such as CAN, the Climate Action Network, which publishes the indispensable *Eco* daily briefings at the COP), and the biggest climate social movement organization (350.org) are all moving in more radical directions. The same can be said of climate science in general (the increasingly certainty and implicit alarm of the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report, among others), the Union of Concerned Scientists, and particular climate scientists such as Kevin Anderson, Alice Bows-Larkin, Michael Mann, and James Hansen. Finally, there is an enormous push coming up from young people, and from indigenous forces on all of these levels. As I see it, this evolution prefigures the kind of reimagining of climate justice that the movement so desperately needs to advance its promise.<sup>12</sup>

### What now? Thinking forward

The question that the global climate justice movement is now asking is what are the prospects for synergy and movement building among all the forces fighting for the climate in one way or another? What are the ways forward?

It's past time for the movement to engage all hands in a major rethink moving forward. As Paul Wapner has put it:

The scarcest resource these days ... is the ability to unleash the mind, heart, and spirit to envision, entertain, and develop unorthodox possibilities ... Imagination, in this sense, is not a flight of fancy but closer to what C. Wright Mills understands as the ability to grasp a larger arc of collective experience and interpret its meaning for the choices we face. This involves disciplined inspiration, creativity, and ingenuity that can help us cognitively and emotionally enter into alternative futures.

(Paul Wapner, personal communication, 23 June 2014)<sup>13</sup>

This is not to accuse anyone of lack of imagination – far from it. Rather, it is as a call to mobilize our brilliant creativity and unleash our radical imaginations to work together with new resolve and joy in the service of deeper climate justice.

We might consider a few of the many, many possibilities. For example, a major new campaign arose in the United States in 2014. The Global Climate Convergence (<http://globalclimateconvergence.org>) proclaims

“People, Planet, Peace over Profits” and is seeking to build “collaboration across national borders and fronts of struggle to harness the transformative power we already possess as a thousand separate movements springing up across the planet.” The basic idea is to create a lasting collaboration between climate activism and other forms of social justice, including progressive labor, indigenous organizing, and the fledgling ecosocialist movement in the United States, and ultimately, no doubt, beyond, building up to some kind of a Global Climate Strike (Manksi and Stein 2014; Global Climate Convergence 2015). Co-convened by Jill Stein, 2012 presidential candidate of the Green Party of the United States, this call for a Global Climate Convergence resonates with the formation of the new US ecosocialist organization System Change Not Climate Change (<http://systemchangenotclimatechange.org>), which aims at shifting the momentum of the climate justice movement in an anti-capitalist direction by starting “a far-ranging discussion within society: can stopping climate change be compatible with an economic system that is flooded with fossil fuel profits? Can we create a safe and healthy planet for all human beings while simultaneously allowing ever-expanding resource extraction, endless growth, and the massive inequalities that come along with it?” In other words, can we genuinely address climate change without addressing widespread social injustice and the structure of capitalism itself?

Meanwhile, the faltering momentum for a UN-sponsored global climate deal received a strong new push at the unprecedented, massive, and diverse People's Climate March attended by as many as 400,000 people in New York City and 700,000 across the world on September 21, 2014. This event may well be seen in future histories as the turning point in the evolution of a strong North American climate justice movement (People's Climate Movement 2014; System Change Not Climate Change 2014; Foran 2014b). Multiple workshops, gatherings, and public events took place in the days leading up to the march, and a smaller, but more militant “Flood Wall Street” direct action took place the day after the march (Popular Resistance Staff 2014; Pantsios 2014; Holpuch 2014). Since the march, multiple initiatives have been embraced by thousands of people who saw their commitment grow and their possibilities for action widen as a result of their participation. The future is likely to witness repeated mass mobilizations and increasingly radical actions as global elites continue to double down on a failed business model and politics.

It may be that we also need to envision and create totally new and different kinds of political parties, responsive to the social movements out of which they will arise (Foran 2014c). We need to discover our own power and learn how to use it wisely to transcend the polarizing debate between adherents of the horizontalism of Occupy and those who favor efforts to transform societies by bringing progressive political forces to power. We have seen significant forerunners in countries as diverse as Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, Iceland, Greece, and Spain; in sub-national areas within coun-

tries like Kerala in India, Chiapas in Mexico, and British Columbia in Canada; and in cities from Richmond, California, to Barcelona and Madrid, to Copenhagen, Denmark. It seems clear that we need to strengthen and make connections within and between such spaces.

