

ACTIVISM & THE ENVIRONMENT



“A free man thinks of death least of all things,
and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but
of life.”

Baruch Spinoza

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ACTIVISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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A FEW WORDS FROM THE EDITORS

What is activism?
What is this thing we call the environment?
What is anything?

It is everything.

And now, right now as you read and breathe, you have in front of you a thing which contains so much. Its roots are so incomprehensibly complex. So marvelous. A set of causal chains we know no definite roots to. Or only one causal chain? One indefinite one that we are all jointly continuing and increasing the complexity of.

Stay afloat and don't drift away.

You are now so fortunate that you, out of all possible individuals, have this thing in front of you at the very moment in time where it is rather comprehensible. Humbly, we dare compare it to a most delicious meal prepared by a set of master chefs. The Chefs have encountered terrific ingredients here and there, and brought them all to their kitchen. There they have worked with the ingredients, treated them all with love and care, followed ideas and thoughts they possess, have received, and eventually made the meal ready for you to enjoy. This thing you are holding is like that meal. Enjoy it while it is warm! Enjoy it open heartedly, tenderly.

The two categories activism and environment are certainly broad ones. What do they mean? What do they mean when used jointly? Are they referring to something good and deeply needed? Stop!

Think no longer alone.

Instead, dive into the texts on the following pages. Engage with the ingredients of this meal! There you will find daring and generous attempts by the contributors of this issue to express, with written words, ideas on this/these grand subject/s. Here you can read about activism done at SUM, the home and birthplace of this journal, you can read about the exploration of anarchist decolonization, about the experiences of being and identifying as an activist. And you can read about encouraging activism done via social media in Peru, you can read about the strength and beauty of creativity in activism, how activism has transcended borders of nation states, and even more. Yes, there is even more.

Join and enjoy the ideas!

The Editorial Board
2021

YOU ARE [DOING] ENOUGH

BY ELLEN YOUNG

Ellen Young is from America's wild west and is currently a master's student in the Interdisciplinary Gender Studies Research Centre at the University of Oslo. Ellen is working on her master's thesis where she examines the relationship between visual impairments and dating and sex lives. Ellen is passionate about disability rights and loves to find and explore street art while traveling.

I am scared.

I am tired.

The life of an activist is tiring. I don't think this is news and I don't think I'm alone.

I am obsessed with, *Am I doing enough? Am I enough? How can I do more?* Are you, dear reader, feeling this way, too? Whether you want to become an activist or feel as though you're not doing enough to label yourself as such, I am talking to you.

Everyone I know seems to be feeling as though they are not "enough." It's the toxic capitalist culture that puts these feelings of self-doubt in our minds. Are we not enough for a world that tries to make us one-sighted consumers who can't see past their latest receipts and shopping bags? Citizens who can't see past the advertising at every subway and bus stop in the city? Are the steps we take to improve our communities, battle climate change, and rid our cities of rampant inequalities still not enough?

We are reducing, we are recycling, we are showing up to protests, and yet... we are still feeling like we are not enough. I blame the constant bombardment of advertising, news cycles, and toxic social media culture.

No. We are enough. You are enough.

Does everyone else carry around this guilt when they see the overflowing trash can at your coffee shop, a metal can full of bleached and non-recyclable paper napkins, waxed coffee cups and plastic lids? Has anyone else felt a moment of grief when they walk by the Oslo fjord and discover a puddle, just beginning to dry up from yesterday's rain, and dozens of disposable face masks are beginning to re-appear out of the mud?

I believe it takes an activist’s mindset to notice these things daily. Because they *are* happening. Daily. It takes an activist’s grit to change our own daily habits, to engage in those conversations turned arguments. To mourn, grieve, and fight for the cleaner forests, cities, lives, air, and world we hope to see, both in our lifetime, and the future world to come.

You are an activist in the choices you make. Of course, this includes those days when you’re tired, those days when you have overwhelming anxiety. It includes where you spend your time, where you spend your wallet, what you look at online, those petitions you sign, and Instagram re/posts you construct. Activism is embraced every time you plant a tree, plant a garden, conserve water and minimize food waste. Activism is often more than that, but I’m here to tell you: You are [doing]enough. It’s in your blood when you see plastic trash landing on our beaches, old beer cans at a campsite, or cigarette butts lining the sidewalk, and you stop to clean it up. Activism lives in the anger you feel when you see Norway is still whaling, but hey, they do it “responsibly.” Activism begins after a long hike when you realize nature is often inaccessible to people with disabilities and unwelcoming to people of color and you dialogue, *how can we change this?*

It takes an activist to make your own cleaning supplies, reuse products in useful ways, and it takes an activist to actively fight capitalist culture that constantly tries to make you feel like you are “not enough.” It takes an activist to bike your non-e-bike up-hill. It takes an activist to remember that reusable cup when you’re packing your “sack lunch” in eco-friendly materials. It takes an activist to wear the same old hiking, skiing, biking, walking, working clothes, year after year and not give in to the pressure to wear the latest, greatest, and most “high-tech” gear, fresh off the rack. It takes an activist to leave those “eco-friendly” big-corporation, name-brand sweaters, hoodies, vests, beanies, off your body, off your camping list, off your “wish list.” It takes an activist to break-up with Amazon, Patagonia, Black Diamond, Helly Hansen, The North Face, and instead shop locally, eat locally, survive locally, focus locally, wear locally, support locally. Knowing that when we act locally, it impacts globally.

I have long considered myself an activist and as I began engaging, I struggled to understand how to do it all. *Am I activist enough? Does what I do really matter?* Then, I read. I read and discover. It is reading about past and current activists, it's doing the homework for current movements, it is here, I realize I am enough, and you are too! Of course, you are doing enough, you are enough-enough! You matter and what you do really-does-matter.

Time and time again, our bodies are becoming the site of being what we read, what we learn, what we see, what we buy. It's tiring. And it is OK to be tired. I am tired. What can we do when we are tired? When we are fed up? I turn to my fellow activists, who speak out about fatigue, activist fatigue, news cycle fatigue, toxic culture fatigue, and I find a way to bring activism back home. Back to what I can control, what I can maintain, back to what allows me to function.

Activism is something within me. It is something within you. It is the times you have shown up, mentally, spiritually, virtually, physically for those who find importance in fighting the dominant paradigms that bind us all. When you stood in solidarity with anti-oil protestors, even when you were tied up working your shift at your hourly wage job. When you stood in solidarity with student climate activists, even when you couldn't join in-person. Whether this solidarity looks like educating peers and family members about these causes and why more of us should pay attention or stand side-by-side with protestors, I see you.

Activism is for me. It is for you. It is what makes us tired. Activism is venting for the frustrated. It is cathartic and heartbreaking for those who have experienced injustice and loss. Activism has been born out of necessity, out of need. It is older than me, it is older than you. It is calling and it is yelling, screaming, hoping we will continue.

Whether you feel called to speak up against animals in cages, against burning forests, called to speak up against eviction and homelessness, or gender and racial inequalities. Every time you show up or speak out, you live activism, you are an activist. Activism exists in those moments of choosing the hard path when there was an easier route all along.

Every time you said “No.” When it was hard, when it wasn’t “cool,” but you just knew- it was right. Every time you stood with your neighbor, your co-worker, your classmate, or a stranger.

Activism has been passed down to us by those intolerant of transphobia, fatphobia, racism, sexism, ableism, Islamophobia, homophobia, anti-Semitism, ageism, classism - deep breath - passed down to us by those against the hetero-patriarchal, earth raping, capitalist bullshit, norms, boundaries, and binaries. Welcome!

Activism is a gift. It has been given to me; it has been given to you. Harness this gift, evaluate it, learn from it, explore it. Use it and never let it go. I promise it will provide you with a community, a passion, a life full of purpose, full of moving forward, full of integrity.

FULL of being enough.

IS THERE ROOM FOR STUDENT ACTIVISM AT SUM?

BY LARS HENNING WØHNCKE

Lars Henning Wøhncke is a master's student at SUM. He holds a previous master's degree in Scandinavian Studies, Political Science and History from the University of Cologne where he wrote his thesis on Sami land rights in Finnmark. Since then, he has worked in various positions in the transport sector. In his current master's thesis at SUM, he explores attitudes towards growth in the Norwegian transport sector.

Abstract

The discussion around limiting air travel at the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM) has exposed the need for a general conversation about student activism at the Centre. This commentary argues that such a conversation should be based on the recognition of students' structural position at SUM and in contemporary society as a whole. Failure to do so risks contributing to a looming generational conflict in society at large, the beginnings of which are already becoming faintly visible.

None of us can talk to our parents. By 'us' I mean my generation, people born after the Change. You know that thing where you break up with someone and say, It's not you, it's me? This is the opposite. It's not us, it's them. Everyone knows what the problem is. The diagnosis isn't hard — the diagnosis isn't even controversial. It's guilt: mass guilt, generational guilt. The olds feel they irretrievably fucked up the world, then allowed us to be born into it. You know what? It's true. That's exactly what they did. They know it, we know it. Everybody knows it.

— Kavanagh, main character in John Lanchester's novel *The Wall* (Lanchester 2019, 55)

The Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM) is rightly proud of its environmentalist heritage. Arne Næss' characteristic profile adorns the main lecture room, and a generous stipend that carries his name is awarded to its foremost students. All new students are tasked with ensuring that Næss' environmentalist spirit continues to grace the halls of SUM. The Brundtland report's legacy is the next thing new students are emboldened to personify. Indeed, the expectations with which a new student at SUM is laden can feel a little overwhelming at first. Change the world, challenge the status quo — SUM students learn early that anything less means under-selling one's aspirations.

Motivated by the encouraging speeches and the inspirational curriculum, and not least by UiO's 2018 climate accounting report,¹ a loose group of SUM students started The Grounded Project. Intending to address the perceived discrepancy between SUM's advertised ambitions and the extent to which they are being lived up to at the Centre, the project aimed specifically at the biggest piece of the emission pie: academic air travel. The project directed three core demands at SUM's leadership: 1) collect and publish all travel data from academic travel at SUM on the centre's website, 2) use ground transportation for all destinations within a radius of 36 hours travel time from Oslo and 3) provide systematic and institutionalized e-conferencing training and support for researchers and staff.² The demands were further detailed and explained by flyers, posters and emails.

The project describes itself as a horizontal, non-hierarchical movement where students can spontaneously participate as they want and see fit, an organizational form increasingly popularized in current environmental activism.³ This mode of organizing soon led to an animated disagreement between SUM's leadership and its students which appears to remain unrecconciled, centering on the issue of personal accountability. This is a pity, considering that all parties seem to agree on the goals, but disagree — and this is the focus of this commentary — on the form the activism has taken.

It would be inappropriate and beside the point to force a partisan narrative of how events regarding The Grounded Project's demands supposedly unfolded.⁴ Instead, this commentary seeks to open a discussion on the underlying conflict over which *form* student activism at SUM should take in general, who decides this and why. It is unavoidable to reference the discussion around the project's activism at SUM, but this will be limited to the presumably uncontroversial main fault lines⁵ to illustrate a deeper point. The commentary argues that disregarding existing structural power imbalances by unilaterally determining which forms of activist expression are accepted as valid and which are not lays the ground for certain kinds of activism while precluding others. This is then situated in the wider context of a looming, all-defining generational conflict within greater society and what it would take to avert it.

¹ <https://www.uio.no/om/strategi/miljo/klimaregnskap/uio-klimaregnskap-202018.pdf>

² <https://twitter.com/TheGroundedProj>

³ Perhaps the currently best-known incarnation of this way to organize is Extinction Rebellion: <https://rebellion.global/about-us/>

⁴ I should note that I have previously contributed to the project, though am no longer affiliated with it. The views expressed here are therefore exclusively based on my own curious observations. I do not write on behalf of or represent opinions of the project.

⁵ An assessment of these is rooted in the written communication that the SUM leadership has sent to all SUM students' personal email accounts regarding this matter.

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM?

Since sustainability and the environment constitute principal research areas for SUM and its students, it seems reasonable to presume that most student activism at SUM would fall into the environmental category. But what does environmental activism mean, exactly? According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Human Geography*, activism in general terms signifies.

“The actions of a group of citizens, usually volunteers, who work together to try and redress what they consider to be an unfair or unjust situation. Their activities include campaigning (such as letter writing, marching, and picketing), peaceful marching, civil disobedience, sabotage, or other militant forms of protest.” (Rogers, Castree, and Kitchin 2013)

Note that this definition requires a group of people as opposed to individuals. From the reference to unfairness or injustice it follows that activism seeks to achieve a fairer or more just distribution of a resource or privilege. An important implication of this is that activism tends to come from those in a weaker structural position than its addressee (if this were not the case there would not be any need for activism). Structural power is an important concept here, and it is in this commentary understood as “the power agents have by virtue of their positions within structures.” (Joseph 2011, 639).

Its environmental sub-category, which the *Oxford Dictionary of Environment and Conservation* lists as eco-activism, is defined as:

“Direct action designed to raise awareness of, lobby against, or stop particular activities that damage the environment, often at a particular site (such as a planned new road site).” (Park and Allaby 2017)

Eco-activism, in seeking to achieve the termination of certain activities to prevent damage to the environment, then, is distinct from ‘conventional’ activism in that it is not primarily redistributive, but of a more subtractive nature.

A working definition of environmental activism thus ought to comprise at least four key elements: 1) the condition of a group of people; 2) the uneven structural power relationship between activists and the addressee(s) which necessitates activism; 3) the specified object which the activism is intended to spare from harm, i.e., the environment; and as a consequence thereof, 4) its subtractive character. Merging the above definitions accordingly, I suggest the following provisional definition of environmental activism: actions designed by a group of citizens, usually volunteers, to raise awareness of or stop particular activities that damage the environment, which are typically carried out by actors with greater structural power.

HOW TODAY’S STUDENTS EXPERIENCE STRUCTURAL POWER

Applying the above definition to the example of student activism at SUM

given that the activism is local and enclosed within a defined system of hierarchy — one can easily identify the structural power imbalance: students direct their activism at actors who are also the gatekeepers to their careers through their formal control over the evaluation of academic results and their informal connections in professional networks. These actors thereby have significant influence on students’ professional fates. It is secondary whether or not this dependency is actualized; the mere organizational configuration of the relationship creates this situation — hence, *structural* power.

Today’s students are well-acquainted with the phenomenon of structural power. The present-day situation of continually narrowing opportunity constantly reminds them of their position on the receiving end of it. Keep in mind that a typical master’s student today was born in the mid-to-late-90s and was thus thrust into the world of studying and work well after the 2008 financial crisis. The sociologist Wolfgang Streeck has labelled the period that has progressed since then the ‘fourth stage of the post-1970s crisis sequence’ (Streeck 2016, 18), a time defined by an increased insecurity and social entropy that its protagonists have no choice to endure but through ‘coping, hoping, doping and shopping’ (Streeck 2016, 41). This career world varies significantly from what those who now control it experienced when they entered the labor market. Herein lies a fundamental problem that I will return to below.

In practice, this means that today’s students face increasingly fierce and

unforgiving competition for a rapidly declining number of slots in the secure state of being that affords the extravagances of permanent work contracts, affordable housing and social security, not to speak of increasingly out-of-reach luxuries like pensions or homeownership. Where previous student generations like that of my own could make mistakes and learn from them, for candidates void of ‘relevant experience’ in current job markets, the one-strike-out rule largely seems to apply.⁶ Like a fellow student belonging to that generation related to me recently, ‘it’s like living in a job interview that never ends’.

The current generation of students has also learned that it is futile to address this situation. Even the faintest demands for remedying measures are met with either an irritable reminder of their relative privilege or an outright scolding as entitled snowflakes, depending on whether it comes from the progressive or conservative camp of elders. As the brilliant, late David Graeber put it,

“In most wealthy countries, the current crop of people in their twenties represents the first generation in more than a century that can, on the whole, expect opportunities and living standards substantially worse than those enjoyed by their parents. Yet at the same time, they are lectured relentlessly from both left and right on their sense of entitlement for feeling they might deserve anything else.” (Graeber 2019, 128).

⁶ Those with the misfortune of having a foreign-sounding name see their chances to be called in for a job interview lowered by another 25 percent on average from the outset, all else being equal. (Midtboen and Rogstad 2012). A now well-known, tragic consequence of this is that it has become commonplace for young graduates with minority backgrounds to officially change their names to something that may sound more familiar to the native ears of recruiters and bosses. See, for example, (Norheim 2019).

STUDENT ACTIVISM IN CLOSED SYSTEMS OF UNEVEN STRUCTURAL POWER

Student activists who want to effect change thus have to navigate this structural power imbalance which permeates their entire lives. This affects which form of activism is chosen. In a situation where students are increasingly dependent on the goodwill of their higher-ups, any activism that aims at the privileges of the upper strata within the same organization exposes itself to the described structural power imbalance. This poses a risk that is perceived by many students as too great to take.

For the record, there is no reason to cast doubt over SUM's repeated reassurances that such risk estimations are unfounded. But SUM is not an island. As a part of a greater structure, the way SUM is organized is no different from other departments, even if its identity and research topics may well be. Though SUM can hardly be blamed for this, from a student perspective, it inescapably remains a part of 'the system'.

The only way to moderate this perceived risk, then, is to choose an articulation of activism that does not expose individual par-

ticipants but rather puts forward a collective approach (which, as noted above, can be said to be an essential feature of activism). But what to do if the organization in which the activism takes place declares such expressions of activism as illegitimate, effectively prohibiting them?

At SUM the conflict has centred around the above question. SUM's leadership made it clear that it regards personal accountability as a sacred bedrock of academic conduct, and furthermore, as an essential value in the Norwegian style of discourse that is based on egalitarian openness. The Grounded Project's demands could not be discussed, according to the unwavering position of SUM's leadership, as long as their authors would not honour this fundamental principle and step into the light with their full names. Offers to discuss matters through assigned delegates from the project and a list of named supporters comprising a majority of SUM students were not able to mitigate this condition.



Photo by Markus Spiske on Unsplash

SUBTRACTIVE AND ADDITIVE ACTIVISM

This, in turn, poses questions related to which forms of activism are left on the menu in such a situation. A redistributive or subtractive activism that aims at curtailing environmentally damaging privileges through systemic reform can in practice be assumed to mainly affect those with higher seniority (and therefore, typically, power).⁷ Consequently, as a result of the described structural power dynamics, such forms of activism are effectively weakened by the requirement of individual identifiability. In this situation, students have the choice between adopting more radical means of activism, thereby significantly raising the stakes for their individual careers, or folding under the pressure applied by the organization's leadership.

At the same time, insisting on personal identifiability fosters a more deferential form of activism, one that is more 'CV-friendly'. This kind of activism is additive in that it does not take away or redistribute but rather supplements through actions that do not address present malpractices directly. It more politely suggests better alternatives and, importantly, does not inconvenience the powerholders within the organization. Additive activism is indeed often encouraged, and it has become clear that this is what is meant when students are encouraged to 'change the world'. 'Challenge the status quo, but not here' would be an appropriately modified slogan.

