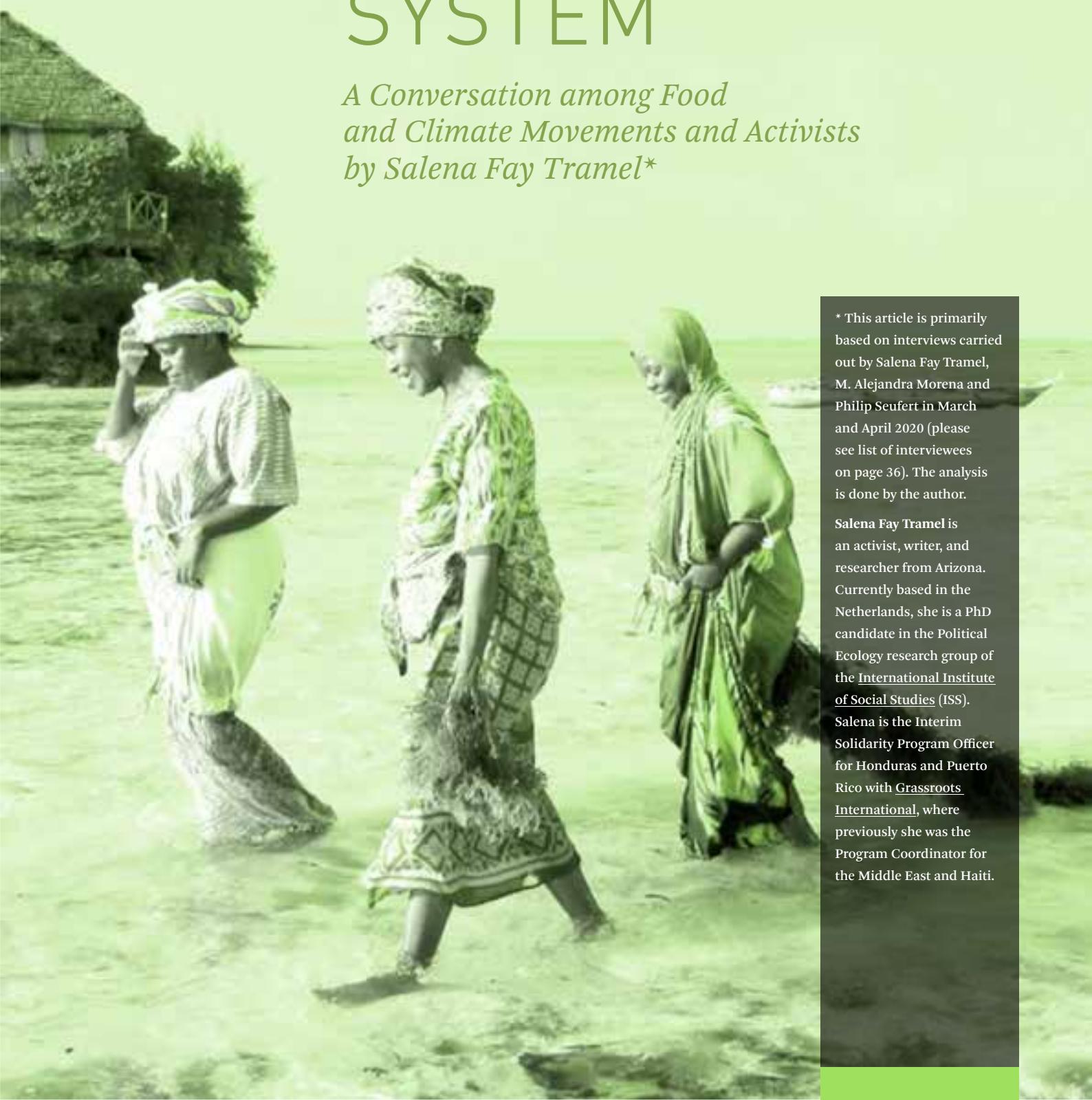


03

CONVERGING TO OVERCOME CRISIS AND CHANGE THE SYSTEM

*A Conversation among Food
and Climate Movements and Activists*
by Salena Fay Tramel*



* This article is primarily based on interviews carried out by Salena Fay Tramel, M. Alejandra Morena and Philip Seufert in March and April 2020 (please see list of interviewees on page 36). The analysis is done by the author.

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“[T]his political moment is a perfect storm of two opposing pressure systems, human health in an era of pandemic, and planetary health in the throes of climate change. Transformation is inevitable, but what that change looks like is up to us.”

