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**Articulating Climate Justice in Copenhagen: antagonism, the commons and solidarity**

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**Abstract**

This paper assesses how the emergence of discourses of climate justice shaped the diverse mobilisations that opposed the Copenhagen Climate Talks in December, 2009. The paper engages with three particularly significant aspects of climate justice. Firstly, we argue that climate justice involves an antagonistic framing of climate politics which breaks with attempts to construct climate change as a 'post-political' issue. Secondly, we suggest that climate justice involves the formation of pre-figurative logics of political activity, especially in relation to commoning. Thirdly, we contend that climate justice politics is generative of solidarities between differently located struggles and these solidarities have the potential to shift the terms of debate on climate change. Bringing these into conversation can *sharpen* what climate justice means for practice and political strategy, and we conclude with offering some indications here.

**Keywords:** climate change, contentious politics, post-political, prefigurative politics

## Contentious Copenhagen

On the 12<sup>th</sup> December 2009, 100,000 people marched through the streets of Copenhagen, Denmark to protest against/ lobby the United Nations ‘COP 15’ negotiations. Protesters marked their resistance to the solutions being proposed by official negotiators and marched to the Bella Centre where the negotiations were taking place. They protested the failure of governments to take meaningful, urgent and coordinated policy approaches to address climate change. They also contested the neo-liberal, market logics being promoted in the negotiations as tools for solving the climate crisis. Protesters refused to view climate change politics in isolation, but linked issues of climate change to critiques of the global economic crisis. One of the recurrent slogans of the week- was ‘if the climate was a bank it would be saved!’ The march was subject to severe police repression. Despite this being an overwhelmingly peaceful march there were over 900 arrests. There were reports of those detained being pepper sprayed in the face while held in cages.

The demonstration formed part of a coordinated attempt by social movements, grassroots activists and campaigns from the across the world to take action on and challenge the various processes and policies contributing to climate change. For the duration of the UN meeting, activists held an alternative ‘climate summit’, staged a range of protests and direct actions across the city, and created a variety of autonomous ‘free’ spaces throughout central Copenhagen in which activists met, ate, slept and planned actions. Such activist infrastructures were familiar to those associated with earlier ‘alter-globalisation’ protests. The Copenhagen mobilisations were marked by the emergence of ‘climate justice’ as a key framing and mobilising discourse which, we argue, articulated a new political agenda for mobilising climate activism.

While the presence of justice in contentious politics has been a leitmotif for alter-globalisation and anti-poverty activists (e.g. Notes from Nowhere, 2003; Juris, 2008;

Routledge and Cumbers, 2009), as well as certain environmental campaigns (e.g. Churchill, 1993; Cutter, 1995; Rhodes, 2003; Schlosberg, D. 2007), the mobilisations in Copenhagen were important because of the emergence, within the discourse of climate justice of three co-constitutive tendencies – antagonism, the common(s), and solidarity. In this paper we will argue that these are important because they pose direct challenges to the de-politicization of climate change through the ‘post-political’ turn and the primacy given to technological and scientific approaches to climate change (e.g. Swyngedouw, 2007; 2010); and are suggestive of the importance of thinking productively and critically about what is at stake in strategies to tackle climate change and how they are framed, positioned and articulated. In short, climate justice “brings people into an antagonistic relation with capital” especially through “the active creation of different ways of organising existence” (Building Bridges Collective, 2010: 83)

Our three key arguments are as follows. First, it is necessary to position climate justice activism in relation to broader antagonisms around uneven and exploitative social and environmental relations, as well as broader trajectories of contestation of neoliberal variants of capitalism. This kind of antagonistic politics is crucial as debates on recent economic and ecological crises have often neglected to engage with the importance of the ongoing contestation of neo-liberalism (see Blackburn, 2008, Gowan, 2008). We are interested in exploring in what ways and with what successes a politics of climate change attempts to contest the unequal geographies of neo-liberal globalisation.

Second, the antagonisms within climate justice activism are generative of actions to create, defend and expand the common(s), especially given the dispossessions and attacks on common lands and ways of life that are being undertaken across the globe. These actions are antagonistic to narrowly conceived environmentalisms which over-privilege managerial, scientific and technological rationality as the principle approaches to climate change (e.g. Porritt, 2007; Stern, 2006).

Third, various and diverse practices of solidarity are shaped through climate justice activism. We recognise that the ‘global’ commons have been appropriated disproportionately by wealthy elites, transnational corporations and the developed world, and that this dynamic is generating new forms of antagonism, often manifested as social movement actions and campaigns, that in turn generate forms of solidarity that extend beyond the local (e.g. Routledge, 2003a; Featherstone, 2008; Juris, 2008; Routledge and Cumbers, 2009). In this sense, commoning as a spatial and social practice is generative of new solidarities that articulate maps of (climate) grievance (see Featherstone, 2003).

The next section of this paper outlines in more detail these three tendencies that deepen our understanding of climate justice activism. We then trace the contours of antagonism, commoning and solidarity as they were articulated during the Copenhagen climate justice mobilisations. This draws on our personal and collective experiences participating in that convergence. Such experiences shed light on how these tendencies are ever present in the ongoing attempts to effect contentious politics of climate justice. Bringing these into conversation can *sharpen* what climate justice means for practice and political strategy. We conclude with offering some indications as to what this might mean.

### *Understanding Climate Justice: Antagonisms, Commons, Solidarities*

#### *The emergence of climate justice*

This paper is centrally concerned with an emerging literature on climate justice (e.g. Page, 2006; Roberts and Parks, 2007; Parks and Roberts, 2010; Angus, 2009). While this is intimately bound up with a broader set of conceptual debates and activist mobilisations around social and ecological justice, the latter do not feature in this paper as they have been covered in detail elsewhere (see for example, Agyeman, 2009; Holifield, Porter and Walker, 2009). Instead, we are interested in how the use of justice in

climate politics adds new complexity energy and contestations to established social and environmental justice debates and activism. Putting justice into climate politics has created new opportunities for social movements in the global south to reinforce the intersections between local environmental resources and changes in ecosystems and colonialism, neoliberalism and hyper-marginalisation (e.g. Martinez-Alier, 2002, Routledge, 1993, 2003b). Thinking climate politics in justice terms has also opened up new possibilities for thinking through and acting upon how environmental inequalities and injustices intersect with geographically uneven power relations (Harvey, 1996 Agyeman et al, 2007; Wolch, 2007 e.g. Beckerman and Pasek, 2001; Page, 2006; Roberts and Parks, 2006 (see Hollifield et al, 2009; Bickerstaff et al., 2009). Most promisingly, it has reinvigorated a language for highlighting unequal and exploitative local and global class relations and bringing capitalism back into the equation. As Castree (2010: 186) states: the ‘first’ and ‘second’ contradictions of capitalism have at last manifested themselves simultaneously and on a planetary scale.

