

Climate Change or Social Change? Environmental and Leftist Praxis and Participatory Action Research

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ABSTRACT *This work seeks to advance and synthesize leftist political and environmental theory and enhance historical and contemporary understanding of environmental activism, especially related to the movement to halt climate change. We share findings from our participatory action research (PAR) on the internal dynamics and debates among the three main climate activist networks mobilizing at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change meetings in Copenhagen in 2009, those of the reformist Climate Action Network (CAN), the more marxian-inspired Climate Justice Now! (CJN), and the autonomist and anarchistic Climate Justice Action (CJA). We elucidate how leftist reformist and especially the more radical currents are engaging with non- or anti-Western indigenous praxis to forge the contemporary transnational environmental movement.*

Keywords: alter-globalization, anarchism, autonomism, climate justice, COP15, ecology, environmental movement, global justice, green movement, indigenous, marxism, NGOs, transnational social movement, United Nations, UNFCCC

Philosophers have only interpreted the world. . . . The point, however, is to change it.

Karl Marx (1845)

The transnational movement to protect the environment is diverse, divided, and yet still interconnected. It has evolved over more than a century to now claim adherents in all regions of the world as it broadens its network and expands its agenda (Dalton, 1994; Diani, 2003; Rootes, 2007, p. 617). Sympathetic scholars have hailed it a pioneering global social movement (Wapner, 1996) and potentially transformative for postindustrial societies on a par with working class struggles of yesteryear (Touraine et al., 1983). Skeptics, meanwhile, question whether we can

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speak of a coherent ‘environmental movement’ at all (Doherty, 2002; Eyerman and Jamison, 1991) much less a global or transnational one (Rootes, 2007, p. 632). Our contribution to this debate is threefold. First, we aim to advance and synthesize leftist political and environmental theory. Second, we do so by adapting a fairly unorthodox methodology in the study of social movements—Participatory Action Research (PAR)—to enhance our historical and contemporary understanding of environmental activism. Third, we focus specifically on this movement’s recent transnational manifestations and coordination to halt climate change.

This work is divided into two parts. In the initial theoretical and historical section, we contextualize environmental praxis within the three main lineages of leftist thought (i.e. reformist social democracy, revolutionary marxism,¹ and radical anarchism and autonomism), and then nest it within the broader Alter-Globalization—or Global Justice—Movement (AGM). This advances our argument that not only is it appropriate to speak of a transnational environmental, or green, movement, but further, that *climate change* has become a key galvanizing, or *bellwether*, issue for the broader global left and AGM. In the second section we ground our theoretical assertions in a rich description of contemporary environmental activism, drawn from our engagement as scholars and activists adapting a PAR approach. We share findings on the internal dynamics and debates among the three main climate activist networks mobilizing at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meetings in Copenhagen held in December 2009. In doing so we elucidate how leftist reformist and especially more radical currents have begun to articulate with non-/anti-Western indigenous praxis. By first pulling the lens out and back to view the movement theoretically and historically, we hope to present a fuller and also sharper image of transnational environmental praxis gained by a close engagement with contentious movement actors in motion.

Three Strands of Leftist Praxis in the Historic and Contemporary Environmental Movement

The history of the environmental movement is arguably as old as the modern left and, although each has a distinct lineage, they’ve grown increasingly entwined in both theory and action. Two themes will be developed here: first, while considered among the most successful of the identity-based and post-materialist ‘new social movements’ emerging in the 1960s and 1970s (Touraine et al., 1983), the green movement nevertheless is bound up with classical, or ‘old’, concerns of the politics of equality, production, and distribution, in addition to sharing strong affinities with so-called ‘newest social movements’ (Day, 2005) of post-anarchism and autonomy. And while this reflects how environmentalism in recent decades has come to be viewed as predominantly a progressive issue,² given its critique of humanity’s harmful impacts on the earth, it has always posed a challenge—at times tacit, and others overt—to the left’s anthropocentric and developmentalist commitments to instrumental rationality, freedom and emancipation, economic prosperity, and technological progress (Rootes, 2007, p. 634; Yearley, 1994).

Many ideological strands have evolved so as to preclude any single vision from uniting this movement. It is common to speak of its successive ‘waves’—conservation, preservation, reform environmentalism, ecologism—though all currents remain salient (Mertig et al., 2002; Rootes, 2007). Much scholarly literature is dedicated to classifying the multiple and oftentimes conflicting goals, tactics, and organizational structures of its many collective actors (Carter, 2007; Dryzek, 1997; Rootes, 2007; Wapner, 1996). In its diversity, however, traces of the three broad tendencies of the modern left—namely liberal reformism, marxian revolution, and anarcho-autonomist radicalism³—can be discerned.

The movement's main historical tension lies between those who see economic growth and development as beneficial (or at least inevitable) and thus should be harnessed to protect the environment, versus those who view these projects as unsustainable and dangerous for human and other species' long-term survival. The two strands emerging in the early twentieth century of conservation versus preservation pitted an anthropocentric perspective of the earth's bounty as resources to be managed by wise stewards for human enjoyment and gain against eco-, or bio-, centric views of 'wild' nature as inherently valuable irrespective of human needs or profitability (see Brulle, 2000; Rootes, 2007). As concerns mounted over environmental degradation wrought by industrialism, international trade and transport, population growth, and nuclear power and weaponry in the post World War II era, so did calls for greater international coordination to address these issues (Wapner, 1996). This culminated in the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment convened in 1972 in Stockholm, around which a cluster of policy-oriented, nationally based environmental organizations strove to become international interlocutors and lobbyists.

