

CHAPTER 3

Climate, Gender and Class Justice in Africa

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'Climate justice' (CJ) fuses progressive political-economic and political-ecological currents to combat the most serious threat humanity and most other species face in the 21st century. CJ arrived on the international scene as a coherent political approach in the wake of the failure of a more collaborative strategy between major environmental NGOs and the global capitalist managerial class. But it is important to ensure that the gendered and class distinctions in addressing climate politics be foregrounded, the subject of this essay.

CJ activists make demands that simply will not be met at the Conference of the Parties (COPs) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): a 50 percent greenhouse gas emissions cut by 2020 and 90 percent commitment for 2050; payment of a rapidly rising 'climate debt' (in 2010, damages to Pakistan alone amounted to \$50 billion); the decommissioning of the carbon markets so favoured by elites; and massive investments in renewable energy, public transport and other transformative infrastructure. As a result, CJ struggles are necessarily retreating from a naively overambitious global reform agenda (politely asking UNFCCC delegates to save the planet) and instead to promoting direct action, as witnessed in sites across the world:

- Niger Delta women, Environmental Rights Action, and MEND halted the majority of oil exploitation in the Delta at peak in 2008
- Canadian anti-tarsands campaigning unites green and indigenous activists, and Quebecois fought successfully against shale-gas
- British Climate Camp and 'Crude Awakening' blocked the Coryton oil refinery, 2010 – and even an MI5 spy couldn't break that network
- Australian Rising Tide and allies regularly block Newcastle coal exports
- Norwegian environmentalists and Attac won against the state oil company in the Lofoten region, 2011
- Ecuador's Amazon indigenous activists and Acción Ecológica have so far halted oil drilling in Yasuni National Park
- 'King Coal' is threatened in the US: Mountain Top Removal nearly halted in Appalachia; Navajo Nation forced cancellation of Black Meza (Arizona) mine permit against world's largest coal company, Peabody; Powder River Basin (MN, WY) farmers and ranchers fight coal expansion
- Derailing US coal energy: nearly all 151 proposed new coal power plants in the Bush Energy Plan have been cancelled, abandoned or stalled since 2007; the key community forces are the Indigenous Environmental Network, Energy Justice Network and Western Mining Action Network, plus Sierra legal defense team
- Preventing waste incinerators in the US: strong opposition to new waste incinerators (more carbon-intensive than coal and leading source of cancer-causing dioxins)

- Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives won a major Detroit victory and helped unite a world wastepickers movement with climate narratives
- Chevron's expansion in Richmond, California was defeated
- Mega Hydro was undammed at Klamath River as indigenous communities defeated Pacificorp Power
- Resilient communities are being built through local action, including frontline communities winning campaigns linking climate justice to basic survival (e.g. the Oakland Climate Action Coalition promoting Just Transition)

Fused as CJ, these inter-related and often overlapping (although sometimes conflicting) traditions are mainly aimed at building a mass-based popular movement bringing together 'green' and 'red' (or in the U.S., 'blue-green') politics. This entails articulating not only the urgency of reducing greenhouse gas emissions but also the need to transform our inherited systems of materials extraction, transport and distribution, energy-generation, production of goods and services, consumption, disposal and financing.

The CJ organizations and networks offer great potential to fuse issue-specific progressive environmental and social activists, many of which have strong roots in oppressed communities, in bottom-up linkages of organic climate activism. But CJ movements across the world have not solidified a coherent set of tactics, much less strategy, principles, ideology and foundational philosophy. CJ is by no means a global 'movement'.

However, there have been early efforts to raise the profile of CJ beyond mere

attendance and protest at the UNFCCC COPs. At a landmark conference in Cochabamba, Bolivia from April 19-22, 2010 (Earth Day), more than 30,000 Bolivians led by host Evo Morales and grassroots indigenous, community, feminist, and environmental movements were joined by genuinely solidary environmental, social, labor and NGO forces. This meeting set in motion a much more serious transnational climate justice approach, based not upon the illusion that the UN will address the climate crisis anytime soon, but instead upon more serious, pragmatic strategies. These can come only from a much richer merging of social and ecological rights discourses (for what such narratives are worth), and choices of unifying targets (such as fossil fuel companies, carbon traders, and the World Bank).

Everywhere, CJ organizers can find excellent local climate change targets to raise consciousness and effect emissions cuts, with direct action against major greenhouse gas sources or large-scale corporate fossil-fuel consumers. Two particularly good sites for climate activists are, first, the public utility commissions which control pricing and electricity generation techniques (and hence coal-fired and nuclear power plants); and second, the municipal or regional planning commissions which give the go-ahead to suburban sprawl and all manner of other climate-threatening projects.

