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*“The protagonist
of world peace
today is the
Global South”*

*-Boaventura
de Sousa Santos*



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Degrowth (and More) 4Liberation

Michael Albert

SHARED VISION

We who desire a better world act within countless organizations, projects, campaigns, and movements each siloed from and often even competing with the rest. Unless this immense array of actors achieves substantial overlapping unity, it will rarely win even partial victories much less a new world. In place of thousands of activist entities each with its own largely isolated banner and agenda, we should have one big movement of movements within which, each member retains its own agenda and banner but all members together have one big encompassing agenda and one big overarching banner wherein each component aids the rest and the rest aids each.

Facing this need, six host organizations and about 300 individuals have so far co-signed the Twenty Theses for Liberation (at 4Liberation.org). Each signer hopes the twenty theses can help unite an international movement of movements.

Are the host organizations and signers delusional dreamers? Or do the twenty theses propose good enough vision and strategy proposals to elicit a conversation among countless projects, movements, and organizations? Should you laugh at our naïveté, or should you sign on?

A recent article pointed out that just the U.S. has nearly 30,000 environmental groups. Add to that labor, economic, feminist, gender, internationalist, anti war, cultural, anti racist, electoral, and judicial social change groups and clearly a truly vast mosaic of activist intent operates even in any one country, much less worldwide. But when each component fails to aid the rest, the mosaic becomes loose strands. Without cohesion the strands flap this way and that. The mosaic loses when it could win.

So, again, are the twenty theses' signers delusional to think proposals for shared vision and strategy could propel most of our multitudinous strands to each help and be helped by the rest? Is our dream time worn and naive? Or is it a dream whose time has come?

I doubt many who have so far signed the Twenty Theses for Liberation carefully thought through the above question for all different advocacy and activist efforts, or even for just those of any one kind, like say environmental, or even for just one large existing and growing approach within one focus, like, say, for Degrowth within environmental. Instead I bet current signers have thought that if we can't develop sufficient unity to become more than so many separate parts we will remain too atomized to win much. I bet current signers have thought we have no choice. We can't let this hope be mere delusion. Would we have signed if we had instead asked if unity is actually attainable? If we had asked can twenty proposed theses about vision and strategy provoke a cross border, cross issue conversation sufficient to sustain a massive movement of movements? Do non-signers not sign due to answering, no? To address this possibility, even partially, will take a lot of words. But if developing greater activist unity is pivotal, doesn't it make sense to spend some time on it?

Degrowth is a rapidly growing international environmental orientation with diverse tendencies. Is there any reason to think the twenty theses can fruitfully engage even just Degrowth, much less fruitfully engage every approach we might consider, much less help get them all to converse not just separately but with one another to pursue growing unity? Let's consider engaging with Degrowth in the hope that if the twenty theses can inspire Degrowth, it might inspire other approaches as well. Imagine you could meet for an extended informal conversation with one Degrowth advocate after another from



Europe, the U.S., South America, Africa, and Asia. Consider the many common aspirations that would recur so persistently that you could justifiably deem them significant parts of Degrowth. Our question becomes, can the twenty theses speak to those common Degrowth aspirations? For that matter, the twenty theses do likewise for Solidarity Economy, feminism, internationalism, ecology, equity, and so much more? It is an undeniably tall order.

At its root, Degrowth asserts that society's well being and even survival requires that we aggressively solve global climate, resource depletion, water shortage, and even broader un-sustainability crises. But while Degrowth began ecologically focussed, and despite Degrowth being known mostly for that ecological focus, conversations with its advocates reveal much broader commonality.

For example, Degrowth rejects inequitable differences in income and wealth within and also between countries. More, Degrowth rejects working people's near total lack of control over the circumstances of their lives. And beyond economy, Degrowth also typically rejects sex, gender, religious, ethnic, racial, and political hierarchies. More positively, degrowth celebrates mutual respect and material and qualita-

tive fulfillment for all. Degrowth wants all facets of life to generate just circumstances, human solidarity, and material equity. Degrowth abhors all things that aggrandize a few owners over many workers, North over South, white over black, and male over female.

All that said, some core questions arise about Degrowth (as about all other movement efforts). First, what vision for society's institutions would fully jettison what Degrowth rejects and permanently elevate what Degrowth advocates? Second, by what strategic steps might we attain such new institutions? And third, and particularly for our purposes here, if sufficiently propelled and augmented, could the Twenty Theses for Liberation provide useful motivation for Degrowth (and by extension for other social change efforts) to converse deeply about these matters among themselves and also with projects and movements that have other primary social change focuses? Could the twenty theses usefully unify actors to favor institutions with intrinsic features that don't allow for, and that even make nonsensical continued injustices?

As an indicative case to consider, Degrowth wants economic activity to end global climate and other ecological crises forever into the future. For this

systemic correction, Degrowth favors that new economic institutions account for ecological costs so as to eliminate the corporate drive to accumulate without regard for ecological and social consequences. Degrowth says we must not have disconnected, competitive actors who each seek their own advance without concern for impacts on others. We shouldn't have a system that ignores how exchanges affect those not directly engaged in the exchange. We shouldn't have a system that ignores those who breathe the pollution cars or workplaces generate but who neither bought nor sold the cars or had a say in the workplace's decisions. We shouldn't have markets that orient buyers and sellers to ignore ecological and even most social implications of their production and consumption.

Degrowth also rejects inequitable differences in income and wealth. It desires for all actors appropriate decision making influence, equitable incomes, and proper awareness of the ecological and social costs of economic choices. The twenty theses propose that future economies should ensure that no individuals or classes dominate others and that all economic actors are able to fully participate in determining their own economic lives. The twenty theses urge that future economies should structurally preclude anyone owning natural resources and factories so that such ownership plays no role in hugely elevating owners' decision-making influence and share of income at the expense of non-owners. The twenty theses urge that workplaces, resources, ideas, and technology should become part of a "productive commons" that all can benefit from. Individuals should not own the sky, oceans, forests, resources, knowledge, or technologies. The on-going benefits of nature and of past human innovation should be collectively enjoyed.

More, to attain appropriate participation by all within and between countries (as Degrowth, labor, economic, feminist, gender, internationalist, anti war, cultural, anti racist, electoral, and judicial social change groups and more each certainly desire), the twenty theses propose that new economic institutions should ensure that all workers and consumers should to the extent possible have a say in decisions proportionate to effects on them. The twenty theses

call this "collective self management." And the theses propose that to attain such self management will in turn entail that new economic institutions have venues for deliberation including worker and consumer councils or assemblies. And that to have appropriate say people not only need free space to congregate but also accurate information to assess and personal preparedness and means by which to pursue their desires.

Likewise, the twenty theses propose that to ensure that self management is well informed and carefully enacted a worthy economy should eliminate corporate divisions of labor that give a domineering one-fifth of employees empowering tasks while relegating to a subordinate four-fifths of employees mainly rote, repetitive, and obedient tasks that make them ill-equipped to participate in effective decision making. To facilitate informed and confident participation from all employees, the twenty theses propose that economies should not only no longer have owners above all other employees, but should also end class division based on differential empowerment wherein empowered employees rule over about four times as many disempowered employees. And to that end, the twenty theses propose that economic institutions should ensure that each worker enjoys a comparable share of empowering tasks via new designs of work that convey to all workers sufficient confidence, skills, information, and access to participate effectively in informed self-managed decision making with no group systematically subordinate to the rest. The twenty theses call this new division of labor "balanced jobs." So, is it reasonable or delusional to think a conversation about the twenty theses could further Degrowth aspirations and simultaneously further solidarity, feminist, anti-racist, and more aspirations for the economy? Put differently, is it plausible that the Twenty Theses for Liberation could help inspire and aid a Degrowth discussion of its theses to augment, refine, improve, and help share them to sustain a movement of movements?

So far, perhaps it is plausible. But what about access to goods and services? The kind of material equity Degrowth seeks will require economic institutions that ensure that workers who do socially valued

labor longer or harder or under more onerous conditions earn a proportionately greater share of the social product than those who work less long, less hard, or under better conditions. Degrowth's desires for equitable income for all also entail that no one earn for property, bargaining power, or the value of their personal output. And that all who are unable to work nonetheless receive society's average income and that of course everyone receives many services and products free, including, for example, medical care, day care, transportation, and education. The twenty theses call these aims "equitable remuneration." Once refined by future experience, the twenty theses suggest that this equitable remuneration would transcend deprivations that Degrowth rejects and implement equity that Degrowth seeks.

The twenty theses also propose that economic relations should avoid both market competition and authoritarian planning since each of these produce oppressive class rule, inhumane alienation, and suicidal ecological degradation which failings Degrowth and indeed virtually all left activism rejects. So the twenty theses urge a conversation about how economic relations should seek ways to conduct decentralized cooperative negotiation of inputs and outputs via workers and consumers councils and federations of councils. The theses call that "participatory planning" and add it to a productive commons, workers and consumers self managing councils, balanced jobs, and equitable remuneration as tentative proposals to discuss to advance Degrowth's highest economic aspirations, and, by extension, also the highest economic aspirations of many other projects, organizations, and movements. Is that a plausible or delusional agenda?

But Degrowth is no more about only economics than it is about only ecology, just like feminism is not about only gender and kinship, anti racism is not about only racism, and labor is not about only economy. Every main focus of activist attention has aspirations that overlap the rest. Every main focus has an interest in all being able to work together. That is the twenty theses' main message.

Returning to our Degrowth case study, imagine you interview a few hundred or a few thousand Degrowth advocates. You find that nearly all reject sex, gender, religious, ethnic, and racial hierarchies, as well as political disenfranchisement and authoritarianism. So, what do the twenty theses say about all that, and could they aid Degrowth advocates to pursue a discussion to better specify and enlarge Degrowth shared vision and strategy to fulfill its widest aspirations and to work compatibly with a similarly oriented movement of movements about all those areas of concern?

To end denials based on sex, gender, identity, or age the twenty theses say new fundamentally transformed kinship institutions should ensure that no individuals or groups—whether by gender, identity, sexual orientation or age—dominate others in income, influence, access to education, job quality or any other dimension of life that bears on quality of life. To attain that aim, the twenty theses propose that future gender and kin institutions should respect marriage and other lasting relations among adults as religious, cultural, or social practices, but also reject such ties as ways for sectors of the population to gain financial benefits or social status that others lack. Likewise, both for equity and also for the enrichment of personality and the affirmation that care-giving conveys to those doing the caring, the twenty theses suggest that gender and kin institutions should respect care-giving as a central function of society including perhaps even making care-giving a part of every citizen's social responsibilities, and, in any event, should at least ensure equitable burdens and benefits among people of all genders for all household and child raising practices.

To all these ends, the twenty theses say it follows that gender and kin institutions should not privilege certain types of family formation over others, but should instead actively support all types of families that are consistent with a transformed society's other norms and practices. And to promote children's well-being and affirm society's responsibility for all children, the twenty theses propose that future gender and kin institutions should affirm the right of diverse types of families to have children and pro-

vide them with a sense of rootedness and belonging, and also utilize non-arbitrary means to determine when an individual is too old or too young or otherwise able or not able to receive benefits and shoulder responsibilities.

Likewise, to ensure that each person honors the autonomy, humanity, and rights of others, the twenty theses propose future gender and kin institutions should centrally affirm diverse expressions of sexual pleasure, personal identity, sexual identity, gender identity, and mutual intimacy while they provide diverse, empowering sex education as well as legal prohibition against non-consensual sex. Considering all that, we may ask is it plausible or delusional that the twenty theses could provide a good basis for cross group and even cross country discussions of core kinship and gender vision suitable to be shared by a movement of movements?

Moving on, desires to have racial, ethnic, national, and religious relations accord with predominant Degrowth values require that we rectify the negative historical and contemporary impacts of racist, colonial, and otherwise bigoted structures and neoliberal policies and practices on countries and communities, especially in the global South. Seeking that, the twenty theses urge that new participatory cultural institutions should ensure that no individuals or groups—whether by race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, or any other cultural community identification—dominate others. And that future cultural and community institutions should provide space and resources for people to positively express their cultural/community identities however they choose consistent with the freedom and dignity of others.

