

For the *Routledge Handbook of Climate Justice*,
edited by Tahseen Jafry (2019)

On the evolution and continuing development of the climate justice movement

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From its origins nearly two decades ago, the concept of climate justice has come to prominence as a research agenda, an ethical and legal framework, and perhaps most significantly as the basis for an engaged grassroots response to the unfolding global climate crisis. Climate justice highlights the disproportionate impacts of climate changes on the most vulnerable and marginalized human populations, as well as the limitations of conventional political responses to rising climate instability and the compelling need for systemic solutions. Representatives of the most impacted “front-line” communities around the world have come forward as among the most articulate and inspired voices at many international forums, and their lived experiences and cultural wisdom have come to shape the political understanding and strategies of social movement actors. Advocates for climate justice have emerged as a unique critical voice in climate diplomacy, raised a comprehensive challenge to various technological and market-oriented approaches to the climate crisis that are viewed as “false solutions,” and challenged political interests linked to the fossil fuel industry in many countries (Tokar 2014).

This chapter will address the growing body of evidence supporting a climate justice outlook, the evolution of climate justice as a social movement perspective, and the critiques offered by climate justice advocates of the prevailing currents in climate diplomacy. We will consider some of the contributions this perspective offers to the wider global movement for climate action, and assess the challenges going forward as climate impacts continue to mount and fossil fuel interests are politically resurgent in key countries. As climate scientists project an increasingly short time horizon to transform energy and transportation systems, among other economic sectors, a justice-centred perspective is sometimes believed to conflict with climate pragmatism. We will review some of the problems and potentialities that arise as policymakers and social movement actors continue to navigate the contested terrain of effective climate action.

Climate Justice Science and Human Impacts

As of 2017, the five hottest years in the history of systematic weather reporting had all occurred since

2010, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Schmidt and Arndt 2017). Individual countries and regions frequently report record-setting high temperatures, increasingly erratic rainfall, and severe regional impacts, including the rapid disappearance of late summer Arctic ice. Extreme weather events increasingly dominate world and national headlines, from the 2003 heat wave that reportedly killed over 50,000 people in Western Europe (Battisti and Naylor 2009, 242) to catastrophic storms that have battered the eastern and southern United States and recent waves of unprecedented wildfires across the American West. For several decades, however, the impacts on tropical and subtropical regions have been most severe. Years of persistent drought have brought acute hunger to over 8 million people in the Horn of Africa (Oxfam 2017) and many more in parts of southern Africa and the war-torn Middle East. Major population centres across south Asia have flooded during the past decade, and two of the most severe typhoons to ever reach landfall have devastated communities in the Philippines and Fiji Islands (Samenow 2016). Still, public attention has often focused on severe climate impacts in U.S. states such as Texas and Florida, even as some of the same storm systems and patterns have had far greater impacts on Caribbean islands and the river deltas of south Asia.

While it remains challenging for scientists to measure the precise climate contributions to particular weather events, three central aspects are clear: the pace of weather-related disasters is increasing rapidly, upsetting even the authoritative projections of the global insurance industry (Munich Re 2015); these trends are fully consistent with the predictions of climate models for the behaviour of a warmer, more turbulent atmosphere (Hansen, et al. 2014); and when the climate contributions to particular weather events can be calculated, the signal of global warming often emerges as a central contributing factor (Min, et al. 2011; Coumou and Rahmstorf, 2012; Fischer and Knutti 2015). A few years ago, Oxfam International (2009) reported that of 250 million people impacted annually by various natural disasters, 98 percent face climate-related hazards. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has cited a more modest, but still disturbing figure of 262 million people affected during the five-year period between 2000 and 2004 (Atapattu 2016, 76). A decade ago, the U.N. Development Program (Watkins 2007, 16) revealed that one out of every 19 people in the so-called developing world was affected by a climate-related disaster between 2000 and 2004, compared to one out of every 1500 people in the OECD countries. Columbia University's International Earth Science Information Network has predicted that by 2050 the world could see as many as 700 million climate refugees (Parenti 2011, 7).