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Ecological and economic shocks in global capitalism are nothing new, even if they have a tendency to catch us off guard. The third decade of the 21st century has opened like the pages of a masterfully crafted suspense novel, its villain a highly contagious and ever-multiplying virus. Modern industrial life as we know it, depending on an intricate series of human interactions, grinds to a halt like a tired steampunk clock. Ghost planes empty of passengers slip through transatlantic flightpaths while hospitals across grids of cities below overflow with the ill. Some of us lean into our computer screens like the portals they have increasingly become, trying to make sense of this peculiar political moment. Others have no time for such musings; the frontlines of the COVID-19 battlefield have widened along the existing trenches of race, class, gender, and generation.

While some journalists spill ink about ‘getting back to normal’, and others lament that ‘it will never be the same again’, communities and activists on the frontlines of climate change and resource grabbing have been experiencing the uneven shocks of the capitalist system for some time now.¹

These ruptures can happen in a geographically limited area: a cyclone, an earthquake, or an oil spill. They can alternatively proliferate across place and space once set into motion, like the 2007-08 food price, finance, energy, and fuel crises that blazed through borders like wildfire. Or indeed like a contagious disease and its manifold impacts.

¹ For more information, please see: O’Connor, James. *Natural Causes: Essays on Marxist Ecology*. New York: Guilford, 1998.

Movement Generation, a U.S.-based collective of grassroots organizers, movement builders, and popular educators, has a useful framework for understanding large-scale change that they describe as ‘shocks, slides, and shifts’.² A slide, as it is conceptualized in this framework, indicates a process of disruption just like a shock – but less abrupt. For instance, global warming and ocean acidification are less sudden than an overnight emergency, but can pose even more danger. Once a slide has been set into motion, it causes a chain reaction that is hard to stop, just like the kinetic energy that sends a row of dominoes toppling to its end.

When a chronic slide like climate chaos comes into contact with an acute shock, like a food price crisis or a sudden outbreak of disease, a shift becomes necessary to break the impasse. Shifts can go either way. In the last decade, we have witnessed alarming trends in shifts towards increased violence, white supremacy, patriarchy, and colonialism. Many of these have occurred in response to the interlinked issues of natural resource extraction and climate change denial and mitigation. At a global level, this is evidenced by the false solution of ‘green grabbing’, land grabbing done in the name of environmental protection – quite literally, “selling nature to save it”.³ Shifts have also manifested in various strands of nationalism, authoritarianism, and right-wing populisms within states as responses to a faltering and overarching neoliberal project.⁴

But there are other kinds of shifts taking place, and those are the ones that social justice movements are using to win longstanding struggles for access to and control over natural resources. Within and across radical movements that have historically worked by sector, activists are engaging in difficult conversations to construct sophisticated convergences for systemic change. Put simply, if capitalism is routinely producing economic and ecological shocks along its accelerated descent into an unlivable future, then why not use this occasion to build political power from the grassroots to replace that system with something better?

This article is about what is needed to win those shifts for justice and people’s sovereignty, and what stands in the way. A fundamental assumption and starting point of this article is that the climate crisis has presented an existential threat that has mobilized movements working on a range of issues to intertwine their struggles in resistance to resource grabbing and climate change. In order to bring the political interactions that are taking place within and across movements to life, its content is based on twelve interviews, six of which were organized in pairs and the remaining six individually. These conversations were carried out with social movement leaders of women’s, peasants’, fishers’, Indigenous Peoples, youth, environmental, and workers’ organizations from five continents in March and April of 2020.

All of these social movements share in common overt and proactive political agendas that struggle against power, privilege, and patriarchy. Climate and food were used as starting points, areas in which the activists interviewed had been engaging for years. Our conversations were organized as open spaces for exchange around what grassroots movements see as the way out of the seeming gridlock of a multifaceted political moment, and how stronger bonds can be soldered to achieve food sovereignty and climate justice in broader struggles for system change. The remainder of this article is organized around four key shifts that came up as common themes for how to get there: feminisms, agroecology, water, and just transition.

² For more information, please see: Movement Generation. “Communities Across US Stand With Those Impacted by Sandy”. Available at: movementgeneration.org/communities-across-us-stand-with-those-impacted-by-sandy/; and Justice Funders. “State of the Movement 2018: 03 Mateo Nube”, February 2018. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6nWP1y2kGI&feature=youtu.be.

³ Fairhead, James, Leach, Melissa, and Ian Scoones. “Green grabbing: a new appropriation of nature?” *Journal of peasant studies*, 39(2), (2012): 237-261.

⁴ Scoones, Ian et al. “Emancipatory rural polities: confronting authoritarian populism”. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 45(1), (2018):1-20.