### Principles, practices, dreams, and hope: constructing vibrant political cultures of opposition and creation

None of the revolutions of the twentieth century was made without powerful political cultures of opposition capable of bringing diverse social groups to the side of a movement for deep social change, as happened in the Mexican, Russian, Chinese, Cuban, Nicaraguan, and Iranian revolutions (Foran 2005). These political cultures drew on people's experiences and emotions and were expressed in complex mixtures of popular, everyday ways of articulating grievances – whether in terms of fairness, justice, dignity, or freedom – and more consciously formulated radical ideologies such as socialism and liberation theology. The most effective revolutionary movements of history have found ways to tap into whatever political cultures emerge in their society, often through the creation of a clear common demand such as “the regime must step down” or “the foreign powers must leave.” The forging of a strong and vibrant political culture of opposition is thus an accomplishment, carried through by the actions of many people, and, like revolutions themselves, such cultures are relatively rare in human history.

In the twenty-first century, the nature of movements for what we might now call radical social change (which I believe is a more apt term for this century's great social movements than revolution) has itself changed, as activists, reformers, dreamers, and revolutionaries globally have increasingly pursued nonviolent paths to a better world, intending to live and act as they would like that world to be. That is, the ends of justice are no longer held to justify the means of violence, but the means of non-violent resistance reflect and guarantee the ends that they seek. In this, they embody and illustrate the virtues of prefigurative politics and in particular horizontalist ways to realize them. We might call these positive, alternative visions “political cultures of *creation*” (Foran 2014c; Ellis *et al.* forthcoming). Movements become even stronger when to a widely felt culture of opposition and resistance they add a positive vision of a better world, an alternative to strive for that could improve or replace what exists. In this sense, some of the differences between old and new movements for radical social change seem to include: the attempt to get away from the hierarchical organizations that made the great revolutions of the twentieth century and move in the direction of more horizontal, deeply democratic relations among participants; the expressive power of using popular idioms and memes more than ideological discourses; the growing use of civil disobedience and militant nonviolence; the building of coalitions as *networks* of movements and

organizations that include diverse outlooks; and the salience of political cultures of creation alongside political cultures of opposition and resistance.

What might go into a radical political culture of climate justice? On the level of emotions, we would do well to cultivate what Gustavo Esteva has termed “joyful militancy”:

Joy means letting the world in and letting oneself into the world: being vulnerable, compassionate, experimental, creative, and embracing uncertainty. Sadness means creating boundaries, making distinctions, comparing, making plans, and so on ...

All movements, spaces, collectives, and individuals have elements of joy and sadness: they're bound together, they help and hinder each other, and they're constantly shifting and changing. We often need good boundaries to create radical spaces in an oppressive world, we need to make plans [but we also need to] be open to changing them and changing ourselves ...

We are arguing that “sad militancy” is hegemonic: that it predominates in many radical spaces today, squeezing out possibilities for conviviality and friendship. We're trying to offer up a conception of “joyful militancy” based on spaces, movements, thinkers, and doers who have inspired us, but there's no formula or guidebook. Even more importantly, we really don't want to suggest a new set of norms that should govern or police people into behaving a certain way: that would be an utter failure. We hope joyful militancy can remain loose and vague, while offering up some ideas that are inspiring and useful to think through.

(Esteva 2014)

Similarly, it will be important to continue to cultivate new languages and ways of being together; one might think of the whole Occupy repertoire, so well captured in the book and website, *Beautiful Trouble*, followed by *Beautiful Solutions*, a project which “gathers the most promising and contagious strategies for building a more just, democratic and resilient world” (see <https://solutions.thischangeseverything.org>). Or the meme-based projects described in Patrick Reinsborough and Doyle Canning's 2010 handbook, *Re:imagining Change: An Introduction to Story-based Strategy*, followed by the brilliance of Occupy's “We ... are ... the 99 percent!” And drawing from the history of our own movement, the simple yet profound slogan “System Change, Not Climate Change,” so evocative and powerful (and very astutely chosen by the new North American ecosocialist network of the same name). In all of this, “activism,” creativity, and love are prominent, and youth movements everywhere are inventing and carrying the new political cultures of creation. As for new ideas about building alliances, one that many are finding illuminating is the “spectrum of allies and opponents” model (Figure 9.1).<sup>14</sup>