The twenty theses likewise propose that worthy cultural and community relations should explicitly recognize that all people deserve self management, equity, solidarity, and liberty even while society also protects all people's right to affiliate freely and enjoy diversity. Also, to end the reality and even the fear of race, caste, religious, or national suppression, the twenty theses propose that worthy cultural and community relations should provide all cultural commu-

nities guaranteed access to means to preserve their cultural integrity without barriers to free exit from all cultural communities including nations, and without arbitrary non cultural barriers to free entry. So the question again arises, can the twenty theses proposals regarding cultural community relations become a basis for visionary discussion in tune with a wide range of projects', organizations', and movements' aspirations on the way toward generating shared vision and strategy able to sustain a movement of movements?

Continuing, the twenty theses propose for international relations valuing people in all countries and being in solidarity with their just struggles for decent lives. The theses propose that no nations or geographic regions should be privileged above others, and that, until that is achieved, we should move toward that result by working to end the subordination of nations in all its forms while we also reduce and finally eliminate residual differences in collective wealth. Aren't these proposals for international relations consistent with Degrowth aims for equitable internationalist globalization in place of exploitative corporate globalization? For that matter wouldn't all potential participants in a movement of movements want to diminish economic disparities in countries' relative wealth, protect cultural and social patterns internal to each country, and facilitate international entwinement as people desire, including implementing reparations and international exchange and mutual aid as well as border redefinitions with these many ends in mind? And so wouldn't these twenty theses proposals for international relations provide a fruitful starting place for a cross group and cross country conversation that seeks shared internationalist vision for a movement of movements?

What about polity? The twenty theses propose that to eliminate political elitism and domination, new political institutions should establish transparent mechanisms to carry out and evaluate political decisions and to convey to all citizens self managing political say proportionate to effects on them. The theses propose that liberatory political institutions should include grassroots assemblies, councils, or communes (and federations of those) by which people can manifest their views. Political institu-

tions should provide advanced public education so people's views are well formed and clearly expressed. Political institutions should provide direct public policy participation or, when that's not possible, re-callable representation and delegation that utilizes inclusive voting algorithms.

Further, to ensure freedom for each person consistent with freedom for all people and to benefit all people while also protecting and even advancing diversity, the twenty theses propose that political institutions should guarantee freedom to speak, write, worship, assemble, and organize political parties. Similarly and additionally, to ensure diversity and continuous development, the twenty theses propose that political institutions should welcome, facilitate, and protect dissent and guarantee to individuals and groups means to pursue their own goals consistent with not interfering with the same rights for others. Regarding violations, to attain justice and promote rehabilitation, the twenty theses propose political institutions should foster solidarity and provide inclusive means to fairly, peacefully, and constructively adjudicate disputes and violations of agreed norms. And so here again the question arises, isn't all of this, properly refined, amended, and improved by diverse participants in extended conversation, compatible with Degrowth aspirations for a continuing visionary political discussion that seeks a movement of movements?

Returning to where Degrowth began, not only for liberation but literally for human survival, the twenty theses echo global calls that to have worthy ecological relations will require that societies implement new participatory ecological practices that first and foremost guarantee that societies cease and reverse unsustainable resource depletion, environmental degradation, climate change, and other ecosystem disrupting trends. To such ends, the twenty theses propose that new ecological relations should facilitate not only an end to using fossil fuels, but an ecologically sound reconstruction of society that accounts for the full ecological as well as full social and personal costs and benefits of both short- and long-term economic and social choices, so that future populations can sensibly decide for themselves levels

of production and consumption, preferred duration of work, degrees of collective self-reliance, modes of energy use and harvesting, means of stewardship, pollution norms, climate policies, conservation practices, consumption choices, and other future policy choices all in light of their full consequences.

The twenty theses additionally propose that new ecological norms and practices should foster a consciousness of ecological connection, responsibility, and reciprocity so that future citizens understand and respect the ecological precautionary principle and are well prepared to decide policies regarding such matters as animal rights or vegetarianism that transcend sustainability. And once again, isn't all this quite consistent with Degrowth aspirations? Indeed, wouldn't these proposals provide a good outline for discussing shared vision for a movement of movements including, in particular, Degrowth?

In sum, for society writ large, most and perhaps even all advocates of Degrowth celebrate mutual respect and qualitative fulfillment and want all dimensions of life to generate human solidarity and mutual aid, and certainly not to aggrandize a few. Degrowth in that same degree typically rejects class, race, gender, and political hierarchy and instead desires new economic, kinship, cultural, political, international, and ecological relations that elevate all citizens to participate constructively in daily life with appropriate influence and equitable responsibilities and benefits. And as that is all consonant with and basic to the twenty theses, is it plausible or delusional that the twenty theses can serve as an outline for further discussion that Degrowth participates in and in turn enriches, as do feminism, Solidarity Economy, labor, internationalism, and all other potential participants in a flexibly unified movement of movements?

One might reply, maybe, perhaps—but so what? Conversations about such matters have occurred for decades, even for centuries. Why will this time be different? The difference is that this time the goal is not only edifying self or enjoying interesting subject matter with a few others. This time the goal is widespread on-going inclusive and continually updated discussion of vision and strategy by diverse

groups, projects, and movements both internally, each among its own members, but also outwardly across issues, focuses, and even countries. This time the goal is discussion with intent. And this time, to fail is forbidden.

Okay, one might reply, yes, but hasn't that also been said before? Sure it has, at least to a degree. But that is not a reason to not continue and greatly enlarge the effort now. The idea is to generate a degree of unity based on shared core vision and strategy not only within a focus area and country, but across focus areas and countries.

Still one might ask, but how do we make shared vision into shared reality? Won't significant mutual aid guided collaboration sufficient for a true movement of movements require not only steadily enriched shared vision, but also steadily enriched shared strategy? Yes, of course it will. So our examination of the twenty theses must continue on to discuss strategy.

SHARED STRATEGY

Well, okay, suppose an international movement of movements that favors fundamental shared vision convenes. Would its participants then say that we face an all or nothing endeavor? Would we chant "we want the world and we want it now"? Would our flexible regularly updated shared vision cause us to believe that to seek anything less than our whole vision would be worthless? Would sharing a core vision cause us to think that we must first attain a new economy, a new polity, a new everything or tipping points brought on by the old economy, old polity, and old everything would guarantee climate, income, and fascistic catastrophe? Would a shared vision cause us to say that unless we attain fundamental change all at once we will drown or burn to oblivion? Would we say that to demand anything less than everything is to sell out?

Well, no, hopefully advocates of shared vision would not say any of that. Hopefully we would tirelessly seek a new world, but also understand the difficulty and duration that attaining a new world will entail.

Hopefully with shared broad vision we would know that the effort to avoid climate catastrophe, resource catastrophe, income, gender, and racial catastrophe, as well as fascist catastrophe can't wait until after we have won a new society. Hopefully we would commit to comprehensive fundamental change but not proclaim "win everything now or win nothing ever." Hopefully we would instead proclaim "win enough now to avoid catastrophes, then win more until we have won a fundamentally transformed, newly civilized, and newly ecologically desirable world."

But in light of the twenty theses visionary proposals (or anything that arises from anything like them), and also in light of knowing that attaining fundamental change will take longer than the time available to avoid climate and other catastrophes, and also knowing that social, economic, and environmental conditions that affect strategy differ from place to place and from time to time, is there sufficient shared strategy to agree to to unify a movement of movements?

To answer that question, the twenty theses propose that a movement of movements will need liberatory projects, organizations, and movements able to slow catastrophic trends as they also move us toward a new society fully freed from such dangers. Such liberatory projects, organizations, and movements will need to facilitate learning, preserve lessons, provide continuity, and combine and apply energies and insights to win changes and sustain support for members. But are these proposed inclinations sufficiently common to Degrowth, Solidarity Economy, labor, feminist, anti racist and anti war practices, among others, to be refined, improved, and explicitly shared by wide swaths of the left?

The twenty theses additionally propose that to ward off current catastrophic dangers while we seek to win shared vision will require organizing that counters cynicism with hope, that incorporates seeds of the future in the present, that grows membership and commitment among the class, nationality, cultural, age, ability, and sexual/gender constituencies to be liberated, and that wins reforms without becoming reformist.

The twenty theses propose that doubt about the possibility of a better society is a primary impediment to people seeking fundamental change. Therefore to combat cynicism rooted in doubt and to engender informed hope should be a permanent organizing priority. Liberatory organizing should always offer and clarify the merit of vision and the efficacy of activism even as it indicates, details, and explains the pains people currently endure and the tenacious obstacles to change people currently confront.

To arrive at, collectively implement, and then monitor that well-considered decisions decisions have been carried out admirably, the twenty theses propose that liberatory organizing should provide extensive opportunities for members to participate in organizational decision making and in deliberations with others. The theses propose liberatory organizing should facilitate everyone's participation including, when possible, offering childcare at meetings and events, finding ways to reach out to those who might be immersed in kinship duties, striving to meet diverse accessibility needs, and aiding those immersed in busy work schedules.

Likewise, a liberatory organization should provide transparency regarding all actions by its elected or delegated leaders, including placing a high burden of proof on keeping secret any agenda, whether to avoid repression or for any other reason. Liberatory organizing should provide a mechanism to recall leaders or representatives who members believe are not adequately representing them, as well as to provide means to fairly, peacefully, and constructively resolve internal disputes.

To be liberatory, the twenty theses also propose a movement's structure and policies should approximate as well as circumstances and priorities allow, the self-management norm that "each member has decision making influence proportional to the degree they are affected."

Liberatory movements should be structured so that a minority who are initially disproportionately equipped with needed skills, information, and confidence cannot form a decision-making hierarchy that

leaves less-prepared members to perpetually follow orders or perform only rote tasks. To that end, the twenty theses propose liberatory movements should apportion empowering and disempowering tasks to ensure that no individuals or sectors of members have a relative monopoly on information or access, and no subset of members has disproportionate say whether due to race, gender, class, or other attributes.

For example, a liberatory organization should monitor and work to correct instances of sexism, racism, classism, ableism, transphobia, and homophobia, not only in society but in itself, including having diverse roles suitable to people with different backgrounds, personal priorities, and personal situations. A liberatory organization should guarantee and celebrate members' rights to organize "currents" or "caucuses" with full rights of democratic debate and should allow dissenting views to exist and be tested alongside preferred views. Likewise, a liberatory organization should ensure that national, regional, city, and local chapters, as well as different sectors can respond to their own circumstances and implement their own programs as they choose so long as their choices do not block other groups equally addressing their own situations or deny the shared goals and principles of the whole organization.

Liberatory organizing should utilize relevant, flexible shared strategy guided by continually updated shared vision to consistently progress toward lasting, fundamental change. So is it plausible that theses twenty theses proposals are sufficiently common to Degrowth and other potential movement of movement members to help inspire within and among them a wide conversation seeking shared strategy to augment shared vision in turn able to plant the seeds of the future in the present to enhance hope, to test and refine ideas, and to learn lessons able to inform strategy and vision even as we currently combat oppressive class, race, gender, sexual, age, ability, and power injustices? Could a movement of movements based on continually refined shared vision and strategy constructively address the way its members mutually interrelate? Could it establish internal norms that support building exemplary workplace,

campus, community, and still more encompassing institutions that represent and refine the values the movement of the movements offers as liberating alternatives to the status quo it combats?

The twenty theses strategic proposals are not original, nor even unusual. They are, however, rarely explicitly and collectively enunciated much less discussed across projects and countries to arrive at a shared set of strategic views.

The twenty theses propose that liberatory organizing should constantly grow membership among the class, community, nationality, and gender constituencies it aims to liberate. It should learn from and seek unity with audiences far wider than its own membership. It should attract and affirmatively empower young people and reach out to and organize people currently critical and even hostile to its aims. It should participate in, support, build, and aid diverse social movements and struggles beyond its own immediate agendas. It should explicitly and respectfully address critical and even hostile constituencies in communities, on campuses, and at work. Once widely discussed, refined, and shared, is it even hard to conceive of collective explicit unity about such matters?

The twenty theses propose that liberatory organizing should also seek, develop, debate, disseminate, and advocate truthful news, analysis, vision, and strategy among its members and especially in the wider society. It should develop and sustain needed media institutions and means of face-to-face communication as well as use diverse methods of agitation and struggle—from educational efforts to rallies, marches, demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, occupations, and diverse direct action campaigns—to win gains and build ever wider support. And the twenty theses propose that to sustain deeper unity, liberatory organizing should develop new forms of cross-constituency and cross-issue mutuality. New blocs of activist movements, campaigns, and organizations should at times take as their shared program not a least common denominator component that they all individually favor, but the totality of their individual priorities, even including their differences, so that

each movement, campaign, and organization in such a bloc aids the rest and all thereby become dramatically more powerful.