Diversity and climate justice politics

No matter that the CJN! component movements are disparate; so too are the forces that moved from sophisticated critique of carbon trading in South Africa to a broad-based campaign against the World Bank's largest project loan, that shook the

energy establishment. These are the kinds of organizations and arguments that link spatio-temporal resistances amongst diverse eco-social forces during a period of austerity, civil society weakness, and repression. The agents of social and environmental change can take advantage of neoliberalism's still-discredited ideological status and demand from the next global and national negotiations a strategy for justice, not one based upon commodifying carbon.

But to do so the climate justice activists still need to generalize an innovative critique, one that emerged over time as the global emissions-trading strategy rose from birth in 1997, peaked in 2008, and attempts a last-gasp resurrection after the economic crisis and climate negotiations breakdown. The frenzied failure of elite climate politics should make bottom-up alternatives much easier to advocate, including globally- coordinated actions against destructive projects (such as international credits for South African coal).

From the wider, deeper, and increasingly common critique of the Kyoto-Copenhagen-Cancun-Durban cul-de-sac, will come more confidence in the types of analyses, strategies, tactics and alliances associated with climate justice politics. The challenge is to aggregate experiences from the grassroots so as to move into alignment with the Cochabamba conference, and in turn, to generate a formidable red-green force uniting radical governments and the popular movements that will keep them accountable within global-left initiatives. In South Africa, the experiences of national interactions in global climate negotiations reinforce a sense of how politics of scale and space can be distorted, so that policies patently against the interests of a country's mass-popular constituencies are adopted. But likewise,

South African climate justice politics from below suggest ways forward that, while not yet sufficiently strong to declare victory, really do offer the only hope for the way forward.

Ecofeminism and climate justice

What Africa and the world must yet grapple with is the fusion of ecofeminist and ecosocialist ideological imperatives, within a revitalized climate justice politics. It is enlightening to contextualize ecofeminist insights into climate politics within a concrete case study in which class, race and environmental oppressions are inextricably intertwined with gender. During the 1960s to 1970s, it was recognized amongst radical South Africans that the apartheid system's discrimination against black people was rooted in the corporations' need for migrant labour, fusing race-class oppression.

Behind the typical black man who labored in the mines throughout the first century of organized mining and plantation agriculture, prior to Nelson Mandela's election in 1994, was a woman. She provided three hidden and un-costed subsidies within the 'care economy', responsible for labour power's cheap reproduction. First, in rural Bantustans – the ecologically-degraded apartheid “homelands” – women raised the migrant worker through childhood, as the state was non-existent or merely a religious mission station. Household reproduction was never subsidized, unlike urban residents who in many cases had access to state childcare and school systems. Second, rural women were compelled to look after sick workers who were tossed back home until they recovered, due to the lack of health insurance, as

offered by states and companies in the West after workers battled long and hard. Finally, when the male worker was too old to work and returned to the Bantustans without adequate pension support, the women again took on the responsibility for care giving. These are the women most likely to suffer additionally as climate change hits Southern Africa.

Of course, it's not just a matter of apartheid capitalism. The reproduction of global labour power has been universally subsidized by women's unpaid work. Neoliberal policies and corporate power have resulted in labour outsourcing, casualisation and informalization. In times of recession, global capitalism becomes much more like apartheid: predatory against women and the environment. With life more precarious as a result, women are the safety net for household reproduction, in addition to being the most vulnerable and disposable of all labour sectors. But they have also been the driving force in resisting this process, overcoming micropatriarchy within communities and leading most of South Africa's grassroots campaigns on issues such as water decommodification, access to AIDS medicines and other successful strategies to enlarge or defend the commons and sustain life.

As recession spreads, global capitalism is becoming much more like apartheid: predatory against women and the environment. Drawing on evidence from southern Africa, Rosa Luxemburg demonstrated this tendency in her own analysis of imperialism back in 1913: 'Accumulation of capital periodically bursts out in crises and spurs capital on to a continual extension of the market. Capital cannot accumulate without the aid of non-capitalist organizations.' Increasingly, such non-capitalist life arrangements rely upon women and the communities that they guide.

And yet on the other hand, Luxemburg continued, capitalism cannot 'tolerate their continued existence side by side with itself. Only the continuous and progressive disintegration of non-capitalist organizations makes accumulation of capital possible' (Luxemburg, 1968).

Luxemburg would not have been surprised at how the destructive force of capital drives men into migrancy, spreads HIV/AIDS and causes rising domestic violence. Such disintegration is always contested by women's personal strengths and mutual aid systems as well as other anti-/non-capitalist reactions, plus campaigns – successful in South Africa (unique on the continent) – to guarantee reproductive healthcare, including the right to a safe abortion. But increasingly, with climate-related migration, the challenge is more formidable because the progressive disintegration of the natural world by capitalist expansion and emissions is what makes the next round of accumulation possible, in the short term, but entirely dubious over the medium and long term.

