

Who Wins From “Climate Apartheid”? - African Climate Justice Narratives About the Paris COP21

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The billion residents of Africa are amongst the most vulnerable to climate change in coming decades, and of special concern are high-density sites of geopolitical and resource-related conflicts: the copper belt of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and mineral-rich African Great Lakes stretching into northern Uganda, western Ethiopia (bordering the Sudanese war zone), Madagascar and smaller Indian Ocean islands, and the northern-most strip of Africa and West Africa including Liberia and Sierra Leone (recent sites of diamond-related civil war and then Ebola epidemics). In other words, the African terrains hardest hit by war and economic looting are going to be sites of climate stress and socio-political unrest, according to the University of Texas project researching vulnerability for the U.S. Pentagon (Busby et al 2013).

The lost opportunity to change this map at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) summit in Paris, December 2015, is tragic. In the 2015 Pew Research world public opinion survey, a near majority of those surveyed—46 percent—identified climate as a threat about which they were “very concerned,” the highest score of any issue in the poll (economic crisis was second). But where it counts most, in the top two polluting countries, the percentage of people who name climate as a major threat is just 42 in the United States and 19 in China (Carle 2015). And even if consciousness rises faster from below, global elites apparently remain too paralyzed to take necessary actions to keep temperature increases below 1.5 degrees Celsius, the point at which runaway, catastrophic climate change is likely to take off (Bond 2012, Klein 2014). Going into the Paris UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (the 21st, COP21), the French hosts estimated that the combined declarations of voluntary commitments would warm the planet by 3 degrees Celsius this century, but this is a vast understatement given the likelihood of runaway climate change once a 2-degree tipping point is reached.

The annual UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) has been held in Africa thrice: in 2001 in Marrakech, 2006 in Nairobi, and 2011 in Durban. But the critical moment that defined Africa’s future climate crisis was in December 2009 in Copenhagen. The negotiations at COP15 were diverted one night into a room where five leaders—from the United States and the group of Brazil, South Africa, India, and China (BASIC)—agreed on a side deal, the Copenhagen Accord. That was the source of Africa’s major problems in climate negotiations for years thereafter, including at the Paris COP21.

The fortnight-long COP talk-shops are typically sabotaged by U.S. State Department negotiators, recently joined by brethren governments in Australia and Japan, with Canada a loyal co-polluter

prior to the October 2015 election (and probably long after, given the national elites' commitment to exploiting the Alberta tar sands). Initial hopes that the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) bloc might make a difference in world climate policy as well as address undemocratic global financial governance have since been dashed, not only because of BASIC's 2009 alliance with Barack Obama (Bond and Garcia 2015). Individually, they are each failing to grapple with new responsibilities to decarbonize their economies.

The world's largest single emitter is China, even if in per capita terms it is far lower than the Northern countries. Beijing claims to have recently reduced coal consumption are dubious given notorious undercounting (probably by 15 percent). The Communist Party leadership decided upon an upward trajectory of greenhouse gas emissions at least through the 2020s. The Chinese standpoint that they need more emissions to "develop" is contradicted by a stark reality: Recent U.S. and European claims to be slowing their emissions rely upon their corporations and consumers *outsourcing* large amounts of emissions to new production sites, mostly in East Asia. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "A growing share of CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion in developing countries is released in the production of goods and services exported, notably from upper-middle-income countries to high-income countries" (Hawkins 2014). In the case of China, the amounts of such outsourcing are vast, having risen from 404 million tons of CO₂ in 2000 to 1.561 billion tons in 2012.

Moreover, BRICS leaders have all endorsed carbon markets, the capitalist strategy for offsetting local emissions by buying someone else's carbon allowances. Initially, from 2005-2012, these took the form of United Nations "Clean Development Mechanism" (CDM) opportunities to sell often-corrupt and gimmick-ridden "emissions credits" as contributing to emissions mitigation (Bond, Dada and Erion 2009).

In recent years, after the BRICS no longer qualified for CDMs, seven Chinese cities started their own carbon markets, with Brazil and South Africa likely to follow in a few years. Moreover, China's attempts to control emissions in future appear certain to foster faith in dangerous techniques such as nuclear energy, hydropower, and untested carbon-capture-and-storage technology.