The twenty theses also propose that liberatory organizing should seek changes in society for citizens to enjoy immediately, while it also establishes by its words, methods, and the ideas it broaches and broadcasts a likelihood that all involved will pursue and win more change in the future. So liberatory organizing should seek short-term changes of its own conception by its own actions, but also seek short term changes that others conceive by supporting other movements and projects internationally, by country, and also locally. It should collectively address climate change, arms control, war and peace, the level and composition of economic output, agricultural relations, education, health care, housing, income distribution, duration of work, work organization, gender roles, education, health care, racial relations, immigration, policing, media, law, and legislation. Liberatory organizing should seek to win gains by means that reduce oppression in the present and that prepare circumstances, methods, and allegiances to win more gains in the future. It should struggle to win reforms in non reformist ways.

Following the wise choices of countless past and current activists, the twenty theses also propose that liberatory organizing should embrace a diversity of tactics suited to diverse contexts that best serve flexible, resilient strategies informed by shared vision. And they propose that liberatory organizing should connect efforts, resources, and lessons from country to country, region to region, community to community, workplace to workplace, campus to campus, community to community, and home to home even as it also recognizes that strategies and tactics suitable to different venues and different times will differ.

The strategic proposals of the Twenty Theses for Liberation propose all the above as possible commonalities to consider. So, are its strategic proposals worth discussing to try to find shared strategic commitments to augment shared vision for a movement of movements?

The twenty theses urge that liberatory organizing will need to focus not solely on immediate tactical success or failure—such as stopping a meeting, completing a march, or winning a vote—but also and even mainly on broader matters such as how many new people we reach, what commitments among participants we enlarge, and what infrastructure we create. The twenty theses urge that activists should combine respect for the urgency to address immediate injustices with the patience that major long-term change requires.

The twenty theses advise that a movement of movements should understand that vision orients aims, strategy informs program, and tactics implement plans. For each, the twenty theses propose that a movement of movements should pay close attention to immediate implications to advance today's campaigns, organization, and consciousness, but also to implications for longer run prospects for those immediately involved and for those viewing from a distance. More, a movement of movements should provide financial, legal, employment, and emotional support to its members so they become steadily better able to participate in and navigate the challenges and sometimes negative effects of taking part in radical actions.

Indeed, the twenty theses propose that successful organizing should substantially improve the current life situations of its members, including aiding their feelings of self-worth, their knowledge, skills, and confidence, their mental, physical, sexual, and spiritual health, their material conditions, and even their social ties and engagements and leisure enjoyments. It proposes that successful organizing should take a positive approach in all interpersonal and organizational matters. It should always seek ways forward. Successful organizing should address disagreements and failings not to cancel others or extoll self, but to find ways all can progress successfully.

Finally, the twenty theses propose that liberatory organizing should understand that we are all different and that successful insights and paths forward are inevitably found, communicated, and advocated by some people earlier than by others. Liberatory

organizing should welcome such leadership but also guard against lasting differential empowerment. The twenty theses thus propose that a key personal contribution of any leading person or group should be to elevate other persons or groups.

So, do the the seven broad theses that bear on vision discussed in Part One of this article and the thirteen broad theses that bear on strategy discussed here in Part Two sufficiently accord with Degrowth aspirations—and, for example, feminist, anti-racist, Solidarity Economics, labor, anti-authoritarian, and anti war aspirations—to warrant Degrowth's consideration of them and critical intervention to improve them and to then advocate for them to help seek flexible, broad vision and strategy to unify a movement of movements?

The Twenty Theses for Liberation document says its first goal is to establish that organizers and diverse movements would benefit immensely from a widely shared positive perspective, and that we would all benefit from a framework for coalescing around shared vision and strategy to identify shared aims and to leverage collective power to win immediate reforms on a trajectory of societal transformation.

But one might reasonably ask, would it even matter if activists were to arrive at such a shared outlook in a country, many countries, or even around the world? Would it matter if people who now mainly address and seek anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian, anti-ecocide, or anti-war gains were to all share a unifying core vision? Would it matter if behind calls to enrich and align struggles in different places and for different aims, there arose a considerable shared strategic perspective? Would it matter if multitudinous environmental, feminist, labor, inter communalist, internationalist and other efforts each backed the agendas of the rest to that each showed up for the actions of the rest?

If not, then there's no need to think further on sharing these or any other theses for liberation. But if such a shared stance could assist each progressive, radical, or revolutionary project, campaign, institution, or movement and could especially align them

into much more effective mutual aid than they now share, then wouldn't it be wise to seek to arrive at shared vision and strategy?

The Twenty Theses for Liberation asserts that its second goal is to move forward from identifying the need for a widely shared visionary and strategic framework to propose a particular draft framework for collective engagement. Are the twenty theses flexible, general, rich, common, and broad enough to sustain a productive discussion? After refinement and improvement, could they generate shared, effective advocacy? The twenty theses come from countless movements, experiences, and organizations. They were collected and put forth by 31 co-authors and six host organizations and have now accumulated a bit over 300 signers though of course no signer proposes them as the only possible formulation. For that matter, likely everyone who has signed has concerns or misgivings about at least some of the theses.

Indeed, across the broad spectrum of progressive and radical movements, there are sure to be initial reactions that the twenty theses are too long, too specific, lack something favorable, include something unfavorable, go beyond our means, utilize imprecise or un-preferred terminology, or are just something that no matter how worthy, will likely be ignored. So what? We should not stop at or be stopped by initial doubts. As the theses assert: "Our hope is that these concerns are not a stopping point, but a starting point for undertaking further examination, discussion, debate, improvements, and refinements towards a shared basis, however different it might look from this draft, for future activism and organization building."

So how might such a final shared viewpoint emerge? By people talking, writing, reading, and proposing with one another, in person, in periodicals, and in organizations. The result the theses advocate wouldn't be a fixed, unchangeable stance. Shared vision and strategy would instead continually alter in accord with new experiences, contexts, and insights. The result would be a continued, collective process of refining, adapting, and utilizing a unifying framework. It would build and sustain a culture that unites

around shared vision and strategy—and isn't that the work of building a movement of movements? It would bring separate agendas into powerful solidarity with one another. And isn't that a path toward victories?

And so, the question arises yet again. Would it be productive for Degrowth's many advocates to participate in such an endeavor? Would Degrowth's participation be good for the endeavor and thus worth Degrowth's attention? And would it also be productive for Solidarity Economy, feminist, LGBTQ, anti racist, anti war, border, prison and justice, electoral organizing and on and on to each participate in all their many facets in such an endeavor, and also good for the endeavor that they each do so and thus worth their involvement? That is the hope of this essay.

It is easy to say it won't happen. But shouldn't we all want Degrowth advocates and indeed all advocates of progressive, radical, and revolutionary change including ourselves to seek unity via seeking sufficient shared vision and strategy to sustain an international movement of entwined, mutually supportive, multi focussed movements?

The Twenty Theses for Liberation are at 4Liberation.org. Its thirty one initial signers are: Kali Akuno, Michael Albert, Renata Ávila, Ramzy Baroud, Medea Benjamin, Peter Bohmer, Fintan Bradshaw, Jeremy Brecher, Urška Breznik, Noam Chomsky, Savvina Chowdhury, Devriş Çimen, Mark Evans, Andrej Grubačić, Jason Hickel, Kathy Kelly, Arash Kolahi, Bridget Meehan, Sotiris Mitralaxis, Jason Myles, Cynthia Peters, John Pilger, Matic Primc, Don Rojas, Stephen Shalom, Alexandria Shaner, Norman Solomon, Cooper Sperling, Yanis Varoufakis, and Brett Wilkins.

Its six host organizations are: ZNetwork, DiEM25, Academy of Democratic Modernity, MetaCPC, Real Utopia, and Cooperation Jackson.

Even all that and the 300 plus current signers is not enough. Not nearly. But more is possible—isn't it?

Why I March: The Importance of Climate Movement Unity

Sebastian Lemberger

It had never struck me until recently how many environmental activist groups there are. Within the U.S. alone, there are around 28,000 different environmental groups currently operating, from small grassroots organizations to giants of the climate movement like 350.org, Greenpeace, and Sunrise. Among these groups, there is also a huge array of sometimes conflicting opinions that reflect the sense of uncertainty that often goes hand in hand with the fight against climate change.

As someone who would consider himself an environmentalist, the sheer amount of people, groups, and perspectives that circulate around the matter of climate change can make it feel like I am not part of a movement with a coherent goal, but rather a highly competitive sector of an “activism industry.” As climate change bears down upon us, the environmental movement needs to fight as one. People uniting as one to drive world leaders forward is essential to stopping climate change; it is also what makes the March to End Fossil Fuels special.

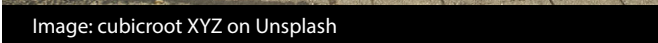
Anybody who follows a climate-related Instagram account probably knows that today, September 17, the March to End Fossil Fuels is taking place in the middle of New York City in order to persuade the Biden Administration and the U.N. to initiate phaseout plans for fossil fuels. This is for good reason; the event is the biggest climate protest that has occurred since the pandemic, with a turnout goal of over 50,000 people.

The protest is an impressive display of unity within the climate movement when taken in a vacuum. It was organized as a joint effort by a variety of New York grassroots organizations as

well as larger U.S.-based coalitions such as People vs. Fossil Fuels. The planning team for the march spans generations and regions, drawing in all manner of people. What is perhaps more impressive is that the actions taking place during the week of the march are not limited to New York alone. There will be over 400 different actions taking place around the same few days across the world. This push to end the reign of fossil fuels has allowed the climate movement to act as one giant machine in a burst of collective action.

I became involved in environmental causes because I wanted to be a part of something greater than myself. Frightened by the future that might come to pass if climate change ran its course, I started joining climate lobbying groups when I started high school in the hopes that I would be helping bring a larger movement forward. In the time since then, I haven’t necessarily found this to be the case. In fact, I have noticed that there is a surprising amount of discord between climate advocacy groups, to the extent that people often refuse potentially advantageous collaboration on the basis of minor differences in opinion or specialization. I find that the refusal of many environmentalists to work with people who do not share their exact beliefs to run contrary to the need for collaboration that is so necessary to stop the climate crisis. As such, I am overjoyed to see people coming together on a scale like that of the march in order to fight the fossil fuel industry.

The climate movement has been shaped by the sluggishness and weakness of world leaders in responding to its concerns. When the decision-making power required to save the planet from climate change lies in the hands of very few people, the only way forward is with the strength



The necessity of collective action in relation to climate change does not stop when the March to End Fossil Fuels and its companion actions end. In the aftermath of the event, there will inevitably be considerable momentum left over; people will be angrier than ever at how world leaders and global capitalism aid and abet the destruction of the planet. My hope for the activist community surrounding climate change is that this momentum is used to keep people together to push for newer, bolder action. Coalitions like the

Climate change has many facets, all of which need to be brought into the light for the crisis to be solved. The climate movement has proven on many occasions that it has the ability to unify around a cause, and, as the climate crisis gets worse and worse, it must continue to do so. The March to End Fossil Fuels is a call for people to unite against the biggest threat to our planet that we as a species have faced, and it is one that I suggest we all answer.

Frontlines Resistance Against Fossil Fuel Expansion in the Balkans

Lora interviewed by Alexandria Shaner

Climate activists from across the Balkans and beyond came together at the end of August for the 2nd annual Adriatic Climate Camp, culminating in nonviolent direct actions against a liquified natural gas, or LNG, terminal, which were met with violent aggression from police and private security forces.

LNG is advertised to the public as a clean “bridge fuel” that will enable a transition away from oil. Unsurprisingly, this dangerous claim is based on flawed industry-financed research. More recent studies have shown LNG and coal to have closer overall emissions, and sometimes it is even more emitting than coal. The war in Ukraine and potential fuel shortages has allowed the industry and supportive politicians to further accelerate LNG expansion, while continuing to lie about emissions.

Leading up to these actions, the Adriatic Climate Camp was both an activism training program and, crucially, a community building space. Both actions could have seen violence escalate very dangerously if the participants hadn't acted with clear purpose, calm and discipline. After the fact, such repression often results in diminished hope, fear and infighting.

Yet, organizers are already eagerly planning next year's camp and attracting more participants. Repressive state and corporate reactions have only galvanized commitment as this grassroots movement continues to grow and diversify locally, as well as to strengthen international ties of solidarity. This points to an incredible amount of trust, good faith and shared vision between people — in other words, strong community.