IPCC Findings and Human Rights

The disproportionate impacts highlighted by climate justice advocates are also echoed in the last

two reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. In 2007, the IPCC concluded (17) that populations with “high exposure, high sensitivity and/or low adaptive capacity” would bear the greatest burdens from climate impacts, including “increases in malnutrition and consequent disorders ...; increased deaths, disease and injury due to heat waves, floods, storms, fires and droughts; the increased burden of diarrheal disease; the increased frequency of cardio-respiratory diseases ...; and, the altered spatial distribution of some infectious disease vectors,” including malaria (12). The IPCC’s Fifth Assessment Report in 2014 (2014a, 12) included a much more thorough review of climate justice concerns among its enumeration of key climate risks identified with high confidence in current scientific assessments. These include:

- Risk of death, injury, ill-health, or disrupted livelihoods in low-lying coastal zones and small island developing states and other small islands, due to storm surges, coastal flooding, and sea-level rise.
- Risk of severe ill-health and disrupted livelihoods for large urban populations due to inland flooding in some regions...
- Risk of mortality and morbidity during periods of extreme heat, particularly for vulnerable urban populations and those working outdoors in urban or rural areas.
- Risk of food insecurity and the breakdown of food systems linked to warming, drought, flooding, and precipitation variability and extremes, particularly for poorer populations in urban and rural settings.
- Risk of loss of rural livelihoods and income due to insufficient access to drinking and irrigation water and reduced agricultural productivity, particularly for farmers and pastoralists with minimal capital in semi-arid regions.

The panel further determined, also with high confidence that “[c]limate-related hazards constitute an additional burden to people living in poverty, acting as a threat multiplier often with negative outcomes for livelihoods” (IPCC 2014b, 11). Further, “[c]limate-related hazards affect poor people’s lives directly through impacts on livelihoods, such as reductions in crop yields or destruction of homes, and indirectly through increased food prices and food insecurity” (ibid.).

Researchers at McGill University in Canada and the University of Maine in the U.S. examined climate-related shifts in population density to develop an index of climate vulnerability for various regions, and their findings affirm the veracity of a climate justice outlook. “[T]he regions of greatest vulnerability are generally distant from the high-latitude regions where the magnitude of climate change will be greatest,” they reported, highlighting the especially heightened vulnerability of people in arid regions of the tropics and subtropics. “Furthermore,” they continued, “populations contributing the most to greenhouse gas emissions on a per capita basis are unlikely to experience the worst impacts of climate

change...” (Samson et al. 2011, 532).

Legal scholar and international human rights attorney Sumudu Atapattu (2016) has identified some of the most trenchant obstacles to achieving climate justice within traditional legal frameworks, especially the difficulty of establishing causal links between climate changes and particular impactful events, along with the multiplicity of factors that contribute to climate-related catastrophes. Further, current law appears ill-suited to address the underlying causes of human rights violations in order to prevent future harms (71). While the UN Human Rights Council has cited the special vulnerability of small island nations, coastal arid and semi-arid regions, and “developing countries with fragile mountainous ecosystems” (69), those who are forced to relocate from such regions currently “have no legal status under international refugee law” (71). Climate change threatens numerous widely acknowledged human rights, including the right to life, health, housing, livelihood, food, water, self-determination, freedom of movement, culture and property (76-86). To fully address these impacts, however, requires us to consider the underlying causes of climate change in “the current development paradigm with its roots in capitalism” (96). Without addressing root causes, Atapattu argues, “it is impossible to design an effective legal regime.” The persistent inadequacy of legal, diplomatic and political efforts to address the climate crisis and uphold core principles of justice and human rights has fueled the evolution of climate justice as an international social movement framework.

Origins of Climate Justice

The first generally acknowledged reference to climate justice appeared in a 1999 report titled *Greenhouse Gangsters vs. Climate Justice* by the San Francisco-based Corporate Watch group (Bruno, et al. 1999). The report focused on the petroleum industry and its hegemonic political influence, but it also described an initial approach to climate justice, including (in summary):

- Addressing the root causes of global warming by holding corporations accountable;
- Opposing the destructive impacts of oil development, and supporting communities most affected by weather-related disasters;
- Looking to environmental justice communities (see below) and organized labour for strategies to encourage a just transition away from fossil fuels;
- Challenging corporate-led globalization and the disproportionate influence of international financial institutions.

