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for war begins in
the minds of the
citizens. ... Warlords
always start by
promoting war
in the name of
preserving peace.”*

-Boaventura de Sousa Santos



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Open Letter to Young People on World War III

Boaventura de Sousa Santos

I am addressing young people as someone who, because of his age, is not going to fight in the next world war (World War III) and may not even witness its beginning. I just wanted to share with you the following ideas, which I believe to be well-founded: I am convinced that a Third World War is approaching; unlike previous ones, the battlefield will be the entire planet and, for the first time, it will include US territory; no matter how sophisticated the military technology and the Artificial Intelligence that supports it, soldiers will be needed on the ground who will die by the millions, along with innocent civilian populations. More than in any previous war; these soldiers will be young people and not the warlords, be they politicians (who will never put the decision to wage war to a referendum) or businessmen and shareholders in the companies of the military-industrial com-

plex; the only certainty we have about war is that we know when it starts, but not when it ends; the specificity of the Third World War is that, when it ends (all wars end), not only the survival of the human species, but the non-human life of the planet will be at risk for the first time. It's a dystopian prediction, but realistic enough for religions centered on the idea of the apocalypse to proliferate today. Unlike theirs, my message is Spinoasian, that is, it is based on the dialectic of fear and hope. I know that most young people, when they look to the future, have a lot of fear and little hope. If they want to have more hope, they need to be prepared to instill fear in the powerful of this world who, apparently, are no longer afraid of their enemies and live in an orgy of hope. Before I go any further, I want to say to the young people that, although I was born in Europe, I speak from the global South through the lens of the



Guernica by Picasso

epistemologies of the South. And for this reason, what I have said above is only half-true. Seen from the global South, World War III has already begun (just keep Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria in mind). When I talk about the future Third World War, I only mean that the scale of the existing war will increase exponentially and that it will also reach the countries of the global North, the sinequa-non condition for something to become global, be it a war or a pandemic.

The interest in promoting war

In every war, there is a country or empire that is particularly interested in promoting the war. In the First World War, the most aggressive was the German empire; in the Second World War, Hitler's Germany. No one in the global South believes that Russia or China are interested in promoting war. Rising empires prefer positive-sum relationships to zero-sum ones (such as war). Their rise and increase in influence are based on providing real advantages to new allies, even if they are subject to conditions of subordination. That's why they favor diplomacy and multilateralism. It may seem strange to say that Russia is not interested in war, when it was Russia that invaded Ukraine in 2022. All peace activists, including myself, condemned that invasion, even though they said from the start (which was later confirmed) that the invasion was provoked by the US with preparations dating back to the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. The aim from the outset was to weaken Russia and provoke its dismemberment. In 1997, Polish-born US politician Zbigniew Brzezinski proposed dividing Russia into three large units. It was the same logic of weakening through dismemberment that led to the 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia (or Serbia), Russia's ally, making it possible to install a huge US-NATO military base in Kosovo. In strategic circles, there has been much discussion of the so-called Afghan trap, i.e. the means used by the US (again, in the Brzezinski era) to induce an invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in December 1979 with the aim of weakening it. The details don't matter for this text, but based on them it is possible to suspect that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a new version of

the Afghan trap, the Ukraine trap, with the same purposes, although the outcome may be very different. The Ukrainian trap began to be built soon after the end of the Soviet Union, with the permanence of NATO after the end of the Warsaw Pact and the project to include Ukraine in NATO, alongside other countries that would serve as a shield against Russia's naval base in Crimea. In addition to Turkey, which had been a NATO member since 1952, Romania and Bulgaria joined the alliance (2004), and Georgia is still missing, which will first have to go through the regime change strategy (the same one that was used in Ukraine in 2014).

Those who promote war don't want real peace negotiations, but stage successive shows of peace proposals without the participation of one of the warring parties, so that the burden of continuing the war falls on the latter and thus feeds the propaganda war. This is how the US prevented the only genuine peace negotiation between Russia and Ukraine, which took place two months after the start of the war. For this purpose, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson, whose imperial unconscious must still be haunted by the Crimean War against Russia (1853-56), was easily mobilized. In contrast to this attitude, since 2008 Russia has presented five serious peace and security proposals for the region, all of which have been rejected by the US.