FEMINISMS

When the flames of the food price crisis subsided across Africa a decade ago, the continent was left charred by deep wounds carved into its territory in the form of redoubled resource grabbing. This great African land grab was unique in that its proponents praised it for solving multiple crises of hunger, unemployment, and climate change. But feminist activists acquainted with the ever-changing costumes in the masquerade of extractivism would not get swept away in the grandeur of its latest ball.

Ruth Nyambura is one of them. “We started the African Ecofeminist Collective just over five years ago to bring together young feminists working at the intersection of ecology, land, food, and extractivism,” she said via phone conference from Kenya. “The food and energy shocks brought on a big boom in mining, and we formulated our struggle against that on two levels,” she explained, “trying to figure out the political economy of all of it, while also working on the intimate spaces.”

The African Feminist Collective has spent time tracing the historical latticework of women, food, and environment that stretches over the continent like a revealing map of patterns. “Our women see the intersectional analysis of food in our region,” offered Ruth. “We are aware that most of it is produced by African women, in rural areas and also in cities, and those food producers are largely older women,” she added.

That history carries with it deep meaning as the women of the African Feminist Collective tackle the challenge of climate change. “There is a tendency to forget the colonial history when trying to address the effects of climate change on women and on our ecosystem and the interconnected challenges of shrinking land plots and the collapse of the public sector,” said Ruth. “But we must apply this when we analyze,” she summarized, “because the climate crisis needs to be seen as an expression and afterlife of the colonial policies that the African continent has been contending with for more than a hundred years.”

Arieska (Arie) Kurniawaty, a feminist organizer with the Indonesian women’s advocacy network Solidaritas Perempuan, shared Ruth’s emphasis on intersectionality and attention to history when addressing the root causes of the food and climate crises. “We talk about women’s rights,” Arie said, “since for us feminism means talking about power imbalances from the family up to the global level.” She explained that in the Indonesian context, feminists organized women and their wider communities into the struggle in ways that were slow and not too confrontational.

Capitalist responses to climate change mitigation have provided a political opening to do so. Indonesia’s cornucopia of natural resources has made it a hotspot for carbon trading schemes across forests, fisheries, and farmlands. The island archipelago has recently been leapfrogging across other countries in Southeast Asia and globally; in 2017, it achieved the coveted economic marker of a trillion-dollar economy and it is now the largest in the region. But at what cost, and for whom?

“Of course we have to reduce greenhouse gasses,” Arie said, “but privatized projects like REDD+ actually limit women’s access to forests, so we have to work together to convince our government that they are false solutions.” She shared that forests are where women go to get food and medicine and also serve as irreplaceable spiritual

and cultural spaces. Solidaritas Perempuan equips rural women with time-tested human rights-based tools such as the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW, 1979), as well as new ones such as the Voluntary Guidelines for Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT, 2012), adopted at the reformed UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

Overall, Arie sees the evolving Indonesian feminist movement as one that has potential to push back against the impunity of transnational corporations and a dangerous right-wing political system that is broadening its reach. Solidaritas Perempuan also works on raising awareness on feminist issues with social movements of food producers and Indigenous Peoples that are aligned on its analysis politically, but lack gender sensitivity. Arie summarized: “patriarchy and capitalism collectively impoverish women, and the feminist movement is a liberation movement for power imbalances in all peoples’ lives. Now is the time to reclaim shrinking spaces across regions and continents.”

On the other side of the Pacific Ocean and away from its shores, where the militarized border of the U.S. and Mexico slices through the exquisite Sonoran Desert ecosystem, is Yaqui territory. Andrea Carmen belongs to the Yaqui peoples, but her commitment to Indigenous issues and movements is not bound by tribal affiliation. As the longtime Arizona-based Executive Director of the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), she holds down many spaces.

Andrea cut her teeth in the women’s movement as a university student in the 70s. At that time, second wave feminism had reached high tide, and was largely focused on the resolution of workplace inequality. While wage parity became a cause célèbre for white feminists in North America and in Europe, many Indigenous women were still busy dressing the infected wounds inflicted by settler colonialism. Andrea, for instance, was working to draw attention to the ongoing forced sterilization of Indigenous women.

“I understand feminism from the European perspective, and it makes sense in their context, but as Indigenous women we need to look at it in another way,” said Andrea, “Mother Earth gave birth to all of us and created respect, so that forcing a binary identity upon everyone is not what we need.” She elaborated: “In our Indigenous movement we do not have, to my experience, lack of strong women leadership since women are extremely respected as knowledge holders. We have different challenges.”