The CorpWatch authors were active supporters of the U.S. movement for environmental justice, which emerged in the 1980s and remains a focus for urban, indigenous, and poor rural populations confronting the disproportionate exposure of African American, Latino/a, Native American and Asian

American communities to environmental hazards. The movement was galvanized by successful local campaigns against toxic hazards, as well as a 1987 church-sponsored report, *Toxic Wastes and Race*, which revealed that the racial composition of communities is by far the largest factor in the siting of hazardous waste facilities in the U.S. (Commission for Racial Justice 1987).

In 1991, a National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit issued a broadly comprehensive public statement against environmental racism and for environmental justice. By the mid-1990s, leaders such as Tom Goldtooth of the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) were articulating the need to bring the deepening climate crisis into this framework, and the movement's second Leadership Summit in 2002 issued a document titled "10 Principles for Just Climate Change Policies in the U.S." (Anonymous 2002).

Also throughout the 1990s, international NGOs such as the World Rainforest Movement, Friends of the Earth International and the Third World Network drew public attention to local struggles of indigenous and other land-based peoples in the global South against the rising levels of resource extraction that accompanied neoliberal economic policies. They joined with CorpWatch, IEN and others at a meeting on the island of Bali in 2002 to develop the Bali Principles of Climate Justice, a comprehensive, 27-point program aimed to "begin to build an international movement of all peoples for Climate Justice" (CorpWatch US, et al. 2002). Two years later, international activists concerned about the inequities inherent in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol's market-based emissions trading provisions gathered in Durban, South Africa and drafted the Durban Declaration on Carbon Trading, which eventually received nearly 300 endorsements worldwide (Carbon Trade Watch, et al. 2004).

When the U.N.'s annual climate conference (COP) was held on Bali in 2007, representatives of communities disproportionately affected by global inaction on climate presented a strong and unified showing both inside and outside the official proceedings, and a more formal worldwide network emerged under the slogan, "Climate Justice Now!" At a series of side events, press conferences and protests throughout the Bali conference, representatives of affected communities, indigenous peoples, women, peasant farmers, and their allies articulated their call for "genuine solutions that include:

- leaving fossil fuels in the ground and investing instead in appropriate energy- efficiency and safe, clean and community-led renewable energy;
- radically reducing wasteful consumption, first and foremost in the North, but also by Southern elites;
- huge financial transfers from North to South, based on the repayment of climate debts and subject to democratic control...;
- rights-based resource conservation that enforces Indigenous land rights and promotes peoples' sovereignty over energy, forests, land and water;

- sustainable family farming and peoples' food sovereignty...” (Climate Justice Now 2007, 2008)

A more detailed statement of principles for Climate Justice Now (CJN), developed the following year, begins in part:

From the perspective of climate justice, it is imperative that responsibility for reducing emissions and financing systemic transformation is taken by those who have benefited most from the past 250 years of economic development. Furthermore, any solutions to climate change must protect the most vulnerable, compensate those who are displaced, guarantee individual and collective rights, and respect peoples’ right to participate in decisions that impact on their lives (Climate Justice Now 2008).

By 2010, the CJN network included some 750 international organizations, including grassroots groups throughout the global South, and had become a reliable communications hub for those seeking to further these goals (Climate Justice Now 2010).

Climate Justice as a Social Movement

Over the past decade, climate justice has come to encompass several distinct but complementary currents from various parts of the world. In the Global South, demands for climate justice unite an impressive diversity of indigenous and other land-based people’s movements. They include rainforest dwellers opposing new mega-dams and palm oil plantations, African and Latin American communities resisting land appropriations for industrial agriculture and agrofuel production, Pacific Islanders facing the loss of their homes due to rising seas, and peasant farmers fighting for food sovereignty and basic land rights, among many others. A statement to the 2009 U.N. Copenhagen climate conference from the worldwide confederation of peasant movements, La Vía Campesina, stated in part:

Climate change is already seriously impacting us. It brings floods, droughts and the outbreak of pests that are all causing harvest failures. I must point out that these harvest failures are something that the farmers did not create. Instead, it is the polluters who caused the emissions who destroy the natural cycles... [W]e will not pay for their mistakes. (Saragih 2009)

In North America, environmental justice activists continue to be among the leading voices for climate justice, especially representatives from communities of colour that have been resisting daily exposure to chemical toxins and other environmental hazards for more than 30 years. Many view the climate justice movement as a continuation of the US civil rights legacy, and of their communities’ continuing “quest for fairness, equity and justice,” as described by the environmental justice pioneer Robert Bullard at a landmark 2009 gathering in New York City. The Grassroots Global Justice Alliance

(GGJ) continues to bring delegations of U.S. environmental justice activists to the annual U.N. climate conferences, while the Labor Network for Sustainability and allied groups work to raise support for climate justice among the ranks of organized labor in the U.S. (ggjalliance.org, labor4sustainability.org).