Both in their domestic and now the international arenas, it is this reformist wing of environmental thought and action that has been widely recognized as among the most successful movements of the twentieth century (Curran, 2007, p. 100; Touraine et al., 1983; Wapner, 1996). Its policy-oriented discourse and organizations have come to dominate the field of environmentalism in recent decades (Rootes 2007, pp. 612–13). This tendency is tightly bound up with, although often critical of, the agenda articulated within intergovernmental forums. Chief among them is the annual UNFCCC negotiations to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions, initiated at the UN Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED), or Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and whose 15th Conference of Parties (COP15) in 2009 was our research site. Though diverse in their own right, reformers tend to support efforts toward sustainable development, ecological modernization, and state- and market-based solutions. Organizations most engaged with this debate are well-resourced, Northern NGOs, who petition and lobby governments within the UN treaty system to adopt technological, market, and regulatory responses to address climate change. As reformists, they do not fundamentally challenge the dominant economic or development model, the global governance system, or 'civil society's' place within it (Curran, 2007; Gibson, 2011; Reitan, 2011; Rootes, 2007; Wapner, 1996).

While the above sets the parameters for policy and much popular discourse at the domestic and international levels, the more radical and anti-systemic wing of the green movement, known as ecologism, first emerged in the 1970s as the 'fourth wave'. Our case below will show, however, that ecologism has morphed and surged again in what could be called a 'fifth wave', galvanized by the myriad threats posed by climate change.⁴ Today's ecologism combines elements of post-anarchism and autonomism with neo-marxist claims against environmental racism and for climate 'justice': specifically, its adherents call for reparations for historical injustices of colonialism and underdevelopment along with demands for equitable distribution of environmental risks.⁵ Furthermore, the radical and revolutionary strands of the left engaged in climate activism are also increasingly entwined with and informed by non- and anti-Western praxis from diverse indigenous struggles (see Mignolo, 2010; Powless, this volume; Zibechi, 2010). They view environmental degradation as a direct outgrowth of state-militarism, corporate rapaciousness, and capitalist expansion, and, more fundamentally, the growth-oriented development and industrial model of the last two centuries that was pursued by all states, whether Western liberal democratic, Soviet-style communist, or Third World developmentalist. And given the mounting frustrations over the official talks and market-based solutions that have yielded little concrete measures to stem climate change, both anti-state and anti-capitalist ideas are again gaining a wider audience.

Although often derided by more orthodox forms of marxism (see Curran, 2007, p. 124; Rootes, 2007, p. 620), the radical wing of the green movement has long been enmeshed with and a source of inspiration for communitarian marxism and anarchism. Giorel Curran (2007, p. 99) describes their relationship as ‘mutual accommodation’, embodied in the varieties of anarcho-ecologism including Murray Bookchin’s (2005) social ecology, eco-socialism, eco-marxism, eco-feminism, and deep ecology (Curran, 2007, p. 109). The latter emerged from a profound sense of crisis in the industrialized West, and seeks to transform relations between humans and nature from hierarchical domination to ‘organismic democracy’ (Merchant, 1992, pp. 1, 86). Deep ecology founder Arne Naess (1973, p. 95) himself drew attention to its anarchistic ethos of ‘diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism, and classlessness’. Naess’s philosophy thus presents the most fundamental challenge to modernity’s anthropocentric and developmentalist assumptions, and to the traditional left writ large, while remaining rooted within the anarchist tradition. As such, deep ecology provides the philosophical bridge to the breadth of resurgent indigenous praxis.

Returning to revolutionary marxism, despite the hybrids referred to above, historically, mainstream marxism and socialism have been viewed as incongruent with and even antagonistic to deep ecology, eco-anarchism, and indigenous worldviews. This is what animates the so-called ‘red-green’ debate (Curran, 2007, p. 124; Weston, 1986, p. 5). While diverse, eco-socialists have tended to maintain their anthropocentric and economic approaches and focus on capitalism’s degradation of nature and the unequal distribution of contamination along class lines (see Eckersley, 1992; O’Connor, 1988; Pepper, 1993). Yet in recent years, Curran (2007) notes that eco-socialists and eco-marxists, to varying degrees, have attenuated their positions to become more open to ecological, anarchist, and indigenous conceptions of humanity’s relationship to the planet—an assertion that is corroborated by our engaged research with the more radical wings of the climate justice movement at the COP15. These tendencies are showing greater sensitivity to the ways that environmental risks are distributed across and within countries and alarm over the global effects of industrialism and economic growth.⁶

Encouraging this convergence between ‘red’ and ‘green’ strands is the mounting concern over climate change. In the last two decades, this issue has been recognized by governments, citizens, the private sector, and activists alike as among the most daunting challenges of our time. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2007) details the growing scientific consensus on its anthropogenic causes and likely catastrophic effects if mitigation efforts prove unsuccessful and average global temperatures exceed 2°C over the pre-industrial average. Likely consequences entail erratic and extreme weather, increased rainfall and flooding in some areas and severe drought and desertification in others, rising ocean temperatures leading to acidification and stronger hurricanes, glacial melting causing sea levels to rise and the flooding of coastal areas, and the migration and dying off of numerous plant and animal species. And though beyond the scope of most natural scientific studies, it is the social, political and cultural upheavals wrought by these changes that are of central concern to social movement activists and policymakers alike.