To discuss the actions, the camp, organizing lessons and possible paths for journeying from frustrated citizen to community activism, I spoke with Lora, a co-founder and organizer of the Adriatic Climate Camp and a member of political groups based in Zagreb such as Extinction Rebellion Zagreb, Food Not Bombs Zagreb and Vrrrane, an anarchaqueer-feminist group.

This interview is co-published by ZNetwork.org and the International Peace Research Association via Waging Nonviolence.

You were involved in two recent actions calling attention to the dangers of LNG expansion that were met with brutal and illegal repression. Tell us about these actions and XR Zagreb's strategy going forward.

This year's five-day Adriatic Climate Camp was centered around community, learning and the peaceful disruption of a nearby LNG terminal on the island of Krk, Croatia. To be exact, the camp was organized in protest of the planned doubling of the capacities of the LNG terminal, announced earlier this year. This is the place where liquified natural gas is imported from other countries (previously Russia, now usually the U.S. and Qatar).

First was the kayaking action — activists rowed out into the sea in front of the LNG ship, but were quickly met with aggression from police and security service boats, including being shot at with a water cannon. The activists refused to be stopped — their training, commitment and bravery shined through as they put up quite a resistance, even creating an hourglass [the symbol of XR] formation with their kayaks. Eventu-



Adriatic Climate Camp action against an LNG Terminal in Croatia, 2023

Photo: XR Zagreb

ally, their banner was taken away and they had to retreat back to the shore.

The second action took place the following day. We traveled from the city of Krk, where the camp was situated, to Omišalj, where the LNG terminal is located. There we met activists from the local community and together (a total of around 120 people), marched from the city to the LNG terminal.

Despite the right to peaceful gathering being set in Croatian law, and despite XR Zagreb liaising with the police over safety, this final protest at the state-owned LNG terminal, which is a large international importer for the EU, was met with violence. We encountered several riot police cordons there waiting for us, but we stayed and rallied with speeches, chants, drumming and a die-in. A self-organized group then separated and entered the premises of the terminal and displayed banners, quickly supported by those outside with chanting.

At this point, we were aggressively attacked by private security personnel and police officers. Protesters were pinned down and kept in painful

pressure holds. All participants showed peaceful and nonviolent resistance. Nonetheless, the riot police violently threw 26 people into police vans and drove them to custody cells where we were held in inhumane conditions for up to 10 hours with no food, water, medical help or phone calls.

Even with the challenges, the actions were a success and provided valuable lessons for improvement in the future. We are committed to adapting the camp and our wider organizing strategies going forward.

Despite the violence displayed by the police and security services, we are persevering together with high spirits. We are now even more determined to fight against the system of capitalism, backed by the state, which places profits in front of people and uses repressive methods to protect the fossil fuel industry which is taking away our collective futures. Their brutality has in no way diminished our hunger for climate justice. In fact, you could say it just further proves that we have to come together and rise up in community.

Could you tell us about how the camp devel-



Nonviolent civil disobedience was met with violent police and private security responses. Photos: XR Zagreb

oped, who participated and especially about the attention to community building?

In 2022, the first edition of the Adriatic Climate Camp was wildly successful, despite being organized by just two people. It became clear that there is a widely shared desire for both community experiences and communal resistance experiences — so naturally, the second one had to be bigger and better. Enthusiasm grew and several more people joined our organizing team. It was still a very small team for this large-scale endeavor, but it was a dedicated one.

I'd also like to highlight that the organizing team is entirely composed of queer persons who are either non-binary or women. This kind of representation is not often seen in the Balkans. We're very proud to be breaking with oppressive traditions through our organizing and to be accompanied by people of all genders.

Since we wanted to host more activists at this year's edition of the camp, and to have more impactful actions, we had to look for a way to finance these high ambitions. We were shown real solidarity from fellow members of the global climate justice movement and are grateful to our friends in XR Serbia for helping to connect us with Extinction Rebellion Global Support for funding. XR Global Support empowers local XR groups to act together across regions, nations and continents, peacefully disrupting business-as-usual. This year's camp definitely wouldn't have been possible without them.

Not only were we able to host 160 rebels at our camp, double the amount of last year, but we were also able to cover the costs of the logistics necessary for traveling to two actions which were situated on the opposite part of the island. The cooperation with XR Global Support was super friendly and we felt supported along the way — their motto "We are all crew" rang very true. Our XR Zagreb team was also very happy that some of our Serbian friends, including Scarlett who was our main contact for the financing, joined us at the camp so that we could meet in person to share experiences and activist stories.



Adriatic Climate Camp action against an LNG Terminal in Croatia, 2023

Photo: XR Zagreb

Can you describe the camp itself and what participants engaged in on a day-to-day basis?

After six months of planning and meetings, our five-day climate camp was finally under way at a commercial campsite near the LNG terminal targeted by our protests. Set up beneath olive and fig trees, the camp included an info point, a kitchen area, several large tents for workshops, a lost-and-found spot, and space for sleeping tents.

Most days began with a morning plenary session for all participants where the day's program was introduced and roles were delegated for joining the kitchen, cleaning and awareness teams. We were especially proud of this year's camp program, because it included a wide array of activities and topics — from “classic” activist topics such as NVDA (nonviolent direct action) and legal workshops, to lectures on radical organizing, the effects of capitalism on food systems,

digital activism, activism, talks on off-grid living, herbalism and foraging, and kayak training. For deeper community building, which includes fun, we included “lighter” activities such as drumming workshops, climbing, speed dating, standup night, movie screenings, yoga and silk dancing.

The camp gathered a wide variety of people and not just ecoactivists, but also members of the local community, anarchists, LGBTIQ+ rights activists, permaculture practitioners, etc. Participants came from all over the region and beyond — with a few even traveling from as far as New Zealand and the U.S. In addition to opposing LNG expansion, the camp was also a space for human rights, for the rights of nature, and for living according to the values we seek for a better world. Together, we formed a community running the camp and joined forces for the two direct actions. After the last detained protester was released, the camp concluded with a big celebration on the beach.

You and your fellow activists have learned and achieved much over the last few years — looking back, could you have imagined what you were able to achieve and the community you have built when you got started? What would you say to others who feel frustrated and don't know where or how to begin their own activism journeys? Everyone's circumstances and paths are different, but perhaps you can share a little about your own story, as an example of one person's path to action.

I'd say that I first became an activist in 2019, because that's when I left my soul-sucking corporate job that turned me into an anticapitalist. (I was fired because I complained about the unpaid overtime.) While I was working there, I spent my limited spare time reading and educating myself on the ecocidal horrors being committed by the capitalist economy, backed by unjust neoliberal politics. I also learned about positive alternatives to this system that people were fighting for, like degrowth.

I felt like being stuck up in a corporate office day in and day out was not only making me miserable but also complicit in the crisis. It was frustratingly meaningless and the opposite of what I should be doing with my life, if there was any possibility of trying to live differently. And so, when I was fired, I took a chance and started my small freelance business so I could finally prioritize my free time and dedicate as much of it as possible to environmentalism and climate activism.

I think it's important to emphasize the fact that not everyone is as privileged to be able to go freelance and have more freedom in organizing their time. I'm not prescribing this path for everyone, just describing my path. Not everyone can quit their job, but everyone can confront the reality of the climate crisis and find ways to prioritize some form of resistance. Everyone can seek communities of change and lend a hand in their own ways. My path from frustration to action also depended on more than changing my work. It resulted from a series of small steps that gradually led to more and more.

What were those other steps, outside of educating yourself and figuring out how to make time for activism? What is the “more and more” that your activism has brought into your life?

2019 was also the year when Greta's movement gained momentum and the Croatian scientist initiative “Scientists For The Climate” sent a public appeal to the government asking for an urgent declaration of the climate crisis. Shortly after, I attended the 2019 autumn eco-seminar run by Zelena akcija (a local environmentalist NGO, part of Friends of the Earth), where I met the people who would soon become my fellow rebels in XR Zagreb. Despite the fact that the group was formed in 2020 during the Corona pandemic, and having faced many challenges of grassroots horizontal organizing in the Balkans, we are still growing strong. For me, it has been a profoundly life-altering experience.

To me, what really helps reduce the feelings of dread and anxiety induced by the climate crisis and biodiversity loss crisis, as well as other anthropogenic crises we may expect in our lifetimes, is learning about the issues while focusing on the solutions. Discovering concepts such as anarchism, a beautiful way of egalitarian anti-systemic local organizing; permaculture, a way of producing food and living with nature while caring for it and restoring its diversity; and degrowth, envisioning an economy that focuses on fulfilling essential human needs while bearing in mind the limits of the biosphere, all brought a lot of joy and peace into my life.

This grounding in positive vision is also guiding my activism towards expanding my knowledge and learning skills and practices that are prefigurative, in the sense that they reflect the future I would like to live, but are also making my life in the current capitalist system a lot more bearable and even enjoyable. I get to live pieces of my dream for a better world while continuously building it with others.

How California's Fast-Food Workers Won \$20 an Hour

Sonali Kolhatkar

More than half a million fast-food workers in California are about to get a raise—not because of the voluntary generosity of their bosses, but as a result of a hard-won labor victory. Governor Gavin Newsom on September 28 signed AB 1228 into law; its title says it all: “Fast Food Council: health, safety, employment, and minimum wage.”

As a result of this new law, the state of California will form a council, which will include worker representatives, to oversee health, safety, and workplace matters for fast-food workers and to decide their minimum wage. Further, the law pushes up the minimum wage for such workers to \$20 an hour starting next April after which the council will determine subsequent annual increases.

That starting point of \$20 an hour is significantly more than the state's already relatively high minimum wage of \$15.50 an hour (one that's set to increase to \$16 in January 2024). California's fast-food workers will now be among the highest-paid low-wage workers in the nation.

The origins of this momentous victory can be traced back to a movement that began on the opposite side of the country more than a decade ago. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU)'s Fight for \$15 campaign, launched in the form of a walkout in New York City in 2012 demanded a wage floor that, at the time, sounded audacious. While it's no longer terribly bold to demand \$15 an hour in an economy where inflation has disproportionately impacted low-wage workers and where billionaires continue to enjoy unimaginable riches, consider this: there are more than a dozen states in the U.S. where the minimum wage remains pegged to the ridiculously paltry federal minimum of \$7.25 an hour. The Fight for \$15 movement used a clever alliter-

ation to change the narrative on what low-wage workers deserved to earn. Earning its fair share of well-deserved criticism for not building explicit “worker power,” SEIU has poured millions of dollars of resources into the movement, playing the long game toward building a national fast-food workers' union, one that has yet to materialize.

In the interim, SEIU has championed the idea of forming sector-specific councils at the state level, which is what AB 1228 is centered on. The New York Times described this as, “sectoral bargaining, in which workers and management negotiate wages and conditions across an entire industry as opposed to at individual companies, often location by location.” By forming alliances with state representatives, organized labor can demand regulations of industries where workers are routinely abused and exploited without having to wait for union representation.

Starbucks workers understand the challenge of organizing unions one restaurant at a time. While workers at hundreds of the coffee chain's locations have successfully petitioned to join Starbucks Workers United (SWU), none have been able to sign a union contract with Starbucks yet. The company has violated so many labor laws so fast that the federal National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has been unable to keep up.

All Starbucks has to do is fire workers known to lead union organizing drives and then ignore the NLRB's demand to negotiate if and when a complaint is filed. The current labor laws are toothless in the face of such aggressive union-busting.

The fast-food industry is even more challenging. Unlike Starbucks, fast-food corporations tend to operate on a franchise model, which helps parent



companies avoid liability for labor violations at individual restaurants. According to a 2021 report by the UCLA Labor Center, fast-food workers routinely “experience physical assault, harassment, intimidation, threats, and verbal abuse.” Further, “Restaurant workers have the highest rates of sexual harassment of any industry.”

That ability to intimidate workers is key to why unionization efforts have failed (Fight for \$15’s original sentiment was “\$15 and a union”). It’s one thing to demand higher wages by walking out for a day—which many workers have risked their jobs to do numerous times—and it’s another thing to organize for permanent union protection.

The fast-food industry is so antagonistic to labor organizing that it threatened to go directly to voters in a high-stakes gamble at the ballot box when Newsom signed an earlier version of the new labor law in 2022 that included holding parent companies responsible for its franchises. An industry-funded proposition slated for the November 2024 California ballot would have asked voters to rollback the labor law.