Equally important, additive activism allows the organization to cheer on and parade its student activists, who in turn are reduced to a supporting role in the internal and external marketing of a progressive image. What Benjamin Bowman has identified as an *engagement frame* in the context of youth activism also applies here:

"Young people must engage, but engagement is detached from efficacy. That is to say, young people [are] allocated a voice, but the power to uphold or disregard that voice is held by privileged adults. An engagement approach [i. e. the framing of action as engagement] ... constrains young people merely to having a voice, but not power. In the consideration of climate change, it identifies (and celebrates) young people as those who 'admirably display civic engagement'." (Bowman 2020, 10)

To avert an anticipated misinterpretation, it must be emphasized that a critique of additive activism, for the reasons mentioned above, should not be directed at the students who engage in such activism. Worried that the alternatives could cost them dearly, additive activism often remains the only viable outlet for students' activist aspirations. Rather, the structural mechanism that allows powerholders to skillfully steer the subtractive element of activism away from their own organization is in focus here. Put differently, limiting the available options for students to additive activism permits powerholders to encourage and capitalize on student activism while simultaneously deflecting aspirations for bottom-up systemic change within their organization.

⁷ In the context of academic flying there are strong grounds to assume this to be the case. A recent study of academic air travel in Switzerland found that "The travel footprint increases drastically with researcher seniority, increasing 10-fold from PhD students to professors." (Ciers et al. 2018). A brief skim of SUM's senior researcher's Twitter accounts does not give the immediate impression that this would be much different at SUM. On the interesting phenomenon of above-average air travel emissions from climate change researchers specifically see also (Whitmarsh et al. 2020).

As has been noted elsewhere, ‘the youths mobilizing in the streets of Europe are the next cohort of university students. They will not only demand action and change from governments, but also from [their universities]’ (Roalkvam 2019). This scenario is already a reality today. It seems like an odd reaction to such demands for an institution like SUM (especially considering its particular history and mandate) to delegate responsibility for systemic change to higher authorities, or an even more abstract political economy of academic labor (Gerhardsen and Hoff 2020). It is all the more surprising when, in parallel, student activism aimed at systemic change from the bottom is hampered by applying to it an antique code of conduct that is no longer compatible with its surrounding reality in that it presupposes a structural egalitarianism that has long since evaporated.

That said, it needs to be emphasized that all parties in the conflict around academic flying at SUM essentially seem to want the same thing. The conflict does not appear to primarily result from diametrically opposed interests. Rather, it is a consequence of the increasingly disparate life-worlds of students and their superiors, as well as the worrying lack of awareness towards this on the part of the latter. By encouraging what has here been called additive activism while striking down on subtractive activism that addresses obvious, systemic excesses within their organization, SUM leaders contribute to this disparity.

The dynamics laid bare here are not unique to SUM, of course. Beyond the SUM microcosm, they make for the ingredients of a veritable generational conflict in society at large that has the potential to worsen considerably over time. As this commentary has tried to argue, the generations graduating post-2008 differ from earlier generations in the conditions they meet when discharged into the labor market in ways that are much more severe than is generally understood. If this is true, little speaks for a reversal of this development. On the contrary, not letting the opportunity of the current pandemic go to waste, ‘many companies are laying off employees and then hiring them back as temporary, part-time, hourly, contract, freelance or contractor workers. So, there is more uncertainty’ (Roubini 2020). The cumulative effects of these changes are likely to surpass the reverberations of 2008, and will bare massive, structural government intervention into labor

markets be felt everywhere, also in Norway. A post-COVID economy might therefore further deepen the generational rift, possibly to an extent that exceeds anything seen since 1945.

Yet, a future overshadowed by a generational conflict, like the one Lanchester portrays in the excerpt which this commentary opened with, is not inescapable. What is required to avert it is the acceptance of rightful blame directed at ‘the olds’, as his character puts it (and to which I regretfully have to count myself), and to transform it into an intergenerational alliance against ‘the system’ that can be confronted, perhaps not alone, but at least in part by collective behavioural change emanating from the bottom up. If

SUM’s intellectual roots can provide sufficient breeding ground for initiatives to that end to spring up, one would think that there could hardly be a better place for such an alliance to emerge.

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TRANSNATIONAL CLIMATE ACTIVISM THROUGH THE EYES OF NORWEGIAN STUDENTS: POWER AND INFLUENCE ACROSS GEOGRAPHIC SCALES

BY JOANNA SVÄRD

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Abstract

Recent years have seen a rise in global climate activism, primarily led by youth. This qualitative study seeks to explore how responsibilities and possibilities for climate action vary across geographic scales, through the eyes of Norwegian students. For them, climate activism is motivated by global structural inequalities as well as social relations within activist networks. Many argue that responsibility exists on all levels of society, but possibilities for political influence vary according to existing power relations and local context. By discussing the concepts of scale, transnational activism and global civil society, this article reflects on how these perceptions are connected to global-local and local-local relations. Today's climate strike movement is an example of how the global and the local dynamically constitute each other through relationships across borders and geographic scales. It also shows how transnational activism changes the dynamics of world politics, and might have an increasing role in future transnational governance. This is a summary of my bachelor's thesis in geography from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, June 2019.

Introduction

Recently, there has been an explosion in visible climate activism globally, with weekly climate strikes and mass protests, new environmental organizations and high engagement over social media. Activists are demanding that ‘governments immediately provide a safe pathway to stay within 1.5° of global heating’ (Thunberg et al. 2019, n.p.). In August 2018, Swedish 15-year-old Greta Thunberg began her school strike for climate, inspiring more strikes globally (Fridays For Future n.d. [a]). The largest strikes in 2019 involved around 2,000 cities in over 130 countries, with at least 1.8 million people striking on 15th of March (Fridays For Future 2019). Political implications became visible as countries pronounced a state of ‘climate emergency’ (Climate Emergency Declaration 2020), and the EU elections in May 2019 proved a success for the Green parties, largely supported by the younger generation (Dunford et al. 2019).

As the extent of climate change effects will be seen over the long-term, it is primarily today’s youth and future generations that will experience them. As Horschelmann and Refaie (2014, 454) explained, ‘young people interpret

international political events with an eye to their own imagined futures and to those of others, anticipating broader global consequences of apparently isolated current events’. Climate change has long been perceived as too big and abstract for one person, group, or country to do something about, but perhaps last years’ surge of climate activism among the youth can motivate another approach.

This article is a summary of a qualitative study on the potential of young climate activists to influence change across geographic scales. Through interviewing Norwegian students engaged in climate activism and discussing transnationalism and the existence of a global civil society, I attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do Norwegian students already engaged in climate activism view themselves as political actors within a global climate action movement?
2. How are considerations of one’s own responsibilities and possibilities to influence climate action connected to global-local and local-local interactions?

GEOGRAPHIES OF GLOBALIZATION AND TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM

Globalization and geographic scale

There are endless definitions of globalization, commonly referring to the economic processes of expanded trade relations and the increasing social integration and connectivity between peoples. According to Murray and Overton (2015), **globalization is, contrary to the popular perception, not homogenizing spaces and places, but creating new and complex geographies.** The *absolute* distance has become less important, while the *relative* distance between places, spaces and peoples has become more important. Murray and Overton (2015) argued that ‘globalization is altering the way time-space operates and is perceived’ (ibid, 48), often referred to as *time-space compression* (Massey 1991). This is a combination of a *convergence* of the time it takes for people, capital and goods to travel between places, and a *distanciation* (or a ‘stretching-out’) of social relations across space and time. The result is the impression of a world closely interlinked, and which according to Giddens (1990, in Murray and Overton 2015), can increase the possibilities for changing global systems.

As this study focused on the interrelations between the ‘global’ and the ‘local’, there is a need to unpack the meaning of geographic ‘scale’. Conceptualizations of scale have been presented by, among others, Herod (2009, 221), who argued that scales are ‘conceived of in terms of a process rather than fixed entities (i.e., the global and the local are viewed not as static “arenas” within which social life plays out but as constantly being made and remade by social actions)’. This is explained through a metaphor of tree roots, which shows how different geographic scales interconnect with each other both vertically (smaller roots growing into bigger ones) and horizontally (nodes connecting and happening simultaneously). This metaphor emphasizes how the world consists of networks rather than separate geographic levels of the ‘local’, ‘regional’ or ‘global’. These are dynamic processes in which actors must actively develop their own scales for operating and building relationships by ‘becoming’ global or local (Herod 2009).

Social movements and the existence of a global civil society

As climate activism is not only a question of geographies but also of politics, there is a need to provide some understanding of how activism can be performed on different scales. Transnational activists can be defined as ‘individuals and groups who mobilize domestic and international resources and opportunities to advance claims on behalf of external actors, against external opponents, or in favour of goals they hold in common with transnational allies’ (Tarrow 2005, 43). Activists organize or participate in different forms of social groups and coalitions, as they see value in the political influence gained from cooperation (Hathaway and Meyer 1993). By collaborating, they can combine resources into pursuing political influence. A ‘social movement’ can be defined as ‘a sustained, organized public effort making collective claims on target authorities’ (Tilly and Wood 2016, 11). This means that it is not enough for protests to simply occur in multiple locations around the world in order for them to become a global social movement. This also requires a sustained commitment and organization with common targets across these borders, something that the global climate strike has. Other scholars prefer to use the term *networks*, as they argue that activists are not only participating in political arenas, but also shaping them. As they organize, they ‘consciously seek to develop a “common frame of meaning”’ (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 6-7). Furthermore, activist networks and social movements may, through transnational relations, form something similar to a ‘global civil society’. Tarrow (2005) suggested that:

“The unusual character of the contemporary period is not that it has detached individuals from their societies or created transnational citizens but that it has produced a stratum of people who, in their lives and their activities, are able to combine the resources and opportunities of their own societies into transnational networks”

Even if scholars are careful not to proclaim any existence of a ‘global citizenship’, there is a belief that transnational relations and behaviour is going to become more prominent in the future. According to Clarke (2004), education plays a crucial role in learning about and integrating with different cultures in an increasingly globalized world, for example, in taking stands on global issues. However, Hörschelmann and Refaie (2014) argued that for youths, citizenship has a multi-value and multi-scalar nature in the way it is performed and imagined through senses of belonging in territories and communities. Citizenship is the political practice and identity which can either verify territorial borders or reach across them. Relationships and interactions across borders are in return influencing young people’s political perceptions and understandings, thereby to some extent shaping their citizenship identities. Being part of a growing global interconnectedness can thus result in ‘a sense of global responsibility and shared humanity’, reflecting a global civil society (Hörschelmann and Refaie 2014, 445).

As we will see, the students interviewed in this study engaged in student activism and organizations locally. According to Hamrick (1998), this represents active political participation as student citizens. Upscaling from this statement, it is then possible to argue that when the participants engage in the global issue of climate change in an attempt to improve the current situation, they are in a way performing a global citizenship.

Transnationalism: interactions over geographic scales

Viewing the world as consisting of networks means recognizing the constant presence of the local in the global and the global in the local. Global networks consist of interactions by people who are themselves localized in particular places, and so, ‘all that takes place in the cultural, economic and political spheres is “grounded” and localized’ somewhere (Murray and Overton 2015, 67). The local is, according to Massey (1991, 28), better understood as ‘constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations’ rather than as a fixed place within specific borders. In that way, the definition and understanding of a place includes not only its own historical development, but also its links with the rest of the world, thereby supporting what she calls a ‘global sense of the local’ (ibid, 29). This constant and mutual interaction of the global and the local simultaneously create ‘hybridized outcomes that are neither global nor local in essence – they are “glocalized”’ (Murray and Overton 2015, 25). Thus, there is a multiway relationship between geographic scales, incorporating both local, national, regional and global levels (Thrift 2000).

The climate strike movement provides a good example of how local actions can stretch to become global as ideas are spreading within climate action networks. However, it is also a case where the local-local interactions are prominent as the strikers in different local places are inspiring and connecting with each other.

Credits: School children striking outside the Norwegian Parliament. Photo: Tom Hansen (NTB scanpix/ Mediehuset Nettavise)

METHODS

This article is based on an empirical qualitative method using in-depth semi-structured interviews with a strategic selection of four research participants (Thagaard 2009). I focused on Norwegian students in Trondheim as they are part of the younger population in society driving the climate strike movement and because they were available for face-to-face interviews. I chose to interview participants already engaged in climate action because I wished to understand how they viewed themselves as part of a bigger climate action movement. Within this group of students, I aimed for a balance in gender, study area (natural, technical and social sciences) and activism backgrounds. However, the research was not intended to be representative; instead, the participants were chosen based on their relevance for the research topic and because the aim was to understand the particular thoughts, experiences and stories of these individuals (Longhurst 2010). I was

aware of the interpretation of the qualitative data collected being guided by my own similarity to the interviewees in age and interest. Therefore, I tried to be aware of my own presumptions of their answers. In addition, data from the interviews and all quotes used needed to be translated from Norwegian to English, creating another layer of interpretation.

CLIMATE ACTIVISM THROUGH THE EYES OF NORWEGIAN STUDENTS

Motivating climate activism: structural inequalities and socializa- tion processes

The participants provided two main reasons for getting involved in climate activism. First, all four participants viewed the world as unequally developed under Western domination, which invoked a feeling of uneasiness about the global inequalities regarding the instigators and victims of climate change. They considered the responsibility for climate action to be primarily lying on the Global North, both because of historical responsibility and because of scientific knowledge and political influence. What we can see here is an understanding of the global as consisting of relations between the national, regional and local. These relations are defined by imbalances in power and wealth, and therefore, also represent differences in responsibilities and possibilities. This relates to the structural inequality aspect of globalization that Massey (1991) referred to as ‘power geometry’.

Second, the participants emphasized the importance of belonging to a social context, for example, an organization. The importance of ‘socialization’ has been supported by scholars such as della Porta (2005). She found that participation in activism can be meaningful for and have major personal and social impacts on the participating individuals. Sociali-

zation may include building grounds for common identities and developing a sense of belonging and purpose, as activists feel they are part of a bigger movement and meet, interact and form relationships with others who share their beliefs and interests. Her conclusions concurred with the findings in this study. One participant explained, ‘I think it is extremely valuable to join an organization, because then one can think that one is part of all the people doing this, and together we make a difference’. The participants also mentioned that connecting with others results in fruitful discussions that challenge their own perceptions and understandings. In that way, activist networks provide an arena for personal development.

One participant stated the important role of social media as a platform for individuals to contribute to developing trends through their social interactions, either as part of or beyond the formation of social movements. For activists, the internet has made it possible to find inspiration and feelings of belonging in the climate movement beyond one’s local society. Furthermore, long-lasting global social movements may both build new relationships and coalitions and strengthen existing ones. As seen in the fast growth and spread of the climate strike movement, the internet has become a tool for mobilizing collective action.

Power of the people: responsibilities and possibilities

As mentioned, responsibilities and possibilities for influencing climate action vary according to existing power relations between countries and actors. One participant stated that all people are responsible for upholding structural inequalities, but that the ultimate power lies within political and market forces. Politicians and the private sector are the major players in the world economy, and therefore have the most responsibility regarding climate action. However, all four participants emphasized the power of individuals to influence these actors through, for example, consumer power and political elections. They put much faith in the democratic processes existing in Norway, mentioning the rights to organize as a tool for achieving political influence. One participant argued that climate activism is the most visible and effective way to voice an opinion, despite the challenge of attracting a large enough crowd. Another participant viewed the climate strike movement as a particularly effective democratic process, arguing that if enough people stand for something, either the politicians will change their politics, or not get any votes...So, these types of world protests...and weekly demonstrations – I really believe in them’. The participants agreed that the strength of the climate strike movement lies in the number of people that are willing to sacrifice something for the cause.

Evidently, the participants preferred engaging in climate activism to remaining passive citizens. As one participant stated, ‘essentially, power comes from below’. Another participant claimed that activism could provide a sense of empowerment, in that individual action does matter. However, they also emphasized the importance of not putting too much pressure or guilt on individuals, as this may do more harm than good. They pointed out that climate activists often forget that people are limited by the norms, laws, and structures of their societies. However, being part of a structure also means that individuals have the power to pursue change. Murray and Overton (2015, 42) stated that ‘the formation of transnational social movements, based on new identities that link sub-national groups together across boundaries, challenges the state from below’. According to Keck and Sikkink (1998, 200), transnational networks are particularly useful where local pressure is not enough to achieve change, as they may ‘curve...around local state indifference and repression to put foreign pressure on local policy elites’.

Climate action – a global responsibility

As seen, the participants believed that addressing climate change issues requires action and solutions on all geographic scales simultaneously and connected across the world. Their demand of global collective action responds to the IPCC's statement D.7.4: 'collective efforts at all levels, in ways that reflect different circumstances and capabilities, ...taking into account equity as well as effectiveness, can facilitate strengthening the global response to climate change' (IPCC 2018, 23). The participants highlighted the importance of international policies such as the Paris Agreement in motivating climate action among and within countries. However, such top-down policies may not be enough to ensure local relevance. One participant believed that there should always be some space in international policies for national and local contexts, as that may provide feelings of ownership. Thereby, there is a constant interaction between the global and the local in which any direct climate action is implemented locally but steered and motivated by global regulations and international cooperation.

Transnationalist ideas state that network interactions occur not only vertically, but also horizontally (the tree root metaphor by Herod 2009), meaning that influence also flows between different local or national actors and places. The participants found it valuable to try to influence actors operating in other places. Working locally, for example, trying to influence a university to divest *from* fossil energy, might inspire other students and encourage other universities and institutions to do the same. Another example is the unique opportunity for

Norway to use investment regulations for the Government Pension Fund of Norway (the Oil Fund) as a guide for other investors (see, for example, Schücking 2015). Furthermore, they believed that if Norway would start phasing out oil production, the country could become a positive example of how to do that while maintaining a stable and wealthy society. One participant emphasized the power in critique from other places as well, especially when voiced at the same time as the domestic climate strikes by Norwegian school children. As such, the participants believed that the power and possibility to influence climate action in other places occurs across both geographic scales and space. However, they believed that we primarily react to climate change affecting the people or countries near us and those we can relate to. Influencing other countries, as well as other individuals, therefore becomes easier when they view themselves as similar.

As global social movements grow and spread, their political impacts seem to increase. Keohane (2002) stated that in the future, transnational governance will be more beholden to societal norms, resulting in greater political influence for those actors who are representing and conforming to widely accepted norms. In addition, when the EU and the UN invited and supported Greta Thunberg and the climate strike movement (Fridays For Future n.d. [b]; Guterres 2019), there was a possibility for institutional pressure from above. As such, networks such as the climate strike movement may have increased political influence in the future, which might give hope to participants concerned about their limited influence in the present.