In attempting to address these formidable challenges, the IPCC, the UNFCCC, its member parties, and the mainstream media tend to frame the climate crisis as a scientific problem and budgetary liability, and then debate the issues and proposed solutions based on their technical and economic feasibility. Yet many activists argue that other actors and experiences should be prioritized: namely, those who are the most vulnerable to—and already suffering—its effects, especially in the Global South, where they are not only the least able to adapt to these changes, but also the least culpable in creating the threat in the first place. The disparities

between North and South, rich and poor, powerful and disenfranchised inherent in the current climate crisis render this issue not only ripe for technical and policy-oriented dispute;⁷ they also provoke social movements' indignation and demands for recompense, restitution, and reparation. Indeed, longtime environmental activists have been quick to draw connections between industrialization, globalization, colonialism, climate change, and global power and wealth inequities (Brand et al., 2009; Rootes, 2007).

Thus, we can discern all three leftist tendencies of reform, revolution, and radicalism embedded in diverse calls for environmental—and more recently climate—*justice*, which draws together struggles against environmental degradation and racism with claims for economic, social, ethnic, and gender justice. This broad-based, amorphous struggle also articulates with indigenous peoples and their allies across the Americas demanding recognition as vulnerable populations and a voice in UN negotiations (see Powless, this volume). It also draws in Southern-based movements and organizations like Via Campesina, Third World Network, and Focus on the Global South and their grassroots Northern allies who now compete with professionalized NGO advocates to demand that the communities most affected speak for themselves in global environmental negotiations, and mobilize to effect or even halt the negotiations and implementation of what they denounce as false solutions (see Gibson, 2011).

The lack of progress in over 15 years of talks and in actual emission reductions has spurred many veteran movement actors to radicalize their critiques and tactics. Meanwhile, the integration of market-based, flexible mechanisms and carbon trading under the Kyoto Protocol, which is the current legally binding global treaty on climate change, has raised the ire of those engaged in anti-capitalist struggles, and thus provided a bridge to draw them into the struggle as well. And the introduction of proposals for what activists deride as 'techno fixes', ranging from genetically engineered, mono-crop tree plantations to industrial weather modification, has invigorated and reengaged the fringes of bio- and eco-centric ecologists which had been in abeyance (Bosso, 2000; Eyerman and Jamison, 1991; Jamison, 2001). Finally, the stark juxtaposition of the 'democratic, consensus-based United Nations' image with the reality of power struggles, backroom deals, and the closing down of non-state access to UNFCCC meetings have further thrown into question the UN's democratic credentials and thus legitimacy, triggering frustrated reactions from a large swath of the reformist to anti-systemic left (Gibson, 2011; Hadden, 2011).

Defining a Climate Justice Movement

As the above demonstrates, several overlapping and entwining interests are evident within climate (justice) activism specifically, the broader environmental movement of which it is the most recent manifestation and bellwether issue, and the AGM at large.⁸ To comprehend this relationship, we find it most useful to adopt Mario Diani's (2003, p. 1; see also Rootes, 2007, p. 610) consensual definition of social movements as 'complex and highly heterogeneous network structures' resembling strings of loosely connected events across time and space, comprised of individual and collective actors linked together in interactive webs of exchanges that range from formal to informal, direct to mediated, centralized to decentralized, and cooperative to hostile. In light of this definition, we argue that climate activism is, on the one hand, part and parcel of the AGM, yet, on the other, still distinct from it. For example, in attendance at COP15 in Copenhagen were single-issue environmentalists and multi-issue justice and rights-based organizations, hierarchical and horizontal groups, reformists and radicals, and seasoned veterans who had been coming since the first COP (Conference of the Parties) to those who were mobilized for the first time.

In our view, then, climate activism, the green movement, and the larger AGM are co-constitutive of one another. They are ‘miscible movements’ (Reitan, this volume; Vasi, 2006) or ever-shifting constellations of networked, social movement organizations and individual activists, sometimes overlapping and converging and at others pulling apart or acting separately. Thus, rather than attempting in advance to define or demarcate—and thus reify—the ‘climate justice movement’, we instead take seriously its emergent, amorphous, and living nature. Our view is consistent with scholars who emphasize movement complexity, diversity, fluidity, and dynamism, that is, *the process and flow of movement* (i.e. Chesters and Welsh, 2006; Diani, 2003; McAdam et al., 2001; Melucci, 1984; Reitan, 2007; Rootes, 2007; Zibechi, 2010), rather than viewing them as strategic actors with stable identities and determinable population borders.

Yet as Rootes (2007, p. 610) astutely recognizes, ‘An environmental movement is identical neither with . . . organizations . . . nor with episodes of . . . protest. . . . It is only when such organizations (and other actors) are networked one with another and engaged in collective action that an environmental movement can sensibly be identified’. Indeed, only a few years ago scholars detected such a high degree of institutionalization (Doherty, 2002; Eyerman and Jamison, 1991) on the one hand, and fragmentation (Bosso, 2000; Jamison, 2001; Rootes, 2007) on the other, to question whether we may conceive of an environmental movement at all. Thus climate change has served as a galvanizing force for what had become a rather dispersed and routinized set of actors, just as the UNFCCC treaty process and COP summit meetings have provided a transnational target, timeline, and periodic convergence space where networking, collective action, and identity can all be bolstered. In our own engaged research then, we consider the ‘environmental movement’ to comprise, at any particular time, those activists who participate in mobilization and organizational spaces we and others assess to be key sites of convergence and contestation, both physical and virtual (i.e. Internet-based). Thus the sector of the green movement—which can be called the climate justice movement—studied herein includes those individuals, organizations, and networks who were actively engaged in the physical and virtual sites leading up to and during the COP15, where the authors undertook participatory action research.