The knowledge that Andrea shared speaks to the necessity of a plurality of feminisms to cut off harmful systemic expressions of patriarchy, colonialism, and neoliberal growth. Nurturing Indigenous, Black, peasant, queer, and other grassroots feminisms allows those most targeted by a system built on interlinked forms of oppression to construct what is necessary to replace it.⁵ We have been able to highlight the violations we are experiencing, but also the ways we can contribute to solutions,” said Andrea, adding, “respect must be given to Indigenous practices and structures”.

AGROECOLOGY

The Peruvian highlands of Ayacucho, descending into the Amazon rainforest on one side and the jagged Pacific coast on the other, exude revolution like steam from the calderas of the volcanoes for which the region is known. Nearly 200 years ago, when Peru was a royalist stronghold of the Spanish crown, the Bolivarian independence movement won a decisive battle in Ayacucho, safeguarding the entire South

⁵ For more information on gender diversity and intersectionality, please see: Gioia, Paula. “Coming Out! Gender Diversity in the Food System”. *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2019):34-41. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/rtfn-watch11-2019_eng-34-41.pdf.

American continent's freedom from Iberian rule. Today, different kinds of threats have made their way through the Andean mountain passes of Ayacucho.

The Quechua people living in Ayacucho have survived many attempts at their erasure, in no small part through holding tight to traditional agricultural systems that protect their natural ecology. Tarcila Rivera Zea is one of these guardians, and a leader in the Center of Indigenous Cultures of Peru (CHIRAPAQ) and founder of the Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas (ECMIA). She has dedicated her life to influencing policy from the local to the global levels as an advocate for fellow Indigenous women, and an important way of doing that has been through the lens of food. “The struggle of Indigenous Peoples is the right to natural resources, and we have to be clear that this is our starting point,” she said.

Tarcila explained that the climate crisis was exacerbating problems of access to native crops in a region already undermined by neoliberal trade policies. She insists: “If we value and prioritize healthy production, from corn and potatoes to herbs and medicines, and then create a fair market for them, the impact of climate change will be less.” Tarcila emphasized that her work through CHIRAPAQ has several tiers and has progressed from the right to food to food sovereignty to climate justice, and today includes all three simultaneously.

Agroecology is one pillar that connects food sovereignty to climate justice. It is a key shift that social justice movements see as the way out of the quagmire that is the industrial food system and other forms of natural resource control and extraction. Most peasants and Indigenous Peoples have been perfecting the art of agroecology for generations, through constant innovation based on deep knowledge of the living world.⁶ With anemia and malnutrition on the rise in Tarcila’s homeland due to corporate capture of the food system, CHIRAPAQ is making sure that agroecological responses from the grassroots start with local production and end with local consumption. “We can use agroecology to articulate the voices of Indigenous women from the local to the global,” she said.

But what, exactly, does agroecology mean in practice? In 2015, a group of food sovereignty and climate justice activists gathered in the small Malian ecovillage of Nyéléni to put their answers to that question on the same page. It was not the first time the peasant movement of Mali had hosted such an event at Nyéléni with their global counterpart La Vía Campesina. Back in 2007, just as the food price crisis was ramping up, social movements met there to discuss food sovereignty as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems”.⁷ Then in 2011, when Mali was experiencing some of the worst instances of land grabbing globally, social movements went back to Nyéléni to denounce the phenomenon and clap back against it with food sovereignty.

The agroecology gathering in 2015 put it all together: when the slide of the climate crisis came into contact with the shock of the food price crisis, the shift that the capitalists sought was one towards land grabbing with a friendly new environmental façade. This strategic alliance of social movements, however, was not about to let them get away with another heist. Saulo Araujo, who attended the agroecology meeting in Nyéléni, said, “Agroecology is not a concept or a technological fix, it is a process of what needs to be done to restore balance, especially in times of crisis.”

⁶ For more information on the link between agroecology and feminism, please see: “Without Feminism, There is No Agroecology”. *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2019):42-50. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/without-feminism-there-no-agroecology.

⁷ For more information, please see: Nyéléni Declaration of the Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007. Available at: www.nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290.

An agronomist by training, Saulo's work supports initiatives around food sovereignty and climate justice led by social movements. Originally from Brazil, he currently directs the Global Movements Program at WhyHunger in the U.S. and is active in both the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance and the Climate Justice Alliance. Saulo explained: "People are reclaiming their ancestral knowledge and protagonism in food sovereignty through agroecology. Solidarity among communities is an act of resistance in which we share knowledge, support one another and build grassroots internationalism as the pathway to the permanent forms of crises that we live in."

It is important to underscore that agroecology, much like feminism, is not a one-size-fits-all remedy. In fact, it is exactly those quick fixes like REDD+ and the Blue Revolution⁸ that agroecology is countering through highly organized political resistance.