Towards transnationality – climate action across geographic scales

Because of global inequalities, collective action must consider local contextual differences. Therefore, there is a need for deeper understandings of scale, and 'a more spatially grounded understanding and wider political space' for these differences (Fisher 2015, 81). The tree root metaphor by Herod (2009) is a good place to start. It maintains that scales are always simultaneously happening horizontally and vertically as processes and relationships rather than fixed spatial entities. Tarrow (2005) stated that any global tendencies among citizens are rooted in national identities and contexts. Instead of being considered as evidence for an integrated global civil society, these should be understood as a set of diverse spatial relations. He claimed that activists are often divided between global framings and the local needs that they claim to represent, as the global and the local are not always aligned. Focusing too much on distant targets may detach activism from its local relevance. The participants considered it important to engage in global issues, but agreed that it might be easier to focus on climate issues of direct local relevance, such as targeting the university. However, they considered all aspects of climate activism meaningful. The common cause within the climate

strike movement is to combat climate change, something that affects local places all over the planet. Being part of such a social context can build confidence and give feelings of togetherness and support in issues that sometimes might feel too big or difficult to handle individually. Therefore, the climate action movement is not a case of local demands upscaled to a global meaning, but holistic in essence – urging political action everywhere. Claims may become reframed into the local and national contexts of every local strike as to create local relevance – what Tarrow (2005) referred to as becoming 'domesticated'.

Climate activism proves dynamic over different geographic scales, where the focus may shift as the topics and the social relations forming the climate action networks change over time (Tarrow 2005). Viewing scale as socially constructed (Herod 2009; Perreault 2003) is both a constant struggle and a strategic device for the promotion of social movements. Therefore, the possibility for arguing for the existence of a global civil society as a basis for social movements, may also shift over time as these trends and relations change. However, we may see more similar activist movements forming as these youths themselves form civil engagements in the future.

CONCLUSION

For the young climate activists in this study, motivation springs from believing in democratic processes, and the possibilities to influence both societal structures and trends among people. Referring to the global extent of the climate change issue, the participants promote collective action, involving multiple actors on all levels of society. However, this must take local contexts into consideration, as power relations create different responsibilities and possibilities for climate action. Political influence is therefore strongest in the relations that constitute a sense of relatability. As such, geographic scales should be understood as simultaneous processes rather than fixed spatial entities, which connects both horizontally and vertically (Herod 2009).

As individual influence is limited, the participants emphasize the importance of a social context provided by being part of a climate action network or movement. For example, the global climate strike movement not only provides an arena for pursuing climate action, but also forms new social interactions locally and transnationally. While scholars warn that too much of a global focus may undermine the relevance of activist networks as they lose local foundation, the climate strike movement has successfully proven how activists can influence climate action globally, while staying active locally. As such, the movement is an example of how the global and the local dynamically constitute each other through relationships across borders and geographic scales. It also shows how transnational activism changes the dynamics of world politics. Even if the existence of a global citizenship is contested between scholars, a form of global citizenship is practiced when activists engage in global issues. The climate strike movement is a prominent example, as it engages people and influences politics globally by bringing the climate change issue to attention. Fronting ideas of collective responsibilities and possibilities for action, it also promotes something like a ‘global civil society’. This implies how **activist networks, and the individuals forming them, might have an increasing role in future transnational governance.**

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“WE ARE NOT DEFENDING NATURE. WE ARE NATURE DEFENDING ITSELF.”

The following is an interview conducted by Tvergastein members Shayan and Clara with Ella and Charlotte, two protestors against the felling at Dannenröder Forest in Germany. We discuss Extinction Rebellion, police violence, activism, civil disobedience, and life in the protest camps.

Ella is a student of social work in Berlin. She has worked in child and youth care and aspires to be a child psychotherapist. She has been active in the local group of Extinction Rebellion for the past two years. Having grown up on the seaside, this is her favorite place to be, but the forest is also a place that makes her very happy. She fills her free time with exploring alternative, sustainable ways of living and learning how to grow her own food.

Charlotte Griestop holds a BA in Sustainability Studies from Leuphana University Lüneburg. She is currently enrolled in a master's degree on Forestry System Transformation at HNE Eberswalde Germany. In Berlin, she is engaged in the climate justice movement Extinction Rebellion and works for the NGO Urgewald. Charlotte is curious about the question of what it means to be human and she loves to explore nature, awareness, and feelings on personal and societal levels.



*Swing force at Danni forest occupation, 16th Nov 2020.
Credits: Charlotte Griestop.*

Shayan: What drew you to Extinction Rebellion? What would you say are its advantages compared to other movements?

Charlotte: I like our three demands. We want the government to tell the truth about our climate and ecological crisis. We want the government to act now. And we want the government to go beyond politics to create citizens' assemblies on climate and ecological justice. I am also convinced by our decentralized structure. Everyone can easily participate and take action as long as they agree with our 10 values.¹ There are many local [Extinction Rebellion] groups around the globe; we have working groups on specific issues and national and international exchange. And we can always create and adapt the structures we need. Sometimes you get surprised by an unexpected action. And for me, it is also very important that we are focused on a systems perspective. We are not blaming individuals, but recognizing that we all live in a toxic system. Structural change is needed and, of course, that is also influenced by individual behavior. Finally, our network is based on nonviolence, which is quite important to me.

Ella: I think that's also part of the whole culture, it is very, very peaceful. We don't use any violence at all. Even if the police are violent against us, we won't defend ourselves in direct action. I think this is an extreme form of non-violence. So I like that it is very peaceful and it is also family-friendly. You can even bring your children to some protests with you. That makes it quite easy for people to join. It is not like, oh, I am so rebellious, I am so extreme. No, it is just people and there is a whole culture of making sure everyone is doing OK. And it is not just focusing on, "this is bad, we have to change it," but also offering a different way of living your life. It is very positive, I would say.

Charlotte: For me, this means to be the change that we want to see in the world. To change the toxic system by living a culture of regeneration. This includes, for example, that after an action, we reconnect emotionally and check whether someone needs support. Our economic system is based on the idea of infinite growth. And for activists, there are infinite spaces to intervene. So we are likely to reproduce toxic structures while aiming for change. Activists can easily get burnt out. I believe that if we want systemic change, we should not reproduce the same toxic structures by exploiting ourselves. We also have to change our own system and the way of our personal being and doing. We have to take care of ourselves and the community around us as we are taking care of the world. In a capitalistic system, self-care is a rebellious act, and personal grounding a weapon.

Clara: Would you like to tell us about the recent protests? What is happening?

Ella: There is a really old forest in Hessen near the village of Dannenrod, and 40 years ago, the federal government decided that they wanted to have a highway right through this forest. Now, 40 years later, they are implementing it. So they are cutting down the trees to prepare for the construction of an asphalt road, even though, from the beginning, there has been protest against this road because it is quite useless. The reason why they're doing it is to save 11 minutes of traffic, even though there are enough roads already and especially after 40 years! What makes me especially angry is that in the local government, so the people who decide whether the road is being built or not, the Green Party is involved. And they have the power to stop this, but they don't do anything. So for me, it is not a Green Party anymore.

Charlotte: From a forest ecosystem perspective, it is a very valuable place. There are some trees that are about 300 years old. It's a permanent mixed forest dominated by beeches and oaks. And it has a high biodiversity, and even some rare species living there. Below the forest is a large groundwater body, and the highway construction is violating the European Water Framework Directive. Legal action has not led to any success yet. Actually, what we need is to invest in sustainable mobility. To build this motorway in the year 2020... it just seems like something that could go directly into a museum. And then, when the beginning of the construction became real last year in September, the first tree houses were built by activists in order to protect the forest. This year, on the 10th of October, the police started to clear out the activists; destroy the houses, barricades, and other structures; and cut down the trees. They finished last week.

Ella: But the activists are still there, and the protest is going to continue in some way.

¹ <https://rebellion.global/about-us/>



Water cannon operation at Danni forest occupation, 5th Dec 2020.

Credits: Charlotte Griestop.

Shayan: What is the community life like?

Charlotte: So, the people who are living in the trees and the treehouses are structured into several barrios (villages). It is an utopian anarchistic way of life. I talked to an activist who was living in a treehouse for several months and said that before the police came, she thought every day that she was the luckiest person in the world to live with the trees and the community. You have sharing circles, people cooking together, skill sharing, and campfires in the evening.

Ella: There is also the protest camp, where people have built tents next to the forest. The protest camp provides an immense self-organized support structure with a communal kitchen, information point and action point, awareness team, legal team, media team, shuttle service, coordination, etcetera. The police have also built their camp well, it is rather a fortress and we call it Isengard. They have a lot of security, and barbed NATO wire and everything. A dystopia definitely, that's a perfect word for it.

Charlotte: Different people are coming together with diverse views and perspectives. I guess all of them are there to protect the forest, but some are more focused on the environmental aspect and others are more focused on living a different way of life and being in a community. Some are proclaiming nonviolence. Some proclaim that we live in a violent system that is oppressing us in a violent way, and that nonviolence does not exist. Some have been living there for over a year and others are just there for one week or for a few days. New people are always very welcome.

Ella: And now it has been like a fight every day. It is very exhausting to be there because during the day, the police come, take out the activists, and smash everything they can. They break everything; they either cut down the trees or they break the whole infrastructure that makes it possible to live there and they take the sleeping bags so that people cannot sleep there anymore. They sprayed the toilet paper with pepper spray, it is just crazy. In the afternoon and evenings, they all go back to their Isengard camp where they feel safe. And then in the night, all the activists come down from the trees and then everyone starts rebuilding everything, and making barricades so that during the day, it is more difficult for the police to come in. And they take all the wood, everything that's been smashed and thrown out, and put it back together to rebuild something. Every day the police come and destroy everything. And then every night everyone works and builds it up again, it is so amazing.

Charlotte: In some moments, I felt like I am part of a reality game or some TV action series.

Shayan: We wonder what the role of emotions, grief, and loss is in this context. To a large extent, people in general already have a sense of grief for the loss of nature due to the construction of new infrastructure. But then it seems like this reality is kind of a constant reminder; every day people are reminded by the fact that their temporary settlements like treehouses are broken. What do you think is the role of grief and love in doing direct action? Or what role should they play?

Ella: I think for me, they have played a big role. I am a bit of an emotional mess since returning. I am really struggling with it, because it makes me so sad, everything I saw. And the sound of the trees being cut down...it makes me so sad and angry. And I think at this point, the emotions are all I have left. It is the only thing that gives me strength. Look, I have been on so many demonstrations, peaceful demonstrations, and I've held up signs saying, "let's save the future," "save our planet," and nobody listens and nothing happens. For example, Fridays For Future — it is amazing how this movement has spread all over the world. But nobody is listening. Nothing is happening. Nothing is being done.

And then there is the love for all the people, like the children I worked with, like the children of my family, and I want them to see the world in a nice place and not just chaos and destruction.



Credits: Chilli.

Clara: Do you want to share some of your experiences in the Danni regarding your emotions and connection with the forest?

Ella: Some of the trees are 300 years old. And then there is just one human who decides, "oh, this tree must go. I'll cut it down," and... I mean, there is so much love and hope in this tree, and then someone cuts it down. A bit further in the forest, there was this place where all the trees were cut down and they were just lying there; it was like a graveyard... It is just like this enormous tree, and it has so much life, and it has seen so much. So many years, and then it is just gone. Someone decides, "no, I'll kill this tree," and.... I just cried, and there is nothing else I think I can do when I see such destruction.

Charlotte: Actually, now when I am listening to you, feelings are arising in me as well. There is a lot of anger and sadness. I would say that for me, activism is one way to deal with my feelings and emotions. I have already been involved in environmental topics for many years, and looking back, I think there was a moment when I started to get numb about it. I knew rationally that I wanted to fight for a better world. But I didn't really relate to it emotionally anymore, because I was afraid that I just couldn't handle it. I noticed that after some weeks or months, my feelings began coming back. I am happy that in some moments I feel very angry again, and that this anger provides me with clarity and energy for change. Being in the forest was a way for me to really be connected to what is happening. I felt very needed as well, like at a place where I could make a difference. Usually, myself and most of society, we do not feel connected enough to the consequences of our actions. For example, when I am buying something in a supermarket, I don't have any clue who produced it, what happened there, under what environmental and social conditions, and so on. In the forest, I could use my anger to change the situation directly and perceptibly. I would say, activism is making emotions visible, and it supports me to feel and act with them.

Ella: And I think that's also really valuable because when I was in the forest and I saw this destruction and I was just crying, I didn't know what to do. But there was someone beside me who also felt like this, too, who knew me and could support me. It is OK to be on the verge of giving up. And there will be people there supporting you and saying, that it is OK. You can cry and take it easy, take your time and we can go back and fight if you're ready. That's one of the strong points, I think.

Charlotte: I totally agree with what you said. I think it is so good that we can be how we are. We all have feelings all day long. And for me, they all serve their specific purpose. If we are in a situation that is different from how we want to be but a change is not possible, like death, then being sad helps us to accept and connect more deeply with ourselves and the new reality. It is good to have people who can see you with your sadness and accept and embrace you without you having to pretend that everything is OK. And then I think we have to be angry about situations that are not as we want them to be and that have potential for change. I think there is a very healthy type of anger and we need more of it! Not being and acting with these feelings might lead to depression and lost self-determination.

Clara: What role does violence play in the protests?

Charlotte: I have seen differences between actions from Extinction Rebellion and the protest in the forest. Extinction Rebellion's actions are based on the idea of nonviolence. In the forest, I perceived violence from both the police and some activists. In Extinction Rebellion actions, the police are using violence against us as well. However, our answer is nonviolent civil disobedience. Clearly defined support roles help in the action. The police contact team is one of them, and takes over the communication between the activist group and the police. The legal team observes the behavior of the police and answers legal questions for the activists. Another support unit is the de-escalation team, which gets in contact with bystanders, activists, police, etcetera to avoid all forms of conflict. Therefore, the activists in action can somehow trust that they are being taken care of. If the police act unlawfully, activists can be sure to be supported in the aftermath as well, for example, through mental help or legal advice. For some actions, we have agreements with the police to accept and respect these support teams.

In the permanent forest occupation, we don't have these structures, except for the legal team. People from the forest are about to lose their homes and to lose their hope for the forest. The police come into the forest and act violently. The activists get angry. For many of them, every person who is a police officer made a wrong decision when they chose their profession and obeyed their commands. They are declared responsible for harming the trees. I am not sure which approach is an adequate one. The police have a monopoly on violence. They get paid to work for the common good. They should be experts on de-escalation. But I have often seen them do the opposite and use violence, like using pepper spray against defenseless people in unnecessary situations just to show their patriarchal supremacy. And of course, there is much to criticize in the police and their structures as an institution as such.

Shayan: In what way do you find direct action effective? What do you think would have to happen in the broader environmental movement, for example, in Germany, to compliment the direct actions to actually influence political decisions in the right way?

Charlotte: I think we need to have more exchange between different actors. We need the local population coming together with scientists, politicians, investors, and companies to discuss which measures we could implement to slow down global warming. Too many people feel that they are not really able to contribute. Citizens are saying the government is not doing enough and politicians are saying that citizens are not engaging enough. What we need are more well-held spaces to meet. We already have so many solutions. We have so much research. We have ancestral wisdom, modern technologies. It is necessary to bring these together in a new way that is truly aligned with the needs around us. Like I said before, often I am kind of numb because I am not really relating to my surroundings; then it is easier to ignore what is really needed. But if I dare to be present and to feel what the world around me needs right now, then I am able to connect to that and to react in alignment.

Ella: I think also the movement needs to be bigger. There is a theory you need 3.5% of the whole population active in a movement for it to be successful. And I think we haven't reached that yet.

Charlotte: Yes, and I believe we don't need to have 3.5% active in Extinction Rebellion, but we need more people to be active in general. There is a diversity of movements you can join. I read on a beautiful sign in the forest: "We are not defending nature. We are nature defending itself."

ACTIVISTS TO COURT

In 2019, the Collins Dictionary word of the year was “climate strikers.” May “climate action” be the word of the future.

BY SOFIE VAN CANEGEM

Sofie Van Canegem holds a master’s in Law from the University of Leuven and a master’s in Public International Law with specialisation in Environmental and Energy Law from the University of Oslo. She has (co-)written multiple climate-related articles for Tvergastein and the Russian International Affairs Council. Being Belgian and understanding Dutch, she kept a close eye on the Klimaatzaak and Urgenda case. As she currently lives in Norway and is an ambassador for Klimasøksmål Arktis, she also closely followed this case.

ABSTRACT

This article gives insight into environmental data, the Paris Agreement, the Aarhus Convention, and the human and constitutional rights that have empowered environmental organizations and climate-concerned individuals to bring environmental claims to court. It examines four national court cases in which environmental organizations requested reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and/or the cessation of new GHG-emitting activities. It compares the legal grounds on which environmental organizations initiated their cases and focuses on the governments’ common defense that judicial review of a governmental decision is undemocratic. The article concludes that, rather than weakening democracy, judicial review of a governmental decision enhances democracy.

INTRODUCTION

In August 2018, Greta Thunberg initiated the School Strike for Climate, which evolved into an international movement of students protesting world-wide for climate action from their governments. The scientific community stood by the movement, with, for example, more than 3,950 Belgian and Dutch scientists and over 1,000 UK doctors expressing their support (Dutch News. nl 2019; Hanson 2019; Taylor 2019). Since minors do not have the right to vote, and hence are not formally represented in the political arena, the protests are their way of influencing the political organs that steer states’ climate policy. However, as the political scene is split on climate policy, so is the political enthusiasm around the movement. The 2020 presidential election in the United States between Biden, who proposed ambitious climate action policies, and Trump, who denied climate change, exemplifies a polarized political landscape that leads people to believe that they have a binary choice: to combat or not to combat climate change. We are, however, reaching the point of no return.

Since the negative consequences of glob-

al warming will increase in the future, combating global warming is critical for today’s children and youth, as well as for future generations. Thus, the fact that children do not hold voting rights and are not politically represented calls into question the democratic system (Cohen 2005; Wall 2011). Furthermore, in a democracy, the legislature and government must act in the best interests of the people. According to available environmental data, it is in the interests of the people that states pursue climate-friendly policies, which they usually fail to do. To be heard and to correct the flaws of democracy, climate-concerned people and environmental organizations have turned to courts, initiating a wave of climate lawsuits. In contrast, governments generally consider judicial review of their decisions as undemocratic.

This article carries out a comparative study of four recent climate court cases. The cases were chosen based on six criteria in order to compare the legal grounds used by the plaintiffs, the governments’ de-

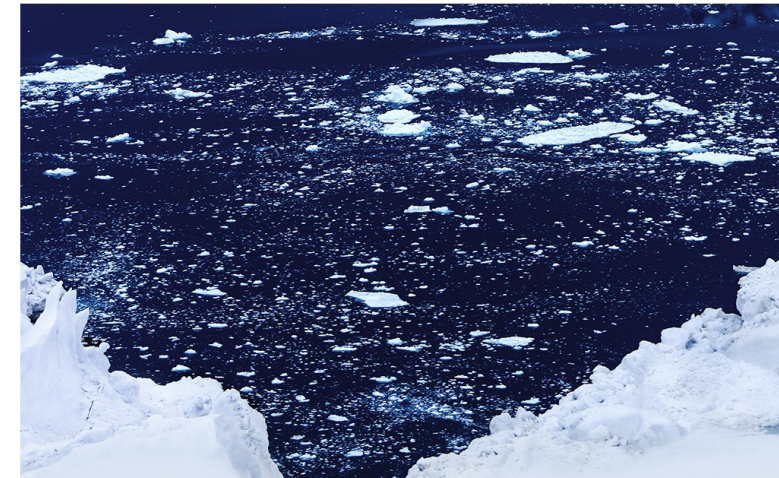
fenses, and the final court rulings. All cases stemmed from national courts¹ in European countries² with representative democracies,³ were brought by environmental organizations⁴ against governments, and⁵ concerned greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions and/or the ceasing of new GHG-emitting activities⁶.