Briefly defined, climate justice refers to principles of democratic accountability and participation, ecological sustainability and social justice and their combined ability to provide solutions to climate change. Such a notion focuses on the interrelationships between, and addresses the roots causes of, the social injustice, ecological destruction and economic domination perpetrated by the underlying logics of pro-growth capitalism. As climate justice has emerged as a motivating frame for social movements, environmental campaigners and non-governmental organisations, a number of common principles have been articulated not least the recognition of the ecological debt owed by countries in the Global North to those in the Global South. For example, the ‘justice’ aspect of recent climate activism foregrounds the uneven and persistent patterns of ecological neo-colonialism, eco-imperialism and neoliberal capitalism whereby wealthier countries owe poorer ones an ‘ecological debt’ as a result of the historical legacy of uneven use of fossil fuels and exploitation of raw materials and contemporary patterns of

uneven environmental damage through offshoring, the export of waste and energy intensive lifestyles and supply chains in the west. (see Andersson and Lindroth, 2001; Muradian and Martinez-Alier, 2001a, 2001b; Muradian *et al*, 2002; Accion Ecologica, 2003; Martinez-Alier, 2003). Clearly, this insertion of justice is far from simple or unproblematic. Justice can just as easily be used as the latest movement preoccupation and be mobilised to imply a range of potential future scenarios policies, values, and political intents. Who wouldn't want a more just climate?

While we are interested in the mobilisation of a climate justice discourse in Copenhagen, the term emerged and developed through a broader constellation of events including the Bali Principles of Climate Justice, 2002; the formation of the Climate Justice Now! (CJN) network in Bali, Indonesia, during the COP14 negotiations in 2007; the Durban Group for Climate Justice; and the 'Climate Justice Action' (CJA) network as an organising platform prior to the Copenhagen mobilisations. Subsequently these ideas have been taken forward through the Declaration of the Klimaforum (the alternative climate forum held in Copenhagen), and the major 'Reclaim Power' action which sought to actively disrupt the convention (discussed below); and most recently the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, during April 2010 and the mobilisations during the COP 16 in Cancun.<sup>1</sup> What the rest of this article charts are the ways in which climate justice, as a call to action and a discursive device to understand the present crisis, generates novel forms of contestation based on antagonisms, commoning and solidarities, which allow us reject the seductive arguments of the post-political and envision relocalisation in more radically political ways.

### *Antagonisms*

Positioning a politics of climate change in relation to unequal and contested geographies of power generates ways of framing climate change politics in terms of antagonism.

Debates around climate change have frequently isolated processes like carbon emission and global warming from the unequal social and environmental relations upon which neo-liberal globalisation depends (Giddens, 2009). Moreover, social movements and other grassroots initiatives opposing dominant responses to climate change are also seen as rather marginal to the politics of the current conjuncture (Blackburn, 2007, Panitch and Gindin, 2010). Engaging with political movements that have foregrounded those unequal social and environmental relations changes the terms of debate on the relations between politics and climate change. Movements that have engaged in struggles in relation to unjust environments have come to issues of climate change through a longstanding engagement with antagonistic environmental politics.

The alter-globalisation mobilisations, such as the iconic mobilisations against the World Trade Organisation in Seattle, were able to bring the unequal relations of power produced through neo-liberal globalisation into contestation. Moreover, in opposition to Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004), such mobilizations demonstrated that it is possible to make the power relations that make up neo-liberal globalisation localisable and contestable (e.g. see Notes from Nowhere, 2003; Starr, 2005; Featherstone, 2008; Juris, 2008; Routledge and Cumbers, 2009). This has important implications for the contestation of dominant responses to climate change. Erik Swyngedouw has argued that climate change has been constructed as a consensual, post-political issue (Swyngedouw, 2007; 2010). This fits into long histories of left critiques of environmentalism for ignoring contested power relations (see for example Enzensberger, 1974).

Swyngedouw usefully foregrounds some of the ways in which climate change has been actively de-politicised. A 'carbon consensus' has emerged shaped by organisations such as the 10:10 campaign, 'a movement of people, schools, businesses and organisations cutting their emissions 10% at a time' (10:10 campaign website). Such campaigns are focused on the rather apolitical task of how to reduce carbon emissions from the atmosphere and avoid critical discussion of the economic and political

institutional arrangements used to do so (Pusey and Russell 2010). This ‘consensus’ on how to deal with climate change is providing new opportunities for ‘rebooting’ capitalism, creating new opportunities for accumulation, overcoming present failures and increasing market penetration and resource/land privatisation (Swyngedouw, 2007; 2010). Swyngedouw goes as far as to argue that ‘the environmental question in general, and the climate change argument and how it is publicly staged in particular, has been and continues to be one of the markers through which post-politicization is wrought’ (Swyngedouw, 2010: 216).