Teresa Brennan made the link from the household scale to climate change, the biggest crisis women will face in the coming decades. She argued that, like the need to end Bantustan migrant labour systems, rearranging spatial and re/production arrangements is crucial to ending the unfair role of women in subsidizing capitalism's destructive irrationality. In her 2003 book, *Globalization and its Terrors: Daily Life in the West*, Brennan wrote: 'The closer to home one's energy and raw material sources are, the more one's reproduction costs stay in line: paid and domestic labour will be less exploited, the environment less depleted' (Brennan, 2003). The need now to limit the 'distance over which natural resources can be

obtained' is obvious given how shipping, trucking and air transport contribute to carbon emissions.

This is one of the insights an eco-feminist political economy gives climate strategists such as Nicola Bullard of Focus on the Global South. A typical debate with neoliberals is over whether globalization of industry has helped break up feudal-patriarchal relations, drawing women out of oppression into Mexican maquiladoras or Bangkok sweatshops. Such export-led growth is now an increasingly untenable 'development' strategy, and in any case always generated extremely uneven development, drawing on the women's care economy for its hidden subsidies.

Bullard likens the climate negotiations to those of the WTO: 'By and large, countries are defending their narrow economic interests and the rich countries in particular are trying to grab the last slice of the atmospheric pie' (Bullard, 2009). Although the Kyoto Protocol is deeply flawed, especially the low targets and reliance on market mechanisms, Bullard asserted that attempts by the US to get rid of Kyoto are dangerous. 'It is critical to retain the rich countries' legally binding commitment in any future agreement and any alternative that could emerge at this stage would be much worse.'

Bullard breaks down the climate policy narrative into three discourses: business as usual, catastrophism, and climate justice. The first comes from business and most Northern governments while the second is advanced by some smaller and vulnerable countries as well as many NGOs. Catastrophism also 'leads to dangerous last-gasp strategies such as geo-engineering, nuclear and carbon markets'. Third, climate justice is supported by a widespread civil society movement launched in

2007 at the Bali negotiations, but which subsequently came to include at least one Latin American government, Bolivia.

Feminists working on climate change are connecting the dots between these various oppressions, to warn how, in times of crisis, their opponents are emboldened. In a report, 'Looking Both Ways', the group Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice document Hurricane Katrina's deeper political damage: 'Following a disaster, women of colour – particularly African American women, low-income women and immigrant women – are routinely targeted as burdens of the state and the cause of over population, environmental degradation, poverty, crime and economic instability' (Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, 2009). And more than for men, ending women's economic instability is a vital component of the struggle for justice.

Ecofeminist/ecosocialist networking for climate justice

It has never been more important to draw together eco-feminist and eco-socialist insights to link issues, analyses, challenges and alliance-building efforts. Is eco-socialism on the agenda? The short answer is no, there is not a sufficient cadreship and network of organizations capable of connecting the dots, globally or in any national setting. But such a movement will have to emerge if we are to survive, so the following are some ways that this challenge might be viewed.

Red-green organizations are networking and expressing eco-socialist sentiments.

The components of the eco-socialist movement are thousands of organizations in all parts of the world whose own assumptions about fighting environmental

degradation are increasingly anti-capitalist. This is abundantly evident from the manifestos, analyses, press releases, demands, leaflets, slogans and other expressions of voice that they have generated in recent years.

The networks are typically single issue and do not sufficiently link across subsectors of environmental justice. The biggest intellectual problem these movements face is linking their concerns across other sectors. This is often because the networks come together around specific targets, and because their funding sources or major in-house intellectual resources are extremely deep within the single issue they address, but unable to move beyond it.

The networks' analysis is sometimes delimited by the specific problem they are addressing. As single issue networks, the organizations generally view the attack by capitalism on nature as a problem that they may not be in a position to name, much less propose sweeping large-scale solutions to. That has generated a void, not only insofar as naming the problem (an environmentally voracious capitalism), but also naming a global-scale socialist solution – with, of course, profound respect for difference and the uneven development of both capitalism and the movements against it. A further problem is that most such manifestos by these movements have not been particularly conscious of gender. And finally, the other kinds of interlocking and overlapping oppressions and resistances – along lines of race, indigenous heritage, different ableness, sexual preference, generation and other divisions – are not sufficiently respected to generate a strong critique.

The networks hunger to continue building links. The obvious next step for groups like Climate Justice Now! is to make common cause with other movements

addressing environmental issues where similar analysis, strategies, tactics, enemies and allies can be found. There is a huge gap, though, in information about each other, since with a few exceptions (for example, the World Social Forum or protests at major world summits or meetings of well-networked organizations such as Friends of the Earth International), these organizations have no opportunities to get together in a systematic way. And yet it is inexorable that these links will become ever stronger, and it seems inexorable, too, that to properly address the challenge we face, nothing less than planetary and species survival, we encounter the overarching power of patriarchal, racially divisive, uneven capitalist 'development'. Climate justice will require nothing less.