We now know that the US's great rival is not Russia, but China. The three main theaters of war in which the US is currently involved, Ukraine, Palestine (and the Middle East in general) and the China Sea, are all aimed at the same goal: isolating China and preventing China's access to Europe and US areas of influence. War is always the last resort, often preceded by regime change destabilization, i.e. active interference in the internal life of target countries to bring about political changes that make it possible to create distance and hostility towards China. If we bear in mind that China is today the dominant country in international alliances that seek some margin of independence from US imperialism (BRICS+, Shanghai Cooperation Organization), it is to be expected that the democracies that are part

of these alliances will be targets of political destabilization, especially Brazil. Regime change is a strategy developed since the Cold War and well documented in Lindsey O'Rourke's book: *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War* (Cornell, 2018). In fact, regime change is just one of the strategies used by the empire to interfere in the internal life of subject states, as so well illustrated by the book by former Financial Times journalist Matt Kennard, *The Racket, A Rogue Reporter vs The American Empire* (new edition, Bloombury, 2024) .

The signs of preparation for war.

In 1931, few people believed that there could be a new war fifteen years after the previous one had ended. But fascism and Nazism were growing in the countries and consciousness of Europeans, and with them the logic of war as a radical solution to conflicts. In 1936, the Spanish Civil War began and at the end of it (1939), with the triumph of Franco's fascism, a wider war seemed inevitable. The same can be said of the Second Sino-Japanese War, fought between the Republic of China and the Empire of Japan from 1937 to 1945.

The preparation for war begins in the minds of the citizens. Suddenly, leading politicians from the "international community" (i.e. the USA and the European Union) begin to suggest the idea that war is inevitable in order to defend the values of Western civilization. There is no question about what these values are or what the threat consists of, but the solemnity of the speeches suggests that the threat is serious and that swift action is needed. A German minister recently said that within a few years Europe would be at war again. All this is said with a tone of normality that trivializes the 78 million dead in the last two world wars and the many millions who have died in all the wars that have followed one another in different parts of the world, and always with the active intervention of the US and its allies: Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Central America, Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Sudan and Palestine. It is also surprising that the nuclear threat, which for decades was the great deterrent to war because of the memory of Hiroshi-

ma and Nagasaki and the immense catastrophe it would mean, is now beginning to be seen as a realistic possibility in military circles. Annie Jacobsen (the same journalist who revealed Operation Paperclip, the secret service program that brought Nazi scientists to the US) has just published a book that is very revealing of what I have just written: *Nuclear War: A Scenario* (Dutton, 2024).

The escalation of war is in full swing and that's what leads me to warn young people that World War III is just around the corner. Two indicators justify my warning. On the one hand, the green light has just been given for the use of missiles and other weaponry, much of it supplied by NATO countries, to hit targets on Russian territory. This means turning the war into a war between Russia and NATO, in other words, a war between nuclear powers. On the other hand, the then NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, said in June that NATO had 500,000 troops available in high readiness for the war in Ukraine. In addition, several countries, including the US, are taking steps to make military service compulsory or to make it easier for young people to decide to join the armed forces.

Rhetoric to promote war.

The rhetoric to promote war goes through several stages. Warlords always start by promoting war in the name of preserving peace. They aggravate conflict situations, justifying them as measures to stop them spreading. They take offensive measures while claiming they are defensive. This rhetoric serves to numb the consciences of peace activists. When this objective is largely achieved, a new phase begins: the demonization and persecution of those who remain steadfast in the struggle for peace. Suddenly they are discredited as being in the service of the enemy, financed by the enemy, traitors to the patriotic cause of the noble war effort to preserve peace and Western civilization. Discredit is followed by active persecution. On the other hand, the exponential profits of arms companies are now hailed as a sign of the strength of the economy, whereas before they were pejoratively considered "the merchants of death" or "war profiteers".

In the case of the US, the country that since the Second World War has most insisted on making its power reside in military power, rather than preparation for war, we are witnessing a policy of limited but permanent war sustained by four pillars: successive defeats in the wars in which they have intervened (Southwest Asia, and the Middle East) are transformed into victories through a massive propaganda war; the priority of the well-being of populations is gradually replaced by the priority of national security, which, incidentally, has both an external and an internal dimension (the US has 25% of the world's prisoners despite only having 5% of the global population); military budgets grow exponentially and their growth is never questioned; finally, electoral processes are manipulated so that the promoters of militarism always win elections.

The interests in promoting war.