This article first explains the scientific facts that sustained the cases as well as the legal instruments on which the environmental organizations relied, namely the Paris Agreement, the Aarhus Convention, human rights law instruments, and state constitutions. It also examines the common government defense that judicial review of a governmental decision is undemocratic. Based on the principles of democracy and the rendered court judgments, the article states that, rather than weakening democracy, judicial review of a governmental decision strengthens it.

ENVIRONMENTAL DATA, THE IPCC AND THE PARIS AGREEMENT

In 2013 and 2014, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – the UN body which assesses climate change-related science, the socio-economic impacts of climate change, and possible response strategies (UNGA 1988) – published its Fifth Assessment Report. This report brought objective scientific materials to the negotiation table of the Paris Agreement at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (PA). The Paris Agreement was signed in 2015 at the Paris Climate Change Conference, with signatory states agreeing to keep global temperatures below 1.5°C and, in any case, far below 2°C above pre-industrial levels (art. 2 PA). The Agreement entered into force in 2016 and has been ratified by 187 states and the EU (United Nations Climate Change 2020). Nonetheless, global GHG emissions are still rising (UNGA 2018).

In 2018, the IPCC reminded the world of the importance of keeping the global temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Its 2018 Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C stated that “climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth are projected to increase with global warming of 1.5°C and increase further at 2°C ” (IPCC 2018). At the current rate, the global temperature “is likely to reach” 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels between 2030 and 2052. To limit global warming to 1.5°C , “rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems” (IPCC 2018) are needed. Although the scale of the required transitions are unprecedented, the pace is not necessarily so. As stated by the IPCC (2018), it is possible; however, all industries must and should make significant reductions in emissions.



Picture credits: Greenpeace

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Human rights, such as the rights to life, food, water, health, self-determination, and housing protect individuals, groups, and peoples against state (in)actions that interfere with their fundamental freedoms and entitlements. Duty-bearers, such as states and state actors, must respect, promote, protect, and fulfil all human rights (UNGA 1999). Human rights are enshrined in numerous international and regional documents, such as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), of which all European countries with the exception of Belarus are signatories (COE 2020).

Environmental protection and human rights are interdependent and interrelated (Commission on Human Rights 2002). This connection has been accepted by international and national courts in a significant number of cases, and by UN agencies and many international organizations. At the international level, environmental cases are brought to courts based on a broad range of human rights, examples of which have been given above (Commission on Human Rights 2002).

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, the UN should also explicitly recognize the right to a healthy environment in human rights instruments (UNGA 2018). At a national level, more than 100 states have already included the right to a healthy environment in their constitutions, thereby formally recognizing the importance of this right and granting individuals or groups the right to file lawsuits on the basis of environmental protection (Commission on Human Rights 2002; UNGA 2018). Other states have recognized this right in other laws or international agreements (Boyd 2012; UNGA 2018). As of 2018, 155 states had legally binding obligations, and 36 supported non-binding international declarations to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to a healthy environment (UNGA 2018).

Although states recognize and/or support this right, many have not yet implemented measures to effectively respect, protect, promote, or fulfil it. Nonetheless, the Aarhus Convention, which all European states and the EU have ratified, partly fills this legal vacuum. The Convention links environmental protection to human rights and, more importantly, to government accountability. It focuses on citizen-government interaction by granting the rights to access to information, public participation in decision-making, and to access to justice in environmental cases. These rights are the cornerstones of environmental democracy. The Aarhus Convention paved the way for citizens and environmental organizations to bring environment-related cases to court, and human and constitutional rights gave these claims the necessary weight.

DEMOCRACY AND THE SEPARATION OF POWERS

The EU and all European states, except for Azerbaijan and Belarus, are representative democracies (International IDEA 2019). The four states discussed specifically here – Belgium, Norway, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom – have parliamentary democracies, meaning that people elect representatives to a parliament. With their votes, the people give their power to the parliament, which holds sovereignty and acts on behalf of, and following the will of, the people.

One of the cornerstones of a democracy is the separation of powers. This avoids the concentration of power in one organ and instead divides it over three branches that have their own tasks and act independently. The parliament, which is elected by the people, is the legislative power and makes laws. The government – the executive power – implements and executes the laws, and the courts – the judicial power – interpret and apply the laws to cases brought before them.

While no branch can interfere with the core duties of another, they are empowered to check the others through the principle of checks and balances. This also stems from another key principle of modern democracy: the rule of law, which claims that everyone, even the parliament and government, are subjected to the law. The constitution is the most fundamental body of laws. It entails the separation of powers, the rule of law, and other fundamental rights and freedoms, such as the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press. According to the latter, the press freely decides on what they write to assure that the people receive honest and independent information about society and politics. Another right is that people are free to establish clubs, unions, and organizations. Thanks to these rights, environmental organizations such as Greenpeace, Plan B Earth, Nature and Youth, Urgenda, and so on have brought the climate crisis to people's attention through protests, presentations, actions, and court cases.



Picture credits: Greenpeace

LANDMARK CASES

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Armed with environmental data, the Paris Agreement, human rights instruments, and the recognized right to a healthy environment (or a similar legal provision), various environmental organizations and climate-concerned individuals have challenged their governments before their national courts, seeking more ambitious GHG emission reductions or the ceasing of all new GHG-emitting activities. Examples include *Urgenda v. the Kingdom of the Netherlands* (Urgenda case),¹ *Plan B Earth et al. v. Secretary of State for Transport* (Heathrow case),² *VZW Klimaatzaak v. the Kingdom of Belgium et al.* (Klimaatzaak),³ and *Greenpeace, Nature and Youth et al. v. the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy* (Klimasøksmål Arktis).⁴ Except for the Klimaatzaak, which is currently before the Court of First Instance, all cases have received final judgments.

Plaintiffs in both the Urgenda and Klimaatzaak cases asked their governments for more ambitious GHG emission targets. In the Heathrow case, they challenged the lawfulness of the expansion of Heathrow airport, and in the Klimasøksmål Arktis, they questioned the legality of government-awarded licenses to drill for oil on the Norwegian continental shelf in the Barents Sea, claiming that such operations would increase GHG emissions.

The Urgenda case and Klimaatzaak both touched on the set of rights enshrined in the Aarhus Convention. These rights grant citizens and environmental organizations access to courts in environmental cases. In all four cases, the plaintiffs invoked the IPCC scientific reports and the Paris Agreement,

which state that their governments are politically committed to the 1.5 °C temperature target and, as a result, to reducing GHG emissions. In the Heathrow case, they also referred to the 2008 Climate Change Act on GHG emission reductions and the 2008 Planning Act with provisions on climate change and sustainable development.

In all cases, the plaintiffs invoked the human rights to life and respect for private and family life (art. 2 and 8 ECHR). In the Heathrow case, they also invoked the 1998 Human Rights Act, which translates the ECHR obligations into English law. In all other cases, they relied on constitutional rights. The Urgenda case referred to the authorities' constitutional obligation "to keep the country habitable and to protect and improve the environment" (art. 21 Dutch Constitution), Klimasøksmål Arktis alluded to the right to a healthy environment (art. 112 Norwegian Constitution), and Klimaatzaak referred to the authorities' duty to pursue sustainable development and intergenerational equity (art. 7bis Belgian Constitution).

¹ *Urgenda Foundation v the State of the Netherlands* ECLI:NL:RBDHA:2015:7145 June 24, 2015 (District Court of The Hague); ECLI:NL:GHDHA:2018:2591 October 9, 2018 (The Hague Court of Appeal); ECLI:NL:HR:2019:2006 December 20, 2019 (Supreme Court).

² *R (on the application of Plan B Earth) v Secretary of State for Transport* [2019] EWHC 1070 May 1, 2019 (High Court of Justice); [2020] EWCA Civ 214 February 27, 2020 (Court of Appeal); [2020] UKSC 52 December 16, 2020 (Supreme Court).

³ *VZW Klimaatzaak v Kingdom of Belgium et al.* (Court of First Instance, Brussels), case initiated in 2014, pending.

⁴ *Greenpeace Nordic Ass'n and Nature and Youth v. Ministry of Petroleum and Energy* Case no. 16-166674TVI-OTIR/o6 January 4, 2018 (Oslo District Court); Case no. 18-060499ASD-BORG/o3 January 23, 2020 (Court of Appeal); Case no. 20-051052SIV-HRET December 22,

2020 (Supreme Court).

The state authorities had one common defense: GHG-emitting activities or reductions are not a court matter, they are a political matter, and therefore the court cannot decide whether these activities are unlawful. They claimed that the parliament and the government are the ones who can make political decisions and, in doing so, enjoy a considerable degree of discretion. They also argued that a court cannot order a reduction in GHG emissions because this is effectively an order to create legislation.

The courts delivered judgments based on, among others, the constitution, human rights, and democratic principles. The Urgenda case was, in many ways, groundbreaking. The Dutch Supreme Court confirmed the Court of Appeal's finding that there was "a real threat of dangerous climate change, resulting in the serious risk that the current generation of citizens will be confronted with loss of life and/or a disruption of family life."⁵ According to the Court, the human right to life, as well as the right to private and family life, require the state to protect its citizens from the threats posed by climate change. As a result, the government's failure to address global warming threatens the aforementioned human rights. Consequently, the Court ordered the government to reduce its GHG emissions by at least 25% by the end of 2020 in comparison to 1990, making it the first court to order a government to cut GHG emissions (Spier 2020). This ruling is especially remarkable considering the political headwinds. State authorities voiced that decisions on GHG emission reductions belonged to the political domain, and were within the power of the parliament and government.

Following the principle of separation of powers, the Dutch Supreme Court stated that decision-making on GHG emission reductions is the responsibility of the government and the parliament. As a result, courts should not interfere in political decision-making or in the creation of "legislation with a particular, specific content."⁶ Nonetheless, based on the principle of checks and balances and the rule of law, the Court has the authority to decide whether the decisions of the parliament and government remain within the limits set by the law. Consequently, if obliged by law, such as human rights law, the Court can order a government to act. *In casu*, based on the Dutch Constitution and the Dutch government's human rights obligations, the Court ordered the government to reduce its GHG emissions by a set date. The Court left the government free to decide on the concrete measures to achieve the goal. In this way, the court did not interfere with the core duties of the government and parliament, and hence did not violate the principle of separation of powers.

⁵ *Urgenda Foundation v the State of the Netherlands* ECLI:NL:GHDHA:2018:2610 (English translation, para. 45) October 9, 2018 (The Hague Court of Appeal); ECLI:NL:HR:2019:2007 (English translation, para. 4.7) December 20, 2019 (Supreme Court).

⁶ *Urgenda Foundation v the State of the Netherlands* ECLI:NL:HR:2019:2007 (English translation, para. 8.2.6) December 20, 2019 (Supreme Court)

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In a similar way, the Court of Appeal in the Heathrow and Klimasøksmål Arktis cases reiterated their powers to review government acts. In the Heathrow case, the Court emphasized in both the introduction and conclusion that the question at hand was a mere legal one: is the government's Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) on the expansion of Heathrow airport lawful in light of the Planning Act? The Planning Act, adopted by the Parliament, imposes statutory requirements on the government when it formulates a national policy statement such as the ANPS. As the government did not consider the Paris Agreement when preparing the ANPS, it did not fully comply with the Planning Act. Therefore, the Court deemed the ANPS, and hence the planned expansion, unlawful. Through stressing that the Court had assessed the legality of the government decision based on Acts passed by Parliament, the Court emphasized that its ruling did not breach, but rather legitimized, the principles of the separation of powers, checks and balances, and the rule of law.⁷

On the same grounds, the Court of Appeal in the Klimasøksmål Arktis found itself empowered to render a decision on a parliament or government action. However, the Court admitted to be more restrained “when reviewing decisions that have been the subject of political processes in the Government or ... [Parliament, rather] than decisions made by subordinate administrative bodies.”⁸ The Court did recognize that future generations, who are named in the constitutional right to a healthy environment, cannot influence today's political process, which is a challenge for democracy. Nonetheless, the Court dismissed the claim made by Greenpeace et al. that the government violated the constitutional right to a healthy environment by granting petroleum production licenses for areas in the Barents Sea.

The Supreme Court upheld the Court of Appeal's ruling on December 22, 2020. The Supreme Court allowed the judicial review of parliamentary and governmental decisions. However, since the parliament was involved in the decision, the Court found the state authorities themselves better placed than the Court to decide whether the decision at hand agreed with the constitutional right to a healthy environment. The Court thus set a high threshold for judicial review of environmental decisions in which the legislative branch had participated. Finally, the Court concluded that possible future GHG emissions from exported oil are too uncertain to violate the right to life and respect for private and family life, and hence, did not block the granting of the petroleum production licenses.^{9,10}

Allowing environmental organizations to challenge governments' climate (in)action in court complies with the people's freedom to unite in organizations and empowers organizations to assist and protect citizens. When courts review challenged (in)actions, they fulfil their duty under the principle of checks and balances and adhere to the rule of law. As the cases also get media attention, both nationally and internationally, they are a great means to inform people about the climate crisis to spread awareness, to create a platform for debate, and even to pressure governments to change their policies. This is press freedom at its best.

Furthermore, and most importantly, in a representative democracy, courts can and should be safe places for economically unfashionable ideas that safeguard future generations' rights. Multinationals, driven by (over-)consumption and fossil fuels, lobby for their interests in the political sphere, while minors and future generations are, by their lack of voting

rights, not represented in the political arena. This disproportionately affects the politics of global warming. Global warming requires industries to transition, and therefore touches upon the current economic structure and multinational leadership from, for instance, the oil and gas industry.

Additionally, the consequences of climate change will increase in the future, when the children of today are grown up and future generations are born. A court can, and should be, free from economic bias and should have an ear to the protection of future generations, based upon the principle of intergenerational equity. Courts are not stages where compromises are

made, contrary to the political field, where there is an abundance of different political parties representing different opinions and peoples that try to come to consensus. In the words of Jaap Spier, Advocate-General of the Dutch Supreme Court, “Lawsuits may be the only way to break through the political apathy regarding climate change” (Bouma and Franssen 2015). Contrary to what the governments have claimed in court, challenging their (in)action does ⁶⁹ not undermine our democracies, but rather strengthens them.

⁷ *Heathrow Airport Ltd appealed the Appeal Court's decision* (Powley et al. 2020). On December 16, 2020, the Supreme Court overruled the Appeal Court's decision, ruling that although the government did not take the Paris Agreement into account in its ANPS, it did consider the 2008 Climate Change Act, which entails emission reduction measures like the Paris Agreement. Thus, the ANPS was valid and the expansion lawful.

⁸ *Greenpeace Nordic Ass'n and Nature and Youth v. Ministry of Petroleum and Energy* [2018] Case no. 18-060499ASD-BORG/o3 (unofficial English translation, title 2.3) January 23, 2020 (Court of Appeal).

⁹ The Supreme Court heard the case in plenary session with 15 judges in total. Four judges delivered dissenting opinions. They rendered the oil licenses invalid due to procedural errors made when opening the Barents Sea for oil production. Additionally, possible future GHG emissions should have been considered in the impact assessment of opening the Barents Sea for oil production. Therefore, the decision to open the Barents Sea for oil production should be re-evaluated and reconsidered. Cf. *Greenpeace Nordic Ass'n and Nature and Youth v. Ministry of Petroleum and Energy Case no. 20-051052SIV-HRET*, December 22, 2020 (Supreme Court) (Webster, B. dissenting).

¹⁰ One of the intervenors in Klimasøksmål Arktis, the Norwegian Grandparents' Climate Campaign, filed a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights in late March 2021.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, by reviewing governmental decisions, courts adhere to and fulfil their duties under the democratic principles of the rule of law and checks and balances. Furthermore, by considering minors and future generations in their climate judgments, the courts redress the main shortcoming of the democratic system – namely, that minors and future generations are excluded in the representative democracies of today. Court cases are, however, restricted in multiple ways: courts can only decide on cases and arguments brought before them, and the judgement only applies to the specific issue at hand. Hence, environmental organizations and climate-concerned people must bring the government's climate inactions to court and invoke, among others, the principle of intergenerational equity for the court to take the interests of current minors and future generations into account. Furthermore, court cases incur a cost for the society and the parties involved, and take a long time – for example, the Klimaatzaak was initiated in December 2014, with court hearings planned in March 2021. Therefore, the author suggests starting a discussion about voting rights for minors in matters that concern them, such as climate change. Minors are disproportionately affected by today's climate-related decisions, and yet stand on the sidelines of political debates.



Picture credits: Greenpeace

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CREATIVE ACTIVISM 101: AN ANTIDOTE FOR DESPAIR

BY IAIN MCINTYRE

Iain McIntyre is a Melbourne-based historian who collates and contributes materials for the social movement repository commonslibrary.org. He is the author of a number of books including *How to Make Trouble and Influence People: Pranks, Protests, Graffiti & Political Mischief-Making from across Australia* (PM Press, 2013) and *Sticking It to the Man: Revolution and Counterculture in Pulp and Popular Fiction, 1950 to 1980* (PM Press, 2019).

The following article is based on a talk Iain McIntyre gave at Counteract's Art and Heart gathering in Melbourne, Australia in 2017. In this article, McIntyre discusses the meaning and utility of creative activism and provides some practical examples.

ABSTRACT

This article explores creative approaches to political activism in terms of applying inventive tactics and strategies as well as employing artistic means. It discusses potential outcomes that accrue from creative activism as well as examples of the forms that these can take.

CREATIVE ACTIVISM WHAT IS IT?

When I think about a creative approach to activism, what comes to mind is one that does not just use elements of the arts or humour, although they are important. Instead, I'm thinking of an approach that applies creativity in its broadest sense to all aspects of campaigning and that is always looking to add to or invent something new for the toolkit. I'm thinking of a perspective that seeks to make the most of one of the few resources we have in abundance, that is, our ability to come up with imaginative means to challenge, resist and solve the many problems in our society. One that takes advantage of the at times small size of progressive movements to rapidly pivot and experiment with means, strategy and tactics.

As people trying to change things for the better, we all too often slip into habits and tend to apply the same tactics, messages and strategies over and over again. Sometimes this is because, at one point, they worked well for us, or because they suit our personality and political leanings, or ethics or ideology, or because we have been inspired and enlightened by a particular person or historical figure and we want to emulate them. Sometimes it's because we're afraid of bringing wider opprobrium upon ourselves and getting into trouble with the authorities or with our *compadres*.