There are, however, important tensions in such arguments, not least a rather limited engagement with the actually existing forms of contestation that are emerging in the current conjuncture. While there are key attempts to de-politicize key issues such as climate change, to argue that these are the only ways that such politics is being articulated is reductive. The protests over the summer of 2009 around the Vestas’ workers who were made redundant at a factory making wind turbines in Newport, Isle of Wight, demonstrated important ways in which climate change politics can be generated in antagonistic ways (Milne, 2009). The red-green alliances that developed around the Vestas dispute linked climate change politics to an innovative attempt to politicise the economic crisis; a crisis that has been rather successfully articulated to the political right. Secondly, this work has tended to adopt a rather nation-centred account of the political (Mouffe, 2005, □ □ ek, 1999, 2005). Swyngedouw, for example, fails to engage with the ways in which contestation to climate change, such as the organising in advance of the UN Meeting on Climate Change in Copenhagen, 2009 and the networked constituencies of activists who coalesced there, exceeds, unsettles, undermines attempts to contain contestation within the nation (as the alter-globalization protests did earlier; see Featherstone, 2003, 2008; Routledge, 2003a; Routledge and Cumbers, 2009). This is an important thread in climate change politics that we will return to below.

Locating climate change politics in relation to the ongoing contestation of neo-



liberalization in diverse parts of the globe opens up different ways of understanding such interventions. The ways that these geographies of power are contested frequently produce antagonistic politics of climate change. They also produce a set of political interventions that can usefully be described as ‘environmentalisms of the poor’ (Martinez-Alier, 2003) that contest assumptions that environmental alliances and tactics are a middle class privilege (Featherstone, 2007, Martinez-Alier, 2003; Martinez-Alier and Temper, 2007). Connecting environmentalisms to the unequal social and environmental relations made through neo-liberal practices are absolutely central to the forms of climate change organising/ politics generated in relation to climate justice. Thus climate change activists have constructed particular maps of grievance as they bring processes of climate change into contestation. These cuts into the contested geographies of power associated with climate change represented most recently by the Camp for Climate Action’s targeting of the Royal Bank of Scotland in 2010 due to their funding of extractive fossil fuel industries. These campaigns bring together different activists in different parts of the world and challenge the terms of climate change politics. In particular they contest the technocratic and consensual politics generated through mainstream environmental politics.

These antagonistic interventions in climate change politics generate perspectives which are antithetical to further capital expansion, which develop movements which do not just want to tackle climate change, but challenge the unequal social and environmental relations which carbon emissions are embedded in and locate it within the broader crisis of contemporary capitalism. Such antagonisms are plural. The mobilising frame of climate justice is being used by different groups in a variety of ways, and their tactics and strategies vary enormously. Nevertheless, the spatially extensive connections that are being forged through these movements can be productive and can shape movements and mobilisations around climate change that refuse the parochialisms of some climate change politics. There is nonetheless a sense of important generative

connections being worked through these overlapping campaign and solidarity networks, especially in the discussion of what a climate justice politics involves. These movements also, crucially, practice a prefigurative politics. As well as opposing unequal social and environmental relations they also generate forms of alternative political practices through their organising and mobilisation. In essence, the antagonism underpinning climate justice mobilisations is not simply towards certain aspects of injustice, it is also an antagonism over how life is produced and reproduced and whether it is produced in common or not.

### *Common(s)*

Central to these antagonistic articulations of climate change politics has been the creation, defence and expansion of the 'common(s)'. We use this term to refer to both the 'common' and the 'commons'. The former refers to the social process of being-in-common, a social relationship of the commoners who build, defend and reproduce the commons. The latter refers to those resources that are collectively owned or shared between and among populations as well as socio-nature - the air, water, soil, plants etc. of nature as well as the results of social (re)production and interaction such as knowledge, languages, codes, information (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Building Bridges Collective, 2010). The common(s), then, are both territorial entity and social relationship and shape how and why antagonisms are articulated, and form part of the discursive terrain of antagonistic alternatives.

Dispossessions from poor, peasant and indigenous peoples' of vital resources and attacks on their livelihoods have generated moves to defend the common(s), which in turn generate further antagonisms against those class interests which seek to undermine them. The common(s) and the process of commoning have emerged as an alternative political keyword of our times. As De Angelis notes:

*Commons suggest alternative, non-commodified means to fulfil social needs, e.g. to obtain social wealth and to organise social production. Commons are necessarily created and sustained by 'communities' i.e. by social networks of mutual aid, solidarity, and practices of human exchange that are not reduced to the market form (De Angelis, 2003: 1).*

The commons consists of a shared interest or value that is produced through communal relations. It potentially forms the ethical coordinates of an alternative politics when common 'wealth' (e.g. land, water, seeds, air, food, biodiversity, cultural practices) that provides direct input into social and physical well-being, is faced with 'enclosure' in the form of the destruction of physical environments and the privatization of resources and genetic stocks (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 95-97, 237). Protecting this 'commonwealth' (Hardt and Negri, 2009) is central to generating new forms of antagonism and solidarity. Mobilising around the common are productive moments that build commonalities, group identity, shared understandings, and repertoires of tactics. This productive moment can be understood through the idea of commoning (Linebaugh, 2008, De Angelis, 2003).

Recent work on accumulation by dispossession (e.g. Harvey, 2003) or enclosure has tended to generate capital-centred accounts of such processes where enclosure becomes theorised as dynamic and processual and the spatial practices associated with commons/ commoning become theorised as more settled and 'merely' defensive. This is related to a long history of seeing commoning spaces as rather bounded, localised and particular (Thompson, 1991, Marx, 1973). Peter Linebaugh's account of 'commoning' is helpful in this regard. In his *Magna Carta Manifesto* he advocates a use of the term common as a verb as well as a noun. This is useful in situating commoning as a process (Linebaugh, 2008). This is a condition of possibility for thinking about the dynamic spatial practices constituted through commoning, rather than positioning the commons as secondary to more dynamic practices of capital accumulation.

Rather than a simplified, monolithic political imaginary, then commoning can be thought of as relational and understood through becoming, rather than through fixed endpoints. As Grosz comments: “[W]hat, for example, would politics be like if it were not directed to the attainment of certain goals, the coming to fruition of ideals or plans, but rather required a certain abandonment of goals?” (Grosz, 1999: 11). Commoning can be allied to a rejection of strategy that is built on essentialist understandings of institutions, political agency or spatial practice. The common also suggests resistance as a productive moment in the ‘everyday’, not only ‘after’ the moment of oppression. The common creates a new vocabulary, social and spatial practices and repertoires of resistance which activists are creatively using to challenge a problem as complex as climate change.