War is at the service of capitalism and colonialism in many forms. Among the main ones, we can distinguish the war arms production companies (the US military industry controls 45% of the global arms trade and its profits have risen exponentially with the war in Ukraine and the war in Gaza); financial capital (Ukraine is currently the third largest debtor to the IMF); access to natural resources (around 30% of the 33 million hectares of Ukraine's rich arable land, considered the breadbasket of Europe, is already owned by ten large foreign agro-industrial companies). While denouncing the genocide in Gaza, we must not forget the Ben Gurion Canal project, proposed in the 1960s and once again on the agenda of the warlords, an alternative canal to the Suez Canal and managed by Israel and its allies. This canal would link the Gulf of Aqaba in the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. Longer, but with more capacity than the Suez Canal and also outside Egyptian control (which in the past has repeatedly blocked the passage of ships to or from Israel), this canal could be an alternative to China's new Silk Road. Initially planned to end in the Mediterranean at a port north of the Gaza Strip, there has been recent speculation that the ongoing ethnic cleansing could, among other "advantages" for Israel, clear the land and shorten the length of the canal, crossing what is now the Gaza Strip.

I'm addressing young people because they will be the cannon fodder of the Third World War, no matter how sophisticated the high technology, the use of robot dogs and Artificial Intelligence. Reading Curzio Malaparte's war diary, Kaputt, on the East and North German front in the Second World War, one of the things that struck me most was the description of the exuberant banquets of Hitler's allied generals and politicians, with the most exotic delicacies, the finest wines and the most elegant women, while at the front young Germans and their enemies were dying in their thousands, deserting or going mad, wandering through the forests with no destination or future or just waiting for a merciful bullet.

To prevent the outbreak of World War III and give hope to those who are afraid of it, it is necessary to instill fear in those who are promoting it. The peace movement, now renewed by the fight against the genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza, is a sign of hope, but it is not enough. War is always the result of a massive manipulation of fear and the creation of conditions of vulnerability, deprivation, precariousness and the erosion of social rights that affect ever larger populations. Above all, it results from the fragmentation of the struggles that resist all this. The greater the fragmentation, the more invisible power and domination become and the greater the risk that victims will rise up against other victims who are even more victimized, that those condemned from the land will fight other groups who are even more condemned from the land. The articulation of social struggles against the three main modern dominations – capitalism, colonialism and hetero-patriarchy – is therefore the necessary condition for the reconstruction of peace alternatives, peace that this time is demanded by both human beings and nature. The sufficient condition is to re-found knowledge and education policies so that they reveal what I call the sociology of absences, the set of anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist and anti-patriarchal alternatives that are proliferating in the world.

We don't need alternatives, we need alternative thinking about alternatives.

Air Pollution Is Killing Millions and Rising Exponentially — A Shift in Agriculture Can Solve It

Jimmy Videle

In 1958, geochemist Charles David Keeling set up the Mauna Loa Global Monitoring Laboratory in Hawaii, which measured carbon dioxide (CO₂). Keeling believed that CO₂ levels were rising and wanted to prove it. Mauna Loa was a perfect location to obtain precise readings since it was located at an elevation of more than 13,000 feet in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. By 1959, the level of CO₂ was 316 parts per million volume (ppmV). Since then, the curve has seen an exponential rise. As of May 2024, the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere had risen to more than 426 ppmV.

It has been more than 4 million years since CO₂ levels were as high as today. “[The] CO₂ levels are now comparable to the Pliocene Climatic Optimum, between 4.1 and 4.5 million years ago, when they were close to, or above 400 ppm. During that time, sea levels were between 5 and 25 meters higher than today, high enough to drown many of the world’s largest modern cities,” stated a report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

These pollution levels are undoubtedly human-caused and have primarily resulted from burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and land-use change by industrial agriculture. In designing our society from an anthropocentric point of view (prioritizing humans above all other species), we have not only neglected but also harmed the Earth’s natural systems. To maintain a sustainable environment, we must adopt an eco-centric point of view that prioritizes the intrinsic value of all living things and preserves the ecological balance.

The Perfect Balance

Carbon dioxide gives our planet life. All living plants need it, converting it into an energy source. They assimilate carbon and expel the oxygen that all faunal beings require. When humans and animals breathe in oxygen, they exhale carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas (GHG) that traps heat. Other gases that heat the atmosphere include methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O).

If we were to look back 1 million years when humans were among the least populous species, and wild fauna was grazing, stomping, and climbing in grasslands and forests, the CO₂ from the plant decomposition and respiration of animals, the CH₄ from the belching, flatulating, and manure composition of ungulates, and N₂O would cycle naturally. The CO₂ levels were between 200 and 280 ppm “during the more recent ice ages”—perhaps the perfect amount to support abundant life. This ideal balance was in place for around 800,000 years.

As humans began to dominate the planet—killing large animals, cutting down forests, farming grasslands, and paving the natural world for our benefit—CO₂ levels began to climb at a torrid pace from 1950 onward.