As European and U.S. activists prepared for the 2009 U.N. climate conference in Copenhagen, a third complementary approach to climate justice emerged, which represents a continuing evolution of the global justice or “alter-globalization” movement that arose in opposition to the World Trade Organization and annual global economic summits during the late 1990s and early 2000s. A March 2010 discussion paper from the European Climate Justice Action network (CJA) explained that “Climate Justice means linking all struggles together that reject neoliberal markets and working towards a world that puts autonomous decision making power in the hands of communities.” The paper concluded: “Fundamentally, we believe that we cannot prevent further global warming without addressing the way our societies are organized—the fight for climate justice and the fight for social justice are one and the same.” (Anonymous 2010a) While Climate Justice Action proved to be short-lived, this approach continues to be expressed through ongoing networks such as Rising Tide – which has had chapters in the U.K., U.S., Mexico, Ecuador and Australia – as well as offshoots of the historic U.K. Climate Camp movement, which organized high profile actions between 2006 and 2010 at major power plant sites, Heathrow Airport, , and various financial institutions tied to the fossil fuel industry (Rising Tide North America, n.d.).

In recent years, larger international NGOs and activist networks such as 350.org have increasingly embraced a climate justice perspective, arousing some controversy among groups that assert a founding stake in the integrity of the concept. Climate justice and indigenous rights were central themes of the massive People’s Climate March in New York City in 2014, however this raised criticism of global networks such as Avaaz that were perceived as diluting the message of the event (Foran 2015). Following the failure of the Paris climate conference in 2015 to agree upon legally binding and enforceable mitigation measures, 350.org allied with groups around the world to initiate a series of protest actions, focused on global centres of fossil fuel production and transport, with a unified message to “Break Free from Fossil Fuels” (breakfree2016.org). These events were noteworthy for their international scope, simultaneously militant and celebratory character, and collaborations between the international network and organized efforts of front-line communities in many countries.

Meanwhile, various newer networks emerged, expressing a more uncompromising climate justice message, particularly in North America. Several organizations led by communities of colour in the U.S. established a Climate Justice Alliance in 2012, promising a nationwide campaign for a just transition away from fossil fuel dependence. They have focused primarily on supporting ongoing community efforts

in three locations: the economically depressed former automobile manufacturing centre of Detroit; the oil refinery town of Richmond, California; and the territory of the Navajo nation in the US southwest, with its long history of resistance to intensive resource extraction (www.ourpowercampaign.org). Following the 2014 People's Climate March in New York, the Alliance held a two-day People's Climate Justice Summit, featuring testimony from front-line community delegations. In 2015, the Alliance joined with GGJ and IEN to bring a delegation of front-line activists to join the civil society protests around the Paris climate summit (Browne and Goldtooth 2016).

During the same period, various anti-capitalist and ecosocialist groups in the U.S. and Canada launched a System Change Not Climate Change network. This network also organized events in New York in 2014, just prior to the People's Climate March, and has organized online seminars and other educational events. Rising Tide North America, along with its counterparts in the U.K. and Australia, organizes extended direct action campaigns against fossil fuel expansion in various locales, while highlighting perceived "false solutions" to global warming and articulating its own counter-systemic political message (risingtidenorthamerica.org). While challenging political dynamics have complicated efforts to forge a fully unified climate justice movement in North America, many activists on the ground remain committed to broader alliance building. One detailed strategy paper by a prominent African American organizer acknowledged underlying tensions, but also encouraged long-term working relationships based on mutual concerns, open sharing of resources, and maintaining a stance of "solidarity, not charity," resolutely focused upon the "[e]mpowerment of traditionally disenfranchised groups" (Patterson 2013).