The strongest efforts to address climate change from the North are in Europe, where in October 2014 a new goal of 40 percent greenhouse gas reduction from 1990 levels by 2030 (not including the carbon outsourcing of hundreds of millions of tons per year) was sought—far too low according to most scientists, but far ahead of goals set by other historic pollution sites. In a late-2014 deal between China and the United States, the latter's goal was only 15 percent reduction by 2025 (from 1990 levels).

In short, very little reason for hope on climate or other aspects of environmental stewardship can be found in any of the major countries' governments. There is, of course, the exception of Cuba, which by compulsion began a strong decarbonization strategy once Russian-subsidized oil became unavailable after 1990. But the good examples that were anticipated in 2008-2011 from left-leaning Latin American countries—Bolivia, Ecuador, and even oil-rich Venezuela—subsequently soured, as each turned to more intense hydrocarbon "extractivism," albeit with nationalist redistributive ends instead of multinational corporate profiteering.

When the September 2014 United Nations special leadership summit on climate was preceded by a march of 400,000 people with strong messages of anger about elite procrastination, nothing more than vague promises were offered. The array of global and national power appears as difficult to affect as ever, what with unprecedented corporate influence—including of fossil fuel companies—over policymakers, and with further awareness that major restructuring of vast industries will be needed.

Going back to 2009, the US+BASIC meeting in Copenhagen not only “blew up the UN,” as Bill McKibben (2009) of 350.org put it, in terms of evading the more democratic process. The Copenhagen Accord also promised only inadequate and voluntary emissions cuts. Japan, Russia, Canada, and Australia subsequently announced they would withdraw earlier commitments made under the Kyoto Protocol.

By November 2015, the (voluntary) Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) statement of the G20 countries confirmed huge barriers to reaching the required emissions cuts. According to Climate Action Tracker (2015), “None of the G20 INDCs are in line with holding warming below 2°C, or 1.5°C.” The agency rated the following contributions as “inadequate”: Argentina, Australia, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Turkey, with the INDCs of another set—Brazil, China, India, the EU, Mexico, and the United States—also “not consistent with limiting warming to below 2°C either, unless other countries make much deeper reductions and comparably greater effort.”

Four Reasons Paris Failed

The INDC strategy was itself flawed because it is voluntary, with no accountability system sufficiently strong—such as economic sanctions or expulsion from the United Nations. Hence the first reason for the Paris COP21’s failure was that the ambition required to cut emissions to survivable levels never materialized. As explained by Pablo Solon (2015), formerly Bolivia’s Ambassador to the United Nations and the man who attempted to block consensus at the Cancun COP16 in 2010, all negotiators since Copenhagen failed to address the need leave 80 percent of known fossil fuels reserves under the ground and make deep emissions cuts: 44 Gigatons (Gt) of CO₂ equivalent by 2020, 40 Gt by 2025, and 35 Gt by 2030.

Second, the reduction of CO₂ emissions agreed upon in Paris will partly occur through “financializing” the climate via carbon markets and offsets. Although this strategy has failed in the main markets to date—the European Union’s Emissions Trading System (EMS) and the Chicago Climate Exchange (which completely collapsed in 2010)—it was reasserted the month before the Paris summit in a preparatory conference. New language that emerged to the effect that these markets deliver “real, permanent, additional and verified” emissions reductions reflects awareness of bad publicity stemming from prior mishaps (Carbon Market Watch 2015). The Kyoto Protocol and all subsequent COPs allowed large polluting firms to buy the right to pollute (from other companies) at extremely low cost, and relied on financiers to set up carbon markets and offsets rather than make direct cuts.

The only effective means of cutting emissions is to use state controls to compel deep cuts by the major polluters, as was accomplished with the UN’s 1987 Montreal Protocol on chlorofluorocarbons in order to halt widening of the ozone hole.

Third, a “just transition” can be achieved only by rebooting each sector of the world economy with a central role for labor and affected communities, but such radical change was off the Paris table, with the partial exception of renewable energy. Such a strategy would not only ensure a medium-term conversion from a carbon-fueled economy (as the G7 leaders agreed would be done by 2100, about 50 years too late), but in the short term, a saner way of relating to the natural environment and to other human beings.