Through our actions, we are producing so much extra CO₂, CH₄, and N₂O that all the natural mechanisms for carbon sequestration are being compromised. Instead of carbon cycling, it bounces back into the atmosphere and creates a gaseous ceiling (the “greenhouse effect”). The sun’s rays pass through, but the heat is trapped and filters through more slowly. The more these heavy gases remain in

the atmosphere, the more heat is trapped, causing the Earth to warm.

“Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1 degrees Celsius above 1850-1900 in 2011-2020,” according to scientists who worked on the International Panel on Climate Change’s Synthesis Report 2023. “Global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase, with unequal historical and ongoing contributions arising from unsustainable energy use, land use and land-use change, lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production across regions, between and within countries, and among individuals.”

“The Arctic has warmed nearly four times faster than the globe since 1979,” stated a 2022 article in the journal *Nature*. This is alarming and could help explain why scientists believe sea levels will rise. When the ice melts, more fresh water enters the ocean.

1.5 Degrees Celsius Is the Threshold

Climate scientists have expressed concerns over rising temperatures and emphasized that we must limit the increase in the Earth’s temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. A 2-degree Celsius increase would be catastrophic for the planet. Currently, global efforts are insufficient to prevent a climate crisis.

In the spring of 2024, I completed comparisons of monthly means against the 30-year normal in Boileau, Québec. The results show that the 10-year average is 3 degrees Celsius above normal. This is what the northern part of North America is experiencing, causing significant climate disruption. The results are earlier springs, warming lows, and shifting the temperature range to what it is like hundreds of kilometers south of Boileau.

This resulted in the snowpack disappearing for the first time by the end of March; the impacts this will have on the floral and faunal community are entirely unknown as there is no earlier precedent. We are now in unknown territory. By the end of April 2024, the Earth had experienced its 11th month of record-breaking warmth.

According to NASA, 2023 was the warmest year on record. The scorching temperatures and drought caused an unprecedented fire season in Canada, burning more than 18 million hectares of area (44.5 million acres), which took a tremendous toll on Canada’s wild flora and fauna. Lori Daniels, a professor in the Department of Forest and Conservation Sciences at the University of British Columbia, recounted, “We were 10 to 15 degrees Celsius above normal in northern Canada, which... primes these [areas] for fire,” according to CBC News.

The Earth will adapt and survive; it has done so for more than 4 billion years. Unfortunately for us and countless other species impacted by our actions, adaptability will be pushed to the limits, and many will perish.

Shedding light on how grim the situation is, a September 2023 article by the Stanford Report said, “The passenger pigeon. The Tasmanian tiger. The Baiji, or Yangtze river dolphin. These rank among the best-known recent victims of what many scientists have declared the sixth mass extinction, as human actions are wiping out vertebrate animal species hundreds of times faster than they would otherwise disappear.”

Impacts to Human Health

We are paying the price for our actions through the severe health impacts we face from polluting the environment.

In 2019, there were more than 17 billion viral respiratory tract infections globally. The most

common in humans include influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), parainfluenza, adenovirus, rhinovirus, and coronavirus. The COVID-19 pandemic, which first emerged in December 2019, was considered such a human health crisis that humanity went into a global shutdown. From the onset of COVID-19 in 2020 until April 13, 2024, there have been 704.7 million cases.

Studies have shown that pollution makes respiratory infections worse. In fact, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, “The combination of experimental and epidemiologic studies has provided evidence of a relationship between short-term (daily) exposures to particle pollution and several respiratory-related effects, including elevated morbidity, higher frequency of emergency department visits and hospital admissions, as well as excess mortality.”

According to a 2022 Lancet report on pollution and health, “pollution was responsible for 9 million premature deaths in 2015, making it the world’s largest environmental risk factor for disease and premature death.”

The report further stated that while the number of deaths due to household air pollution and water pollution might have seen a decline, the number of deaths because of air pollution and toxic chemicals has only increased, with hardly any progress made by low-income and middle-income countries.

According to a 2018 study in Japan, humans may experience increased heart rate and blood pressure at CO₂ exposure between 500 ppm and 4,000 ppm. The researchers warned that “short-term CO₂ exposure beginning at 1000 ppm affects cognitive performances, including decision making and problem resolution.” Many indoor environments already see these higher levels.

Clearly, air pollution is a serious crisis that we should funnel more resources into.

Solutions for Clean, Fresh Air

Clean water, a healthy diet, and clean air are the most important things that sustain human life on Earth. Without them, our existence is in peril. It is still not too late to start taking remedial steps to prevent further destruction of the environment.

We must eliminate the burning of fossil fuels. Making public transportation free is one step in that direction. We also need to devise a plan for transitioning toward renewable energy.