Climate Justice and Climate Diplomacy

In 2009, the U.N. climate conference in Copenhagen (COP 15) ended in a near-deadlock, with several countries objecting to the sidelining of the Kyoto Protocol's enforceable emissions limits and the substitution of a plan for voluntary national "contributions" to climate mitigation (Tokar 2014, 49-64). Ever since Copenhagen, the annual Conferences of the Parties to the UN Climate Convention (UNFCCC) have featured systematic interventions from civil society groups and some global South delegations, seeking a justice-centred approach to the ongoing climate negotiations. Between Copenhagen and Paris, delegates from the North and South clashed repeatedly over an array of issues, including the future of Kyoto's emissions limits, mitigation goals and greenhouse gas reduction targets, financing and technology transfers for an energy transition in the global South, reporting and monitoring requirements, and the nature of the negotiation process itself (Khor 2010). As Northern delegates pushed to retain the carbon markets and other "flexible mechanisms" of the Kyoto Protocol while abandoning mandatory

emissions targets, many Southern delegates and civil society representatives took precisely the opposite position.

In April of 2010, Bolivian president Evo Morales sponsored a climate justice-centred “World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth” in the city of Cochabamba. Some 30,000 civil society representatives, social movement actors and public officials from around the world met to draft a comprehensive set of principles, rooted in indigenous views of social and environmental harmony and anti-colonialism. The delegates proposed a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth, condemned the use of carbon markets, as well as the commodification of forests for carbon offsets under the UNFCCC’s REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation of Forests) program, and called for an International Climate and Environmental Justice Tribunal to judge and penalize activities that promote climate change and contaminate the earth (Anonymous 2010b).

At subsequent UN COPs, delegates attempted to bring the substance of the Cochabamba agreements to the table, but were repeatedly blocked by delegates from wealthy countries. As North-South polarization grew during these years, and most Northern countries outside of Western Europe officially withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol, global South representatives protested both inside the proceedings and out, denouncing the suggested 2 degree global warming limit as a “death sentence for Africa, small island states, and the poor and vulnerable worldwide” (quoting Friends of the Earth International chair Nnimmo Bassey, in Petermann and Langelle 2012, 29). In Warsaw in 2009, African delegates walked out of the conference *en masse* to protest their continuing marginalization in the official proceedings. Concerted efforts to raise the problem of already-experienced losses and damages from extreme weather events were dismissed by the Obama administration’s lead U.S. climate negotiator Todd Stern (2013) as merely an “ideological narrative of fault and blame,” as he simultaneously disparaged the long-standing principle of national responsibility for historic emissions.

The agreement that was eventually reached in 2015 in Paris offered a rhetorical nod to many climate justice concerns, but its substance fell far short of satisfying the substantive concerns of climate justice advocates. The agreement’s Preamble referred to the “principle of equity,” the reality that some people are “particularly vulnerable” to climate impacts, the rights of indigenous peoples, migrants, and children, as well as principles of “gender equality,” “intergenerational equity, and the “imperatives of a just transition of the workforce.” The Preamble further highlighted the imperative of biodiversity protection, “recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth,” and even “the importance for some of the concept of ‘climate justice’” (UNFCCC 2015, 21). In contrast, Article 15 of the operational part of the agreement proposed a “mechanism to facilitate implementation and promote compliance,” but only in the form of an international “expert-based” committee that is to be “transparent, non-adversarial and non-

punitive.” (ibid., 29). The revised emissions reduction proposals that signatory countries have pledged to bring to the table in subsequent rounds of negotiation would remain wholly voluntary. The document offered a nod to global South concerns to address current climate-related losses and damage, but the text explicitly denied “a basis for any liability or compensation” (ibid., 8).

While 188 countries brought proposals for their “Intended Nationally Determined Contributions” to climate mitigation to the table in Paris, independent assessments of the various “contributions” affirmed that the Paris outcome fell far short of what officials had promised. While the text of the agreement confirmed the Copenhagen goal of limiting average global warming to 2 degrees Celsius, and the Preamble pledged to “pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels” (ibid, 22), two independent research collaboratives projected a global temperature rise between 2.2 and 3.5 degrees C by 2100 if all current pledges were to be fully implemented (www.climateactiontracker.org, www.climateinteractive.org). It is important to note here that 2 degree diplomatic baseline is by no means a “safe” level of warming, but rather the point at which the likelihood of catastrophic, uncontrollable climate disruptions would reach about 50 percent (Rogelj, et al. 2012; Peters, et al. 2013).