Indeed the UN has not yet considered the wide-ranging decarbonization, environmental planning, and economic restructuring proposals from climate activists (Klein 2014). Instead, the only strategies adopted will make shifts at the margins, especially those using carbon pricing in attempts

to nudge markets with incremental taxation or worse, carbon trading incentives. To address the crisis forcefully, a just transition is overdue in the world's energy, transport, extraction, urbanization, agriculture, manufacturing production, consumption, disposal, and financing systems. But while these continue to be driven by the profit motive, most externalities—that is, ecological and social damage not incorporated as market costs—remain as damages foisted onto the powerless.

Fourth, large parts of Africa as well as low-lying islands, the Latin American and Asian mountain chains, and sites like the Bay of Bengal are already owed reparations for the massive damage done to local climates. But Paris failed to substantively advance the cause of “climate debt” payment by the North to the South. This is damage far worse than the effects that will be felt in France and other sites in the industrialized world where CO₂ emissions per person are greatest. While being a climate creditor gives African negotiators the moral high ground, unfortunately it took until 2012 (at the Doha COP18) for the UN to recognize “loss and damage” (the UN's technical term) suffered in weather-related crises.

But the voluntary nature of Copenhagen and its Green Climate Fund means there is no legal liability on the part of climate debtors in the Global North. As Washington's lead negotiator, Todd Stern, famously explained in Copenhagen, “We absolutely recognize our historic role in putting emissions in the atmosphere up there that are there now. But the sense of guilt or culpability or reparations, I just categorically reject that” (Broder 2009).

What are Africa and other vulnerable sites facing, in the wake of the COP21? In Paris, binding emission cuts were not made on the scale required. Market mechanisms were reaffirmed. A just transition for the world economy towards genuine sustainability was rejected. The climate creditors—especially Africans—continue to be stuck with the bill for most damage done, though they did not cause the crisis. The Paris COP21 process did not allow the power change required to address these four major challenges. Those in the mainstream nongovernmental organizations who entered Paris claiming that the conditions were in place for a planet-saving deal (for instance Avaaz's Ricken Patel 2015) were profoundly mistaken.

Climate Apartheid Cooks Africa, and Pretoria Stokes the Flames

Hence Paris merely continued what is being termed “climate apartheid.” According to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's Global Humanitarian Forum (2009), already more than 300,000 current deaths per year are attributable to climate change, mostly in the Global South. With the present trajectory of warming anticipated to break 4 degrees Celsius above normal by 2100, with inland Africa heating up by 6 to 7 C, not only are humans threatened, but so too is nearly every living species—biodiversity itself—reliant upon water and a stable ecosystem.

With the world insurance industry already facing a rise in annual liabilities associated with extreme weather events from \$10 billion during the 1980s to \$50 billion since 2000, and with even larger damages simply not covered, even the conservative Bank of England governor Mark Carney (2015) admitted, “Currently modelled losses could be undervalued by as much as 50 percent if recent weather trends were to prove representative of the new normal.”

As a result, Africa anticipates worsening weather chaos, and 182 million Africans dead this century, early and unnecessarily, due to climate-related disease (Christian Aid 2006). In this context, the delegate leading the G77+China group of 130 to Paris, Nozipho Joyce Mxakato-Diseko, put it most starkly at October's prenegotiations in Bonn: “It is just like apartheid.”

Mxakato-Diseko is South African, and knows of what she alleges firsthand: “We find ourselves in a

position where in essence we are disenfranchised” (Doyle 2015). And yet Mxakato-Diseko’s own principals let her down in the end. South Africans are especially adept at “talk left, walk right” posturing (Bond 2006), and so it is interesting to consider the stance Pretoria takes on climate at home. To change the world balance of forces requires changing national environmental policy in every country, and South Africa is one of the world’s great battlegrounds (Bond 2002).

The large mining-smelting-shipping corporations—whether local, Western, or BRICS in origin—still appear to have inordinate influence in Pretoria (surely as much as enjoyed in Washington by the Koch Brothers and others in the oil and gas lobby). Against them, the Department of Environmental Affairs has a minister, Edna Molewa, who did nothing to shift power relations in defense of the climate, in spite of a relatively high profile in international negotiations. She played a central role in Durban’s COP17 (Bond 2011, 2012), and in 2012, she was visible at the Rio+20 UN Earth Summit.