An example of this work is taking place in Puerto Rico, a gorgeous little archipelago laid out over the Caribbean like a trio of emeralds on a jeweler's glass countertop. A quick glance at a map gives one the impression of an isolated paradise, complete with its own tropical rainforest. But a momentary scan through the pages of its history tells a different story. First, the island was wrested from the hands of the Indigenous Taíno peoples by Christopher Columbus and his marauders, and it was then acquired by the U.S. as booty after the Spanish-American war. Today, the island remains an unincorporated territorial possession of the U.S., or in other words, one of the oldest colonies in the world.

Jesús Vázquez, a Puerto Rican activist with Organización Boricuá de Agricultura Ecológica (Boricuá), a movement of *jibaras* and *jíbaros* (peasant farmers) sees agroecology as the shift needed to break away from expensive and unhealthy food imports from the U.S. and suffocating austerity measures, also imposed by the 'mainland'. "We are thinking a lot of our ancestors, the Taíno peoples, and people everywhere who want to go back to the land and use it productively without destroying or exploiting it," said Jesús.

A growing network of agroecology activists in Puerto Rico that includes Boricuá is promoting the straightforward logic that if Puerto Rico once grew most of its own food, not to mention the food that was extracted to satiate its colonizers – coffee for Spain, and sugarcane for the U.S. – it can do it again. Jesús explained that Boricuá borrowed the *campesino-a-campesino* (peasant-to-peasant) methodology from La Vía Campesina, the international peasant movement of which Boricuá is a member, and adapted it to the unique needs of the Puerto Rican people. "We call this method agroecological and solidarity brigades, and they are essential to how we organize." Jesús offered.

These brigades move from farm to farm to support not only farmers, but also the wider community. Such strategies are part of Boricuá's commitment to a multi-sectoral view. "Food and agriculture are the essence of sustaining life, so we know we have to have broader alliances, with unions, with workers, agricultural workers, health workers, and others," said Jesús. "We do this work in different regions in Puerto Rico and lift each other up across the reach of our movements", he added.

WATER

Mention Palestine in mixed company, brace for impact. With so many complicated layers of oppression suffocating so many people in the context of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, it would be easy to brush off this hotly contested

⁸ For more information on 'Blue Growth' initiatives, please see: Barbesgaard, Mads. "Privatization and Corporate Capture of Global Fisheries Policy". *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2016):34-37. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/%07privatization-and-corporate-capture-global-fisheries-policy.

corner of the Mediterranean as an anomaly. After all, the ‘conflict’ plays out in a tiny geographic area, against a distracting backdrop of seemingly irreconcilable religious divisions. Certainly, the Palestinian struggle for freedom – not unlike any other struggle for freedom – has its unique history and features. But its contemporary politics boil down to control over natural resources, and chief among those is water.

The Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) is one of a multiplicity of Palestinian social movements filling the gaping hole that is the absence of sovereignty across the occupied territories. “Israel uses some 85% of our Palestinian waters,” Saira Abbas⁹ said, from UAWC’s headquarters in Ramallah. “The occupying forces do not allow us to harvest rainwater from the sky, and they also prohibit us from managing underground water by blocking us from accessing springs or building or rehabilitating artisanal wells,” she explained.

Practicing food sovereignty through agroecology in rural Palestine in the shadows of encroaching settlements is no easy task, but it is one that UAWC is committed to nonetheless. “Our best work at the junctures of climate, food, and water is through our seed bank,” said Saira. UAWC has maintained a seed bank since 2003; in it, they safeguard rare heirloom Palestinian seeds that have been passed from one generation to the next like an elderly matriarch’s cherished case of jewels. “Not only do these Indigenous seeds make it easier to go back to the land and protect it through cultivation,” Saira offered, “they hardly use any water and shield us from climate change.”

UAWC insists on the importance of internationalism and solidarity in normalizing the plight of the 20,000 peasant farmers and fishers it represents across Gaza and the West Bank. It is a member of La Vía Campesina, and having a political relationship with the global movement has allowed Palestinian activists the opportunity to host learning exchanges in their territories and also participate in those that take place abroad. “Together, we are showing the whole world the important role of water in agroecology” said Saira. “And we can help people understand that water is a driver of the occupation that we seek to end,” she added.

Some of La Vía Campesina’s most important recent work has been spearheading the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) and getting it passed; the General Assembly adopted the human rights-based instrument in 2018. UNDROP outlines rights to water for personal and domestic use and highlights its importance for peasants and other populations that protect natural resources and whose livelihoods depend on them. Article 21.2, for instance, stipulates: “They have the right to equitable access to water and water management systems, and to be free from arbitrary disconnections or the contamination of water supplies.”¹⁰

Even though social movements of various sectors strive to strengthen the aspects of their work that relate to water, for fishers and fishworkers, water not only sustains life, but also provides livelihoods. It is in this spirit that the World Forum of Fisher Peoples organizes small-scale fishing movements from across the world. One of their most active members is in an often-forgotten West African state where rivers snake through the red earth to meet the sea.