Commoning evokes a political imaginary which is simultaneously anti, despite and post capitalist (e.g. Gibson-Graham, 2006; Holloway, 2010). Activists accept that commoning will weave together practices and values that will sometimes feel embedded or trapped in capitalist ways of doing things, and at other times will be more post or anti-capitalist. But they continue to move forward acknowledging it is always going to be contradictory, interstitial, and in the making. This is not to say that building commons are likely, easy or free of diverse cross cutting relations of power. What is crucial is the prefigurative character of such practices (i.e. they practice the future that they wish to see) and the potential to generate solidarities (Franks, 2003).

Dynamic accounts of the spatial and political constitution of the commons can be productive for engagements with alternative political strategies. We contend that interrogating the spatial constitution of the common and commoning can be a useful project in this regard (see also Vasudevan, Jeffrey, McFarlane, 2008). Too often the spaces of the common are merely assumed to be local and particular, and not thought as dynamic, formed relationally and as generative. Hardt and Negri’s recent engagements with the constitution of the common in *Commonwealth* are suggestive here. They position

the common as a form of 'bio-political production' and envision the commons as generative of new relations between people and things (Hardt and Negri, 2009). This emphasis on the commons as a form of bio-political production, like Linebaugh's stress on commoning, is indispensable for developing a processual account of the commons. Though their account is structured by a problematic elision of the multitude, autonomy and the common that closes down a focus on the multiple geographies of power shaped through commoning (2004; 2009).

This creates significant resources for thinking about the spaces of commoning because frequently spatially extensive networks and the commons become counterposed. Craig Calhoun, for example, opposes transnational politics with the 'home feeling' associated with the moral economy (Calhoun, 2002). Paul Gilroy's suggestive account of the formation of 'moral economy' through the routed translocal cultures of the Black Atlantic, however, situates the common and the moral economy as a product of intersections, connections and exchanges (Gilroy, 2010). This positions the common as a central demand/ practice of translocal political networks, rather than as something which is necessarily bounded or particular. Engaging with the spatialities constituted through commoning practices, then, is central to engaging with the alternatives mobilised through movements, networks, and translocal alliances for climate justice. It is to the forging of the solidarities necessary for such mobilisations that we now turn.

### *Solidarities*

*Solidarity means fighting for our own autonomy at the same time as we struggle against corporations and the relationships of capital that exploit people everywhere. (CJA, 2010: 1)*

Solidarities are shaped through the ongoing contestation of spatially stretched power relations (Featherstone, 2008) and the construction and defence of the common. It is

crucial to understand how processes of relationality, connectivity, and commonality are enacted between places and organisations to understand the politics of extension and translation of place-based interests and experiences concerning climate change (Katz, 2001). Struggles concerning climate justice require the forging of solidarities and mutual responsibilities between groups and communities, and the articulation of those rights within, between and beyond particular places. Solidarity here is less altruistic (i.e. based upon the worthiness of, and sympathy towards the suffering of distant others) than reciprocal (i.e. when activists in different groups draw connections between the suffering of others and their own plights or claims) and based upon shared threats or harm suffered as a consequence of common identities between activists (Reitan, 2007: 20-21). Solidarity is also based upon feelings and emotions (e.g. anger; passion; empathy; fear) that are amplified into senses of collective solidarity (see Chatterton et al 2008; Juris, 2008; Routledge forthcoming a), particularly when faced with the threats and uncertainties of climate change.

Examples of such spatially-extensive solidarities would be those manifested in more 'local' initiatives such as the Camp for Climate Action (in the UK) – that, while the outcome of organising at the local, regional and national level also sees the convergence of activists from beyond the U.K.; those more 'international' initiatives such as the mobilizations around the UN Meetings on Climate Change in Copenhagen in 2009; or the practices of *La Via Campesina* the international peasants and farmers network that comprise the convergence of multiple 'local' groups, projects and initiatives, in a variety of spatially extensive campaigns (see [www.viacampesina.org](http://www.viacampesina.org)).

The importance of such solidarities to political strategies around climate justice and activism cannot be underestimated. This is because there have been important debates over how practices of localisation are to be envisioned as responses to climate change. Some versions of localisation being produced through responses such as the transition town movement constitute what might be termed a 'new parochialism'. These

movements have had significant effects in shaping low carbon alternatives. They have also been significant in drawing in to political engagement, people who have traditionally not been engaged with activist subcultures. The particular practices of localisation they adopt, however, are limited in key ways. They have generally been rather silent about the relations of power that shape practices of localisation. Further, they have tended to generate practices of localisation in isolationist rather than solidaristic ways (Trapese, 2008).

A different and more politically productive approach to localisation has emerged through some aspects of the opposition to dominant responses to climate change. That is strategies of localisation that are envisioned and practiced directly as part of solidaristic alternatives (see also North and Featherstone, 2009). These strategies do not produce localisation in bounded or isolationist ways. Rather, they envision localisation as part of strategies to ‘trans-localize’<sup>2</sup>. This opens up the possibility of political alternatives that are about engagements in particular sites, often through what could be termed militant particularisms, but where the politics of such strategies are envisioned or generated as part of translocal political networks. This can be exemplified by the political strategies adopted by networks such as *La Via Campesina* (LVC), whose opposition to dominant responses to climate change has combined a commitment to the importance of localized forms of agriculture, and food sovereignty as an alternative to carbon-intensive agribusiness etc, with a focus on translocal circuits of opposition to neo-liberalization (Via Campesina, 2009).

Shared notions of climate justice have the potential to create common ground enabling different themes to be interconnected, and different political actors from different struggles and cultural contexts to join together in common struggle (della Porta *et al.* 2006). Indeed, Agyeman *et al* (2007) argue that an international climate justice movement has emerged and cite as evidence think tanks such as India’s Centre for Science and the Environment; international activist networks such as Rising Tide; U.S.

based policy groups such as EcoEquity; and Indigenous networks such as the U.S. based Indigenous Environmental Network. However, rather than a coherent climate justice ‘movement’ emerging we would argue that we are witnessing a range of overlapping, interacting, competing, and differentially-placed and resourced networks concerned with issues of climate change and differing understandings of climate justice (e.g. see Juris, 2004; Routledge and Cumbers, 2009).