Yet when it counted, in regulating South African polluters, Molewa knew how to avoid conflict. She was silent about the vast bulk of national infrastructure spending on carbon-intensive activities: three major coal-fired power plants, expanded coal exports via a \$25 billion rail budget in the first plan of the Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Commission, and in the second PICC project, the \$20 billion expansion of Durban’s port and petrochemical complex, aiming to raise container-throughput capacity by a factor of eight by 2040 (Bond 2014a). The government also gave permission in 2013 for Shell Oil to begin the process of “fracking” the arid Karoo region. This was followed in mid-2014 by President Jacob Zuma’s Operation Phakisa (“speed up”) ocean-economy strategy, including \$5 billion worth of deep-sea oil and gas exploration, especially by ExxonMobil. Other carbon-intensive state policies include ever-worsening suburban sprawl facilitated by the doubling of the Durban-Johannesburg oil pipeline at nearly four times the initial budget of \$500 million. Pretoria also granted approval for a new \$6 billion state oil refinery, and has plans for more smelter-intensive minerals beneficiation including a new Chinese steel factory (in spite of steel imports from China decimating the two main existing producers in 2015).

Facing this intensification of South Africa’s capital-carbon metabolism, Molewa’s 2014-2015 budget (\$400 million) was revealing. In addition to an 8.3 percent real cut in overall climate-change programming, her \$1.5 million cut to the South African Weather Service’s budget meant, according to Parliament’s Environmental Oversight Committee (2014), “South Africa would be unable to meet its international obligations regarding the monitoring of greenhouse gases through the Global Atmospheric Watch station. ... The country would also be unable to formulate baselines and monitor emissions versus set targets.”

Writing in the *Mail & Guardian*, Molewa’s (2014) reply to concerns expressed (by this author, Bond 2014b) about such developments was defensive:

“Contrary to Bond’s analysis, South Africa is not at risk of not meeting its international obligations regarding climate change or its attendant priority, greenhouse gas emissions monitoring and reduction. Our national climate change response policy guides the government’s approach to climate change impacts and the country’s transition to a climate-resilient, low-carbon, mitigating economy” (Molewa 2014).

Yet as the Environment Oversight Committee (2014) had warned, “As a country, we must be seen making our fair contribution to the global effort to mitigate climate change by ensuring that we reduce our greenhouse gas emissions below the business-as-usual by 34 per cent by 2020 and 42 per cent by 2025.” In mid-2015, the next opportunity arose for Pretoria to commit to the COP21, but Molewa’s offer inspired a scathing response from the South African office of Greenpeace (2015):

“The ‘Discussion Document: South Africa’s INDC: 1 August 2015’ avoids quantifying any

contribution to mitigation and fails to meet the very basic generic requirements agreed for the mitigation component of the INDC. If not rectified, such blatant evasiveness will undermine South Africa's credibility and any claim to moral authority in leadership of developing country negotiators."

This lack of ambition is consistent with Pretoria's approach of turning a blind eye to pollution violations especially from coal mining, electricity generation, and oil refineries (all associated with climate change) (groundWork et al 2014). Molewa's (2014) rebuttal confirmed an inappropriate degree of state modesty: "We are constantly addressing issues to do with climate change—mostly behind the scenes."

Staying "behind the scenes" can be explained by the durable power of South Africa's so-called minerals-energy complex (Fine and Rustonjee 1996). That power was unveiled when Molewa's cabinet colleagues Nathi Mthethwa and Cyril Ramaphosa assisted London-based platinum firm Lonmin, in August 2012, by deploying the police against striking workers for the sake of maintaining corporate mining profits. Ramaphosa, later to become deputy president of South Africa, was a 9-percent owner of Lonmin, and it was his emails that brought massacre-minded troops to end the wildcat strike (he called it "dastardly criminal"), leaving 34 corpses of workers, many of whom were trying to surrender. Testimony Ramaphosa gave to the investigating commission in mid-2014 confirmed his loyalties: He admitted that instead of building 5,500 houses for Lonmin workers, as promised, the corporation's Transformation Committee that he oversaw built just three. He also facilitated the off-shore "illicit financial flows" of Lonmin profits to Bermuda.