The bizarre borders of The Gambia are such that the country has the appearance of a long crooked finger jutting out of the Atlantic Ocean over Senegal as if it were

⁹ Name has been changed to maintain confidentiality.

¹⁰ Available at: digitallibrary.un.org/record/1650694?ln=en. For more information, please see: Claeys, Priscilla and Marc Edelman. “The United Nations Declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas”. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47(1), (2020):1-68.

pointing eastward over the vast Sahel. This strange topography is a remnant of a British colonial water grab in Indigenous African territory that was already occupied by the French. Since 1965, The Gambia has been independent; however, the water grabbing continues unabated.

The National Association of Artisanal Fisheries Operators (NAAFO) is the World Forum of Fisher People's Gambian member organization that is pushing back on water enclosures on a number of fronts. Fatou Camara explained that her movement is adapting the food sovereignty framework to meet the unique needs of The Gambia's riverine and coastal communities. "Fish is a highly nutritious affordable protein for our people," she said, "and destructive industrial fishing and coastal tourism are a threat to fishers." Fatou represents NAAFO internationally within the fisheries working group of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, an umbrella for movements that has been instrumental in co-drafting global governance policies like the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (VG-SSF, 2014).

Back at home in The Gambia, Fatou works on implementing political mechanisms such as the VG-SSF at state level, with an eye on gender justice. "Most of the activities that have to do with fishing and climate justice are done by women, so we want our role to be prioritized within the fisheries movement," she said. Additionally, Fatou recognized that land tenure rights were an obstacle for all Gambian women, and hoped to create linkages with other sectors looking to win those rights. She said: "We want to work with women in other sectors so that we can build our collective power."

One of the most awe-inspiring displays of collective power using water as a framework for system change took place deep in Sioux territory in 2016-17. More than 280 Indigenous tribes gathered at Standing Rock, a reservation on the vast windswept Dakota Plains where the poverty rate is three times higher than the U.S. average, to block the construction of a massive oil pipeline in the area.

Although the congregation was ultimately forcibly dispersed and the pipeline went ahead, the water protectors were on the political map to stay. The events at Standing Rock had acted as a generating station, pumping high voltage energy across a new electrified grid of alliances. New protest camps sprung up in Minnesota and Louisiana to evoke treaty rights¹¹ to their territorial waters. And in Navajo Nation, the largest reservation in the U.S. that is mostly located in the arid deserts of Arizona, the battle cry of 'water is life' was used to work across the water-energy-food nexus.

Janene Yazzie, who is from Navajo Nation, and works at the IITC, explained that desertification is increasing and sand dunes are spreading across her homeland due to climate change. That slow encroachment has been paralleled by extractive activities in sacred mountains, coal mining, fracking for natural gas, and a legacy of uranium mining. Janene explained: "International Indian Treaty Council works with Indigenous communities to build models of not only food sovereignty, but also water sovereignty, and then find the pathways necessary to lift up those grassroots struggles at the international level."

An example of this work is making sure that energy partnerships and land development are tackled from a rights-based approach using tools such as the ones compiled in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) that stipulates, among other things, the right to water as a key natural

¹¹ Treaty rights are binding agreements between two nations or sovereigns. For a simple analysis, please visit: indianlaw.org/content/treaty-rights-and-un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples.

resource and the right to uphold treaties such as the ones that theoretically govern Navajo Nation. “At the community level, this is intergenerational work,” said Janene. “We hold the urgency to protect our traditional knowledge holders, of the practices, languages, and protocols that are necessary to inform what it means to restore our self-sufficiency, our sovereignty, and who we are as Indigenous peoples,” she elaborated.

JUST TRANSITION

The just transition framework came out of trade union organizing and environmental justice when anti-globalization movement was in its heyday in the late 90s. Some North American and European proponents of neoliberalism were luring the former colonies with the toxic elixir of stabilization, structural adjustment, and export-led growth. The blue-collar workers and environmentalists calling for economic and ecological transition at that time were well aware that it was tied to breaking down barriers related to race and class.