Participatory Action Research Methodology at the COP15

Given our ontological view of climate activism, and the AGM more broadly, as constantly evolving in form, functions, participants, and discourses, concordant epistemological and methodological stances must accompany it. We agree with Graeme Chesters and Ian Welsh (2006, pp. 1, 101) that:

Sociologically this is not a movement that can be engaged with using the standard tool box. . . . To capture the dynamics . . . , one must literally be adrift within the network, engaging with movement actors in material and immaterial spaces and sensitised to the emergence of qualities that are irreducible to the sum of the parts of that network.

We thus have adapted a PAR approach in our relationship to climate activism and the broader AGM. Within international relations theory, PAR is closely linked to and informed by feminist approaches emphasizing hermeneutic, conversational, and dialogic methods of understanding power and transformational possibilities emanating from societies’ margins, such as Christine Sylvester’s (1994) ‘empathetic cooperation’ yielding what Donna Haraway (1988) and J. Anne Tickner (1997) call ‘situated knowledge’. Rather than maintaining a sharp subject–

object distinction, the appropriate ethos for PAR is fundamentally *relational* (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, p. 579).

We therefore set out to ‘embed’ ourselves within the networks and organizations mobilizing around the climate conferences not solely as academics and researchers, but also as activists and *compañeras via accompaniment*.⁹ The research goal is to illuminate existing along with potential connections across the broad tendencies of climate activism in order to spotlight avenues for greater cooperation or coordination of struggles to protect the life and health of the earth. At the same time, we look for tensions, contradictions, and unintended consequences that arise from certain actions or stances taken within and between network actors. Both aims are consistent with the role of empathetic insider who accompanies other activists and helps articulate a new ‘common sense’ that those involved would consider authentic, integrative, clarifying, and useful for practice (see Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000).

Mobilization and meeting spaces leading up to and during the COP15 have provided us with rich milieus in which to observe, interact with, comprehend, and accompany the various ideological strands converging and diverging within the climate justice movement. Our PAR process has entailed a wide range of methods, including theory-driven participant observation of protests and coordination meetings, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations, email listserv monitoring, as well as often spontaneous, volunteer accompaniment roles (including information-disseminator, message-carrier, relationship broker, guide to meetings, media-team supporter, translator, interpreter, blogger, note-taker, meeting facilitator, report-back speaker, witnessing and reporting preventive arrests and police brutality, character voucher, jail solidarity, protest organizer, and mass march runner). The two authors combine a breadth of knowledge of and engagement with AGM activists over time with considerable depth from close engagement with climate activism in recent years: one has been involved with numerous AGM networks for over a decade, including the Washington, DC-based Mobilization for Global Justice and numerous World and European Social Forums (see Reitan, 2007); while the other has been closely following climate activism since 2008, and particularly the radicalization process of some of its participants, in her doctoral and now post-doctoral research (Gibson, 2011).

For the current study, we began our joint participatory research in 2009 during the lead-up to COP15 at the WSF in Belém, Brazil, followed by one of us attending the G20 meeting in Pittsburgh, US. Activities included attendance of and participation in more than 20 global and North American COP15 mobilization meetings and various working group sessions (i.e. media, strategy, action, framing, and logistics). During COP15 itself, in an effort to provide a broader account of the various sectors of the movement, the authors’ PAR sites and roles were divided: one focused on ‘outside’ activist protests, marches, planning meetings, cultural and social events, and educational and informational sessions at the large, parallel, meeting space of the Klimaforum. The other gained accreditation as an official NGO observer with Global Justice Ecology Project (GJEP), a US-based environmental justice organization and key facilitator and actor within the Climate Justice Now! (CJN) and Climate Justice Action (CJA) networks. In this role she monitored and participated in ‘inside’ informational and planning sessions, media work, and protests by accredited NGOs and their state allies in the official summit site of the Bella Center.

This inside–outside division proved especially valuable as the negotiations wore on, when the UNFCCC began to restrict civil society participation in the Bella Center. This pushed some of the most professionalized NGO insiders *outside* and into the Klimaforum, where they could be observed by the ‘outside’ researcher, while the ‘insider’ remained as one of relatively few who continued to be issued new badges for entry. Our inside–outside team served a further,

spontaneous accompaniment role during the Reclaim Power March on 16 December: In the face of preventive and ongoing arrests of key organizers, the researchers' SMS contact became the most direct—and possibly only remaining in the event—line of communication between the inside group of NGOs and delegates attempting a walk-out and the outside coordinators of the march trying to breach the Bella Center perimeter fence and police line in order to hold the People's Assembly for Climate Justice.