‘Climate justice solidarities’ (Routledge, forthcoming b), refer to how shared ‘maps of grievance’ are constructed which link different activists involved in struggles over climate change (Featherstone, 2003). They bring together geographically, culturally, economically, and politically different and distant peoples and enable connections and alliances to be drawn that extend beyond the local and particular (Olesen, 2005). Such solidarities can shape the terms of debate of climate justice politics in significant ways. One key way these linkages and connections are articulated is through convergences such as the Copenhagen climate justice mobilisations. The next section develops a detailed analysis of how notions of antagonism, commons and solidarity were worked through the Copenhagen climate justice mobilisations.

### *Copenhagen’s Contentious Spaces*

The 15<sup>th</sup> UN Conference of Parties (COP) meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009 provided a fertile terrain to explore the development of the tendencies of antagonism, commons and solidarity within climate change politics. Indeed the protests were part of a broader reconfiguring of social movements’ local and translocal maps of grievance as a range of struggles whose campaigns and discourse had been focused on challenging dispossession; destructive development; and neoliberal economic policies were recast. Although such struggles have been conceived of as environmentalisms of the poor (Martinez Alier, 2003), as noted above, in Copenhagen it was apparent that a reconfiguration of struggles to embrace the issue of climate change was taking place.



Grassroots social movements have incorporated the issue of climate change into their repertoires of contention through a longstanding engagement with antagonistic politics of environments, and as the place-specific impacts of environmental change become more apparent. It is almost impossible to capture the diversity of those groups involved in climate justice politics, broadly defined, during the Copenhagen mobilisations. Climate Justice Now!, for example, is composed of several hundred members ranging from single organisations large networks and federations and coalitions. Climate Justice Action comprises a smaller number of groups, networks, organisations and collectives generally of a more radical and autonomous nature. Nevertheless, the trajectories of antagonism, common(s) and solidarity were important in shaping the construction of contentious climate change politics within the city. In this section we trace the tendencies of antagonism, commoning and solidarities as they played out within three different activist spaces that constituted a significant part of the terrain of contention within Copenhagen.

### *The Spaces of Climate Justice*

The mobilisations in Copenhagen were the culmination of diverse forms of translocal organising. This included the Camp for Climate Action in Kent, August 2008, and continuing through the 'call to action' of the newly formed Climate Justice Action network the following month. A number of international meetings were held during 2008 and 2009 to develop both network goals and actions focused around the COP15 meeting. The prelude to the COP15 was characterised by translocal activism and networking. For example, on 24th October 2009, a global day of action organised by the 350 campaign saw 5200 actions in 181 countries unite in a call for an equitable and meaningful solution to the climate crisis (White, 2009). Immediately prior to the mobilisations in Copenhagen, a "From Trade to Climate" Caravan was conducted, conceived of at one of the preparation meetings of the Climate Justice Action (CJA) network in Copenhagen prior to the UN summit. The Caravan linked the mobilisation

against the WTO summit in Geneva (November, 2009) with the Copenhagen protests. It consisted of 60 representatives of grassroots movements from around the world who engaged in meetings, protests and exchanges *en route* from Geneva to Copenhagen.

A diverse range of civil society actors converged upon Copenhagen for the mobilisations against the COP15 Summit, that included European autonomist groups and direct action networks such as Camp for Climate Action, the CJA and CJN networks; grassroots social movements from the Global South exemplified by the presence of LVC members; a range of NGOs from around the world; some trades unions; and assorted concerned individuals.

There were principally five different spaces through which the events of the week unfolded, three of which will be discussed in detail. Two were spaces that predominantly represented the post-political, capitalist and techno-scientific positions that we mentioned earlier. First, there was the space of states and officially sanctioned lobbying NGOs that attended the COP15 meeting that took place at the city's main convention centre, the Bella Centre. Much has already been written about this meeting, the hopes attached to it, its disputes and its failures (eg Klein, 2009) and it is not within the remit of this paper to address this space in much detail, only insofar as it is relevant to the spaces of contentious politics discussed below.

Second, there was the space of corporate and business interests. Transnational corporations turned the summit into an opportunity to present big technology, science and market-based approaches as the solutions to the problematic of climate change. Through advertising billboards, the city was turned into an advertising area to promote and deepen a pro-growth, market based response to climate change, in part to secure legitimation for a further round of green capitalist accumulation. For example, opposite the Danish government building a giant billboard proclaimed: 'Trying to cut CO<sub>2</sub> now isn't going to work' and directed viewers to the Copenhagen Consensus Center website ([www.fixtheclimate.com](http://www.fixtheclimate.com)). The Copenhagen Consensus Center provides policy-makers

with advice from ‘top economists’ on different ways to respond to climate change, including climate engineering, technology-led policy responses, and technology transfers.

In particular, green capitalist accumulation strategies were embodied in the ‘Hopenhagen’ exhibition area in central Copenhagen, opposite the Tivoli Gardens. The area was dominated by a large, slowly revolving illuminated globe. Superimposed on the map of the earth was a tally of the global virtual protesters that have signed up to the Hopenhagen website to give hope a chance at the UN climate talks. As the globe turned the Siemens logo appeared off of the southeast coast of Africa. Surrounding the globe were a series of illuminated green neon booths that provided the public with information about climate change and a range of corporate-financed solutions. A stage was set up for music and other artistic performances. The Hopenhagen website discussed ‘The business of hope’ as articulated by the Hopenhagen sponsors Coca Cola; Siemens; and German software corporation SAP.

The other three spaces were spaces of contentious action: an alternative climate summit, ‘autonomous’ spaces, and actions in the streets themselves. The articulation of antagonisms, common(s) and solidarities informed and shaped these spaces albeit in different ways.

The third space was an alternative climate summit, the KlimaForum, which took place in a sports centre in the middle of the city centre. This became a focus for a range of voices largely antagonistic to the official UN process. The Forum provided an open space for individuals, grassroots movements and NGOs from around the world. It was organized by a wide array of Danish (31) and international grassroots activists (63). In particular, the Forum provided the space where a diversity of narratives, especially from the Global South, concerning the effects of climate change on communities could be voiced. Indeed, the forum provided a space for the articulation of grievances, and reconfigured antagonisms concerning a range of climate justice campaigns.