Because the police, bureaucrats, large companies, and so on are often based on command-and-control hierarchies and established methods of doing things, there is potential for agile tactics and thinking to wrong-foot them, in the realm of ideas and physically through protests and direct action. However, the efficacy of the unexpected is lost when we do the same thing over and over. Our opponents may be slower, but they too adapt and learn how to counter us. A lack of imagination and innovation can also lead us into a dead end where we simply find ourselves being arrested in a slightly novel fashion rather than effectively shutting down a logging site or power plant, or shaking things up in some other way.

Thus, many of our tactics and messaging can become boring and ineffective, not just for the people we're trying to reach or influence, but also for ourselves. This can include what seem like, or were once, exciting and creative means and tropes. Deciding when a tactic is played out can be a tricky proposition, as most of this is fairly intuitive stuff that requires experimenting and taking risks.

CREATIVE ACTIVISM WHY DO WE DO IT, WHAT CAN WE ACHIEVE WITH IT?

However, creative activism is a craft like any other, and we all can learn and build experience along the way. Just to show that there isn't a one-size-fits-all formula, sometimes returning to old tactics can make them seem fresh if they haven't been seen for a while, or if they are applied in a new setting or have a new twist added.

Creative activism, of course, can also be interpreted as engaging in activism amongst creative types, scenes and the 'art world' to shake up existing hierarchies, challenge rampant exploitation, expose the true nature of corporate sponsors, and ensure neglected communities, issues and practices are represented and celebrated.

Pretty much all the figures and movements we draw inspiration from are those that used an innovative approach which tapped into the zeitgeist of their times in order to majorly shift social perceptions and unleash new power. Not all of us are going to be part of collective and individual efforts that invent the next game-shifting Occupy or Reclaim the Streets type approach, but we can apply creativity to whatever we're doing in order to make it more engaging and interesting for ourselves and those we're trying to reach.

Creative actions can be carried out as self-contained events that are ends in themselves or can be used to add something extra to ongoing campaigns. Much of what I'll be discussing applies to protests, disruptive direct action and other public events, but can also be used in relation to more mundane promotional and informational materials.

By using creative troublemaking, we enhance our ability to do the following.

Make activism fun, exciting and fulfilling

Creative approaches and handiworks can provide us with a laugh, liven up an event, or enable us to carry out actions for kicks as a form of artistic expression and political extreme sports. This won't necessarily eliminate the hard slog involved in effective campaigning, but if the boring stuff is interspersed with and guided by tactics and events that are cheeky and adventurous, then they should lift our spirits and give heart to ourselves and our allies. It's important during campaigns to have perceptible results along the way, and creating artworks and holding actions and events, particularly those that involve collective participation, can generate these. I'm a big believer in having ends and means match as much as possible, so creative tactics can also subvert everyday reality, including activism, and provide a glimpse into different worlds and possibilities.

Grab attention and transmit messages

We can use innovative and artistic events, works and actions to draw attention to an injustice and the solutions to it indirectly via mainstream, alternative and social media coverage, or take our message directly to passers-by, rally goers, politicians, corporate heads, and so on.

Maximise limited resources

Once again, the fact that we are often outgunned and outnumbered requires us to think creatively in order to maximise the impact and power of what we have in order to move things forward and mobilise support.

Make direct action and civil disobedience more effective

Humour, 'out-of-the-box' thinking, and creativity can make civil disobedience and disruptive direct-action fun rather than a grim exercise in bearing witness to horrible acts. Music can generate unity, raise spirits and defuse tensions (both amongst protesters and with opponents). Props, banners, t-shirts, and so on transmit messages which can cut through mainstream media framing. Thinking creatively can also help us to subvert laws or make them look ridiculous through the exploitation of loopholes, such as when free speech fighters in the early 20th century took to marching backwards or speaking on boats offshore to flout repressive laws.

Broaden the field of conflict

Using creativity and arts allows us to challenge our opponents on terrain and in areas of belief and knowledge beyond the courts, parliament, workplaces, and so on.

Transmit multi-layered messages

Whilst simplicity can be the key, a creative action can also engage people on a number of levels. When Aboriginal activists walked out of the Hogarth art gallery in 1979 with six paintings by Gunwinggu artist Yirawala, they didn't just reclaim work whose ownership had never been renounced. They also asserted their sovereignty, drew attention to the widespread exploitation of Indigenous artists, and upended the concept of theft and ownership in a settler colony. Despite being arrested, they convinced others of the righteousness of their act, and 18 months later, a jury found them not guilty of theft despite instructions from a judge to only follow strict interpretations of New South Wales law.

Impose economic and political costs

This might be done by directly disrupting economic activity in the course of a performance or action or indirectly by damaging or reframing our opponents' brand or reputation. By forcing authorities and authority figures to comment or intervene, we can demonstrate state or corporate complicity.

Broaden involvement

Ideally, our campaigns and movements will allow the broadest range of people to participate, and involving creative elements is another means of doing this.

EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE ACTIVISM

The following are just a few ways in which Australian activists have used shock, cheekiness and surprise in their campaigns.

Billboard/billposter and other revisions

The addition or deletion of text can make a big difference. Using stickers and paste ups to revise offending advertising material can cause people to do a double-take. Billboard-Utilising Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions (BUGA-UP) were the experts of taking existing billboards and modifying them to send different messages during the 1980s.



Picture credits: Billboard-Utilising Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions (BUGA-UP).

Public demonstrations of policy outcomes

Protests, vigils and actions can incorporate elements that drive home the negative effects of policies to decision makers. During the 1980s, Joan Coxsedge set off a stink bomb in parliament to demonstrate to her fellow politicians what constituents living near factories in working class areas have to put up with every day.

Being out and proud

Simply heading out the door and entering the wider world can be a subversive and radical act for marginalised communities. These daily acts of resistance have at times been amplified through collective endeavours such as the Gay and Lesbian Zaps of the 1970s during which friends and lovers kissed and cavorted on public transport *en masse* to assert their existence and challenge heteronormative conventions.

Sculptures, installations and props

These can be artworks placed in public places or used within protests, actions and other events. As with all visual artworks, placement is crucial, as you want them to be seen, photographed, discussed and disseminated. If you don't think that they can stay up for long, then placing them in the doorway of your opponent's head office might be a way to generate extra publicity and get some great shots.

Picture credits: UnReal Estate installation Squatspace.com The UnReal Estate installation in 2002 highlighted the large numbers of houses and buildings being wasted in Newcastle via a property board in the Hunter Street Mall which included photos and addresses.

Many more examples, and the full articles from which this piece has been extracted, can be found at <https://commonslibrary.org/topic/arts-creativity/>.



WRITE FOR US!

ISSUE #16: ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

For years, for decades, for centuries, we have been infused with the belief that economic growth, endlessly, is what all should serve. It had become the ultimate goal of politics, of the economy, of our labour.

It is the human paradigm of self-serving economic growth that now brings us with alarming speed into a state of the earth that yields suffering for all. For humans, for animals, for plants - for nature.

And so we ask, is the endless growth paradigm really irreplaceable, inescapable? We long for your inspiration: If not economic growth, what other potential drivers of political and societal decisions are there? Are there alternatives to this paradigm? Where are they already experienced - in very small places, or at large scale?

We kindly ask for your opinion-pieces, academic articles or artworks on the subject matter: **Alternative futures**. Please follow this call and give us all inspiration to meet our exciting and unpredictable future.

**Deadline to Express Interest in Submitting:
October 15th, 2021**

Tvergastein accepts submissions in two categories: Shorter op-ed pieces (2000-5000 characters, about 4-6 pages) and longer articles (10000-20000 characters, about 6-12 pages) in either English or Norwegian. Submissions in other languages could potentially be accepted - please simply send a request to the team. We also welcome artwork, photos and poems!

FROM THE CLOUD TO THE STREETS: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM UNEXPECTEDLY SECURED ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN PERU

BY

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the relationship between environmental and social-media activism during the November 2020 protests in Peru. In particular, it explores the opportunities and challenges posed by social media activism for the political participation of the 'bicentennial generation' in environmental causes. It concludes that the November 2020 protests were a new event in Peru's history that opened a collaborative path between social media and environmental activism. Although the long-term implications of this case remain uncertain, the partnership between social media and environmental activism will hopefully have a positive effect on the future.

INTRODUCTION

On the 9th of November 2020, Peru's Parliament voted to oust the then-president Martin Vizcarra. This event sparked a wave of protests, which were among the largest in the last two decades. Unlike previous demonstrations, these were mainly organized by grassroots groups of young Peruvians through social media, now called the 'bicentennial generation'. Amid this political crisis, some parliamentarians introduced two bills that sought to substantially modify the environmental framework for the prevention of environmental damage. This article focuses on the relationship between environmental activism and social-media activism during the protests in Peru. It explores the opportunities and challenges posed by social-media activism for the political participation of the bicentennial generation in environmental causes. To this end, first, it describes the social, political and legal background that frame the case. Later, it briefly explains the role played by social media activism in shaping the social movement. Finally, it examines the strengths and weaknesses of social media activism in securing environmental protection during the November 2020 protest in Peru.

SECTION I: BACKGROUND

At the beginning of November 2020, Peru's Parliament voted to remove from office the then-President Vizcarra, alleging 'permanent moral incapacity'. This move was based on a controversial interpretation of the prerogative provided by article 113 of the Constitution of Peru (BBC 10 Nov. 2020). The reaction from civil society organizations and political and legal experts was resounding. They condemned the removal of Mr. Vizcarra and branded it as a veiled coup d'état that breached the Peruvian Constitution, the rule of law and the democratic system of government (Collins 10 Nov. 2020).

The same day, several protests sprung up in different parts of Peru, including its capital city, Lima. In response, the Peruvian National Police deployed a riot unit to suppress the demonstrations. Since the beginning, the clashes between the two factions were remarkably violent (Amnistia Internacional 13 Nov. 2020).¹ The South America Regional Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (ACNUDH 12 Nov. 2020), Human Rights Watch (HRW 12 Nov. 2020) and the Inter American Commission for Human Rights (CIDH 16 Nov. 2020) reported the abuses and denounced the excessive and unnecessary use of

force by the National Police. By the 15th of November, two young men were killed and more than 100 demonstrators were injured, with some facing life-long injuries (CIDH 7 Dec. 2020). As a consequence, the recently sworn-in President Manuel Merino and his ministerial cabinet resigned the next day.

Amid the political crisis, the already discredited and unpopular parliamentarians Omar Chehade and Alexander Lozano, from *Alianza por el Perú* and *Unión por el Perú* respectively, presented two contentious bills before Parliament (CEDIA 12 Nov. 2020). The first one, Bill N 06639/2020-CR, was introduced by Omar Chehade on the 11th of November 2020. Concisely, the bill sought to undermine the *National Environmental Impact Assessment Framework* (SEIA, in its Spanish acronym), which is one of the crucial mechanisms to prevent and remediate environmental degradation. This bill aimed to simplify and loosen up the process of awarding *environmental certification*² to investment projects on the rationale of boosting the national economy. Environmental organizations responded by denouncing the bill for conflicting with the preventive principle enshrined in the SEIA (SPDA 12 Nov. 2020).

¹ As reported by Amnesty International, the police used tear gas and fired pellets against demonstrators, journalists and even bystanders.

² The SEIA enshrines the *environmental certification* as a singular system to identify, supervise and prevent the possible negative environmental impacts of investment projects. Therefore, activities that can have a negative impact on the environment must be certified before they begin.

The second, Bill N 06641/2020-CR, was introduced by the parliamentarian Alexander Lozano on the 12th of November 2020. The proposal aimed to formalize artisanal and small-scale mining activities in the Amazon and Highlands of Peru (Huánuco, Pasco, Junín, Cusco, Puno, Cajamarca and Ayacucho).³ In

short, this bill pretended to remove the requirement of *environmental certification* as enshrined in the SEIA and replaced it with an affidavit of environmental sustainability.⁴ Environmental organizations condemned this bill because it encouraged the spread and intensification of mining activities in the Amazon.



Picture credits: Giovana Tullume, 2020.

³ T Bill N 06641/2020-CR, Articles 2 and 3.

⁴ Bill N 06641/2020-CR, Article 7.

SECTION II: SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM

The use of social media to organize demonstrations that expand at high speed and scale is a relatively new global phenomenon that has intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. As stated by science journalist Jane Hu⁵ in The New Yorker about the Black Lives Matter movement, ‘Three months of quarantine taught us to live online, so it’s perhaps unsurprising that it was what we saw online that sent us back to the streets’ (Hu 3 Aug. 2020). Therefore, the protests in Peru were not an abnormality, but rather part of a global phenomenon characterized by an increase in social media use over the previous months.

Although social media had played a role in the organising of protests or spreading of news in Peru before, the November demonstrations showed peculiar traits. First, due to quarantine regulations, protesters were mainly in contact with one another through social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and TikTok.⁶ Second, protesters used social media, websites and apps to not only convene and coordinate demonstrations but to report police abuses and share information. Third, the protests were organised within hours, with protesters deciding where to go on the same day, that is, they were a spon-

taneous movement with no clear leadership. Despite that, the protests gathered thousands of people.

The group behind the protests has been dubbed ‘*generación del bicentenario*’ [bicentennial generation], referring to the soon-coming bicentennial anniversary of the Peruvian Declaration of Independence.⁷ This generation distinguishes itself from previous ones by its capacity to convene and organize demonstrations through social media, a tool that previous generations had no access to and that the traditional ruling class struggles to understand. Most of this class were baffled by the idea that no political leader was leading the movement.

⁵ Jane Hu is a PhD candidate in English and Film and Media Studies at UC Berkeley. Her cultural criticism has appeared in The New Yorker, The New York Times, among other places.

⁶ Many Peruvian celebrities also supported the protests and shared pictures of the injured and missing people. For instance, K-pop stars and fans of K-pop were essential in ‘hijacking’ a hashtag that was being used to spread misinformation.

⁷ As the sociologist Noelia Chavez explains, the bicentennial generation is highly diverse. What unifies them is a narrative or desire to bring some decency back to politics, which is seen as a field riddled with corruption and the prevalence of private interests over public ones (Chavez 20 Nov. 2020).

Although environmental concerns were not at the core of the protests, they became part of the issues justifying the protests following the presentation of Bill N 06639/2020-CR and Bill N 06641/2020-CR before Parliament. The timing of the bills’ presentation fuelled rumours that proponents were using the political turmoil to ensure that the bills would not face much public scrutiny. It was believed that the bills were launched in the middle of the political turmoil because politicians expected them to fly under the radar of civil society.

However, environmental organizations picked up on the bills’ submissions and decided to share them through the same channels that the demonstrators used. The environmental non-profit organization (NGO) known as the Peruvian Society of Environmental Law (SPDA in its Spanish acronym) and the indigenous rights NGO *SERVINDI* posted content related to the bills the night of the 12th of November. They were shared on three platforms: Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. The posts’ headlines highlighted the proponents of the bills⁸ and also briefly described the bills’ contents.

Influencers, celebrities and journalists⁹ also shared the bills’ contents via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. For instance, YouTubers Fatima Sotomayor and Daniela Rita owners of the YouTube channel ‘*Misias pero viajeras*’ with 664,000 subscribers shared a tutorial on the steps of using the formal mechanisms offered by the Parliament to speak out against the bills. Celebrities such as the recognized chef Gaston Acurio (676,000 followers) and the actor Anahi de Cardenas (1.5 million followers) also denounced the bills on their Instagram accounts. As a result, the sponsored parliamentarians withdrew the bills the day after their introduction.

⁸ Parliamentarians Omar Chehade and Alexander Lozano.

⁹ On the difference between influencers and celebrities see Nouri, Melody. ‘The Power of Influence: Traditional Celebrity vs Social Media Influencer’ (2018). *Advance Writing: Pop Culture Intersections*. 32.

SECTION III: ANALYSIS

AN UNUSUAL PARTNERSHIP

Peruvian democracy has faced many challenges over the last 20 years. One of the most pressing issues has been how to strike a balance between environmental concerns and the promotion of profitable extractive activities. The Andean and Amazon areas, rich in gas and minerals, are at the core of this battle. Protests, strikes and violent repression have been the common currency in those areas. The time between 2006 and 2015 alone witnessed the death of 253 Peruvians due to environmental conflicts.¹⁰

Despite their importance, environmental concerns had not been at the forefront of national-scale demonstrations. Likewise, social media activism around environmental conflicts had been limited to a narrow community of advocates and interest groups. These groups typically share controversial environmental regulations under the #alertalegislativa hashtag on social media sites. Yet, generally, such posts have not been widely disseminated.

In such a context, the going viral of the Bill N 06639/2020-CR and Bill N 06641/2020-CR was a mile-

stone in the relationship between environmental causes and social media activism. Unlike on other occasions, environmental bills' information was spread quickly and shared by thousands of people. For the first time in Peruvian politics, environmental regulation proposals were acknowledged at a national level and were the target of social media outrage.

The high rate of social media use in this case can be explained by the peculiar circumstances surrounding it. First, the bills were seen by their opponents as acts of an illegitimate government that seized power through undemocratic procedures. Thus, irrespective of their scope and subject matter, the bills inherently lacked social and political legitimacy. Social media activism against the bills considered them a form of opposition by the government itself. Second, one of the sponsor-parliamentarians, Omar Chehade, was particularly well-known and almost unanimously disliked by Peruvians. It was not surprising then that a bill sponsored by him would gather such animosity both online and on the streets.

¹⁰That number refers to those who died as a consequence of mining conflicts (Zevallos 12 May 2015).

In this case, social media activism was the main reason the bills were removed just one day after their proposal. Bill N 06639/2020-CR and Bill N 06641/2020-CR 'going viral' was key in the blocking of the bills' approval, through which a hard blow to the already weakened SEIA was avoided. This outcome represented a triumph over the illegitimate government of Merino and the Parliament's attempts to undermine environmental standards. However, above all, it showed the bicentennial generation that social media activism is not restricted to the virtual world but can have a significant impact on the Peruvian reality.

Moreover, this case showed that social media can effectively be used to channel popular demands for participation and recognition in environmental decision-making. Regrettably, the Peruvian State has a legacy of imposing projects, regulations and decisions without consulting the affected population. For instance, in investment projects such as Conga (Cajamarca), Tía María (Arequipa) or Tambogrande (Piura), the Peruvian government pushed for the approval of investment projects without seeking the acceptance of the local population.

While the Peruvian regulatory framework recognizes public participation in environmental matters, it does not promote it in practice. As stated by James Anaya, UN rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, the Peruvian administration does not seriously consider the ma-

terial challenges that hinder public participation (2013). These include budgetary restrictions and a lack of accessible information, transparency, and actual decision-making power. In the scenario of Bill N 06639/2020-CR and Bill N 06641/2020-CR, social media served to denounce the exclusion of the bicentennial generation from the political realm and reclaim their role as crucial stakeholders in environmental issues.