Democratic as the state’s ballot measures are on paper, moneyed interests have tested the system time and again, realizing that massively well-fund-

ed public relations campaigns to deceive voters into backing corporate interests offer a great ROI (return on investment) to preserve shareholder profits.

The highest profile case in point is the 2020 California ballot measure Proposition 22, which allowed rideshare and delivery companies like Uber and Lyft to treat their employees as individual contractors, and therefore exempt them from standard labor protections. The industry spent upward of \$200 million to pass Proposition 22—the most expensive ballot battle at the time—and prevailed, even in a state that embraces labor rights.

Likely realizing that the fast-food industry could hire armies of PR consultants, marketing experts, and election campaigners to similarly convince voters that the 2022 labor law was not in their best interest, the governor’s office brought labor and fast-food to the negotiating table. AB 1228 was the result of a compromise that was struck: the legislature would pass a new version of the bill without the threat to the franchise model in exchange for the fast-food companies withdrawing their ballot measure to undo the entire law.

On the one hand, the passage of this new labor law proves that a corporate oligarchy still has far too much sway on our democratic processes, using money and resources as weapons to undermine people’s rights.

On the other hand, it also proves that there is no need to capitulate to corporate employers and that an alliance between organized labor and lawmakers can move the needle on workers’ rights. Further, the fact that this battle took place in California, the nation’s largest, and the world’s fourth-largest economy, creates a strong precedent for the rest of the nation.

Most importantly, more than half a million low-wage workers struggling in one of the most exploitative industries in the nation will shortly get a decent pay bump and enjoy a measure of protection from the forthcoming council.

The Importance of Political Decentralization: Reflections from the Balkans

Yavor Tarinski

Everything about the dominant modern form of social organization tends towards centralization. Capitalism and the nation-state tends to take power away from local communities and concentrate it in the hands of narrow elites. This tendency towards centralization is not confined to one or two social spheres, but is spreading steadily, like a cancerous cell, into all areas of our common life. As Murray Bookchin suggests:

Centralized power invariably reproduces itself in centralized forms at all levels of social, political, and economic life. It not only is big; it thinks big. Indeed, this way of being and thinking is a condition for its survival, not only its growth.

There are several factors at work in this trend. On the one hand, the capital-nation-state complex is moving at a certain speed, where decisions have to be made with as little delay as possible. This is required, among other things, by the mechanisms of capitalist growth and the rules of geopolitical statecraft, both of which imply an ever-increasing pace due to their innate logic of competition. This promotes the decrease of the number of people involved in decision-making so that decisions can be made with as little delay as possible.

On the other hand, this framework inevitably creates a narrow-privileged stratum which cannot but constantly strive to further consolidate and extend its authority. And while the members of this elite are antagonistic to the rest of society and result in a class in themselves, they are far from being a unified group; they are constantly at odds with each other, trying to absorb each other in order to increase their power. Of course, this doesn't mean that they don't unite and cooperate when they see that the regime on which their privileged position

rests is in danger. In short, the organizational system that dominates most parts of the world today is an authority-centered cult that promotes a dog-eat-dog logic, in which you either expand your power (either politically or economically) at the expense of someone else, or you risk losing any obtained privileges.

But there is popular resistance to this trend, which resembles the double movement observed by Karl Polanyi in his magnum opus "The Great Transformation". Just as peoples resist the creeping economization and marketization of society, communities attempt to resist the spread of political centralization. People in different geographical areas are organizing to support an institutional decentralization that can keep power closer to the citizens, so that people can have a real and meaningful say over issues that directly affect them. Such struggles often invoke and even put into practice institutional forms and democratic processes that can potentially serve as building blocks of a truly democratic future.

Let us examine these trends through the lived experience of a geography that I happen to know best – the Balkans. Specifically, I will focus on the disastrous effects of political centralization in Greece, as well as on some of the efforts at popular self-institution at municipal level in Bulgaria.

Political centralization in Greece

The state of local governance in Greece has never been rosy, but in recent decades the situation has only worsened. The trend described above towards the centralization of political power in the hands of narrow elites has been steadily implemented,

with the most notable reforms in this direction being Kapodistrias in 1998 and Kallikratis in 2010. In 2019, more reforms in this direction have been passed that further weaken the power of municipal and community councils.

As a result of these policies, local communities and municipalities have been merged into super-municipalities that favor demagogic-type of management and keep citizens in the role of a passive clients to be served by “experts”. It has created an environment that nurtures strong regional lobbies with considerable power and influence, both economic and social, that are completely dependent on the central national authority. The creation of these lobbies has been greatly facilitated by the abolition of the two-term limit for mayors and regional governors, as well as by stripping local communities from any control over their budget, whose management has instead been concentrated in the hands of distant regional bodies.

This trend towards centralization has shown its shortcomings in the age of climate change. As deadly and massive forest fires and floods become

a regular occurrence in Greece, local communities appear disorganized and unprepared to deal with these disasters. The centralized authorities seem too distant from the localities in need, with little to no knowledge of their specificities. Crucial preventive services have either been abolished due to neoliberal austerity or their management transferred elsewhere. As a result, the response of the authorities seems inadequate and delayed, which only adds to the chaos and destruction caused by the fires and floods. It is no wonder, then, that a growing number of reports suggest that, in the face of such disasters, residents rely more on each other, on local self-organization, and on the solidarity offered by people from afar, rather than on help from the authorities. Such self-reliance appears to be crucial to saving lives and homes, as it comes directly from the grassroots and is shaped by needs, context and specificity. It is also reminiscent of Kropotkin’s suggestion that mutual aid is the surest means for giving to each and to all the greatest safety, the best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual, and moral. Ultimately, communal resilience requires decision-making processes to be as close to the community as possible.



The “Tree of Life” in Negushevo. Photo: Yavor Tarinski

Efforts of popular self-institution on municipal level in Bulgaria

NEGUSHEVO

The Bulgarian village of Negusevo is a settlement of almost 300 inhabitants at the foot of the Balkan mountain. Thanks to the struggle and initiative of the inhabitants of Negushevo, supported by the population of all the other villages in the municipality of Gorna Malina (to which Negusevo belongs), on 25 June 2011 the first successful local referendum in Bulgaria was held, where the inhabitants said a resounding “NO!” to the question: “Do you agree with the municipality granting rights over municipal land for the exploration and opening of hazardous waste landfills, mines and quarries for subsoil mining or polluting industries?”

The referendum protected the beautiful nature of the municipality of Gorna Malina from the appetites of multinationals and oligarchs and was the beginning of its designation as a protected, green municipality.

In 2015, on the initiative of a citizens’ committee, a monument, named “The Tree of Life”, was built in the square of Negushevo, so that the history of the struggle and the referendum would not be forgotten. Instead of stone quarries – a stone tree and a public fountain.



The General Assembly held on 31 July 2016. Photo: BGDirectDemocracy

KRESNA

In the summer of 2016, in Bulgaria, residents of the municipality of Kresna rose up against the centralization of water-supplying services, a measure that puts municipal water resources in the hands of a centralized association. “In our municipality we only have water, we don’t want that taken away from us too,” residents say. The mobilizations lead to a very rare precedent for our current Balkan latitudes – the holding of a general assembly of the municipality’s population in the central square. Such an assembly is held on July 31, 2016, where citizens decide by vote that they do not want to join the new water association and that local water should remain in the hands of the municipality.

More than 2 thousand residents gathered in the square, which makes the decision valid, as a quorum was reached – 2 thousand people out of almost 5 thousand who were entitled to vote. In this way the municipal management of water is maintained. It is worth noting how a few minutes before the meeting, the then deputy minister of regional development arrived at the municipality with some MPs from the ruling party to show pressure, but to no avail.



The vote that took place at the end of the assembly. Photo: PodTepeto

ZLATITRAP

At the beginning of September 2021 and after strong protests, several hundred inhabitants of the village of Zlatitrap in the municipality of Rodopi (Bulgaria), for the first time in the history of their municipality, gathered in the village square to express their opinion in a general assembly of the population. The subject of the meeting was the authorities' attempt to make the kindergarten of Zlatitrap village an annex of the kindergarten of the neighboring village of Brestovitsa.

The authorities justified their decision by claiming that it would save money, as there would only be one central administration responsible for all the kindergartens in the area. However, the residents of Zlatitrap argued that this would only save an insignificant amount of money, while removing control of this critical public structure from the municipality and opening the door to its possible future privatization.

201 people expressed their position against the merger of the two educational institutions. Citizens exercised their right and stated that they wanted their kindergarten to remain under municipal management. A quorum was achieved at the meeting and thus the residents saved, for the time being, their kindergarten from centralization.

The crucial issue of avoiding parochial localism

It is important, however, to be ever cautious about the danger of the struggles against political centralization being derailed into the backward path of parochial localism. Direct democracy cannot exist in a closed environment. According to Cornelius Castoriadis, in the situation of extremely closed societies there is nothing to prepare the people who constitute them to question established institutions and meanings (which, in this case, represent the principles and agents of closure), and furthermore, everything is set up in them in such a way as to make this kind of questioning impossible and unthinkable. In one such environment of enclosure there is always the real

danger of what currently exist being perceived as the only correct setting, which is the first step towards xenophobic and authoritarian mindsets.

To prevent such dangers, and to create the conditions for the functioning of a real democracy, it is necessary to establish interconnected relationships that transcend community and social boundaries, so that the democratic values of constant questioning and critical thinking can flourish. This is why revolutionary thinkers like Bookchin insisted that confederalism is an integral part of any democratic struggle against centralisation. For this reason, he argues that:

Only insofar as confederation is an extension of participatory administration—by means of confederal networks—can decentralization and localism prevent the communities that compose larger bodies of association from parochially withdrawing into themselves at the expense of wider areas of human consociation.

To avoid such a risk, it is up to each of us to take an active part in the struggles and push them in a democratic and ecological direction.



The Perilous Path From Western Domination to De-Dollarization

Justin Podur

Two interesting things happened at the BRICS summit in South Africa in August. Several new members were invited to join BRICS in 2024: Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. And, at Brazil's urging, a commission was established to study the possibility of a new currency to replace the dollar in international trade. Currency swap agreements will continue to be the way the process moves forward in the short term, though, because the dollar cannot be replaced in a rush.

To escape the shackles of dollarization, Global South countries have a perilous path to walk. The major problems, as described by political economists Michael Hudson and Radhika Desai, are as follows: Global South countries are saddled with immense debts in dollars, and Western corporations claim ownership over their resources. The international legal structure favors the West, finding in favor of American corporations and vulture funds. The U.S.-run covert network continues to have the ability to foment wars and coups against those who defy Western rules—including financial ones. These problems now confront most countries of the world.

Thus far, most of the world is not polarized. Very few countries (mostly in Europe) are unconditional supporters of the U.S.-led West. On the other side, only a handful of states (e.g. Russia, China, Iran) dare to categorically refuse when the West makes demands.

Everyone else—where the future of the global economy will play out—is in-between. Will they find a way out of these traps?

Argentina's Politicized Debt

For about 200 years, Argentina has been the site of first British, and then U.S. experiments in debt-driven subjugation. Each time a developmentalist government came to power and tried to get the country out of a crisis, it would be followed by a right-wing government that would plunge the country back in.

Among the in-between countries, Argentina has a special role. The country is on the list of the new invitees to BRICS. Its finances are in disarray, and its leading presidential candidate, who takes economic advice from his four dogs, wants to close most of the government down and use the U.S. dollar as the currency. Like many right-wing Western politicians, from Berlusconi and Sarkozy to Trump and Bolsonaro, Milei's electoral brand is damaged neither by clown antics nor by infeasible economic plans.

And infeasible they are. The Economist notes that "Milei promises cuts worth 15 [percent]... of GDP, to a public sector that accounts for 38 [percent]... of GDP, but struggles to outline where they will come from."

Nor does he know

"how... Milei's government would find the \$40 [billion] his team thinks is necessary to make the switch to dollars. Currently, Argentina cannot even repay the [International Monetary Fund (IMF)]... to which it owes \$44 billion. Having run out of American currency, the central bank is instead burning through yuan borrowed from China... Milei has suggested selling state-owned firms and government debt in an offshore fund to raise the necessary capital. It is hard to imagine there will be many buyers."

Argentina's fate has been controlled by imperial debt since 1824 when the British Empire's bank (Barings—whose Lord Cromer used financial methods to take over Egypt, among other notable operations) first advanced a loan of one million pounds to newly independent Argentina. This was less than 20 years after the British landed forces to try unsuccessfully to colonize Argentina. They ultimately found the financial weapon more effective. The first of nine defaults followed in 1827. The latest was in 2020 (the Economist is advocating a tenth).