Fast forward more than two decades, and just transition in practice is as diverse as the communities implementing its core principle of replacing extractive economies with regenerative ones.¹² “We are inspired by many different forms of nonviolent direct action, from Ghandi to the civil rights movement, to the anti-apartheid movement, to the suffragettes,” said Esther Stanford-Xosei, a London-based African heritage climate justice and reparations activist with Extinction Rebellion’s Internationalist Solidarity Network. “We know that land grabbing and dispossession was and is connected to food plantation economies,” she explained, “and that extraction of resources in our homelands is Britain’s new form of colonization.”

Esther emphasized that healing a wounded planet must include reconciling the wrongs done to people in the process of breaking it down. This starts with reparations to those enslaved and killed by the colonial project. Esther does this work in her South London community through the Stop the Maangamizi! Campaign, which is targeted at the British parliamentary level by campaigning for the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry for Truth and Reparatory Justice.

“Food is a central issue that has been at the core of colonization, and our reparations lens starts with that history,” Esther explained, “There is a clear link from food to land to the ecocide that we are now witnessing.” For her, transforming the food system and reparations are intertwined. “Ecocide and genocide are interconnected processes that have targeted both African and Indigenous peoples,” said Esther, “so reparatory justice, including debt repudiation, has been advocated by racially and colonially oppressed peoples in the global North and South.”

Through a tightly woven social movement network, Esther sees intersectionality as the way forward.¹³ “It is also important for white communities to explore their struggles of land dispossession and class-based oppression of their working class,” she offered. “We are elevating our perspectives, solutions, and methodologies to merge our respective people’s rebellions,” Esther added, “and part of that work is winning hearts and minds in Europe.”

As Esther so powerfully described, common ideological stances of social justice movements are informed by class and identity; in turn, those ideologies feed into political strategies, like just transition. Khwezi Mabasa explained that food and climate movements need to build inside-outside strategies to see tangible outcomes

¹² For more information, please see: Climate Justice Alliance. “Just Transition: A Framework for Change”. Available at: climatejusticealliance.org/just-transition/.

¹³ For more information on intersectionality, please see: Woods, Deidre. “Invisible Women: Hunger, Poverty, Racism and Gender in the UK”. *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2019):27-32. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/invisible-women-hunger-poverty-racism-and-gender-uk.

in their work. “We must engage with the state, and also with corporate capital, since both are dispossessing people and undermining food sovereignty,” he said over the phone from South Africa, “from a strategic perspective, we need different pillars of organizing to transform the food system.”

Khwezi first found himself at the intersections of food and labor as a policy educator and coordinator in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU); today, he is pursuing doctoral work that is centered on a gendered analysis of South Africa’s contemporary agrarian crisis. His work cuts across alternative political economy, racial justice, and feminisms. “Black South African women have historically been subsistence farmers, and their work has basically sustained the social reproduction of the working class during Apartheid and even after it,” Khwezi explained. “This is important because their forgotten work is part of a broader livelihood strategy held up through community and household gardens,” he added.

South Africa’s position as a regional economic powerhouse, and the extractive activities that got it there, were not lost on Khwezi. He said that race is sometimes used as an economic weapon to make way for mining activities. The country’s platinum belt, for instance, has some of the highest concentrations of the precious metal in the world. “When big national and international corporations want a mining license, they must show that they are contributing to South Africa’s policy goals like racial redress, so they forge partnerships with the Black elite,” Khwezi said. “Some sections of the former oppressed become the oppressor,” he summarized.

Cape Agulhas, at the tip of the continent in South Africa not too far from where Khwezi lives, is the place where the oceans turn back on themselves. The warm waters of the Indian current meet the frigid ones rushing upward from the Antarctic and the two systems push against one another like dancers spinning from the energy of centripetal force. This oceanic choreography is as fluid and predictable as the life-cycles of humans and the social movements they construct to keep them moving. Such are the politics of generation.

“There is so much to deal with and we don’t have very much time,” said Chiara Sacchi, a youth activist with Jóvenes por el Clima (*Youth for Climate*) in Argentina. The more Chiara shared about what it means to be 18 years old and coming of age in the era of both climate chaos and a major pandemic, the more her voice boomed. “All of our problems in Argentina are systemic,” she explained, “and individual changes are not going to be enough, so we must demand public policies that can make a big change, from the root of the problem.”

Jóvenes por el Clima is separated by different interests into modules, and Chiara has joined two of them: climate change and rural areas. “Argentina is a country that is constantly using natural resources, through agribusiness, through deforestation, and through mining, but we are organizing as young people to stop this,” she said.

Chiara puts the principles of just transition into practice through her organizing work. One aspect of that work is chipping away at the industrial food system, to replace it with one where consumers in cities connect directly with small-scale producers in the countryside. “We are establishing a dialogue, and that works best when it starts from the municipal level, neighbor to neighbor, and this way we pres-

ent another vision that changes the game”, Chiara offered. “And then those big political moments open up, and we all get together and march on the capital and show our faces to the world,” she added.