Finally, this case broke a disgraceful pattern in Peruvian politics. Bills which aim to erode environmental protections have typically been approved despite strong opposition from environmental experts and civil society organizations. For instance, in June 2017, the Ministry of Environment approved the new National Environmental Quality Standards for Air," which increased the legal amount of sulphur dioxide in the air by more than 12 times. National and international environmental organizations widely rejected the draft bill because of the high risk that sulphur dioxide pollution poses to human health. Their claims had little influence on the government, and 10 days after its proposal, the law had been accepted without any alterations. Thus, in the scenario of Bill N 06639/2020-CR and Bill N 06641/2020-CR, social media offered environmental institutions a platform with a greater audience that had the power to respond and demand a policy U-turn.

¹¹Supreme Decree No. 003-2017-MINAM.

CHALLENGES

The information shared by environmental organisations during the crisis focused mainly on the opponents of the bills rather than on accurately reporting their content. One can easily attribute this to the immediateness of social media – a space that calls for quick reactions and succinct content. To post that the very unpopular and discredited Congress sought to undermine Peruvian environmental legislation was effective because it provided protesters with another cause for anger and directly identified the responsible individuals. It was a simple and clear message to which most people could react. However, other cases have proven that social media allows for more complex content when it is framed correctly. For instance, the Black Lives Matter movement has promoted discussion in social media around the tangled issue of race relations around the world.

Though effective, it is a dangerous strategy to focus on the legislators and not on the piece of legislation. By tying both realities together – Parliament and environmental protection – a narrative is advanced in which once the first one is gone, the second one will improve. This could become a double-edged sword. On the one hand, using the unpopularity of the Peruvian political elite proved successful in gathering support and acting speedily, achieving advances that traditional means have failed to achieve before. On the other hand, it could very well be that if a similar bill were pushed by different parliamentarians in the future, it would not gather as much attention and outrage.

Social media was a tremendously useful instrument for promoting the specific message that those bills were damaging. But it failed to become a tool for engaging a vast number of individuals in debate about the merits of the bills and the broader problems around the environment in Peru. This is proven by the lower share of posts containing more detailed and nuanced analysis of the proposed regulatory amendment¹² in contrast to those that named the sponsors of the bills.¹³ Debate on environmental justice is so needed in Peru, a country where environmental conflicts are on the rise and will likely continue to grow unless action is taken. The November 2020 protests were a rare opportunity to begin this debate at a deeper level.

¹² See the post on the facebook page of the SPDA on November 12th (19:40), shared 156 times. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/actualidadspda>, accessed: 22 November 2020.

¹³ See the post on the facebook page of the SPDA on November 12th (12:51), shared 6600 times. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/actualidadspda>, accessed: 22 November 2020.

Environmental groups could draw on this spark and promote a deeper involvement of the general public in environmental matters – one that goes beyond the immediate and emotional retweet and repost during a political crisis. This experience could be a lesson for civil society organizations about the advantages and disadvantages of using social media platforms to spread their messages effectively to a broader audience. It is up to them to capitalize on the growing constant online presence of the bicentennial generation and walk together into environmental activism.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The long-term impacts of the November 2020 protests are not clear yet. On the one hand, there is no doubt that the bicentennial generation has awakened to political life and, with them, other sectors in Peru. For them, social media might be the first step towards a broader discussion of environmental issues – one that goes beyond the cloud. On the other hand, we should not rush to assert that Peruvians, in general, have substantially grown to care about environmental protections. Only time will tell if the bicentennial generation finally fulfils its promise to guard the environment and to remain vigilant of any attempts to undermine the legislation put in place to protect it.

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ACTIVISM AS EXEMPLIFYING PATHS OF LEAST ACTION

BY SINDRE COTTIS HOFF

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ABSTRACT

In this universe, all bodies of matter, to the best of our knowledge, move from one point to another as is predicted by the Principle of Least Action: along the path of least action. As we are organisms built up of matter in this universe, it seems inevitable that this applies to you and I just as it applies to dust particles following the explosion of a star. Therefore, I suggest that all of us people—regardless of ideology, age, religion or nationality—live our lives in a way that we *believe* yields happiness and meaning, and that we seek to move to the point where this is attained along the path of least action. Seemingly, and sadly, many follow paths to happiness and meaning that deliver only little of it. In this pursuit, many also follow paths that contribute to the destruction of our mutual habitat, planet Earth. Thus, I suggest that activists ought to engage in ex-

perimentation with different paths to happiness and meaning that do not necessitate large environmental footprints. In so doing, activism may catalyze widespread changes in people's paths pursuing happiness and meaning. This could lead to people going through transformative changes in the personal sphere in which environmental benefits are positive side effects of pursuing happiness and meaning. With references to ecovillages in Denmark and repair initiatives in Europe, I find partial empirical support of this argument. Evidently, more empirical testing is needed to prove the actual change-potential of such activism. Fortunately, this can be done by everyone. One only needs to playfully, creatively, and in an informed manner experiment with and converse about ways of attaining happiness and meaning that are environmentally friendly.

“contemporary science indicates that it is possible to experience happiness and a deep sense of meaning in life while at the same time being environmentally friendly”

1. THE NEED FOR TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE LIMITATION OF FORCE

The basis for the argument of this text rests in the vastness of the ecological problem(s) we are collectively experiencing. Some frame the issue mainly as one about reducing greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere to minimize global warming and enable society to continue as before (Azevedo et al. 2020). Some emphasize the loss of biodiversity as species suffer and go extinct (IPBES 2019). Some frame the problem as the inevitable manifestation of the greediness of humanity (Guenther 2019). A related and not exclusionary framing emphasizes culture, values, and norms that have spread through vast parts of the human population (Crate 2011). Along that line of reasoning, a more specific but prevalent framing blames capitalism (Klein 2015; Bonneuil and Fressoz 2017) or, arguably, its offspring, neoliberalism (McCarthy and Prudham 2004).

The list above is far from exhaustive of all tentative diagnosis-making of the ecological problem(s) of this time. What I hope the brief overview serves to illustrate is that a myriad of framings exist, and that a plausible truth is that a complex set of interactions generates the problems we are experiencing. Moreover, I hope it illustrates that it is not clear which actors

are to blame, who can fix it, and how those that may have agency can solve the problem. In other words, as Sun and Yang (2016) argue, it is a wicked problem we are facing. Based on comparing annual numbers of publications found in Google Scholar with the searches “‘wicked problem’ and ‘climate change’” and “‘wicked problem’ and ‘biodiversity,’” it appears as if a growing chorus of academic voices agree on this.

Followingly, many recognize that we need transformative change(s) to address this wicked problem (O’Brien and Sygna 2013). In tandem with that, according to O’Brien and Sygna, the diversity of interpretations of transformative change appears to have broadened. Still, a common denominator for many of the definitions is the emphasis on changes in how each human aspires to achieve meaning and happiness in life. Karen O’Brien and Sygna argue that this is at the very core of transformative change. Moreover, O’Brien and Sygna, who label this component of transformation as *transformation in the personal sphere*, argued that such change cannot be forced upon people in any manner that is ethically sound. Rather, the changes must be voluntary.

Thus, I here present the Principle of Least Action as a potentially useful analytical tool to comprehend the possibilities for activists in contributing to catalyzing such voluntary transformative changes. The rest of the paper goes as follows. In section 2, I briefly present the principle of Least Action as it is understood in physics. In section 3, I introduce the applicability of the Principle of Least Action in explaining human behavior. In section 4, I suggest that meaning and happiness is what most people seek to experience, that most people have a conscious or dogmatic idea of what will cause them to experience it, and that they live their lives according to what they perceive to be the path of least action towards experiencing it. Further, I indicate that many people may have erroneous ideas of what yields happiness and meaning, and that a lifestyle with a large environmental footprint is not needed to experience happiness and meaning. Building on that, in section 5, I introduce how activists can, via experimentation, exemplify precise paths of lesser action to experience happiness and meaning that do not necessitate

large environmental footprints. In so doing, I suggest activists may contribute to catalyzing transformative change based on profound voluntary changes in the personal sphere. In section 6, I introduce empirical observations from repair initiatives in European countries and ecovillages in Denmark that seem to exemplify paths to happiness and meaning while also being environmentally friendly. The cases presented vaguely indicate the change-potential of such activism. Lastly, in section 7, I conclude the text by underlining that the change-potential of activism like this needs more testing for it to be proven to exist, and that everyone can contribute to this testing.

2. MOVEMENT AND THE PRINCIPLE OF LEAST ACTION



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How and why matter moves in the universe has been subject to much inquiry. In the first half of the 17th century, Pierre de Fermat suggested that light, at every point in *time*, takes the path of least time from one point to another, later referred to as Fermat's Principle (Grabiner 1983). This was impactful. Amongst other things, it seemed to explain why, for an observer standing above water, an obstacle below water appears further away than it is. Later, when physicists started operating with the persistent force that is energy, it was postulated that all matter in the universe moves from one point to another, at every point in time, via the path of least *action*. Famously, in the middle of the 1830s, William Rowan Hamilton formulated the equation for the Principle of Least Action as it is broadly used today. While yielding the same results as Newton's Laws, this principle provides a different theoretical way of comprehending and calculating how bodies of matter move in space and time. In its simplest form, the principle goes as follows: "a particle moves along the path for which the action ... is a minimum" (Hanc and Hancova 2003,

1). Here, action is considered to be the average kinetic energy along the path minus the average potential energy along the path. Worded differently, the path of least action equals the path from one point to another that necessitates the least kinetic energy and generates the most potential energy.

This simple yet profound principle has led to much amusement and confusion in physics (Feynman 1963). According to Terekhovitch (2018), three branches of interpretations of this have developed: (1) the theological view, which refers to the principle demonstrating the perfection of God; (2) the teleological view, which refers to consistent and precise economy being a truth of nature; and (3) the instrumental view, which refers to the principle being a constructed calculation tool made by humans in the pursuit of explaining what we see in the world, and not something that in itself is "true". There are deep ontological differences between the three interpretations. For this paper, I agnostically treat the Principle of Least Action in a manner leaning towards the second interpretation: the teleological view.

¹ It has been re-discovered that the 10th century Arab thinker Ibn al-Haytham also suggested that light moves along the path of least time

3. APPLYING THE PRINCIPLE OF LEAST ACTION TO THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

In the social sciences, laws of physics such as the Principle of Least Action are rarely used for any scientific enquiries. It is seldom considered that these laws provide further insights into explaining and understanding phenomena in the social world. However, Herbert Spencer, by some considered, along with Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, and Alexis de Tocqueville, as one of the forerunners in establishing sociology as a field of study (Shills 1970), utilized principles of physics in explaining social behavior (Spencer 1890). Later, George Kingsley Zipf, largely considered to have provided the foundation for modern quantitative linguistics (Rousseau 2002), also utilized the principle in explaining social behavior (Zipf 1942). In our current time, the interdisciplinary scholars Shyam Sunder and Shabnam Mousavi (2019a & 2019b) have come to champion the usefulness of applying the Principle of Least Action to understand social phenomena. They call for inquiries of social phenom-

ena via a three-tier framework (Mousavi and Sunder 2019; Mousavi and Sunder 2020).

In this three-tier framework, Sunder and Mousavi first suggest that scholars start explaining social phenomena via theories from physics. Subsequently, they suggest enriching the understanding of social phenomena with principles from biology. Lastly, to further deepen understanding, they suggest employing the principles used most commonly in social science inquiries: the psycho/social principles. They have laid the early-phase groundwork for the application of the Principle of Least Action in the first tier. They have argued that all human behavior can be viewed as movement from one point to another, and that action equals a movement from state A to state B , where A and B can be specifiable (denoted as \hat{A} and B) or non-specifiable (denoted as \tilde{A} and B) states. A pair of beginning-end states (\hat{A}, B) is a *situation* (Mousavi & Sunder 2019, 10).

“there are today smaller and larger groups of people that creatively experiment with activities that seemingly find synergies between environmentally friendly lifestyles and happiness and meaning”

From this, they derive four different possible *situations* for observable phenomena in the social sciences:

1. $(\hat{A}$ and $B)$'s outcome is observable and binary. Prior to arrival, the point can be seen, and either one succeeds at arriving there or one fails. For example, a lifeguard swimming out to rescue a person in the water.
2. For $(\hat{A}$ and $B)$, the starting point, \hat{A} , is in a state of wishes, dreams, and ambitions. If action informed by these anticipations occurs, this scenario will be realized as an \hat{A} and B *situation*.
3. For $(\hat{A}$ and $B)$, action is initiated from the starting point of a specifiable point, and the outcome is uncertain and non-specifiable.
4. In $(\tilde{A}$ and $B)$ scenarios, no action is done in a *situation* where there is inaction between A and B . Point B is arrived at by default.

Mousavi and Sunder made clear the current prematurity and developing state of this framework. Rather than claiming to have presented a new set of guidelines to be tightly followed by others, they hope “to elicit feedback, suggestions, and criticism that will further this objective” (Mousavi & Sunder 2019, 16). Ultimately, they hope to see “new approaches to thinking, investigating and categorizing the study of human behavior” (Mousavi & Sunder 2019, 15).

Inspired by and in support of the call for such inquiries of social phenomena, I build on the first tier of this early-phase framework. I use it to indicate the potential for activists to catalyze transformative change with experimentation of different paths to what most, if not all, humans seek to obtain: happiness and meaning.

4. THE PATH OF LEAST ACTION TO HAPPINESS AND MEANING

Before I proceed with this experimentative inquiry, the statement that most, if not all, humans seek to experience happiness and meaning with the least amount of action needs to be substantiated. Admittedly, limited space available, thus this text allows this to be done only partially.

First, several surveys have found that the majority of respondents report that happiness and/or meaning² are the most desired attainments (Moore 2016; Caprino 2016; Oishi et al. 2020). Second, in the epilogue of the book “The Chinese Pursuit of Happiness,” Madsen (2008) illuminated the centrality of attaining happiness and meaning for people in Chinese cultures. Simultaneously, he emphasized different interpretations of happiness and meaning in mainstream Western society and in mainstream Chinese society, where the latter is more focused on collective attainment of happiness. Third, happiness and meaning appears to serve as a cornerstone in religions. For example, it is believed by many followers that Buddhism provides a path to meaning

and happiness (Joshanloo 2014). The same applies to many followers of Christianity (Meconi 2010), and the same is the case for Islam (Amalia et al. 2016). Paradoxically, there has been observed increasing levels of stress and other mental issues in populations of affluent, high-polluting societies like the US and Norway, societies where the population is also considered to have broad freedom (Dæhlen 2020; Mental Health America 2020; Buyon et al. 2020).

As I believe is indicated by the heterogeneity of these examples, we humans know little with certainty about what generates happiness and meaning, and there appears to be different ways of experiencing this desired thing. This deduction was reached also by Dolan et al. after an extensive review of the literature on the “economics of happiness” (2008). In other words, we know little about the certainty of a given path to the experiences of happiness and meaning, and there might be many paths of lesser action to this ambiguous but desired state than what is commonly believed. Moreover, and sadly, we are in a time

where the paths that large masses of people follow in this pursuit contribute to utter destruction of our joint habitat, planet Earth (Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014).

²In much literature, the term hedonic wellbeing is treated as covering happiness and eudemonic wellbeing treated as covering sense of meaning. See e.g. Huta (2015) for an overview of the academic debate around the interaction between the two types of wellbeing

Building on the preliminary framework developed by Sunder and Mousavi and the information provided above, it seems like many of the situations based on arriving at experiences of happiness and meaning resemble type 1 situations and partially type 3 situations. The former is because it appears as if people, consciously or dogmatically, have ideas about a point in the mental horizon that will yield experiences of happiness and meaning. Put differently, point A, the start of the situation, and point B, the end of the situation, are both perceived as specifiable (\tilde{A} and B). Hence, people seek to get from point A to point B along the path perceived to be of least action. In their everyday lives, as large and small decisions are made, people will implicitly or explicitly act according to what they believe will keep them on that path. In addition, the situations partially resemble type 3 situations because the perceived specifiable point B is not necessarily a true point B, and so the path believed to be of least action may miss the point of happiness and meaning which the subject aspired to arrive at. Possibly, the point Bs in the situations are inherently non-specifiable (\tilde{A} and B). However, as research on happiness over the past 20 years seems to indicate, not proving, certain perceptions of specifiable point Bs might be relatively easier to attain and might bring sub-

jects closer to happiness and meaning. In addition, there seem to be possible synergies between these perceptions and environmentally friendly lifestyles.

Numerous studies conducted in Asia, Europe, and the US have found positive correlations between engagement in behaviors labeled as “sustainable” (e.g.,

reducing consumption, buying recycled paper products, shopping with a reusable bag, walking or cycling for short journeys, carpooling with others, etc.) and happiness (Kasser 2017; Kasser and Sheldon 2002; Welsch & Kühling 2010; Kaida 2016; Corral-Verdugo et al. 2011). It has been documented that learning to appreciate what one currently possesses, being physically active, engaging in prosocial behaviors (e.g., helping others), reaching goals, having deep relationships with others (Sheldon and Lyubomirsky 2019), and also feeling belonging to the place and people where one lives (Appau et al. 2019) correlate with a sense of meaning and happiness in life. Moreover, it has been found that intrinsic values and goals (personal growth, relationships, and community involvement) rather than extrinsic values and goals (financial success, image, and popularity) are associated with happiness (Brown and Kasser 2005; Niemiec 2009). As is suggested by Brown and Kasser (2005) and others, intrinsic values and goals also correlate positively with behaviors labeled as sustainable, and extrinsic values and goals correlate negatively (Hurst et al. 2013). Thus, arguably, contemporary science indicates that it is possible to experience happiness and a deep sense of meaning in life while at the same time being environmentally friendly.

5. ACTIVISM AS EXEMPLIFICATION OF PATHS OF LEAST ACTION TO HAPPINESS AND MEANING

Granted there is truth to the reasoning above, it follows as viable that people could be eager to change their specifiable point B (B) in the situation where B is the experience of happiness and meaning, and thus change their behavior. The development of such a change in point B (B) might be catalyzed by obtaining consciousness of paths to happiness and meaning that appear to require lesser action and/or a yield more happiness and meaning. The changed specifiable point B (B) of the person may then be highly inspired by the character of this specifiable point B (B) that he/she is made conscious of. Then, it follows that if the paths presented to people necessitate smaller environmental footprints, positive environmental effects will be impactful and positive side effects of people pursuing happiness and meaning. In consequence of this, the paths of happiness and meaning, such as those that necessitate smaller environmental impacts, can be spread again and again to others once obtained by a person.

What then becomes the role of environmental activists? It seems that a role of the highest appropriateness and importance in this time is to playfully, creatively, and in an informed manner engage in a myriad of real-life experiments with inclusive, environmentally friendly paths to achieving the state of meaning and happiness. In so doing, activists may change broadly held perceptions of point B in this situation. Through such experimentative behavior, small groups of people can broaden the perception of possible paths, and the perception of what is realistic or not, for large masses of people. As Gibson-Graham (2008) has emphasized, what we as single humans or as communities of people perceive as possible is largely limited by what we have seen and experienced. Thus, worthy of great sense of hope and excitement, there are today smaller and larger groups of people that are creatively experimenting with activities that seemingly reach synergies between environmentally friendly lifestyles and happiness and meaning.