A Tibetan delegation from the ‘Third Pole’ network, for example, gave a

presentation in the Forum that discussed the forcible relocation of Tibetan nomads by the Chinese authorities from the grasslands of the Tibetan plateau into fenced model villages. This struggle over a primarily human rights issue – where the traditional ways of life of the nomads were threatened as their mobility was curtailed – was reconfigured as a climate justice issue since the grasslands upon which the nomads lived were carbon sinks that were themselves threatened by the construction of the model villages.

The Forum was also an informational commons that over its twelve days featured 202 debates, seventy exhibitions, and forty-three films covering a wide range of climate-related issues. It provided a space for bringing together activists from different struggles. In so doing it forged connections and bonds of trust between activists that are the prelude to the building of solidarities around the issue of climate justice: not least through the articulation of the common ground exemplified by the Klimaforum Declaration. This declaration was signed by 466 civil society organisations (predominantly NGOs), and articulated a series of series of principles around which different campaigns concerned with issues of climate justice, located in different local and national realities, could forge common ground as the basis for translocal solidarity and cooperation. This declaration included a range of antagonistic demands: leaving fossil fuels in the ground; reasserting peoples' and community control over production; re-localising food production; massively reducing over-consumption, particularly in the Global North; respecting indigenous and forest people's rights; and recognising the ecological and climate debt owed to the people's in the Global South by the societies of the Global North necessitating the making of reparations ( see <http://declaration.klimaforum.org/>).

The demands for a climate debt owed to the peoples in the Global South by the societies of the Global North as articulated in the KlimaForum declaration is an example of the recognition of the importance of the common. Conceptualised as an attempt to balance the severe disequilibrium in emissions produced in the industrialised countries whose

consequences are predominantly experienced in the Global South, the notion of climate debt necessitates reparations in terms of, for example, the removal of patents on technologies so that they are free and available for all.

Critiques of mobilizations of climate debt argue that it perpetuates a system that assigns the same logic of commodification to the biosphere and ecosystems that carbon-trading markets are predicated upon (Simons and Tonak, 2010). As an antagonistic issue climate debt, however, is not reducible to simple financial transactions that place a monetary value on the damage done to people's lives after centuries of human and resource exploitation. Rather, it dislocates the dominant agenda, reminding people of who is responsible for industrialised capitalism and the current bio-crisis. During the Climate Reparations demonstration outside the Bella Centre, on the 14<sup>th</sup> December, speakers from activist groups based in the Philippines, Senegal, India and Brazil and beyond, for example, used climate debt as a way of articulating climate change in relation to the unequal histories of colonialism and continuing global inequalities. Demonstrators demanded 'reparations from highly industrialised countries for their climate debt' and urged that the World Bank and its sister institutions 'stay out of climate finance' (Jubilee South, 2009).

The fourth space comprised several autonomous sites that were established across the city to house the huge influx of activists and protesters from across Europe and beyond. In these spaces different antagonisms concerning climate justice were articulated. Unlike the KlimaForum, a space of predominantly reformist NGO politics, the autonomous spaces embodied what Franks (2003) has termed a 'direct action ethic', characterised by anarchist and autonomist politics. These spaces embodied the practice of commoning, providing free communal sleeping spaces, kitchens, info points, indymedia centres, convergence spaces and legal information and support spaces and included the longstanding Free state of Christiania, the large ecovillage/squatted free town located on the east of the city centre for over three decades (see Figure 1). In these

spaces actions during the protests were planned, information provided, media reports written, and solidarities forged between activists from different local and national contexts. For example, one space served as the location where LVC activists from across the world who had arrived in Copenhagen could sleep, eat, and hold strategy and campaign meetings.

**Figure 1. Map showing the activist spaces in the COP15 at Copenhagen**

The Copenhagen mobilisations built upon connections forged during the alter-globalisation mobilisations, to develop new forms of solidarity, as activists from different countries and continents shared concerns, tactics and ideas for tackling climate change. In particular, strategies of localisation have been deployed by social movements in order to forge solidarities. In particular, struggles around the common(s) have been deployed as part of social movement strategies to trans-localise. For example, LVC's campaign of food sovereignty attempts to connect up different place-based struggles over land and water commons around the world through networks of translocal solidarity. This generates connections between movements in the 'Global North' and 'Global South' and vitiates against parochialism and chauvinism. While many of the struggles represented in Copenhagen were local struggles against exploitation, dispossession, industrial expansion etc. rather than 'climate' struggles *per se* – and this certainly applies to the participant movements within LVC – climate justice was considered an appropriate notion around which such diverse struggle might mutually organise.

However, the forging of such translocal alliances was not smooth and generated diverse tensions. The differences between NGOs and grassroots social movement activists from the 'Global South' became evident illustrating the contested practices generated through solidarities. These tensions can be illustrated by the barracking of Tadzio Mueller, of the Climate Justice Action network, and Naomi Klein by some

activists for arguing for a non-violent approach to the ‘mass action’ at the Bella Centre. Klein and Mueller’s defence of non-violence depended though on a rather troubling mobilisation of activists from the ‘Global South’. They argued that non-violent strategies were necessary to ‘protect’ activists from the ‘global South’ with more vulnerable visa privileges or juridical status. This positioned such activists in paternalistic and unitary ways and they became ‘represented’ in these debates rather than being allowed to shape the terms of discussion. Tracing the political trajectories formed between alter-globalisation movements and climate activism across the class, gender and racial fractures and inequalities of the Global North and Global South is significant in this regard. The relationship of different civil society actors such as grassroots communities and social movements, to state and capital is also shapes such trajectories in significant ways.