Ramaphosa's massive coal mines and similar dirty-coal corporate operations were, according to insiders, long pampered by Molewa's water officials. At least forty major new mines are now being dug or planned to provide coal to two new power plants, not to mention new export-oriented coal digs to supply China and India. The coal-producing province of Mpumalanga was, by 2014, quite literally wheezing (groundWork et al 2014). Yet electricity producer Eskom applied to Molewa for "rolling postponements" on pollution reductions required by law at 14 power plants there. Eskom's assumption was that its own crises—and regular load-shedding that struck fear into the society—would persuade Molewa of the need for forbearance. By February 2015, Molewa had agreed to a five-year extension on air pollution regulatory forbearance for Eskom, Sasol, and dozens of other firms whose emissions both harmed local workers and residents and contributed to climate change.

The only hope emerging from the adverse balance of national forces in South Africa could be discerned at the global and the grassroots scales: in plunging world prices for fossil fuels, and in the resistance by community and environmental activists that in late 2015 began to bite. The former included a shrinkage in the coal price from a peak of \$170/ton to \$50/ton from 2011-2015, and that set the stage for at least a temporary victory at one of the main sites of struggle against new mines: the iMfolozi wilderness area, Africa's oldest nature reserve. There, in May 2015, more than 1,000 women spoke out against a company, Ibutho Coal, associated with mega-corporations Glencore and BHP Billiton. This plus legal objections based on environmental harm drove Ibutho into retreat, withdrawing its plans, even though many of the local Zulu chiefs had been bought off by the firm and the national government.

In a second encouraging case two hundred miles south, in Durban, the world over-accumulation crisis had stalled world shipping to the extent that in November 2015, plans for digging the new \$20 billion port and oil terminal were put on hold indefinitely. This again reflected the durability of community opposition, for climate change was a leading reason the local group opposed the port-petrochemical complex's extension, as well as ExxonMobil's plans for deep-water drilling off Durban's shore. It is these grassroots victories that represent South Africa's climate "Blockadia" (Klein 2014). While the Paris agreement led to unmitigated failure, combining local resistance with

global capitalist contradictions suggests the way forward.

With the South African population recording 47 percent awareness that climate change is the world's greatest threat in the 2015 Pew survey (Carle 2015), the possibility for turning awareness into activism remains the only hope, given that Pretoria's elites appear unwilling to change course.

Conclusion

The South African case illustrates how difficult it is for the world to solve the climate crisis, even while its highest-profile delegate offers claims of "climate apartheid" as heard during the Paris COP21. The genuine victims of climate apartheid did not make it to Paris (and not only because of the severe impact of terrorism on EU visa availability). But they will continue to make their voices heard at national and local scales, where after all the war against emission sources will be won or lost.

Terrorist attacks that left more than 130 mainly young Parisians dead on November 13 remind us of blowback hazards that will be faced by future stubborn governments of the North and the BRICS. Refugees will arrive in faster, higher waves to their shores, initially from North Africa and the Middle East—which will heat to unliveable temperatures by mid-century—illustrating how mass migrations from many climate-creditor sites are driven by weather-related conflict. Climate refugees from Syria's extreme 2006-2010 drought—treated so carelessly by the Assad regime, compelling popular rebellion in 2011—and the simultaneous difficulties faced by migratory herders in western Sudan's Darfur give these sites the dubious honor of witnessing the first climate wars.

Future COPs will make efforts at enforcement of the non-binding Paris summit agreement. But top-down, this is likely to remain futile, for already in Washington, Obama faces Republican efforts to undue his 2015 Environmental Protection Agency rulings against coal. In Morocco at the December 2016 COP22, conditions for social mobilization will be far more adverse than even Paris. So looking back on Paris, even if the climate marches across the world on November 28-29 played a salutatory role in raising consciousness, it was the protest activities against the COP21's weak outcome that set the stage for climate justice activism in years ahead.

Evidently, nothing useful to solve this crisis will come from world elites. The action will continue to be at the coal-face local sites of "Blockadia" and then an aggregation of these, to make national contestations—such as over South African government economic policy—the battlegrounds where activists can muster strength to change the balance of power.

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P.S.

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