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6. EXAMPLES OF ACTIVISM DEMONSTRATING PATHS TO HAPPINESS AND MEANING

An elevated focus on repairing goods has been considered important for reducing consumption levels and people's destructive impact on planet Earth (Schmid 2019). In a study from 2019, Mock and colleagues investigated wellbeing outcomes of people engaging in repair initiatives in five European countries. Based on qualitative methods, the researchers found that "doing things together and asking for help and advice was described as enjoyable" (Mock et al. 2019, 5). For many of the people engaged in the initiatives, it appeared as if the wellbeing outcome was the strongest motivation to pursue the repair activities. One of the informants in the study stated that "You can make people happy with it, and that you reduce waste, that is very nice, but [...] Yes, for me it is more about the people and the joy of doing something" (Mock et al. 2019, 5). Mock et al. also suggested that the repair activities positively influenced the informants' senses of meaning in life. They suggested that this was exemplified by informants saying things like, "Well, and then someone leaves completely happy. And that is such a grateful thing" (Mock et al. 2019, 6).

The ecovillages in Denmark also yield something similar to these synergetic effects. These villages are currently being researched as part of the interdisciplinary research project Collective Movements and Pathways to Sustainable Societies (COMPASS) at University of Copenhagen (Institut for Antropologi 2020). In particular, research has focused on one village called Den Selvforsynende Landsby, in which 34 adults and 40 children reside. They are self-sup-

plied with meat and grow vegetables to cover much of their annual consumption. Other groceries are purchased, prepared, and enjoyed jointly. The village is governed with a consensus-based decision-making model (Den Selvforsynende Landsby 2020).

Although the research is still ongoing, some of the current findings have already been presented. With a representative sample of the Danish population serving as control group, researchers have generated data indicating that residents in the ecovillages on average are happier than those in the control group, and slightly happier than the 25% highest-consuming members of the control group (Möller-Christensen 2019). Contrary to what is found in the representative sample of the Danish population, researchers found no correlation between material consumption and happiness in the ecovillage. Based on calculations of consumption-based greenhouse gas emissions, they found residents in ecovillages to have, on average, more than 30% lower carbon footprints than those in the control group. Outstandingly, the average member of Den Selvforsynende Landsby had 60% lower emissions than the average in the greater Danish society (Anette Høyte Hansen, e-mail communication, September 20).

³At the discretion of the author of this text, the name of the village translates into English as The Self-Supplied Village.

The variable that appears to make ecovillages and especially Den Selvforsynende Landsby stand out so starkly in terms of low average consumption-based emissions is believed to be the sense of community, not environmental awareness (Möller-Christensen 2019; Anette Høyte Hansen, e-mail communication, September 20). The research team suggests that the sense of community has developed into social infrastructures that nurture environmental norms and behaviors. The role of the community was exemplified in an interview I did via Zoom with a resident in Den Selvforsynende Landsby in October 2020:

"Here we live within a community where all members are needed. Everyone feels valued. It contributes to a sense of meaning in life. Everyone is needed also in the greater society, yes, but it is more obvious here. This also makes it easier to love oneself."

Another resident I interviewed via Zoom in October 2020 shared the appreciation of the community in the village:

"What is different with a community like this is all the things we do together. It becomes so very fundamental. I think it is great. It feels natural. I do not believe it is healthy nor natural for humans to live alone or in nuclear families."

Lastly, and importantly, a paper from the COMPASS project suggests that groups of people elsewhere in Denmark have been inspired to make impactful changes in their life based on inspiration from ecovillages like Den Selvforsynende Landsby (Hansen 2019). This has been made possible, it is suggested, by the combination of residents living their life in the ecovillage and people informing the larger society of the successful and joyful alternative ways of living. In the article, Hansen underlines that both type of actors are equally important and ought to be considered as activists: those living happily and sustainably in the ecovillages and those informing the greater society of how those people live.

However, in both the ecovillages in Denmark and in the repair initiatives in Europe, it is not established the extent to which they influence other people's perceived path of least action to happiness and meaning. Therefore, while the reasoning in the preceding sections of this paper indicate that initiatives of this kind potentially contribute to catalyzing widespread transformative change in the personal sphere, these cases briefly presented do not firmly prove this to be true.

7. CONCLUSION

This text has been an experimental inquiry. I presented the Principle of Least Action, which states that all bodies of matter in the universe move from one point to another via the path of least action. This, I suggested, applies to humans and our behavior too, including how we seek to experience happiness and meaning in life. A perceived point of happiness and meaning in life is ambiguous and influenced by personal and collectively held experiences. Hence, each of us all follow slightly or starkly different paths believed to be of least action to what each of us believe will yield this desired state. Sadly, many ideas of paths to happiness and meaning seem to be wrong as they do not yield what is intended. Simultaneously, we live in a time where many paths pursued in this regard contribute to utter destruction of our joint habitat, planet Earth. I therefore suggest that activists in this critical time in history ought to playfully, creatively, and in an informed manner experiment with ways of living that yield meaning and happiness in life while being environmentally friendly. In so doing, activists will exemplify challenges to people's perceptions of paths to happiness and meaning, and they will exemplify different environmentally friendly paths to this mental state. This may, consciously or subconsciously, inspire people to change their pursued paths of least action to happiness and meaning, where a reduced environmental footprint may be a deeply positive side effect rather than the end goal for them. In support of the viability of this reasoning, I referred to research in positive psychology that finds correlations between happiness and sense of meaning and behaviors that do not necessitate a large environmental footprint. Lastly, I briefly presented encouraging findings from repair initiatives in European countries and an ecovillage in Denmark. These cases seem to constitute synergies between environmentally friendly lifestyles and happiness and meaning. However, the knowledge presented from these cases does not firmly establish the extent to which they influence other people and make them change their perceived paths of least action to happiness and meaning. As this is a critical aspect, it requires further empirical testing and/or research. Fortunately, all of us, regardless of whether one identifies as an activist or not, can contribute to this. One only needs to playfully, creatively, and in an informed manner experiment with and converse about ways of attaining happiness and meaning that are environmentally friendly. Together, we will see the effects.

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SPIRITUALITY OF ACTIVISTS

STUDYING INNER STANCES OF ENVIRONMENTALISTS IN GERMANY

BY GERRIET SCHWEN

Gerriet Schwen explores how profound societal transformation can succeed. In order to get to the heart of inner and outer transformation, he studied liberal arts and science and completed several training courses in, for example, theme-centred interaction. Gerriet is involved in civic initiatives as one of the editors of the magazine *Evolve* and as a board member of the association *Ideen hoch drei*. Currently, a research fellowship allows him to explore stories of success in community projects.

ABSTRACT

I wonder which fundamental transformation is possible if we connect external and internal, collective and individual approaches to change. In my bachelor's thesis, I investigated the inner attitude of people who are radically committed to ecological issues. In this article, I discuss the relevance of individual-internal transformation for social movements and introduce the eight key themes of activist spirituality identified in my study. I assume that this mindset supports engagement beyond one's own benefits, not only within high-risk activism but in all areas of life. Finally, I reflect on some questions that arose in terms of the study, like how to deal

respectfully and effectively with wisdom from cultures that have been and still are oppressed by western thought.

Profound transformation becomes increasingly urgent in our times of multiple crises. How can in-depth transformation succeed? This question led me to join social movements as well as to engage with spiritual traditions. I am now convinced that social change and individual development are necessary prerequisites to make good lives possible for everyone.

Social movements have historically generated innumerable changes on a political level, giving us many of the liberties we enjoy today. In spiritual traditions, human development beyond adulthood has been a strong point of focus over thousands of years. Although spirituality can motivate people to act altruistically beyond their individual concerns, the transformative potential of spiritual practices is largely ignored, both in academia and in the new social movements. Yet, it is my impression that there is much potential in combining practices from political and spiritual traditions for more extensive transformation.

However, isolated from each other, both the politico-collective and the spiritual-individual approaches to transformation have their downsides. First, spirituality without systemic thinking and political action can easily lead to turning away from the world and neglecting oppressive structures in favour of an individual-internal path of practice. Second, engagement in social movements without personal development can lead to short-sighted reactions if the contested values are not embodied. This intersection of a strategic-political as well as an inner-qualitative approach to profound change has been called sacred activism, spiritual activism, engaged spirituality and transpersonal social engagement (Rothberg and Coder 2013). Although this is still a niche phenomenon, it seems that the intersection between spirituality and activism have grown in recent years. I see the increasing importance of concepts such as awareness and micro-politics in diversity-affirming

political environments on the one hand, and movements such as engaged spirituality on the other, as an expression of the fact that currents of internal and external transformation are increasingly converging. I conducted a qualitative interview study based on the specific question:

What characterizes a spirituality that leads to radical social-ecological activism?

I use the provocative term spirituality for what is generally referred to as a mindset: the totality of one's inner attitude and conceptions of humanity and the world. In this context, I investigated the general question of what characterizes an inner attitude that encourages people to go beyond individual concerns and engagement for life-enhancing societal developments. I have investigated this in the field of activism, since I see engaging in the socio-ecological oriented Climate Justice Movement as an expression of commitment over one's own advantages. However, I assume that the inner stances explored in this area are not limited to strongly visible and risky activism but could be the basis of change-oriented, regenerative cultures.

As a result of the study, it became clear that at the centre of this activist spirituality is an inner stance characterized by 1) continuity of spirituality and activism, 2) love as a guiding compass, 3) community and nature as energizers, 4) the experience of being part of a larger whole, 5) transindividuation from ego to eco perspectives, 6) transrational understanding, 7) marvelling at the mystery, and 8) acceptance of all that is. I will discuss these characteristics below.

Method

In order to include the most diverse perspectives, I first identified some of the projects that are particularly relevant for the understanding of spirituality in the Climate Justice Movement in Germany¹. I then interviewed people of different spiritual backgrounds, ages and genders from a variety of political groups². The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide³. I evaluated the recordings of the 21 interviews in an explorative approach, first marking all topics addressed and then grouping them. In this process, eight key themes of a worldly spirituality emerged. These crystallized in all of the interviews, and representative interview answers are quoted.

Continuity of spirituality and activism

All interviewees experienced spirituality and activism as significantly interdependent and inseparable. The ideal is to realize spiritual values in activism and to embody political claims through inner development. The practice of life, which arises from this connection between inner and outer transformation, goes beyond usual forms of spiritual and political practice and changes both areas. Gee, program director of the Ulex training collective, described this as follows:

“It’s not as though the spiritual life is just the inner, or the individual, and is not just that activism is the outer in the social-political space. Our activism is also about the way that we shift our understanding, our ways of thinking, we shift the relationship between parts of ourselves, we shift the relationship between each other, we sort of embody values in our social interactions and in our groups ... The activism and the spiritual happen in all of these fields.”

From this perspective, consistently pursued spirituality leads to activism and activism extends into the realms of spirituality. Inken Gritto, Extinction Rebellion’s nonviolent communication trainer, noted that ‘if I want to stay true to my values ... I am actually obliged to disobey’. Timo Luthmann, author of *The German Handbook of Sustainable Activism* (Luthmann 2018) and co-initiator of Ende Gelände and Climate Camps in Germany, said, ‘through political engagement you get out of your little ego’.

¹ Among those identified were activists from Extinction Rebellion, Ende Gelände, from the occupation of the Hambach Forest and Climate Camps in Germany, trainers from Ulex and Sensing the Change, organizers from Living Utopia and the Symposium Rebels of Peace as well as authors, for example, of *The German Handbook of Sustainable Activism* (Luthmann 2018).

² If a single name is used instead of first and last names, it is done so to preserve the anonymity of the person.

³ Interviews were translated by the author.

Love as a guiding compass

The interviewees oriented their decisions towards seeking love, peace and freedom and avoiding what creates suffering. For sacred activism trainer Griet Hellinckx, ‘life-affirming’ and ‘that which supports life’ are important criteria. For Inken Gritto this means ‘to ask oneself again and again the question: “Am I serving life? Or am I contributing to harming life?”’. Having played a vital role in the growth of Extinction Rebellion Germany, Hannah described it as a deeply spiritual impulse to become active out of love for life: ‘I have the feeling that the world is suffering, the earth is suffering, people are suffering and I am suffering, ... many people feel this, but would not call it spiritual to make the decision to become active’. Martin Winiecki, coordinator of the Institute for Global Peacework called this ‘a spirituality that does not turn away from the earthly existence, but that turns towards it in a loving, compassionate way’.

Community and nature as energizer

To avoid burnout from their altruistic work towards far-reaching goals, activists need to connect to sources of internal energy. Spirituality was described by all interviewees as an important source that gave them strength to become, be and remain active. ‘In the end, spirituality is what drives me’ said Lola, a resident of the Hambach Forest woodland occupation. This experience of being was nurtured by something, described Mira, also an inhabitant of the Hambach Forest, as ‘a kind of living primary ground, an aspect of reality that always carries and supports life’.

In order to connect to this nurturing field, interviewees engaged in community with other humans and the more-than-human world that we call nature: ‘Where the well-being of others is as important as your own well-being. That’s as deeply spiritual as you’re gonna get’ (Gee). Diam, who also lived in the Hambach Forest, reflected, ‘It helps me a lot to go into the forest and connect with it, just to get back into myself and calm down again’. Time spent in nature enables the experience of belonging to a whole and has been described as spiritual nourishment: ‘I have the experience that being in nature, let me put it this way: nourishes the soul’ (Andrea Schaupp).

The interviewees described themselves as part of a larger living fabric. In this connectedness, they experienced themselves not as isolated, autonomous subjects, but as parts of a larger context. Living Utopia networker Zoé describes this deep interconnectedness, saying, ‘I understand myself as a part of a whole organism’.

Geseko von Lüpke, Vision Quest facilitator and initiator of the Symposium Rebel*innen des Friedens (Symposium Rebels of Peace), elaborates on the image of being a cell of a larger being: ‘Hence I connect myself with the whole, get out of my isolation, out of the dualism that there is the world and I am here, towards a perception where I, as a part, as an organ, as a cell in an organismic whole, connect myself to this organismic whole and act politically out of this understanding’. The understanding of being an integral part of the world is of fundamental importance for the self-assessment of one’s own power: ‘If I see myself as a helpless mechanical cog in a big machine, then I have hardly any influence. But if I experience myself as a cell and also as part of a larger organism, then I know that I am co-creative’ (Geseko von Lüpke).

Transindividuation from ego to eco perspectives

A further key theme turned out to be what some activists call transindividuation: a personal development beyond the individual, from ego interests to a field consciousness. Spiritual practices, such as freeing oneself from self-identification, are intended to help one recognize the limitations of the ego and become proactively involved for the common good.

David, a resident of the Hambach Forest and active in the civil disobedience anti-coal campaign Ende Gelände, emphasized two assumptions that underlie this personal development. First, ‘there is a path of development, of “continuing to grow”, both individually and collectively’, and second, ‘the further I develop and the further I move away from my old patterns, the better and more effectively I can practice activism’. Mira described this development as ‘towards an “I see life as a whole and myself as a living being that is connected with the others”. Then it is no longer about “me first.”’

A transindividual perspective, instead of one of personal advantage, asks questions like ‘What does the world need? What does life need? What does being together need?’ (Griet Hellinckx). In this sense, many interviewees are concerned with the question of which collective structures support the necessary changes in consciousness.

Another key theme is an integrating attitude that combines seemingly contradictory perspectives of critical thinking and emotional intelligence, perception and interpretation, and compassion across the political divide and the paradox of giving everything for apparently unreachable goals. Transrationality includes the rational as well as going beyond it without abandoning critical thinking. Climbing activist Helena describes it as adding ‘other levels, for example, intuition or emotional awareness, to rational understanding’.

Overcoming a dual concept also allows activists to perceive and integrate logically contradictory perspectives and cultivate empathy beyond the political mentality. Mira describes the feeling resulting from such an integration as ‘such a softness, something loving on the one hand, something accepting of myself, but also of the other, then I do not go so easily into a friend/enemy thinking’. Mira is convinced that ‘if I really take the other side seriously, ... then there is a lot of transformation in that’. David explains:

That means that I might do something extreme, like breaking through a police line or chaining myself up somewhere, out of this strong empathy and solidarity for what I am fighting for, for a better society, for the preservation of our ecosystem, our environment and at the same time with solidarity to the people, the individuals, who are standing in my way.

Marvelling at the mystery

Through the admiration of life, gratitude, humility and respect arise. This shows the appreciation of related experiences: ‘The mystery, the beauty, the kind of, you know, the specificity of leaves and mosses and rocks and bark and all that kind of stuff. Those are very, very important kinds of experiences’ (Gee). To meet nature with such enthusiasm can create a deeper connection, which strengthens our commitment:

It invites us, when we see beauty in the natural world, to appreciate the wonders of life and when we see the winding of the natural world, it invites us to care and feel the sense of pain and compassion...It’s so clear that this landscape is my larger identity, it’s what I belong to, what I care for. (Rupert Marques)

A way to transcend the materialistic-utilitarian worldview is found in the notion of the sacred: ‘Simply that something really touches me so deeply, has such a depth, has such a meaning that this word seems appropriate’ (Thomas Steininger). Even if not all interviewees used the term sacred, the economization of life was generally viewed critically, and they shared the wish to ‘go beyond the merely human use of nature and to say “every life has value in itself”’ (Geseko von Lüpke).

Acceptance of all that is

Another key theme that has emerged is being touchable, open and radically accepting feelings and reality. This form of open acceptance is not the same as a lethargic giving up. Actually, truly appropriate action can only arise from the recognition of what is:

This acceptance ... is an acceptance that connects, that opens, that also triggers mourning, pain, that makes me alive ... this acceptance of OK, that’s the way it is, I would rather describe it as a ‘I limit myself, a split happens, I turn away or simply remain with a resigned, aw, yes, I can’t change anything anyway’, that does not get me moving, neither internally nor externally, something stagnates, something blocks, I close. (Andrea Schaupp)

Accepting what is can cause great sadness when we feel that what we love is threatened: ‘The reason why it is difficult for people to open themselves to this spiritual experience at all is ... the pain we encounter when we open ourselves to the world’ (Martin Winiecki). Andrea Schaupp calls it a crucial ingredient for effective activism ‘that we as human beings learn that every life also dies ... so that we no longer act as human beings on the planet out of fear of our own death, but out of gratitude and love for life’. The pain that can be felt from such an opening to the world can be a motivation to deepen our political commitment.

REFLECTIONS

Along with many others, I am seeking a greater framework of understanding than the dominant, materialistic worldview. In that process, I ask myself many questions. How can we bring together analytical-strategic thinking and intuitive-contemplative forms of knowledge? How might contemporary spiritual practices that encourage and enable us to face the challenges of our times in a way that is life-enhancing look?

I am becoming increasingly aware of the extent to which inner attitude shapes how we respond to the world. Everything that we do and do not do is influenced by our view of humanity and the world. How we relate to ourselves, our fellow human beings and the world is largely defined by these concepts. Therefore, I consider it necessary to add inner development to political action in order to achieve profound change.