Contributions of Climate Justice

With this celebrated but substantively uncertain diplomatic outcome, combined with the current U.S. administration pledging to withdraw from even its modest commitments under the Paris agreement, climate justice advocates have redoubled their efforts. Bold direct action campaigns have helped halt the construction of coal-fired power plants, major oil and gas pipelines, and the expansion of hydrofracturing (“fracking”) technology for fossil fuel extraction in many regions. Innovative cross-sectoral alliances, most notably between climate campaigners and organized labour, have helped raise political support for a more rapid and just transformation of the world’s energy and transportation systems (labor4sustainability.org, leapmanifesto.org). Let us now review several of the outstanding contributions climate justice advocates continue to bring to the wider global movement for climate action.

First and foremost, climate justice campaigners continue to highlight the disproportionate impacts of climate disruptions on the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable and politically marginalized populations, from indigenous nations and peasant communities in the South to impoverished urban centres in the global North. The leadership, priorities, and strategic insights of front-line activists are at the centre of effective climate justice organizing and lend a far greater urgency to climate action in all its diverse forms.

Second, climate justice advocates bring an understanding that the institutions and economic

policies responsible for climate destabilization are also underlying causes of poverty and economic inequality. For many activists, the built-in growth imperative and increasing concentrations of wealth that are central to modern capitalism are at the roots of both social and environmental problems, and a transition to a more inclusive and democratic economic system is necessary to meaningfully address the climate crisis. Climate justice advocates also remain highly skeptical of efforts to implement climate policies through market mechanisms such as the trading of pollution permits and the creation of carbon offsets, citing the substantive inadequacies of existing carbon trading programs, as well as the long-range consequences of further commodifying the atmosphere (Böhm and Dabhi 2009).

Third, climate justice brings a broadly intersectional outlook into the climate movement. The concept of “intersectionality” was first proposed by the feminist legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (n.d., 2) in an effort to “conceptualize the way the law responded to issues where both race and gender discrimination were involved,” and has been embraced by climate justice activists as a means to address the many common threads that link environmental abuses to patterns of discrimination by race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other social factors. This awareness is further reinforced by organizational and interpersonal practices aimed at challenging manifestations of oppression and social hierarchy both within the climate movement and in society at large.

Additionally, many climate justice campaigns strive to link efforts to challenge climate-damaging practices to an alternative vision of a future without fossil fuels. The resistance is symbolized by the term “blockadia,” popularized by Naomi Klein (2014, 293-336), and first coined by the nonviolent campaigners of the Texas-based Tar Sands Blockade. Their creative direct actions aimed to block the construction of the controversial Keystone XL pipeline, which would transport oil from the Canadian tar sands in central Alberta to refineries and shipping terminals on the U.S. Gulf Coast. Blockadia is envisioned as a distinct new geographic and political space, replicated throughout the world, where people committed to direct action live and work in a cooperative and liberated fashion. The reconstructive dimensions of the movement are symbolized by the French Basque term “alternatiba,” which was adopted as the theme of a bicycle tour that encircled France during the summer of 2015 to highlight scores of local alternative projects in various economic sectors (Combes 2014; alternatiba.eu/en). Many movement actors view the convergence of oppositional and reconstructive strands of activity as a crucial step toward catalysing fundamental changes.

Further, climate justice advocates believe that policy changes need to be substantively driven by the priorities and agendas that emerge from grassroots campaigns. Elite-oriented policymaking, where corporate interests often shape political agendas behind the scenes, has not served the needs of people nor the planet and a new approach, driven from below, is proposed. A related concept, framed mainly by

circles of international labour activists, is energy democracy, an agenda for community-based public-sector ownership of renewable energy projects and energy distribution utilities. In an era of widespread privatization of formerly public services, energy democracy represents a distinct counter-narrative. “Renewable energy technologies,” according to labour activist and scholar Sean Sweeney (2014, 4), “have the potential to completely transform the global energy system by 2030 and also change the political and class relations around energy production and consumption. But the transition must be planned and coordinated in a democratic manner.”