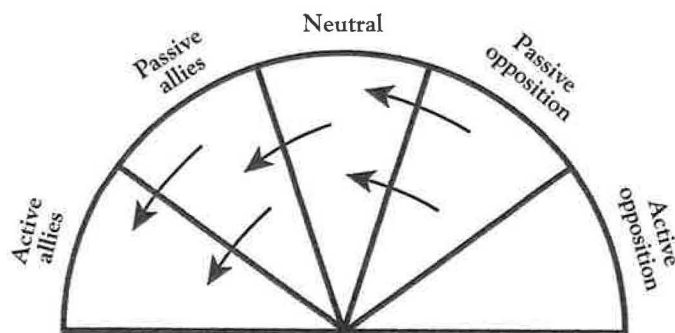


Figure 9.1 The spectrum of allies and opponents

Source: <http://beautifultrouble.org/principle/shift-the-spectrum-of-allies> (used with permission from Joshua Russell Khan).

Veronika Libao explains the idea this way:

The most important thing this movement has to realize in order to accomplish its goal is the fact that it can never convince everyone, and that is completely fine ... The “spectrum of allies” model avoids wasting valuable energy in convincing those in active opposition. Instead, it focuses on shifting those in a passive opposition to neutral, those in a neutral position to passive allies, and passive allies to active allies (as shown in the diagram). As disheartening as it is to know that there are those who openly choose to ignore climate change, there are plenty of others who devote their lives to ensuring that those people don’t ruin the planet for all of us.

(Libao 2014)

The key is to unlock ways to bring increasingly radical, broad forces together to multiply our impact and networks exponentially, learn to build the bridges, and generate the new ideas we need. As I have been suggesting throughout, we can best do this by recommitting ourselves to fighting injustice as our core political project and creatively appropriating the language of justice to speak to each other across our struggles. As the global climate justice movement melds and finds solidarity with other movements, it should cultivate such ties through a shared outrage at exploitation, abuse, hierarchical corruption and mistreatment, and all assaults on human dignity.

### The briefest of conclusions

The forces of climate justice may seem weak, but this is the time for them to grow. What each of us brings to the table in the struggle for global climate justice has value. Our movements for climate justice around the world need all hands on deck, now and for as far as anyone can see into the future. That is the challenge the global climate justice movement now faces.

In this chapter, I have tried to reimagine the global climate justice movement. I have done so by identifying its core moral mission and calling for a scaling up and intensification of its efforts. Put differently, I have argued for radicalizing the movement. Climate change represents the most profound challenge humanity has ever faced. The forces behind it are powerful, ubiquitous, and ruthless. Undermining and eventually reversing them is not for the politically moderate since polite politics and negotiated compromise rarely survive hegemonic cooptation. Rather, we need to marshal new cultures of resistance and creation that focus on the deep causes of climate change as we imagine and realize anew a new post-capitalist world. The global climate justice movement represents our best hope for addressing climate change given its ability to identify root causes and mobilize on behalf of all life. It is up to all of us who care deeply about the future of life to nourish the climate justice movement with our support, actions, and visions for a better world. We can reradicalize the movement and further its promise by imaginative, open-hearted dialogue and determined action.

In the long run, the only real systemic “solution” to the crisis is a broad yet at the same time more radical climate justice movement willing to confront the root causes of the crisis, including capitalism, and strong enough to decisively cut emissions in a just way. This movement, or convergence and confluence of many movements, has to get there in the relatively medium term, say, the next twenty-five to fifty years, or by 2040 to 2065. In the short term from now out to ten to fifteen years, or from 2015 to 2025 or 2030, the task is to widen and radicalize climate justice movements everywhere we can, preparing ourselves and a new generation for the longer anti-capitalist project of deep social transformation in the direction of an ecologically sustainable, socially just, and deeply democratic global future.

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## Notes

- 1 In 2007, Paul Hawken made the claim that the movement organizations already numbered in the thousands. For a partial, annotated list of some of the key climate justice movements and resources of which I am aware (see [www.iicart.org](http://www.iicart.org)).
- 2 See 350.org *et al.* (2013) for the open letter signed by dozens of climate organizations at the Warsaw COP 19.
- 3 *Buen vivir* (literally, "living well"), in its largest sense means living in harmony with other people and nature, and is often contrasted with the neoliberal notion of consuming more to live better. This Quechua and Aymara indigenous concept has been inscribed in the Ecuadorian constitution.
- 4 Wikipedia (2015), citing the Australian Public Service Commission (2007). The term apparently originated in social planning, and was first introduced by Rittel and Webber (1973).
- 5 McKibben (2012) notes that "John Fullerton, a former managing director at JP Morgan who now runs the Capital Institute, calculates that at today's market value, those 2,795 gigatons of carbon emissions are worth about \$27 trillion."
- 6 My thanks to Eknath and Chetan Ghatge, who calculated the 13.68 year supply (starting with 2012). The formula is

$$\sum_{i=1}^x (34 \times 1.03)^i = 565$$

where  $x$  is the number of years that it takes for the right-hand side to reach 565. The rate of increase in global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2014 was zero, making this a crucial trend to watch.