In the 20th century, Argentina alternated between elected governments and military dictatorships and switched between developmentalist and neoliberal economic approaches. In the neoliberal periods, Argentina was the site of innovation—new experiments in plundering a country were invented. Among these was what Esteban Almiron outlined as the “financial bicycle” made possible by the peg of the peso to the U.S. dollar:

“When billionaire speculators were allowed to exchange Argentine pesos for unlimited amounts of dollars, benefiting from [high-interest]... rates in pesos, it was the state that had to borrow those dollars from [U.S.]... private banks or from the IMF and pay interests on them. Once exchanged, the dollars obtained by the speculators were moved out of the country, leaving the debt to the state.”

In 2001, Argentina defaulted and dropped the peg. It then paid its \$9.5 billion IMF debt in full in 2005, saving the country \$842 million in interest in subsequent years. It also negotiated, through to 2010, a restructuring of 92 percent of the rest of the national debt.

Almiron's history of Argentina's debt describes what happened next: a story of Argentina and the American vultures. The remaining 8 percent of the debt offers a case study of the rigged international legal structure that facilitates the U.S. plunder of Global South economies. It was held by vulture funds run by American billionaire Paul Singer and others. The

vultures turned to the U.S. courts and, predictably, in 2012, got exactly what they wanted—a U.S. judge ruled that Argentina would have to pay them in full.

Then-president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner refused to pay, but subsequent elections brought Mauricio Macri into power. Macri increased Argentina's debt-to-GDP ratio from 52.6 percent to 90.2 percent and oversaw an increase in poverty from 30 percent to 40 percent (four million people entering poverty). By the time he left power in 2019, Argentina had experienced \$79.8 billion in capital flight—and defaulted again. Almiron writes that “Macri and his team wrecked the relatively healthy finances of the Argentine state in less than two years.” Macri brought back the financial bicycle:

“Their trick was to buy pesos, profit from the [high-interest]... rates in pesos, then convert them to dollars and move the dollars out of the country. In the meantime, the state had to provide a virtually infinite amount of dollars for the speculators, and was left with the pesos.”

On his way out the door, Macri took out a \$57 billion loan from the IMF, later reduced to \$44 billion, which “disappeared in just 11 months.”

His successor Alberto Fernández tried to rebuild the gutted health ministry during COVID-19 but was stuck with the \$44 billion loan. Out of desperation as much as out of developmentalist ideology, Fernández turned to China, joining the Belt and Road Initiative in 2022 and applying—successfully, it turns out—to BRICS. Argentina will join in 2024. However, collaboration with China (and Qatar) so far has been a matter of getting additional loans from China to pay the IMF. This is not exactly the type of “win-win” deal China seeks with Global South countries in its infrastructure investments and trade deals around resources.

If elected, Milei can be expected to withdraw the BRICS application. If he keeps Argentina in BRICS, he will apply his (and his dogs') financial genius to facilitate the U.S. use of Argentina not just to drain

Argentina, but China (and perhaps other emergency lenders) as well.

With each new plunge into debt, the country's right-wing attempts to sink the state so much deeper that it can never emerge. When he arrives in office, dog whisperer Milei has promised to outdo Macri's record of destruction.

The Travails of Pakistan, Ally of Both the U.S. and China

Like Argentina, Pakistan has been controlled by imperial debt regimes—first British, then U.S.—for centuries. What is now Pakistan was once a group of rich provinces in British India. Each kingdom that Britain's East India Company brought under its boot was saddled with debt, the principal mechanism (there were others) through which Britain drained \$45 trillion from the subcontinent. Britain then partitioned the subcontinent into India and Pakistan before handing it over. Today India is playing an ambiguous role in BRICS, while Pakistan's post-coup government has resorted to severe violence to try to get the country under control.

Also like Argentina, Pakistan is a place where both BRICS and the IMF have a heavy economic presence. In April, about a year after former Prime Minister Imran Khan was ousted, the U.S. Institute for Peace reported that Pakistan was facing an “existential” economic crisis. Dividing the debt into three types (multilateral, private, and Chinese), the USIP gave a breakdown of Pakistan's debt and to whom it was owed: “As of December 2022, Pakistan holds external debt and liabilities of \$126.3 billion. Nearly 77 percent of this debt, amounting to \$97.5 billion is directly owed by the government of Pakistan to various creditors; an additional \$7.9 billion is owed by government-controlled public sector enterprises to multilateral creditors.”

Pakistan's multilateral debt of \$45 billion broke down as follows: the World Bank (\$18 billion), the Asian Development Bank (\$15 billion), and the IMF (\$7.6 billion), with smaller amounts to the Islamic Development Bank and the Asian Infra-

structure Investment Bank. It owes another \$8.5 billion to major creditor countries Japan, Germany, France, and the United States.

Pakistan's private debt was led by Eurobonds and global Sukuk bonds, amounting to \$7.8 billion. It also had foreign commercial loans to the tune of nearly \$7 billion, likely to increase to nearly \$9 billion by the end of the current fiscal year.

Finally, the USIP placed the “Chinese debt” of \$27 billion in a separate category:

“This includes around \$10 billion of bilateral debt and \$6.2 billion in debt provided by the Chinese government to Pakistani public sector enterprises, and Chinese commercial loans of around \$7 billion. In addition, China's State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) has placed \$4 billion worth of foreign deposits with Pakistan's central bank.”

With a GDP of \$376 billion and a debt of \$126 billion in 2022, Pakistan's debt-to-GDP ratio of 34 percent is much more favorable than Argentina's even before the Macri disaster. Still, Pakistan's Western creditors presented it as an impossible situation and inflation was indeed causing popular hardship.

The 2022-23 government budget projected revenues of \$24 billion and expenses of \$33 billion. Debt repayments, not factored in, were looking like they would exceed state revenues, at almost \$25 billion.

The Chinese debt could be rescheduled as per historical precedent—but it was only 30 percent of the total. What about the rest? Over the decades, Argentina's developmentalist governments tried to use economic growth to raise the tax and export base to shrink the debt when in power, but Pakistan's growth forecast wasn't looking good. Likewise, in the long-term, as documented in Jawad Syed and Yung-Hsiang Ying's 2020 book *China's Belt and Road Initiative in a Global Context Volume II: The China Pakistan Economic Corridor and its Implications for Business*, the CPEC envisions upgrading Pakistan's value chains and infrastructure as a process of economic development for both countries.

But what about the short term? Pakistan tried to get creative: Prime Minister Imran Khan had just struck a deal for energy and wheat—the two most necessary and inflationary items in the basket—from Russia when he was ousted. The post-coup government scuttled the deal, trying to avoid trouble with the U.S. for trading with U.S.-sanctioned countries outside of dollar transactions. Pakistan took a page out of pre-Nixon-visit China's book and used barter. But the Western creditors are still there, demanding to be paid (in dollars). Whether by downgrading Pakistan's credit rating or monitoring and punishing Pakistan as a financial sponsor of terrorism through the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the United States has many tools to force debt compliance on Pakistan.

How did the situation get so dire? Pakistan's finances, including its U.S. debts, are tied up in the two countries' web of covert relationships and the interventions of both countries in Afghanistan since the 1970s. Sure, the United States and Pakistan trade cotton and textiles, steel and machinery, but the heart of the economic relationship is martial. The people of Afghanistan suffered the worst, with author Nicolas J.S. Davies estimating a death toll of 875,000, but Pakistan too suffered. Pakistan's intervention in Afghanistan and U.S. operations in rural Pakistan cost the U.S. ally \$150 billion and 70,000 lives according to the Pakistani ambassador to the United States in 2021 and 325,000 deaths according to Davies.

The amount of money the United States spent on the Afghan occupation is immense and probably uncountable. There are official accounting numbers of \$100 billion in military contracts alone. Columnist Khawaja Akbar quipped that if Pakistan was passing military aid money onto the Taliban, it could only be a fraction of what the United States spent: "The \$1 trillion spent by the U.S. in Afghanistan during the same time period failed to negate the effect of the \$30 billion given to Pakistan."

When Imran Khan ended support for the U.S. effort in Afghanistan, the occupation's days were numbered: U.S. logistics for the 2001-2021 Afghan

war all ran through Pakistan. A New York Times article published shortly after the Taliban takeover noted "Pakistan's ports and airfields provided the main entry points and supply lines for American military equipment needed in Afghanistan." American occupation logistics were a touchy issue and the U.S.-Pakistan relationship broke down over it numerous times.

Tariq Ali wrote of one such moment in his 2008 book, *The Duel*:

"The country is in the grip of a food and power crisis. Inflation is approaching 15 [percent]... The price of gas (used for cooking in many homes) has risen by 30 [percent]... and the price of wheat by more than 20 [percent]... since November 2007. Food and commodity prices are rising all over the world, but there is an additional problem in Pakistan: too much wheat is being smuggled into Afghanistan to feed the NATO armies. According to a recent survey, 86 [percent]... of Pakistanis find it increasingly difficult to afford flour, for which they blame their new government. [Former president Asif Ali] Zardari's approval rating has plummeted to 13 [percent]."

There is no discussion of the smuggling economy in Pakistan and Afghanistan without mentioning opium. It was an economy of literally uncountable riches, maybe \$2 billion, maybe much more, for U.S.- and Pakistan-based covert organizations, criminal organizations, and financial institutions that the Taliban has put an end to.

When the United States stole Afghanistan's \$7 billion in reserves after the Taliban takeover, Pakistan also suffered as the country's major trading partner.

During the decades of Afghan wars, the United States and Pakistan developed dossiers full of secret leverage on one another—so much so that after invading Afghanistan in 2001, the United States made sure Pakistan was able to get its most important operatives out. This operation would later be called the "airlift of evil" by the United States.

We can summarize this as follows: Over the course of the U.S. war on Afghanistan, Pakistan ran up an immense covert expense bill, an immense death toll, and an illicit, parallel economy that only harmed the formal economy.

After the Taliban takeover and Imran Khan's ouster, the United States would resume this web of covert relationships with Pakistan—not over Afghanistan this time, but Ukraine. According to the Intercept, Pakistan's post-coup IMF negotiations were smoothed by a secret agreement to produce munitions for the United States—munitions the United States would then send to Ukraine to fight Russia. Needless to say, had Imran Khan's wheat-energy deal with Russia gone through, Pakistan probably would not be sending munitions for the Ukrainian side of the war.

Other Cases

Between Argentina and Pakistan, many of the dilemmas of the dollar-dominated and the post-dollar world are encapsulated. But a quick tour of some other states reveals some other dynamics. The IMF wants Egypt (another new BRICS invitee) to devalue; Egypt's president, who came to power in a coup a decade ago, is stretching the negotiations out. Keeping Egypt out of a revolutionary situation is how the United States provides for Israel's security, so expect those negotiations to keep dragging on. In Lebanon, the IMF strategy is different—keeping Lebanon in a state of financial collapse is another plank of the U.S./Israeli strategy, so as with Argentina, the objective is an unending financial crisis. So far, mission accomplished. Tunisia has been pillaged by neocolonial debt arrangements since the 19th century. This continues uninterrupted. Sri Lanka, devastated by the tsunami of 2004, became a recipient of IMF-led predatory lending from that point on. Even though just 10 percent of this debt is owed to China, Sri Lanka is referred to in the West as being caught in a “Chinese debt trap.” In fact, because so little of the debt is Chinese, Sri Lanka is fairly straightforwardly in a Western debt trap from which it will have difficulty escaping.

A couple of final cases to conclude: In Kenya, the IMF is pressuring hard, demanding more suffering from Kenyans in the form of higher taxes and lower spending—the usual austerity measures. Kenyan authorities announced earlier this year they aren't going to try to reschedule or restructure. Kenya is also the site of one of the flagship China-Africa projects, the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), along with other infrastructure. On the other hand, a U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) military base is also in Mombasa. Zambia, lucky enough to owe \$4.1 billion of its \$6.3 billion debt to China, restructured in June. Naturally, the IMF claimed this as a triumph for its own flexibility and long-term vision, claiming the agreement was “helping put Zambia on a path toward sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction.” France's President Emmanuel Macron also took credit for the “historic achievement”: “We remain [mobilized]... to ensure that other countries caught in a debt trap benefit from a multilateral response,” he tweeted.