The final space of activism was the streets of Copenhagen which became the focus of numerous demonstrations, skirmishes, stand offs with the police, preventative arrests, street theatre, exhibitions, interventions and stunts. This was the space of antagonism *par excellence* but also a space wherein solidarity between activists was practiced, and claims to the commons articulated. For example, on 12th December 2009, the Climate Justice demonstration was held that we referred to at the beginning of this article; wherein activists demanded major systemic change to address the issue of climate change; the Farmer’s Action on December 13<sup>th</sup> led by LVC was both a protest against industrial agriculture (exemplified by the global meat industry) and an articulation of LVC’s campaign of food sovereignty; and the ‘Resistance is Ripe! Agricultural Day of Action on the 15<sup>th</sup> December, focused on the enclosure of peasant and indigenous commons around the world.

The streets were also the primary space of police action on behalf of the Danish state. Prior to the protests, the Danish parliament had passed legislation that gave the police sweeping powers of ‘pre-emptive’ arrest and extended custodial sentences for acts of civil disobedience. Under the new powers, Danish police were able to detain people

for up to twelve hours whom they suspected might break the law in the near future, and protesters could also be jailed for forty days if they were charged with hindering the police. Although the climate justice protests were largely peaceful and law abiding, the levels of police violence, provocation and intimidation were excessive. For example, on the Climate Justice demonstration on 12th December 2009, the police waded into the legal march, split off a section of the crowd and arrested them *en masse*. There were 968 arrests with virtually no charges pressed. Activists were handcuffed and forced to sit on the ground in cold temperatures and in uncomfortable positions for several hours. Activists were also held in cages and some were pepper-sprayed by the police while caged. Elsewhere in the city, activist convergence spaces such as those at Ragnhildegade were raided by police and hundreds of activists detained. The autonomous district of Christiania – where a range of legal events and meetings had been organised by activist groups and networks – was surrounded by police one night and tear gassed. The place was shut down with free movement in or out prohibited. This emphasises the work that is done to push contestation out of dominant constructions of the political.

The articulation of antagonism and solidarity *par excellence* took place on the 16th December 2009, when a global day of action was organised to demand ‘system change not climate change’. This was the ‘Reclaim Power’ action, which was the product of the coming together of diverse groups and networks involved in the mobilisations (particularly CJA). The action involved combining an inside and outside strategy: the activists on the outside would attempt to enter the Bella Centre in order to reclaim the people’s power, while certain the delegates on the inside (such as those from Bolivia and Tuvalu) would disrupt the UN sessions in protest at the injustice and inadequacy of the UN process, and meet the outside group in order to hold a ‘People’s Assembly’ and provide a dramatic show of solidarity.

On a bitterly cold and snowy December morning, the march was made up of a patchwork of activists, unionists and NGOs from across the world. There were activists



from LVC, CJA and CJN; from NGOs such as Friends of the Earth, Indigenous Environmental Network, and the Rainforest Action Group; and autonomous climate activists from Germany, Denmark, USA and the UK. Banners read: 'Reclaim power: fight the system', 'system change not climate change', and 'change the politics not the climate'.

A large sound system and PA unit formed the centre of the walking demonstration as it weaved its way through the suburbs of Copenhagen towards the Bella Centre. The walking march was to arrive at the main gates of the Bella Centre at midday, in order to undertake the People's Assembly. What happened in practice was rather more humble, as huge numbers of police divided the protestors, arrested many, stopped delegates getting out of the conference compound, confiscated the truck and speakers and used police dogs, tear gas and pepper spray to disperse the crowd. The conference delegates were prevented from joining the demonstration. In the end the remaining nucleus of the Reclaim Power protest were able to hold a small People's Assembly, with activists from across the world taking turns to make demands for a response to climate change which also respected food sovereignty, indigenous rights and justice for the world's poor. As Olivier De Marcellus from the From Trade to Climate Caravan stated:

*The critical point is that this Assembly was not a chance and fleeting moment. It marked a longer term convergence of different networks and political cultures: global networks of movements and progressive NGOs like Climate Justice Now and Our World Is Not For Sale, networks composed more of young northern activists like Climate Justice Action, the Climate Camps, old Peoples' Global Action bands, etc... since the Zapatistas called forth the anti-globalisation movement 13 years ago, there has never been such a broad alliance of organisations calling for 'system change'*<sup>3</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that there was a significant amount of movement and exchange between these different sites. NGOs, journalists and friendly politicians who predominantly attended the Bella Centre also talked and held workshops at the KlimaForum. Anarchists and activists from the autonomous spaces protested on the streets and also attended the KlimaForum. The streets of Copenhagen became a site of engagement for folk from these various constituencies making their way around the city to official events and demonstrations.

While the summit at Copenhagen was only a brief moment in the development of an antagonistic climate politics, it provided significant momentum that has been led to further events. The CJA network has held a series of further European-wide meetings. In April 19<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010, the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth was held in Cochabamba, Bolivia. This conference, planned to become an annual event, was called by the Bolivian government and included a range of social movement activists from around the world, and has created a space where many climate justice concerns can be further discussed and worked upon. The inter-ministerial in April 2010 in Bonn and the 16<sup>th</sup> COP meeting held in Cancun, Mexico also became key sites of climate justice activism.

### **System Change not Climate Change: foregrounding antagonism, commons and solidarity in climate change politics**

There were significant tensions surrounding the articulation of climate justice during the mobilisations in Copenhagen. There has been much subsequent criticism of the idea of climate justice from differing positions (Lynas, 2010, Simons and Tonak, 2010). The mobilisations in Copenhagen, however, have key implications for the directions of climate politics based on justice. Here we draw out particular implications for each of the three tendencies that we have outlined.

First, events in Copenhagen served to reintroduce and maintain an antagonism within climate change politics, posing a significant challenge to the dominant terms of the climate change debate, and building upon the antagonism long demonstrated by the alter-globalisation mobilisations, towards unaccountable global elites and their institutions. By making issues of justice central to climate change politics, climate change is constructed in antagonistic ways especially in relation to the neoliberal economic order and its current crisis. The antagonistic reframing of climate change politics was in no small part due to the injection of energy and ideas from activists from grassroots social movements in the Global South.