- 7 Tim Radford (2014) sources the Schellnhuber quote to George Marshall (2014).
- 8 The original study is by Oxfam (2014). In 1999, the United Nations Development Program reported "The net worth of the world's 200 richest people increased from \$440 billion to more than \$1 trillion in just four years from 1994 to 1998. The assets of the three richest people were more than the combined GNP of the 48 least developed countries" (UNDP 1999, 36–37, quoted in Prasad 2014, 234).
- 9 The recently issued *Ecomodernist Manifesto* (Asafu-Adjaye *et al.* 2015) and the work of the Breakthrough Institute suggest that humans can "decouple" the environment and the economy through constant technological innovation, but this flies in the face of the first principles of ecology and is a profoundly a-sociological view of the world.
- 10 The original source for the Chomsky quote is Sethness (2014).
- 11 Some of the most visible signposts on the way to the climate justice movement include:
 

1991	People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit: US
2000	Climate Justice Summit at COP 6: The Hague, Netherlands
2002	Bali Principles for Climate Justice: UN World Summit on Sustainable Development: Johannesburg, South Africa
2002	Delhi Climate Justice Declaration: New Delhi, India
2004	Durban Group for Climate Justice is formed: Durban, South Africa
- 12 "Re-Imagining Climate Justice" is the name given to a gathering in Santa Barbara, California, in May 2014 in which I participated (see [www.climatejusticeproject.com](http://www.climatejusticeproject.com); see also Summer Gray's video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpJpbnMjiYs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpJpbnMjiYs)).

- 13 See also the burgeoning climate art, climate fiction, and other creative approaches to climate activism such as the Climate Justice Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara, which I participate in (see [www.climatejusticeproject.com](http://www.climatejusticeproject.com)), or the Imagination and Climate Futures Initiative at Arizona State University (see <https://climateimagination.asu.edu/about>).
- 14 This image is from Joshua Khan Russell (2012). The "Spectrum of Allies" was presented to us by United Kingdom Youth Climate Coalition members Fatima Ibrahim and Louisa Casson.

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## 10 The promise of climate fiction

### Imagination, storytelling, and the politics of the future

*Manjana Milkoreit*

Over the last two decades, climate change has risen on the global political agenda. Although attempts to create an effective international agreement have so far had a poor record of success, the range of climate-related discussions, decisions, actions and changes are proliferating around the world. Collectively, the human community has been devising an ever growing set of responses to the problem, ranging from grassroots mobilization and protests, to the creation of carbon markets, renewable energy policies, research programs, adaptation strategies, international funding mechanisms, and geoengineering technologies.

However, the multiple solutions that have been devised, deployed or conceptualized, so far have fallen short of producing any significant effect on the climate system. Observed processes of change have overtaken scientific predictions, occurring sooner than anticipated. One could argue that current mitigation and adaptation measures simply need more time – global energy infrastructures cannot be replaced within a decade or two, and renewable energy sources must evolve in terms of technological innovation and widespread deployment. Furthermore, nations need time to implement treaty obligations and voluntary measures, and cultures across the world similarly must go through phases in embracing post-carbon practices. Patience might be the order of the day. After all, we might take heart that greenhouse gas emissions remained stable in 2014 despite a growing economy, and this may be a harbinger for the future (IEA 2015). And yet, patience may also be the enemy of climate protection for, as I will argue and as this entire volume tries to make clear, the failure to address climate change effectively stems not from a lack of activity but of imagination. All of the change initiatives we are supposedly waiting for represent tweaks in a system that requires wholesale overhaul. They stand as various examples of Climate Inc. With the intensity and accelerating drumbeat of climate change, it is clear that we must move beyond the conceptual straightjacket of these strategies, and to do this we need to exercise the imagination. Imagination is essential not only for understanding and “seeing” climate change itself – a phenomenon no single human being can observe or