Observation field notes were taken at multiple mobilization, action, media and cross-network coordination and information-sharing meetings as well as at protests both inside and outside the conference center. Semi-structured interviews were performed at various locations (both at research sites and via Skype) throughout 2008–2010 by one of us.¹⁰ For the case below, first-hand evidence was drawn mainly from our own participant observation, dialogue, and accompaniment roles with other activists. Given the nature and content of these discussions as well as our desire to maintain rapport, trust, and discretion, most of these conversations were informal and understood to be off the record. We consider it our task as participatory action researchers to attempt to synthesize what we saw, heard, discovered in dialogue, and felt during the COP15, into a 'common-sense' understanding of network relations and dynamics—but while also taking responsibility for any conjectures or errors made. Finally, the listservs affiliated with the networks were monitored during this same period. Emails pertaining to international meetings and conference calls, ideological debates, and cross-network discussions on framing and protest strategies were analyzed.

Taken together, these observations, field notes, conversations, interviews, accompaniment roles, and email content analysis conducted from 2008–2009 comprise our primary evidence, and helped shape our theoretical arguments articulated above, in a recursive spiral. We'll next turn to present evidence drawn from our PAR approach and informed by our theorizing, of the climate justice movement as being constituted by dynamic interactions among various actors and tendencies embedded in the three historic leftist strands, as well non- and anti-Western, indigenous praxis.

Pulling Liberal Reformism 'Left' toward Anti-Systemic and Indigenous Strands

The two main networks in which NGOs played key coordinating roles in the lead-up to the 2009 UNFCCC negotiations were the Climate Action Network (CAN) and Climate Justice Now! (CJN). Given their history, distinct organizational modes, and political stances of reform environmentalism versus a more transformist or radical climate justice frame, respectively, their relations have been marked by contention and competition, as will be seen below.¹¹ Yet that said, the two networks nonetheless remain linked by a shared history, meeting spaces, some members in common, informal information exchange, support for Southern governments' positions, and coordinated action.

CAN is the oldest and largest network participating in the UN climate talks, emerging out of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Thus, any impact that civil society actors have had on the treaty process can largely be credited to its members. The network's leaders are among the most established environmental reform groups such as World Wildlife Fund and Greenpeace. But they've recently been joined by influential social justice, aid, and development NGOs like OXFAM and Christian Aid, which reflects the increased salience of the climate issue in the larger Global Justice Movement's ever-shifting agenda. CAN's secretariat in Washington DC coordinates activities, information exchange, and strategy among 12 regional offices worldwide, publicizes its campaigns, raises funds, and collects membership dues. Its stance, while increasingly critical,

has largely focused on ‘sustainable development’—that is, human and economic development that doesn’t compromise either’s continued growth or unduly harm the planet. In this regard, it reflects the liberal socio-economic and political discourse of universal, yet differentially assigned, rights and obligations based on each country’s level of economic development. CAN’s lobbying and campaigning efforts promote government regulation at both the national and international levels through ‘fair, ambitious and binding’ targets and treaties, sustainable economic growth supported by technology and aid transfers to the South, and individual behavioral change (see Gibson, 2011; Hadden, 2011).

CAN’s network structure and aims thus approximate the more hierarchical, reformist, and limited agenda of a so-called ‘first generation advocacy model’, with its attendant tensions (see Bennett, 2005; Reitan, 2007). These came to a head in the UN climate talks two years prior at the COP13 in Bali. CAN members, including Friends of the Earth International and some of its national affiliates, voiced concerns about lead Northern NGOs promoting their own governments’ interests over those of poor and developing countries. They also accused them of blocking the network from adopting more critical and direct action stances against powerful state and economic actors and in defense of the planet and its vast majority of people. These critiques resonated with some Southern-based networks and *embedded partisan NGOs* (Reitan, 2011) who were coming to the climate talks for the first time (Gibson, 2011; Hadden, 2011). The dissidents began meeting and staging actions separate from CAN and, by the COP13’s end, 20 groups issued a press release launching a new network, Climate Justice Now! (CJN, 2007).

The latter’s name highlights their commitment to struggle for social, ecological, and gender justice simultaneously, as well as their demand for reparations for ‘climate debt’ to be paid to the South. Since a number of its members can be said to have ‘spilled over’ from (Hadden, 2011)—or ‘coalesced’ with (Reitan, this volume)—the anti-neoliberal, Global Justice Movement, CJN’s climate justice frame embodies an eco-marxist tendency. It is also telling that CJN’s critical and more confrontational stance against the UNFCCC process—charging it as undemocratic and marginalizing of voices from the South most affected by climate change and as proposing false and profit-oriented solutions that fail to address the scale of the crisis—are the very same criticisms its participants leveled against their former CAN comrades upon their exodus.

Going into the COP15, the more established CAN had to compete with the upstart CJN for UN accreditation badges, and many of the former were incensed to find that 40% went to the latter. The two networks were made to share the NGO room in the official Bella Center as well as to coordinate times for press conferences—both of which were conflictual. When NGO access to the center was severely curtailed in the final days of negotiations, CAN members migrated to the Klimaforum space, where CJN had been hosting well-attended and open informational and mobilization meetings all week. Yet as one of us observed, CAN proceeded to string tape and check badges in its cordoned off section of the hall, excluding non-network activists and the public from their ‘sensitive’ discussions (and then bursting into tears and walking away when questioned about it).