SYNTHESIS

In this political moment that is as much delineated by an impending fallout as it is defined by the pandemic itself, an image of a painting by Filipino activist artist Federico ‘Boy’ Dominguez has been making its way through some virtual activist circuits. The painting depicts a scattering of boats assembled from different denominations of currency, adrift in a thrashing sea of exaggerated sapphire waves. It shows social stratification at its worst, where cartooned passengers nervously cling to the sides of their overcrowded paper boats; a closer look reveals other people abandoned alone in the violent sea waving in distress at those in the boats, signaling upwards towards relief. It serves as one of many reminders that whatever is going on right now is profoundly uneven.

Indeed, this political moment is a perfect storm of two opposing pressure systems, human health in an era of pandemic, and planetary health in the throes of climate change. Transformation is inevitable, but what that change looks like is up to us. Social justice movements that are already familiar with these kinds of shocks and slides, especially those working at the intersections of resource grabbing and climate change mitigation, have put forth some bold proposals about the shifts that are sorely needed to break the impasse.

Key among those are the frameworks of feminisms, agroecology, water, and just transition. These shifts were never conceptualized as silver bullets; they look different across scale and space, and vary according to factors such as race, class, gender, and generation that have been used as levers of oppression within the capitalist system. Each of the frames is focused on the centrality of territory and community control over it. And each of these reference points are linked to and reinforced by the others. For instance, feminisms are as much a part of just transitions as water is a component of agroecology.

From the painful jolts of globalization that defined the last two decades of the old millennium, to the convergences of crises that have characterized the first two decades of the new one, food sovereignty and climate justice movements have worked – increasingly so, together – to uphold the master frame of system change. The massive effort of changing the system was never intended to be an individualized one, like a mythological Atlas balancing the weight of the world over his shoulders. It is a highly collective and ongoing process that is exemplified by millions of little fires lighting up a moonless sky.



IN BRIEF

Social justice movements are using food sovereignty and climate justice as entry points for radical systemic overhaul. Although many grassroots organizations have historically worked by sector, activists are engaging in deep conversations to construct sophisticated convergences to win longstanding struggles for natural resources and solve multiple crises. These conversations show synergies within and across movements, the most vibrant of which are work on feminisms, agroecology, water, and just transition. This profound moment of political dialogue also unearths tensions, many of which are being addressed through an intersectional approach to alliance building that accounts for overlapping systems of oppression like race, class, and gender. Transformation is inevitable at this time of reverberating global economic and environmental shocks, but what that change looks like is up to us. As capitalism's descent into an unlivable future accelerates, social justice movements are showing humanity once more that another world is possible, necessary, and already in the works.



INTERVIEWEES

- Andrea Carmen, International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), Yaqui peoples;
- Arieska Kurniawaty, Solidaritas Perempuan, Indonesia;
- Chiara Sacchi, Jóvenes por el Clima (*Youth for Climate*), Argentina;
- Esther Stanford-Xosei, Extinction Rebellion Internationalist Solidarity Network (XRISN), United Kingdom;
- Fatou Camara, World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) fisheries working group, The Gambia;
- Janene Yazzie, International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), Diné peoples;
- Jesús Vázquez, Organización Boricuá de Agricultura Ecológica (Boricuá) / La Vía Campesina (LVC), and Climate Justice Alliance (CJA), Puerto Rico;
- Khwezi Mabasa, former Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) social policy coordinator, South Africa;
- Ruth Nyambura, African Ecofeminist Collective, Kenya;
- Saira Abbas¹⁴, Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), Palestine;
- Saulo Araujo, WhyHunger / U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance, United States;
- Tarcila Rivera Zea, Center of Indigenous Cultures of Peru (CHIRAPAQ) / Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas (ECMIA), Peru.

¹⁴ Name has been changed to maintain confidentiality.



KEY CONCEPTS

- Nurturing grassroots feminisms allows those most targeted by a system built on interlinked forms of oppression to construct what is necessary to replace it.
- Agroecology is a process of what needs to be done to restore balance through food sovereignty and climate justice, not a one-size-fits-all remedy.
- Sometimes treated as an afterthought in debates about natural resources, water must be addressed urgently and head on.
- Just transition encapsulates ways forward at the impasse of resource grabbing and climate change mitigation.



KEY WORDS

- Climate change
- Ecological destruction
- Climate justice
- Food sovereignty
- Feminisms
- Agroecology
- Water
- Just transition
- Agribusiness
- Corporate power
- Capitalism
- Racism
- Patriarchy