This is important because permeating the discourse of some civil society actors, not least NGOs, was what Pusey and Russell (2010) term the ‘carbon consensus’ and Swyngedouw (2010) has termed ‘carbon fetishism’, a post-political imaginary where the social relations of capitalism are replaced by a thing (i.e. CO<sub>2</sub>) as the object of resistance. The antagonistic re-framing of climate change politics in Copenhagen has served to question the politics of mainstream NGOs and their networks such as the Climate Action Network who have been actively engaged in the COP process, supporting market-based solutions to climate change such as carbon markets (Building Bridges Collective, 2010). In their place, antagonistic solutions have emerged (e.g. see KlimaForum declaration) that deny the law of the market and insist on a response to climate change based on dignity and justice. The momentum provided by the conference in Bolivia has been crucial to taking forward and maintaining this antagonism.

However, the articulation of such justice-based antagonism is riven by tensions and struggles over how climate justice is mobilised. There are multiple, shifting, and place-specific meanings assigned to climate justice and activists from different campaigns and political persuasions articulate and deploy climate justice frames in a range of ways (see Hollifield *et al*, 2009; Building Bridges Collective, 2010). The term climate justice is contested and can be mobilised to imply a range of potential future scenarios and key

differences in terms of policy, values, political intent and the (re)production of power and knowledge between governments of different states and between different civil society actors. Indeed, the term is used by movements and activists in diverse ways, from those who argue for regulatory or reformist agendas, to those who argue from more socialist and anti-capitalist positions. As a result antagonisms can be generated over ways of understanding and forming climate change politics. While the concept of climate justice contributes to an ecological critique of capitalism, through an understanding of how the process of endless accumulation is in contradiction to the planet's biophysical limits, more work remains to be done for it to become effective in linking up and expanding social struggles (Building Bridges Collective, 2010).

Second, the various activist spaces of the Copenhagen mobilisations highlighted the desire to create common spaces for debate and exchange that can develop new subjectivities and pose challenges to market-based solutions to climate change. For example, the People's Assembly was a demand to assemble in public and an antagonistic response to the global elite's private meeting. It represented a demand for a public, participatory democracy against the enclosure and privatisation of global political solutions to climate change. These common public spaces create new socio-spatial imaginaries that are anti-capitalist. These attempt to reach beyond solutions grounded in the public or private sectors, to create new forms of common rights, belonging, value and subjectivity.

This is important because new forms of international security measures and forms of governmentality can be perceived as a way to respond to the threat of climate change. This can be seen through crude instruments such as migration controls, but also in terms of arguments for carbon rationing. The scientific threat of climate change is being used in new ways to create a politics of containment and discourses of securitisation towards zones of under-development (REFERENCE).<sup>4</sup> What an approach based on the commons asks us to do is to interrogate the basis of the liberal international

state system based on the protection of individual rights, private property and ensuring the security of nation states, and to create new forms of antagonism towards emerging international frameworks to both trade carbon through markets and enclose indigenous, common lands.

Third, Copenhagen built upon connections forged during the alter-globalisation mobilisations, to develop new forms of solidarity, as activists from different countries and continents shared concerns, tactics and ideas for tackling climate change. These solidarities were productive. They had effects on the terms on which climate change was contested. The solidarities forged through the Copenhagen protests brought together different trajectories of resistance. Like the conduct of other alter-globalisation political activity this wasn't smooth or consensual. Rather, tensions over different political strategies and different ways of envisioning solidarity were generated. But this also emphasises the ways in which solidarity, rather than being a practice which constructs relations between like actors, can be a much more generative and transformative process than this suggests. One key concern remains how to forge global solidarities which are aware to the dynamics of uneven north-south class relations. In the context of NGOs in Copenhagen, for example, Simons and Tonack (2010:10) point out:

*[I]n Copenhagen, NGOs were much more than a distracting sideshow. They formed a constricting force that blunted militant action and softened radical analysis through paternalism and assumed representation of whole continents [...] the obfuscation of internal class antagonisms within states of the Global South in favour of simplistic North-South dichotomies, and the pacification of militant action resulting from an alliance forged with transnational NGOs and reformist environmental groups who have been given minimal access to the balls of power in exchange for their successful policing of the movement.*

Through illustrating the ways in which climate justice politics weaves different elements

of antagonisms, commons and solidarities we have sought to emphasise what is gained through thinking about these different practices in connection with each other. We have also suggested ways in which the efficacy of these connections can be developed and deepened. Engaging with these emergent forms of contentious politics suggests that a turn to accounts of the 'post-political' is partly premature and risks marginalising of the forms of antagonistic politics that are being crafted. Further, we wish to stress that a 'post-political' consensus politics is something that is achieved through active political strategies and through the disciplining work of repressive policing and juridical frameworks. The policing of the protests in Copenhagen highlights how successful these frameworks can be in keeping contestation out of the terrain of the political, and in policing how the political is constituted. It is necessary to situate the formation of antagonistic climate change politics within these geographies of repression. This problematises claims concerning the absence of contestation from contemporary experiences of the political (see Featherstone, forthcoming).

Rather, for further research and action we suggest the importance of engaging with the dynamic forms of political activity shaped through actually existing forms of contestation. What we are making a claim for here, in terms of both academic debates and political strategy, is a climate justice politics which more clearly articulates the antagonistic relations of uneven capitalism, a desire to build a prefigurative commons and to extend practices of north-south and interclass solidarities. This kind of climate justice politics articulates solutions to climate change built upon accountability and participation, ecological sustainability and social justice. Further such politics positions climate change directly in critical relation to ecological neo-colonialism and neoliberal capitalism.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.ejnet.org/ej/bali.pdf>; [www.climate-justice-now.org](http://www.climate-justice-now.org); [www.durbanclimatejustice.org](http://www.durbanclimatejustice.org); [www.climate-justice-action.org](http://www.climate-justice-action.org); and <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/awglca10/eng/misc02.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> We use the term translocal to refer to the connections, relations, and campaigns between different place-based (but not place-restricted) social movements and other grassroots actors. This is in preference to the term 'transnational' which elides the specificity of the particular places in, and from which, collective action emerges and operates.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=88>.

<sup>4</sup> This was graphically represented by recent events in Haiti, where the prospect of large numbers of internal refugees created a potentially huge security risk for richer nations.