These fractious relations notwithstanding, it’s important to note how the first generation CAN and the ‘second-generation, direct action social justice’-modeled CJN (Bennett, 2005; Reitan, 2007), nonetheless coordinated around the COP15. Informally, the two networks shared information via their overlapping members such as Christian Aid, the Washington, DC-based Institute for Policy Studies, and some national delegates of Friends of the Earth. Because the two networks’ meetings ran back-to-back, it was not uncommon for some CAN members to stay after to liaise or participate with CJN. Further, both networks supported the joint demand of

the Africa group, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the Group of 77 Developing Countries (G77), and China to hold industrialized nations to legally binding reduction targets and to a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol.¹² Additionally, CAN is credited (if grudgingly) by CJN members for their ability to produce daily policy newsletters, the *ECO*, which is widely distributed and read by negotiators and civil society observers alike.

Regarding coordinated and joint action, both networks mobilized on 12 December for the permitted march called by CAN members' Global Campaign for Climate Action (GCCA; see Björk, 2010; Hadden, 2011). CJN, however, joined the third and more radical network Climate Justice Action (discussed below), to march that day under the anti-systemic banner of 'System Change not Climate Change'. Some CJN members have credited CAN for their ability to orchestrate mass marches such as that on '12/12', where up to 100,000 turned out, in addition to media-savvy and popular sign-on campaigns such as TckTckTck, which the younger, less well-resourced, and more confrontational CJN has not yet been able to do.

Articulating Leftist Revolutionary and Radical Strands with Post-Autonomist Praxis

A reinvigorated leftist radicalism, increased pragmatism, marxist–anarchist convergence, and growing valorization of indigenous struggles were all embodied in a third network, spearheaded by anti-systemic groups and direct action autonomists at the COP15: Climate Justice Action (CJA). Organizationally and demographically, CJA stands in contrast to both CAN and CJN in that most of its participants were young, urban, European women and men (fairly gender-balanced), whereas the other two networks were comprised of more traditionally organized and professional NGOs and transnational organizations, as well as older and more geographically diverse participants. CJA's most active organizers were from Danish and German direct action, anti-capitalist and autonomist groups and the No Borders and Climate Camp networks, who hatched the idea for the new network shortly before the 2008 WSF in Belém. At that forum, they were joined by a number of CJN's mass-based organizations and more embedded partisan NGOs including GJEP, Via Campesina, Indigenous Environmental Network, and Focus on the Global South.

Even more so than the CJN, this diffuse collectivity strove toward a second-generation, direct action network ideal—with all its attendant difficulties: CJA was launched in 2008 through a series of international mobilization meetings as a horizontal network based on consensus decision-making and the principles of autonomy and trust. Of the three networks it has been the most outspoken critic of capitalism and firmly committed to civil disobedience and direct action to safeguard the environment. CJA was forged by activists coming from both anarchistic and marxist orientations into what one of its lead organizers (Müller, 2010) described as a broadly 'post-autonomous' network, which reflected the rapprochement that marxist theorist David Harvey and others have hailed as the contemporary leftist zeitgeist. The network's statements and actions bordered on outright antagonism toward the UN and interstate system, and instead championed solutions to the climate crisis emanating from grassroots, workers', and popular social movements linked into a global 'movement of movements'.

Consensus decision-making in a new and diverse network whose prominent members were also the most radical meant that CJA's planning meetings and online discussions were volatile from the start. As the COP15 grew nearer, the consensus process came to a standstill and, in the event, broke down. During the summit itself, key decisions were mostly made by a core group of activist-spokespersons—whose phones were being tapped and who, one by one, were arrested—

and then ‘consented to’ in giant meetings at the convergence centers. But in spite of internal derision and decision-making breakdown exacerbated by police surveillance and a concerted decapitation strategy, CJA activists—and especially the Copenhagen logistical group Climate Collective—went to great efforts to assure that the hundreds of youth who turned up at the Ragnhildesgade and Tegholmen convergence centers were housed, fed, entertained, informed, and able to forge smaller affinity action groups and to participate to some degree in the larger CJA decision-making.

Notably, CJA activists also worked closely with impacted communities such as the Indigenous Environmental Network and Via Campesina through their support of the Trade to Climate Caravans, which was a one-week tour that brought 60 farmers and frontline community members from the anti-WTO protests in Geneva to the climate negotiations in Copenhagen. Conversely, indigenous representatives attended several CJA action planning meetings to provide input on the aims and tactics of the proposed Reclaim Power action. Of particular concern for these participants was ensuring that vulnerable people had the opportunity to lead the march but also avoid arrest or undue persecution, should police repression ensue. Finally, CJA mobilized thousands to take part in mass, direct, and antagonistic action over several days, the largest being the 16 December Reclaim Power march on the Bella Center of approximately 3,000, which was co-organized by CJN.

CJA can be viewed as an ambitious experiment in increased openness and pragmatism drawing together all activist tendencies present in Copenhagen and thus the broad swath of the transnational environmental movement. This experiment was coupled with a valorization of autonomous indigenous movements, which we detected to varying degrees among all Western tendencies in the climate change struggle (see also Powless, this volume). For while CJA promoted direct action, localized solutions, and horizontality, they also pledged to coordinate closely with other international climate and social justice groups across the political spectrum coming to Copenhagen and to facilitate their taking action while there. This ‘post-autonomist’ approach was a pragmatic effort by some in CJA to avoid the secrecy and (self-)marginalization commonly associated with anarchists and the radical left subculture (Müller, 2010).