In all of these cases, the U.S. and IMF are careful to pressure only when they hold the cards. When China holds a big share of the debt or can offer a meaningful alternative, the IMF also seems to find a way to be less haughty with its debtors. The IMF needs to tread lightly as well: they are no longer the only game in town, and negotiating too hard in the presence of alternatives will lead to default—perhaps the IMF's last.

In summary: De-dollarization is a road fraught with many challenges. Most countries are not the world's biggest economy (China) nor the military peer of the United States (Russia). Few countries fall into the category of Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, Afghanistan, and the DPRK—those who have suffered everything the United States can realistically throw at them and have nowhere to go but up.

Most are like Argentina and Pakistan, in the in-between of economic suffering, perils, and difficult decisions. Extricating themselves from Western power will be painful, but no longer appears impossible.

IMF Showdown with China in Morocco

Michael Hudson

This year's annual IMF/World Bank meetings in Morocco are the most explicitly confrontational yet by US/NATO diplomacy toward China and its fellow BRICS+ allies. It is not really rivalry, because US neoliberal financial policy is so different from the aims that the BRICS+ countries have been developing at their own recent international meetings. At issue is not only what countries will be the major beneficiaries of future IMF and World Bank loan operations, but whether the world will back US unipolar dominance or start to move explicitly toward a multipolar philosophy of mutual support to increase living standards and prosperity instead of imposing anti-labor austerity in an attempt to maintain a trade and investment system that is now widely seen to be dysfunctional and financially predatory US demands to use these two organizations as arms of its New Cold War policy.

At issue is an increase in the US drive to increase quotas of IMF and World Bank member countries. Quotas reflect voting power, with 85% of the votes required to enact a policy. A 15% veto is able to block any policy change. And ever since the inception of these two organizations in 1944-45, the United States has insisted in having veto power in any organization it joins, so that no foreign countries will ever be in a position to dictate its policy – while enabling it to block any policy that it deems benefiting other nations more than itself. Its 17.4% quota (and 16.5% of the vote) gives it veto power in the IMF.

It was inevitable that the original distribution of quotas has not kept pace with the shifts in international financial power since 1945. Rising economies have asked for a larger quota and hence voice in settling IMF and World Bank pol-

icy. But each round of quota increases has seen US strategists insist that any increase in overall quotas must not reduce its own quota to less than the 15% enabling it to maintain its unique veto power.

No other country remotely approaches U.S. power. US strategists were glad to let Japan obtain the second largest quota, now 6.47 percent. That reflects not only its great industrial takeoff in the 1970s and '80s, but US confidence that Japan will be like a "second US vote." (That is why it tried to add Japan to the UN Security Council. The Soviet delegate vetoed this, citing Japan's role as a US political satellite.)

China is in third place, with 6.40%, closely followed by the weakening economies of Germany and Britain, thoroughly reliant on US gentleness as it imposes tightening US-centered dependency on their economies.

What makes this issue so pressing this year is the emergence of BRICS+ countries and the collective alternative that they are in the process of juxtaposing as they move to de-dollarize their economies so as to protect themselves from the threat that US diplomats will impose sanctions, confiscate their official monetary reserves (as they have done with those of Iran, Venezuela and Russia) in punishment for their seeking national self-sufficiency instead of reliance on US suppliers and creditors.

For countries seeking a multipolar world order instead of US-centered unipolar economy, the widely used term "dedollarization" has evolved rapidly to mean much more than simply using other currencies to settle their trade and invest-



ment transactions. A fundamentally different philosophy of international finance, creditor/debtor relationships and national self-sufficiency to protect themselves from trade sanctions and other US-sponsored economic warfare. For many decades, countries sought to avoid running into debt to the IMF in fear of being subjected to its anti-labor austerity policies imposed in the junk-economics belief that any volume of foreign debt service could be squeezed out by reducing labor's wages by a sufficient degree.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and her US neoliberal gang at Marrakesh have thrown down the gauntlet when it comes to giving China a stronger voice – that is, quota – in the IMF. The Financial Times published the most explicit statement of their position on October 12 in an

article by former US Treasury official Edwin Truman. “Like it or not,” he points out, “any deal must satisfy the US Treasury.” Its primary concern is that while ideally each member's quota would increase by at least one-third, “the combined size of these selected increases must not threaten the US voting share, or Washington will block the compromise.”

Furthermore, Mr. Truman explains, the planned increase should not apply to “the emerging market and developing countries.” They are debtors and hence would support policies that help debtor countries recover instead of fall into deepening dependency on international bondholders and new US dollar loans from US/NATO creditors and the IMF.

The problem is that “Under the current formula, the quotas of [the strongest] 25 IMF members should be at least 50 percent larger than their current ones, led by China.” But in addition to threatening to “reduce the US voting share to close to 15 percent,” it would give China increasing influence. “The US has made clear that it will not support an increase in any member’s quota share unless that country respects the rules and norms of the IMF, which in the US view China does not. To remove this obstacle, China should agree not to accept the selective increase in its quota to which it would otherwise be entitled, and the US should support the compromise.”

If it does not submit quietly, he threatens, is for the IMF meeting to end in “another stalemate.” By that word, he means a refusal by China and other countries to acquiesce in U.S. Cold War strategists hijacking even more Asian and Global South resources to support their international diplomacy.

In one sense, I wonder what all this kerfuffle actually is about. Who really cares what the IMF’s articles of agreement stipulate and what its staff recommends? We are no longer in a rule of law, but in a “rules-based order,” with US officials setting the rules on an ad hoc basis. This already had made a travesty of IMF rules and procedures.

The IMF’s recent loans to Ukraine have raised its borrowing to seven times its quota. The IMF no longer feels obligated to follow its articles of agreement, and quite openly acts as an agent of the US State Department and military to finance the US/NATO war against Russia and China (and really, of course, against Germany and Western Europe).

In addition to IMF loans to Ukraine violating its stated limits to member-country borrowing, it is lending to a country at war, also forbidden. And third, it violates the “No more Argentinas” rule that it is not supposed to make a loan to a country without some calculation that the country will be able to repay the loan. Does anyone be-

lieve that Ukraine can repay – except perhaps by selling its agricultural land to Monsanto, Cargill and other US agribusiness companies?

Since US strategists at the IMF and World Bank are bound to continue to weaponize their loans to promote US-centered neoliberalism, I have a modest proposal for China. I know that it does not want to use the present state of international tension to emphasize its willingness to break. So perhaps it should indeed give the US precisely what it wants – and even more!

It can indeed go on record as suggesting that it be given a quota reflecting its economic equality with the United States. That certainly would seem to be warranted by being designated America’s Number One long-term adversary. But if the US refuses, then I would like to see China simply withdraw its IMF and World Bank subscriptions altogether. Walk away.

Why should China help subsidize international organizations whose policies are adverse to those of China and its fellow BRICS+ allies? The World Bank is always headed by a US diplomat, usually from the military, and hopes to finance the US/NATO-backed alternative to China’s Belt and Road initiative. And the IMF’s neoliberal “stabilization” policies are anti-labor and hence most amenable to US client oligarchies, not the reforms that BRICS+ countries are seeking to put in place.

If Chinese and fellow BRICS+ de-dollarization is indeed a broad system-wide effort to replace the US unipolar predatory asymmetry with a more positive-sum philosophy of mutual gain, why not take this opportunity to accept the US challenge that has just thrown down the gauntlet to China? That would avoid a “stalemate.” It would make clear the philosophical distinctions that have led the world economy to today’s crossroads.

In diplomatic terms, let’s call it an agreement to disagree.

How 'Al-Quds Flood' Altered the Relationship between Palestine and Israel Forever

Ramzy Baroud

Regardless of the precise strategy of the Palestinian group Hamas, or any other Palestinian movement for that matter, the daring Palestinian military campaign, deep inside Israel, on Saturday, October 7, was only possible because Palestinians are simply fed up.

17 years ago, Israel imposed a hermetic siege on the Gaza Strip. The story of the siege is often presented in two starkly different interpretations. For some, it is an inhumane act of 'collective punishment'; for others, it is a necessary evil so that Israel may protect itself from so-called Palestinian terrorism.

Largely missing from the story, however, is that 17 years are long enough for a whole generation to grow up under siege, to enlist in the Resistance and to fight for its freedom.

According to Save The Children, nearly half of the 2.3 million Palestinians living in Gaza today are children.

This fact is often infused to delineate the suffering of a population that has never stepped outside the tiny, impoverished Strip of 365 square km, approximately 141 square miles.

But again, numbers, though may seem precise, are often employed to tell a small part of a complex story.

This Gaza generation, which either grew up or was born after the imposition of the siege, experienced at least five major, devastating wars, of which children, like them, along with their mothers, fathers, and siblings, were the main targets, victims.

"If you surround your enemy completely, give them no chance to escape, offer them no quarter,

then they will fight to the last," wrote Sun Tzu in The Art of War.

Yet, year after year, this is precisely what Israel has done. This strategy proved to be a major strategic miscalculation.

Even the mere attempt at protesting the injustice of the siege, by gathering in large numbers at the Gaza fence, separating besieged Gaza from Israel, was not permitted.

The mass protests, known as the Great March of Return, were answered with Israeli sniper bullets. Scenes of youngsters, carrying other bleeding youth, shouting 'God is Great,' became a regular scene at the fence.

As the casualty count increased, the media interest in the story simply faded with time.

The hundreds of fighters who crossed into Israel through four different entry points at dawn, on October 7, were these same young Palestinians who knew nothing but war, siege, and the need to protect one another.

They also learned how to survive, despite the lack of everything in Gaza, including clean water and proper medical care.

This is where the story of this generation intersects with that of Hamas, or the Islamic Jihad and any other Palestinian group.

Yes, Hamas chose the timing and the nature of its military campaign to fit into a very precise strategy. This strategy, however, would have not been possible if Israel did not leave these young Palestinians with no other option but to fight back.

Videos circulating on social media showed Palestinian fighters yelling in Arabic, with that distinct, often harsh sounding Gaza accent, “this is for my brother,” “this is for my son.”

They shouted these and many other angry statements as they fired, among panic-stricken Israeli settlers and soldiers. The latter, on many occasions, had abandoned their positions and run away.

The psychological impact of this war will most certainly exceed that of October 1973, when Arab armies made quick gains against Israel, also following a surprise attack.

This time, the devastating impact on the collective Israeli thinking will prove to be a game-changer, since the ‘war’ involves a single Palestinian group, not a whole army, or three.

The October 2023 surprise attack, however, is directly linked to the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

By choosing the 50th anniversary of what Arabs consider a great triumph against Israel, Palestinian Resistance wanted to send a clear message: the cause of Palestine remains still the cause of all Arabs.

In fact, all statements made by top Hamas military commanders and political leaders were loaded with such symbolism and other references to Arab countries and peoples.

This pan-Arab discourse was not haphazard and was delineated in statements made by the Commander of Al-Qassam Brigades, Mohammed Deif, founding commander of Al-Qassam, Saleh al-Arouri, Head of Hamas Political Bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, and Abu Obeida, the Brigades’ famous masked spokesman.

They all urged unity and insisted that Palestine is but a component of a larger Arab, Islamic struggle for justice, dignity and collective honor.

The group called its campaign ‘Al-Aqsa Flood’, thus, again, recentring Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim

unity around Al-Quds, Jerusalem, and all its holy places.

Everyone seemed shocked, including Israel itself, not by the Hamas attack per se, but by the great coordination and daringness of the massive, never-seen-before, operation.

So, instead of attacking at night, the Resistance attacked at dawn. Instead of striking at Israel using the many tunnels under Gaza, they simply drove there, parachuted, arrived by sea, and in many cases, walked across the border.

The element of surprise became even more baffling when Palestinian fighters challenged the very fundamentals of guerrilla warfare: Instead of fighting a ‘war of maneuver’, they, however temporarily, fought a ‘war of position’, thus holding for many hours on the areas they gained inside Israel.

Indeed, for the Gaza groups, the psychological warfare was as critical as the physical fighting. Hundreds of videos and images beamed through every social media channel, as if hoping to redefine the relationship between Palestinians, the usual victim, and Israel, the military occupier.

The insistence on not killing the elderly and children, as emphasized by various field commanders, was not just intended for Palestinians. It was also a message for an international audience, that Palestinian Resistance will play by the accepted universal rules.

Regardless of how many Palestinians Israel kills, and will kill, in retaliation, although tragic, it will hardly salvage the tattered image of an undisciplined army, a divided society, and a political leadership that is solely focused on its own survival.