I am particularly perplexed by the question of what characterizes a solution-based approach to differ-

ences in power and privilege that facilitates effectiveness beyond criticism and inaction. Most approaches that go beyond the purely rational come from cultures that were and are suppressed by Eurocentric thinking. This is why I see a mindful handling of power and privileges at the intersection of spirituality and collective liberation as more important than ever. I find myself in an attitude of not-knowing: what characterizes a non-discriminatory and creative approach to the experiences of cultures that have been and are suppressed? Such questions concern all of us. As a scholar, I ask myself, ‘how can I, considering my social background, respectfully and constructively contribute to an effective understanding and widespread application of transformative practices for the common good?’

The study outlined here will be presented in more detail in one of the next issues of the scientific *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*.

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COMPOST THE COLONY: EXPLORING ANARCHIST DECOLONIZATION

BY ALEXANDER DUNLAP

Alexander Dunlap is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM) at the University of Oslo in Norway. Working across anthropology, geography, and political ecology, his work critically examines police-military transformations, market-based conservation, wind energy development, and extractive projects in both Latin America and Europe.

The term “decolonization” has gained prominence within the University over the last decade. From diets to international security, academics are talking about decolonizing. While the watering down and co-optation of the term “decolonization” is recognized (Tuck and Yang, 2012; Grosfoguel, 2016; IAM, 2017), this article briefly examines how anarchism might be useful for decolonization: what is anarchist decolonization or decoloniality?¹ The recent article by Lina Álvarez and Brendan Coolsaet (2020) on “Decolonizing Environmental Justice Studies” indicates the affinity between anarchism and decolonization without saying it directly. In response, this article provides a conception of anarchist decolonization, which is accomplished by briefly reviewing a multiplicity of anarchist positions², before locating and responding to observable tensions within decolonial theory from which anarchist decolonization departs.

¹ Anarchist Decolonization is preferred to “decoloniality” because of, at least in North America, its academic roots and absence in Indigenous Anarchist texts outside the University.

² Because of word count, well-known scholars and journals are only named within the text. See Simon Springer (2016) for background on classical anarchist thinkers.

Decolonial critics recognize that there exists a eurocentrism within Anarchism. This entails the problematic privileging of Enlightenment rationalism and materialist atheism, reducing issues solely to class (class-centric), and transposing Western conceptions of state, sovereignty, and law onto Indigenous cultures (Ciccariello-Maher, 2011; Ramnath, 2012; Barker and Pickerill, 2012). These limitations have resulted in calls for decolonizing anarchism (see Ciccariello-Maher, 2011; Ramnath, 2012; Pico in Ruiz, 2020). “We have lost and forgotten these links” to the earth, Josep Gardenyes (2011) contends, “to such an extent that in classic anarchist texts we find the same rationalist proposal to replace the capitalist war of all-against-all with the socialist war of ‘all against nature’” to create the “architecture of their controlled environment.” Recognizing this limitation, Maia Ramnath (2011: 26-8), however, notes at least three ways anarchism complements anti-colonial struggles. First, anarchism acknowledges the state as “extraneous to society” and anarchists act as the “primary resistance to the onset of industrialization” as “opposed to the Marxian and syndicalist [teleological developmental] assumption” (see also Springer, 2016). Second, anarchism asserts that the “agrarian peasant rather than industrial proletarians [represent] the leading edge of struggle” (see also Roman-Alcalá, 2020),³ and third, anarchism now recognizes the intersectionality of (economic, political, psychological, ideological, and military) oppressions encompassed in colonization, thus requiring a “total decolonization.” Decolonial anarchism necessitates the total liberation of humans and non-humans (Springer, forthcoming) and, following the insurrectionist tendency (see Loadenthal, 2017), the (neo)colonial state is identified as an occupying force waging a permanent low and high intensity war to control natural “resources” and domesticate people.

Anarchism, however, has multiple positions and cross-pollinating tensions. Classical anarchism(s) such as anarcho-syndicalism and communism, while taking many shapes, emphasize collective struggle, labor organizing, and controlling productive infrastructures to institute egalitarian, self-organized, and worker-led workplaces, which includes abolishing wage-labor (see Rudolph Rocker, Peter Kropotkin and Mikhail Bakunin). Anarcho-individualism and/or egoism alternatively emphasize free will and individual action over groups or ideological systems (see Max Stirner, Renzo Novatore and Emma Goldman). These ideas have spawned Insurrectionary Anarchism, which challenges classical organizational strategies with “informal organization,” affinity groups, and unmediated action against the capitalist state (see Alfredo Bonanno & Jean Weir). Anarcho-nihilism, inspired by the 19th century Nihilist movement and anarcho-individualism, breaks from articulating any future “hope” or “better tomorrow” and charts a path of evasion and destruction (see Novatore and Anonymous, 2013a). Insurrectionist and Nihilist tendencies have taken hold in Latin America (Anonymous, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Rodriguez, 2013, 2020; Ruiz, 2020; *Negación & Conspiración Acrata* Magazines); meanwhile Feminist and Queer expressions have also proliferated (see Beniamino, 2018; FBI, 2019; *Bash Back! & Bæden* Journal).

³Obviously, there are Marxian varieties, but there are relational differences.

Finally, and particularly relevant to anarchist decolonization, is the Green and ecological anarchist constellation (see Green Anarchy, 2005; Clark, 2020). Influenced by the latter tendencies, green anarchism places ecological issues at its core, which includes land defense, animal liberation (anti-speciesism, veganism), and appreciation for horizontal Indigenous cultures. Green anarchism is associated with Anti-civilization anarchism, which recognizes the oppression and domination of the present within Ancient Civilization, originating before colonialism (see Green Anarchy, 2005; *Return Fire & Black Seed Magazine*). Anarcho-primitivism has been central to advancing anti-civilization critique and deconstructing technology, time, and culture, all the while advocating non-“civilized” lifeways and, in its extreme, a return to hunter and gatherer practices (see John Zerzan; el-Ojeili and Taylor, 2020). This brief, partial, and incomplete typology serves as a sample for crafting decolonial synergies.

There is an exhaustive number of positions, theories, and disagreements between anarchist tendencies. These come in the forms, for example, of anarchism versus anarchy (Green Anarchy, 2005) or civil versus subversive anarchists (see Anonymous, 2013). The latter frequently seek to distance themselves from work-erism, bureaucratized forms of life, and, for our purposes here, its Eurocentric underpinnings. Instructive is defining anarchism as a tension. Alfredo Bonanno (1998 [1996]: 2) contends:

Anarchism is not a concept that can be locked up in a word like a gravestone. It is not a political theory. It is a way of conceiving life, and life, young or old as we may be, old people or children, is not something definitive; it is a stake we must play day after day. When we wake up in the morning and put our feet on the ground we must have a good reason for getting up, if we don't it makes no difference whether we are anarchists or not. We might as well stay in bed and sleep.

Anarchism is relational, believing in self-organized, unmediated direct action. It does not believe in separating theory from action, which has created an inclination for anarchists to reject universities (see Springer, 2016). “Our anarchism is not pure,” contends Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2014: 12): “it is stained with indigeneity,” feminism, ecology, and even with spirituality. Anarchistic and anti-authoritarian tensions refuse neat categorization, taking multiple shapes and forms within the Pluriverse of struggle.

Despite the diversity of anarchist thought (see Anonymous, 2014b; Rodríguez, 2013, 2020; Maldonado, 2012; Maxwell and Craib, 2015; Ruiz, 2020), following Aragorn's (2005) search for an Indigenous Anarchism, there are three important relational pillars: direct action, mutual aid, and voluntary cooperation. Direct action stresses unmediated

action through self-organization, but also through attacking structures of domination. Mutual aid is the voluntary reciprocal exchange of resources and services for mutual benefit (see Kropotkin; Goldman; Springer, 2016). Meanwhile, voluntary cooperation is how individuals determine their activities: how and with whom they experience life. These traits have long existed implicitly, and have been expressed differently, in various Indigenous cultures across the world. Anarchism, in this sense, offers one way to speak about the rejection of domination emanating from groups, bureaucracies, technological systems, infrastructural arrangements, economic imperatives, environmental justice “leaders” (depending on the context), and coercive authority itself. The claim to follow “the *leadership of oppressed people* is in fact manipulation, because not all oppressed people are going in the same direction,” explains John Severino (2015):

If we are honest about it, we can reject the false neutralism, the cynical selflessness of “ally politics,” and recognize that we have to make choices about who we want to support, who we want to fight alongside, and these choices will arise from our own subjectivity, our own need to struggle, our own vision of freedom.

Rooted in self-reflection and anti-authoritarian vision, anarchist action aims to reject all domination and political control.



RÍONA O'REGAN

DECOLONIAL THEORY: AUTHORITARIAN VERSUS ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN

Decolonial thought, like anarchism, is in different intensities rooted in combative practice and struggles for self-determination. Decolonization as a term is historically associated with Marxist-Leninist and Maoist armed struggle and Article 1(2) of the 1945 UN Charter asserting the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. Decolonization in academia not only revives authoritarian Marxism(s), but also a reductionist and divisive identity politics that panders to university hierarchy and liberal reformism (see Asher, 2013; Grosfoguel, 2016). While autonomous Marxism is valuable, and decolonial theory offers important interventions into the diversification of knowledge, university-based decolonial theory—often referred to as the “modernity/coloniality-decoloniality” (MCD) project—exemplifies these criticisms.

theoretical and identity-based criteria. “[W]hy ignore Spivak and claim Gandhi?” asks Asher (2013: 839). Bashing Eurocentrism and Marxian thought—and rightfully so, in many respects—this arbitrary line is further exemplified by Mignolo (2010: 1) applauding Max Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School because it “condensed a tradition of Jewish critical thinkers in Germany during the early years of Hitler’s regime that, although Marxist in spirit, was entangled with racism and coloniality in the body.” This divisive border patrolling, Asher (2013: 840) indicates, arises from a type of “de/postcolonial identity politics and nationalism within academia.” Cusicanqui (2014: 7) might counter rightfully that “identity is constructed by living in the present.” Moreover, as Ramón Grosfoguel (2016: 134–5) reminds us, this academic policing is compounded with “epistemic extraction” by MCD scholars appropriating “ideas from thinkers” in struggle “without any political commitment to social movements or the struggles of Indigenous and Afro peoples.”

Today, “MCD scholars are patrolling theoretical and political borders” within the university, observes Kiran Asher (2013: 839), noting how postcolonial scholars—but also European-based scholars—are creating arbitrary

Identity politics create exploitable boundaries and rely on a reductionist essentialism. Asher (2013: 839) points out how MCD texts “pay scant attention to heterogeneity and diversity within the [Latin American] continent.” This includes affirming categories of analysis and avoiding their different articulations and politics. “[D]ecolonial literature pays little attention to the fact that culture itself is often contested at the local level,” explain

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Iokiñe Rodríguez and Mirna Liz Inturias (2018: 91), who bridge this issue by engaging decolonial theory at the “intra-communal level.” Raúl Zibechi (2012: 320, 268) criticizes decolonial scholars’ use of the term “social movements,” instead offering the concept of “movements” or “societies in movement” to demonstrate political and cultural differences motivating mobilizations and uprisings. This issue coincides with the fact that many MCD thinkers are not anti-state, not only (implicitly) celebrating the colonial collaboration of Gan-

dhi (cf Dunlap, 2020: 22), but also the presidential power of Evo Morales because it is “the collective project of state decolonizing” that has links with grassroots mobilizations (Walsh, 2018: 51)⁴. Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ support for Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), asserting that he “is a man who is not corrupt” as he spreads highly contested industrial corridors across Mexico, thus serving as another example of authoritarian applause (Velázquez, 2019). While there are different developmental logics behind different Civilizations, these should not act as an excuse for the organization of domination and ecological catastrophe. Decolonial theory has statist and authoritarian sympathies, which anarchist decolonization inherently rejects.

The state, however, is frequently rejected in decolonial literature outside academia. Anti-authoritarian decolonial tendencies are prevalent outside the university and within it,

arguably, arising from the post-development school. An anti-authoritarian and anarchistic tension is strong within the post-development school, where post-development prioritizes affinity over “identity politics and nationalism within academia” (see Rahnema, 1997; Kothari et al., 2019). Outside the academy, decolonial writings identify the state as central to (neo)colonialism or coloniality. Indigenous anarchists have highlighted the variations and complications with “Indigenous” as an authoritative label. The works of Aragorn (2005, 2018), Taiaiake Alfred, Rob los Ricos, Zig Zag/Gord Hill, Cante Waste (2012), Cusicanqui, Klee Benally, Indigenous Action Media (IAM, 2014, 2017), and many others are central to developing Indigenous Anarchism(s) and anti-authoritarian decolonization. Articulating an Indigenous Egoism, Cante Waste (2012: 5) criticizes “a simplistic view of self-interest” and asserts “Individualism as a Tenet of Decolonization” to combat self-hatred and assimilation and to

⁴ See, for example, the radical contrast with anarchist perspectives on Morales voiced and documented by Gustavo Rodríguez (2020).

embody a “Native Pride” that internalizes “that we matter, to us, and start acting in our self-interest” against the colonial/statist system. *Black Seed: A Journal of Indigenous Anarchy* (2014-present) remains another under-acknowledged resource for anarchist and anti-authoritarian decolonization. Overall, the point here is that “your politics matter,” as a Michif-Cree reminds us. Recognizing the value of anarchism, this person (Anonymous, 2018: 5, 14) conveys the complications of political struggle in Indigenous territory:

Saying you support Indigenous sovereignty doesn’t mean backing every Indigenous person on every project. There are plenty of Indigenous misogynists, and ladder-climbing politicians out there, and you don’t do me any favors by helping them gain power. Fight for liberatory ideas, not for nations or bloodlines.

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ZEE [Special Economic Zone], Trans-Isthmus Corridor and Train Maya/
Credit: SIPZA

The state is an advancement of the colony model — the material infrastructure of (neo)colonialism (see Dunlap, 2018). “Pick yourself a point whether it is police, prisons or whether it is militarism or whether it is environmental devastation,” explains Ward Churchill (2002), “and the point of confluence is named the state.” The state, for Churchill (and anarchists), is a “unitary target that encompasses [and intersects with] the whole,” instrumental to corporate capital, and the “internal colonization and oppression of native North America is contingent upon the existence of centralized state structures...north and south of the border, and elsewhere for that matter!”

Anarchist decolonization recognizes the state as central to facilitating (neo)colonialism, but also intersecting processes of domination that manifest in genocide, ecocide, and various forms/intensities of slavery. Decolonial epistemic deconstruction resonates with (geo)archeological inquiries into “statism,” which locate and challenge the “epistemological ‘fix’” perpetuating self-reinforcing statist mythology and oppression (Torre and Ince, 2018: 181). Anarchist decolonization rejects this mythology organized to perpetuate the world-eating Leviathan, consuming and re-directing human and nonhuman resources into its cybernetic infrastructure and circuits of capital.

Statist reformism propels socio-ecological destruction. Reforms frequently organize socio-ecological domination at a lower intensity, meanwhile allowing a

greater quantity of “less” or “friendlier” forms of socio-ecological degradation. Supporting Álvarez and Coolsaet (2020), justice must be plural, relational, and based on a praxis of mutual aid, voluntary association, and direct action. Categorical dimensions of environmental justice (distributional, recognitional, and procedural) are progressive impositions channeling forms of rebellion and protest into statist institutions, and separating the whole into different parts to permit socio-ecological extraction on more egalitarian terms. In practice, anarchist decolonization, as Gardenyes (2011: 14-15) reminds us, means not seeing “revolution as something organized according to a unified plan,” looking down from above “as if it were a game of *Risk*.” Instead, anarchists are stronger by moving “in the network of our own relationships, to “communicate horizontally or circularly” and devising the best ways to complement those who are different and following divergent paths towards socio-ecological liberation (Ibid.). Anarchism offers a complementary toolbox of ideas and exists outside its Western variations (See anonymous, 2013, 2014; Rodríguez, 2013, 2020; Maldonado, 2012; Maxwell and Craib, 2015; Ruiz, 2020). Anarchism, in its pluriverse of articulations, continues to evade enclosure and conceptual reification to express an ungovernable force against domination and ecological destruction.

Anarchist decolonization places autonomous, horizontal, and “anarchistic” socio-cultural values in their diversity and potential as central to decolonization, which challenges the legacies of civilizations, re-branding authoritarianism and centralized control through identity politics. This embodies Álvarez and Coolsaet’s (2020: 57) acknowledgement of the inverse: “those who are marginalized and racialized are not necessarily free from the risk of coloniality.” Techno-capitalist progress is the art of capturing “the desires of the subjugated” (Ibid.). Álvarez and Coolsaet (2020: 60) mention Canadian oil pipeline development on First Nation land, noting how participatory strategies

“transformed ‘how Indigenous peoples now think and act in relation to the land’” (see also Dunlap, 2018a). Manipulative participatory strategies are central to state structures and development, influencing people and attempting to manage rebellion in favor of socio-ecological extraction. Equally concerning is the realization that everyone resisting the state and the onslaught of development, to various degrees, will become targeted by security forces (see Dunlap, 2020). Anarchist decolonization recognizes that not only is the location from which one speaks important, but also the anti-authoritarian politics and knowledge people choose to articulate and practice.



Warriorpublications

CONCLUSION

This article has sought to introduce the notion of anarchist decolonization. Briefly reviewing different strands of anarchist thought, fault lines within decolonial theory, and people identifying with Indigenous anarchism, this article highlights the affinity between anarchism and decolonization. Anarchist decolonization is resolutely anti-state and rejects the myths of capitalist progress, struggling against forms of domination and embracing various spiritual and ecological practices. The state, thinking of Patrick Wolfe, is the structure of conquest that is continuous, variegated, and morphing; infecting its subjects and articulating decentralized and “bottom-up” governance strategies. This article seeks to create an explicit opening to advance decoloni-

al, anarchist, or anarchist decolonial thinking. Creating new academic labels and analytical categories, it should be recognized, is itself a double-edged sword. While this might be a useful point of reference for discussing new ways to understand diverse anti-authoritarian political practices, it can also make visible what should remain silent, evasive, and subversive. Anarchist decolonization, like anarchy, should remain too slippery, chaotic, and amorphous to capture or hold. A fluid concept, anarchist decolonization seeks to revitalize a spirit rejecting, grinding and dancing through circular holds of power and psychosocial traps of domination, which as always deserve greater experimentation and elaboration that is both loud and quiet.

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Tvergastein bears the name of Arne Næss' cabin retreat in the mountains of Hallingskarvet. It was there that Næss, an activist and one of the most wide ranging philosophers of the last century, wrote the majority of his work. These writings, his unique ecophilosophy, and his life of activism continue to inspire environmentalists and scholars in Norway and abroad. In making this journal the cabin's namesake, we aim to similarly join academia with advocacy for the environment. We aspire to the "enormous open views at Tvergastein" and the perspective Næss found there.

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