This new openness was not without its critics even further to the left, so to speak. Evidence of intra-anarchist fracturing existed alongside simultaneous coalescence with the larger climate, indigenous, and global justice movements. This fracturing was embodied in Never Trust a Cop (NTAC). Critical of CJA’s more open, collaborative approach and its eschewing the ‘shut it down’ position in favor of ‘no deal is better than a bad deal’ (Hadden, 2011), the smaller NTAC broke away in the lead-up to COP15 to pursue separate campaigns, such as the Hit the Production action aimed at shutting down the Copenhagen harbor. Yet even this was not a complete break, as NTAC activists were indirectly linked to CJA via the Climate Collective, who coordinated solidarity housing and information-sharing for both, and some NTAC joined the autonomous ‘green bloc’ (who were mostly preemptively arrested) during CJA’s Reclaim Power action.

It was within the CJA where we see the clearest evidence of convergence among post-marxism and post-anarchism into post-autonomy, blending policy-oriented critique and tactics with consensus-based participatory democracy, broad alliance-building, and contentious outside mobilization. CJA utilized many tactics to amplify and bridge their revolutionary and radical roots into an inclusive, collaborative post-autonomist campaign against the UNFCCC. To build a coalition from the ground up, they held open international planning meetings beginning in 2008 and through the COP15. They first established the core of the network, while in later meetings they strategically opened out to other actors. Efforts were spearheaded by the

Danish network, Klimax!, who brought together around 100 people from 25 countries at the first meeting in Copenhagen. A second, at COP14 in Poznan, Poland, drew roughly 80 people from nearly 30 countries, the majority being CJN members. The third was held at the 2008 WSF, a crucial moment to network with the many indigenous activists present in Belém. The remaining 2009 meetings were again held in Copenhagen to focus on the site and meeting logistics. By shifting locales from the Danish capital to the UNFCCC summit to the Brazilian forum and back, coordinators ensured that a broad base of local organizers, impacted indigenous communities and grassroots movements, and sympathetic insider NGOs were engaged in the planning process. To promote transparency, CJA routinely circulated their meeting minutes on the CJA and CJN listservs and posted them on their open access wiki page.

When the COP15 was underway, CJA took several steps to continue constructing their more inclusive, anti-systemic campaign among the hundreds of new activists becoming involved for the first time. To build broadly for their Reclaim Power march, they organized a rally and party in the free community of Christiania where renowned journalist Naomi Klein and scholar-activist Michael Hardt shared the platform with CJA spokesman Tazio Müller. And for an ‘inside strategy’, CJA sought out sympathetic CJN allies, liaising with GJEP, Focus on the Global South, Indigenous Environmental Network, and *SmartMeme*. They routinely invited CJN members to attend their nightly coordination meetings in Ragnhildesgade and sat in on several CJN media meetings. Perhaps the strongest example of coordination came when GJEP accredited CJA’s Müller and Stine Gry Jonassen to the UNFCCC and gave over one of its coveted CJN press conference slots (which were split between CJN and CAN after some contention) to members of CJA so that they could publicly announce details of their Reclaim Power march from within the official meeting site.¹³ Finally, members of CJA and CJN launched multiple ‘inside-out communication teams’—one of which was the text messaging between the authors—to coordinate the three-pronged action of Reclaim Power: (1) an NGO walk-out that was to meet the (2) mass march, followed by (3) the People’s Assembly for Climate Justice. For the march, CJA organized a speakers’ truck, arranged permits, and dispersed into affinity groups clustered into a direct action green bloc, a bike bloc, and a permitted blue bloc to march on the Bella Center and breach the police line and fence to hold the People’s Assembly inside the perimeter.

In this confrontational, ‘last stand’ protest against the UNFCCC, CJN members joined the CJA blue bloc and formed an additional yellow (badge) bloc of NGO delegates—including some CAN members—who were no longer allowed into the Bella Center, under the banner ‘No Decisions about us without us—Climate Justice Now!’ CJA and CJN also coordinated inside disruptions and a walk-out of some 300 UN observers and participants led by the Indigenous Peoples Caucus. Crucially, this action was also meant to protest the lack of inclusion in the final agreement of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and of Bolivia’s demand that the rights of Mother Earth be recognized. Those leaving—including one of us—were halted, pushed, and beaten back by riot police on an icy bridge. Meanwhile, other CJN members, among them the Social and Climate Justice Caravan activists, were invited by CJA to be the main speakers for the Peoples’ Assembly which did take place, under heavy police surveillance, outside—not inside—the Bella Center’s perimeter fence, for attempts to breach it were repelled with police teargas and billy clubs.

Post-COP15 Reflections

As the COP15 closed to little fanfare with the abrupt ‘taking note of’ the Copenhagen Accord, the convention was judged by all of the networks to be a failure. Both CJA and CJN issued

statements not only condemning the Accord as empty and undemocratic, but also heavily criticizing the UNFCCC and Danish and European police for their unprecedented repression of civil society voices. The CJN (2009) statement struck a despondent, anti-capitalist and eco-marxist tone: ‘The UN conference was unable to deliver solutions to the climate crisis, or even minimal progress toward them . . . government and corporate elites here in Copenhagen made no attempt to satisfy the expectations of the world. False solutions and corporations completely co-opted the United Nations process.’ And while some CAN members, such as the Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, and National Resources Defense Council at least publicly defended the Copenhagen Accord as a ‘crucial step forward’, others such as Greenpeace, some Friends of the Earth affiliates, and the Institute for Policy Studies derided the Accord as ‘unfair’ and a ‘non-result’. One close observer of CAN noted: ‘The political outcome of COP 15 was a bitter disappointment to groups who had spent years developing careful plans to push delegates towards a more ambitious conclusion’ (Hadden, 2011).