It is too early to reach sweeping conclusions regarding the outcomes of this unprecedented war. But what is crystal clear is that the fundamental relationship between the Israeli occupation and occupied Palestinians after October 7, 2023, is likely to be altered, and permanently so.

Gaza is Europe Here And Now

Boaventura de Sousa Santos

Without soul or memory, Europe is incapable of seeing the similarity between the images of death and destruction in the Warsaw ghetto, during the desperate Jewish uprising on 19 April 1943, and the images we see today of the Gaza Strip. The fate that Europe (and now also the US) legitimizes for those considered subhuman is the same: in Warsaw it was deportation to concentration camps and crematoria; in Gaza it is the strip reduced to rubble and scorched earth. Since they have nowhere to go, neither by land nor by sea, the fate of the people of Gaza is the same: death. Ultimately, this brutal policy is legitimized by what I have called the abyssal line, the line that has separated, since the beginning of colonial expansion, people considered fully human beings from those considered sub-human beings. It is no coincidence that we hear Israeli officials speak of Palestinians as animals.

At the time of the Warsaw ghetto, Europe was dominated by Nazism and fascist governments. Today, Europe is dominated by democratic governments, some of which are even left-wing. What difference does it make? What is the political color of indifference? Why is it that the news is filled with voices of outrage and horror when a Russian bombing kills three people in Ukraine, whereas razing buildings, mosques, hospitals and schools with hundreds of people inside, and without warning, is reported as a legitimate response? Because the Ukrainians are white Europeans and the Palestinians are not? After all, weren't the Jews also white and European?

Some news outlets (echoing their US sources) dared to characterize the Hamas attack as “unprovoked”, the same trope they have been using for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This year alone, 245 Palestinians have already been killed, including women and children, but this is not

provocation “because nothing justifies the killing of Israeli civilians”. We don't need to go back to the beginning, to the Balfour declaration of 1917 (the first authorization for the Zionists to settle in Palestine), or to the 60. 000 Jews who arrived in Palestine between 1933 and 1936, after several European countries refused to receive the Jews Hitler wanted to expel (it wasn't yet the final solution), or the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, which occupied more than 78% of the territory of Palestine, forcing 750,000 Palestinians into exile in their own land, destroying 530 villages and killing 15,000 Palestinians. Just think of 2006, the year in which Hamas won the elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council with 44.5% of the vote. These elections were free and fair, according to international observers, and since the Western world is the world of democracies in constant combat against autocracies, there was no reason for regime change. As it turned out, this result did not please the West. As has happened before in so many parts of the world under Western influence, Hamas' victory was not recognized, the conflict between Fatah and Hamas was internationally instigated and what remains of Palestine was divided into two governments from 2007 onwards: the West Bank, controlled by Fatah, and the Gaza Strip, controlled by Hamas. It was then that Gaza finally qualified as the largest open-air prison. It is now in danger of becoming the world's largest cemetery or dump for world's human and non-human waste.

For a long time my position has been one of strict obedience to UN resolutions [UNGA Resolution 3314 (1974); UNGA Resolution 37/43 (1982)]. I have therefore been defending the two-state solution. This solution has been made unfeasible by the continuous annexation of Palestinian land against international agreements.



Smoke and flames billow after Israeli forces struck a high-rise tower in Gaza City Photo: Ali Hamad

The conclusion seems obvious: either there are two states or there are none. The State of Israel is behaving more and more like a colonial state and, therefore, as an illegitimate state. It is now on the verge of culminating this policy of extermination in the good colonial tradition, of which its best ally, the USA, is one of the cruel examples with the final solution it imposed on Native Americans. Suppose the genocide of the Indians that took place then was taking place now, would any democrat or person of common sense have difficulty in declaring the US an illegitimate state?

If anyone with common sense had any doubts about the concept of state terrorism, they must have been enlightened by the actions of the State of Israel. However, since common sense today has little to do with the behavior of international institutions, it is quite possible that the International Criminal Court will continue to

have doubts about accusing Israel, since Israel is “acting in self-defense”. This will go on until the last Palestinian in Gaza is gone. It means that an occupying country can destroy the occupied country if it resists occupation. This is surely the new norm of rules-based international relations, the sacrosanct creed by which the US and Europe continue to guide their international policy. Their international isolation is clear when we look at the world map and see which countries are calling for peace. The protagonist of world peace today is the Global South (in the sense of all the countries, many of them former European colonies, that oppose the international policy of the US and Europe). The only exception is India, today dominated by a prime minister who, according to Arundhati Roy, is turning the country into a fascist Hindu regime that is increasingly inclined to treat Islamic Indians as Israel treats Palestinians.

Francesca Albanese On The Crime Of Genocide: “I Do Not Exclude It At All.”

Francesca Albanese interviewed by Kristina Božič

The renowned expert in international law Francesca Albanese was on her way to cross the Atlantic, continuing to appeal to states, members of the international community, to stand up and demand respect of international law when it comes to human rights of Palestinians and to actions of the state of Israel. Last May she took up the position of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 and until now she has not had a chance to present her findings to the UN Security Council. In her public talk on 3rd October she emphasized, that “international law is as valid as the will of the states to enforce it”.

It was a day after she and other UN experts issued a statement condemning the violence and indiscriminate attacks against civilians in Israel and Gaza, calling for, among other, respect of international humanitarian law and human rights, a ceasefire and an international protective presence in the occupied Palestinian territory. They warned of the “appalling language that dehumanises the Palestinian people” and warned that intentional starvation – an unavoidable consequence of the total Israeli blockade and siege of Gaza – is a crime against humanity.

Francesca Albanese began the interview by saying that the present was the most difficult time in her career so far. She has worked as a human rights expert for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and for Unrwa, the Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees, she has written a book *Palestinian Refugees in International Law* and witnessed wars on Gaza in 2008, 2012, 2014, 2021, 2022 ... For a year and a half now she has monitored, documented and reported on “daily brutalities, indignities and humiliations that Palestinians are subjected to under the Israeli occupation that is “completely illegal”. She explained that

under international law occupation cannot last in perpetuity, must not be used for colonization and must not use apartheid. “But still I have never seen in all these years the ferocity I see being unleashed against a civilian population, which is trapped inside 365 square kilometers of land, half of whom are children,” she said.

Asked whether we are standing witness – again – to the international crimes of genocide or ethnic cleansing and whether the repeat of the mass atrocities can be prevented, her answer was unequivocal. “It must. It must be prevented. It is difficult to talk about international law in a context where there is no one single provision of human rights or humanitarian law that has not been violated. And yet: because of the level of destruction of Palestinian people – physically – and the destruction of the civilian infrastructure that is essential to people’s lives; hospitals, water cisterns, water plants, electricity ... at this moment when 2,3 million people are being heavily bombarded, the international community has the obligation to prevent the possible destruction of the Palestinian people or part of the Palestinian people. This is what international obligations are about. Including to prevent the possible crime of genocide – I do not exclude it at all.”

The international law expert and the author of two pivotal UN reports on the question of Palestine continued to explain that ethnic cleansing is nothing new. It has happened during Nakba or Palestinian Catastrophe, between 1947 and 1949, accompanying the establishment of the state of Israel, and in 1967. It has been steadily unfolding in the occupied Palestinian territory by confiscations of the Palestinians’ land and forcible displacements of Palestinian people, by terrorizing them, revoking residency permits, destroying homes and schools.

This abuse of power by the Israeli state has been well documented by Israeli, international and Palestinian human rights organizations, as well as by the UN. Yet no state sanctions or boycotts, worthy of mention, have been taken to ensure the respect of the international law. “Western countries, the Global North have huge responsibilities,” said Francesca Albanese. “But where are the rest? Where are the African countries, where are the Asian countries, where are the Arab countries?” She warned of the move into the opposite direction: “Now we see that even solidarity with the Palestinian people under occupation either coming from the Diaspora, international activists or from the Jewish communities has been quashed.”

The focus, especially in Western countries on battling anti-Semitism has been in the last decade with the imposition of the definition by the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) hijacked to try to silence any criticism of Israel. Francesca Albanese clearly emphasizes that anti-Semitism remains a problem and a challenge we have not dealt with yet. “But to scrutinize Israeli practices as any other UN member state’s and to hold Israel to the same international standards that apply or should apply to the rest of the international community is not anti-Semitism,” she said. Instead, such extension of the definition of anti-Semitism represents an instrumentalisation that is to preserve immunity and impunity of Israel, she added.

The latest report by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories introduces a new legal language and vocabulary of incarceration and explains how Israel by “treating the Palestinians as a collective, incarcerable threat erodes their protection as ‘civilians’ under international law, deprives them of their fundamental freedoms, and expropriates their agency and ability to unite, self-govern and develop as a polity”. Thus Israel can further its settler-colonial project. “This has entrenched segregation, subjugation, fragmentation and, ultimately, the dispossession of Palestinian lands and Palestinians’ forced displacement. Intended primarily to secure colonies’ establishment and expansion, this system

suffocates Palestinian life and undermines Palestinians’ collective existence,” concludes the report.

Francesca Albanese says that the entire occupied Palestinian territory is administered as a prison, with the Palestinians on every step confined by physical – the wall, checkpoints, roadblocks, segregated roads – and bureaucratic barriers, topped by digital surveillance. This defines the lives of the occupied by all the rights they do not have – they cannot move freely, travel, they cannot live where they want nor go to the school they wish. “There is no normalcy in this. It is an open-air prison and it is a panopticon – the inmates are controlled from the outside and from within. And it touches the most vulnerable. Half of the Palestinians across the occupied territory are minors, they are children,” said Francesca Albanese.

In her two reports she describes settler colonialism and cultural erasure of Palestinianity – policies to de-Palestinianize the occupied territory; she writes about the need for decolonisation and cites reports on necropolitics. Overall, she offers a legal framework to understand the Israeli occupation policies. In the interview she paraphrased John. F. Kennedy saying that those who make peaceful resistance impossible make violent resistance inevitable. “This is what is happening and I do not justify it. I criticize the violence, I have condemned the crimes committed by Hamas,” she emphasized. However, she recognizes and warns about the omnipresent and structural violence the Israeli occupation needs to continue.

She said she does not despair but continues to talk to policy-makers. “I hope they will not turn their eyes away. So far their conscience sits elsewhere, it is not with the Palestinian people. But if you differentiate human beings on the grounds of their national group and if you are unable to recognize dignity, freedom and equal rights to everyone regardless of their nationality, then this is racism,” she said, and continued, that at the moment “the international community is tarnishing and undermining the very foundations of the system that has originated from the ashes of the Second World War”.



Seized Israeli vehicle in Gaza. Image: Mustafa Hassona

She has stressed, also in her reports, that the question of Palestine cannot be treated as a matter of security. “It is a matter of human rights and equality of all, Palestinians and Israelis – of equality in dignity and in human rights and freedoms. This is what I ultimately stand for,” she said. As possible alleys to greater respect of international law she pointed to the International Criminal Court and the national courts.

“But I do not think the situation will change with a top-down approach,” said Francesca Albanese. Israeli bombs and Hamas rockets continue to fall from top down. As an expert in international law she turned to the experiences from the apartheid South Africa but warned that creating a joint Israeli-Palestinian front and movement is much more difficult than was building a national antiapartheid movement with white and black South Africans. “We need to normalize the unity of the human rights discourse. I have had extremely humanely touching relationships with Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations. They speak the same language. And in the tragic hours that Israeli people have gone through as of 7th October all major human rights organisations in Israel have condemned what Hamas had done as heinous crimes and then spoken at length of the context, of the reality of the Palestinian people and urged a de-escalation to protect the Palestinian people, to end the occupation

and apartheid. This is humanity. This is where I see hope,” she said.

In her first report as the Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese emphasized that “the unlawfulness of Israel’s occupation cannot be remedied, or humanized, by reforming some of its most brutal consequences”. Furthermore, the international law obliges states “not to contribute or condone Israel’s settler-colonial apartheid, which criminalizes Palestinians for (re)claiming or refusing to forsake their collective right to exist as a people, and act to realize all conditions that would allow the Palestinian people to realise their rights including their inalienable right to self-determination”.

“We need to look at the people,” she said at the end of the interview, looking beyond netanyahus, hamases or fatahs. “We need to identify the people to talk to and to listen to in Israel and in occupied Palestinian territory and in the Diaspora. There are so many Jewish communities who have over the years stood up for peace, justice and equality for all – from the river to the sea. They are the bastions for the protection of human rights, together with the Palestinians, also in the Diaspora, and together with the international activists. They might be repressed but they do exist,” she said. “My trust right now is with the people.”