Energy democracy also has the potential to help address the concerns of local opponents of renewable energy installations, who often object to the increasingly massive scale and distant ownership of many wind and solar developments (Phadke 2011, Agnew 2017). While earlier wind power projects in both Europe and the U.S. were often built and owned by local, cooperative entities, today’s larger-scaled projects are more likely to be developed by remote corporate owners (Maegard 2010, Shaffer 2016). Larger turbines and installations can be justified by their increased power output and efficiency, however local opposition to larger-scale projects often impedes overall progress toward a renewable future. This reinforces the need for a more genuinely transformative approach.

Future Challenges

It is clear that numerous longer-range questions and challenges remain for those committed to a climate justice perspective. How can a movement mainly rooted in local initiatives help catalyse a social and economic transformation capable of addressing the vast magnitude of global climate threats? How can a thoroughgoing energy transition be sustained in a period where the political influence of fossil fuel interests is on the rise in key countries, along with interests fundamentally hostile to the public sector of the economy? Can we envision an improved quality of life for most people in the world in a future freed from fossil fuel dependence? And what manner of transitions are feasible in the global South, where the daily effects of climate disruptions are most apparent, yet the imperatives of poverty reduction are perennially co-opted by elites who remain focused on economic growth (Bidwai 2012)?

Important differences remain as to what manner of energy transition is most compatible with a climate justice outlook. Could a rapidly accelerated wave of renewable energy development serve to foster job creation and relieve global poverty, as promoted by “green growth” advocates (Pollin 2015), or is this incompatible with the world-wide economic contraction projected as necessary by some climate scientists and promoted by European degrowth advocates (Demaria, et al. 2013)? Are current strategies to expand the use of renewable energy sources compatible with demands for a just transition, supporting the needs of workers and sustaining models of democratic community control? If the necessary energy and

economic transitions prove incompatible with the imperatives of capitalist growth, can more thoroughgoing economic changes occur rapidly enough to prevent climate catastrophe?

Challenging questions raised by climate justice advocates are already impacting current policy debates in the U.S. and beyond. For example, many climate activists agree that measures are necessary to compel polluting industries to pay the costs of their greenhouse gas emissions, but serious differences in approach are impacting political outcomes. A recent ballot initiative for a carbon tax in Washington state in the Pacific Northwest was voted down in 2016, after advocates of a “revenue neutral” proposal – substituting a carbon fee for a portion of existing taxes – were the first to get their initiative onto the statewide ballot (Roberts 2016). Environmental justice groups, concerned about the disproportionate impacts of energy taxes on low income households, objected to the lack of dedicated funding to facilitate energy transitions for those individuals and families. Ultimately those concerns divided mainstream from justice-centred environmentalists and the proposal was voted down.

In California in 2017, the state legislature approved a long-term renewal of the state’s climate policies, centred upon a cap-and-trade system for carbon dioxide emissions permits. Not only did the proposal fail to address the particular needs of people living near centres of concentrated pollution, but the plan further constrained the ability of local and regional pollution control agencies within the state to enact appropriate emissions standards (Murphy 2017). Nationally in the U.S., a carbon tax proposal that has gained the support of prominent Republican Party elders would substantially overturn all other regulation of greenhouse gases by federal agencies (Feldstein et al. 2017). Clearly such a proposal would grant an unprecedented primacy to market-oriented mechanisms for pollution control and implies an exceptional confidence in the rationality and integrity of capitalist markets. If such policies represent a future standard for “climate pragmatism,” those seeking to simultaneously advance the goals of climate action and social justice will face a very long road ahead. However if climate mitigation can be effectively aligned with the pressing needs of marginalized communities worldwide, it could portend a uniquely comprehensive and effective solution to a considerable array of social and environmental ills.

This chapter has highlighted several essential aspects of climate justice and its continuing contributions to the global movement for climate action, in particular:

- A consistent focus on the disproportionate impacts of climate disruptions on the world’s most vulnerable peoples, those who generally contribute the least to excessive emissions of greenhouse gases;
- Various distinct contributions to climate movement strategies, rooted in the outlooks of front-line communities and highlighting the systemic implications of a justice-centred

perspective, links to other kindred justice movements, and a synthesis of critical and reconstructive approaches to climate action;

- Several challenging political questions that are raised by this perspective, including the problem of economic growth in the emerging energy transition and the implications of policy proposals in the global North that may tend to sideline justice-centred concerns.

It is hoped that this discussion will help illuminate the continuing relevance of climate justice in today's world and advance more just and equitable approaches to climate policy in Northern and Southern countries alike.

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