Little has changed in the ensuing negotiations to modify this pessimistic assessment. While hope briefly surged around Bolivian President Evo Morales’s April 2010 ‘World Peoples’ Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth’, which drew some 35,000 participants from over 140 countries, most states have simply ignored the eco-marxist and indigenous Peoples’ Accord (PWCCC, 2010) that came out of it. In the face of what is clearly a gross abdication of leadership and denial of responsibility on the part of the world’s most powerful governments, we encourage other concerned scholars to experiment with the participatory action methods we’ve employed here. In doing so, we can gain a better appreciation for the broad diversity of contemporary environmental and other activist praxis as well as for their deep roots in the history of the left—and now branching beyond it. Via PAR, we can also take up roles of movement accompaniment, and in the process help articulate a new ‘common sense’. For today’s myriad threats emanating not just from potentially cataclysmic climate change but also from the deepening inequalities and perennial injustices that plague all regions of the world, provide scholars with an opportunity—one might even say a duty—to move beyond passive (or ‘objective’) observers into more active *subjects*¹⁴ and participants in struggle.

We are presented, it seems, with a choice: to simply stand back and interpret the world, or together to seek new ways of changing it. As the PAR pioneer Paulo Freire once said and the Zapatistas have echoed, ‘we make the road by walking’. Moving together in this way, we may become conscious, critical, unfettered, and ultimately transcendent of our Western traditions.

Notes

- 1 We refer to ‘marxism’ in the lower case to signify that the intellectual and activist lineage inspired by Karl Marx now transcends one man’s ideas and texts.
- 2 It is important to note, however, that some of the earliest proponents of nature conservation in the US and Europe were game hunters, a concern that continues to this day (Rootes, 2007, p. 612). And on historical and contemporary ecological fascism in the West, see Staudenmaier and Biehl (2011).
- 3 For an elaboration of these three strands in the context of the Alter-Globalization Movement, see Reitan (this volume).
- 4 This resurgence can be partially explained by climate change being perceived as a zero-sum game, akin to forest preservation and halting nuclear power, which have provoked similarly transgressive praxis. See Rootes (2007, p. 620).
- 5 On the development of the environmental justice and racism frames, see Agyeman and Evans (2004), Brulle (2000, pp. 207–8), Cole and Foster (2001), Dawson (2010), and Rootes (2007, p. 615).

- 6 Curran (2007) notes a similar move by deep ecologists toward post-autonomists and post-marxists, by taking up the fight against environmental racism and embracing the view that environmental concerns are as well *social* concerns.
- 7 For example, there is an ongoing debate between various climate activists over email listservs on the preferred temperature cap. Many reformist NGOs subscribe to the 2°C standard issued by the IPCC and accepted by most Kyoto parties. Since 2008 however, more radical groups and those from the South and impacted communities have begun to challenge this target from both a scientific and justice perspective and have issued a call for a 1.5 or even 1°C cap.
- 8 A number of scholars, such as Brand et al. (2009), Curran (2007, p. 59), Hadden (2011), Klein (2009), and Reitan (2009), have identified climate change as the newest bellwether issue galvanizing the broader AGM by serving as the most salient mobilizing threat and opportunity following the 2005 and 2007 G8 summits and 2003 US-led attacks on Iraq.
- 9 *Accompaniment* refers to collaboration based on trust, common understanding and analysis of the problem, and a commitment to solidarity and equality (see Lynd, forthcoming; Whitmore and Wilson, 1999). For a fuller explication of our PAR approach and its strengths and limitations, see Reitan (2007, pp. 32–9). Combining PAR with expressive auto-ethnography and feminist praxis is central to Reitan's current research.
- 10 In accordance with the University of Miami's Institutional Review Board, all interviews required informed consent and were coded anonymously to protect those who may have been involved in or were planning to participate in events that had the potential to elicit reaction from police or security officials. Interviews are analyzed and presented in Gibson (2011).
- 11 The membership and structure of, along with contentious relations between, these two networks are explored at length in Gibson (2011) and Hadden (2011).
- 12 CJN furthermore strongly supported the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) countries' spokesman Evo Morales in his call for 49% emissions reductions. And the Third World Network, a prominent CJN member, provided expertise to a number of Southern governments, working with their under-staffed delegations long into the night to come up with negotiating positions.
- 13 Müller was arrested upon his exit by plainclothes police and held on charges of incitement to riot for the summit's duration.
- 14 We largely accept the post-structuralist position that 'we' (the authors, that is 'I' and 'I') are not modern(ist), autonomous, 'free subjects', but are rather constructed by, and thus subject(ed) to, discourse. That said, we have some capacity—or limited agency—to choose between 'subject positions', and we adopt the critical, marxist notion that the current conjuncture grants an opportunity to choose a more active, engaged, dialogical, and egalitarian relationship with those who the modernist scientific discourse would deem 'objects' of inquiry to be analyzed and explained, not understood or accompanied.

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