We must stop cutting down forests for agriculture, forestry, or mining of so-called “essential minerals.” A new regulation should be put in effect immediately to provide a moratorium on the development of all sacred lands. More trees will lead to more carbon sequestration, increasing oxygen levels. It is the most straightforward biological math.

We must significantly reduce the emissions of CH₄ and N₂O in the atmosphere. Methane is the second largest, and nitrous oxide is the third-largest contributor to climate change after carbon dioxide. We can drastically decrease these emissions by changing agricultural activities (one of the main drivers contributing to GHG emissions) that support raising livestock and growing monoculture crops (like corn and soy). Converting to a 100 percent plant-based agricultural system that eliminates the use of domesticated animals, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides will help mitigate the release of these greenhouse gases considerably.

Today’s biggest epidemic is the exponential rise of CO₂-equivalent atmospheric emissions. With COVID-19, the world changed protocols within weeks of the outbreak. This shows that we can change today to stop the harm inflicted on the planet, the more than 8 billion humans, and countless other Earthlings. We need to realize that there is no bigger threat facing us currently.

How Science Fiction Can Inspire Environmentalism and Climate Action

Katherine Dolan

Climate change is, by far, the biggest story of our era, an existential threat that has already profoundly affected life on Earth and promises to change it even more radically over the next few centuries. As our most pressing problem, it has inspired numerous non-fiction texts—news articles, science journalism, documentaries, academic monographs, and pop-science books (think Greta Thunberg’s *The Climate Book* or Anri Snaer Magnason’s *On Time and Water*).

In mainstream fiction, though, climate change took a long time to appear. In 2016, the novelist Amitav Ghosh observed in his book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and The Unthinkable* that “it is a striking fact that when novelists do choose to write about climate change, it is almost always outside of fiction.”

Ghosh’s distinction between literary fiction and genre fiction implicitly discounts remarkable early treatments of climate disaster in science fiction—Laurence Manning’s *The Man Who Awoke* (1933), J.G. Ballard’s *The Wind from Nowhere* (1962) and *The Drowned World* (1962), George Turner’s *The Sea and Summer* (1987), and Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable* series (1993-1998), to name a few.

What’s more, at least two ‘serious’ novelists have recently tackled the subject: Margaret Atwood in her dystopian *MaddAddam* series (2003-2013) and Barbara Kingsolver in *Flight Behavior* (2012). Even so, in 2016, Ghosh’s point largely held true: Climate change was not a hugely popular subject for mainstream literary novelists.

Since then, however, more stories and novels about climate change have been published and are attracting recognition. Ghosh himself marks the turning point as 2018, a year that saw a wave of extreme cli-

mate events, and the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction going to Richard Powers for *The Overstory* (2018), a book that foregrounds the usually invisible world of trees.

What Is Cli-Fi?

Cli-fi encompasses narratives about climate change. The tag was first coined by journalist and climate activist Dan Bloom, who used it in print in a review of Jim Laughter’s 2012 novella *Polar City Red*.

As the rhyme suggests, cli-fi is a sub-genre of sci-fi. It tends to be speculative, to focus on anthropogenic global warming, and to examine the effects of climate change on human communities. Frequently, as with Atwood’s trilogy, there is a dystopian slant.

In keeping with the complexity of climate change itself, cli-fi is multiform, encompassing science fiction, fantasy, mystery, thriller, magical realism, fable, satire, and everything in between.

Speculative works set in the future in a world where climate change has already transformed the Earth offer models of possibility and cautionary tales. *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* (2020) by Pitchaya Sudbanthad takes place in the Thai capital in the late twenty-first century when the city is submerged by the rising sea. *American War* by Omar el Akkad is set in 2074 when a ban on the sale of fossil fuels ignites a new American Civil War. Similarly, Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Water Knife* (2016) imagines a near future in which the Colorado River drying up leads to bloodshed.

Many books foreground the human cost of climate change rather than explaining its scientific basis. *Salvage the Bones* (2011) by Jesmyn Ward, for example, describes a family drama in the lead-up to Hurricane Katrina, a storm whose intensity pre-

saged the increasingly destructive storms caused by climate change. *How Beautiful We Were* (2021) by Imbolo Mbue takes a different approach, showing African villagers standing up to a big American oil company, and *The Book of Fire* (2023) by Christy Leftieri traces the tragic aftermath of a wildfire in present-day Greece.

Some novels offer elegiac depictions of climate change's costs to other species. These include *Migrations* (2020) and *Once There Were Wolves* (2021) by Charlotte McConaghy, *The Effort* (2021) by Claire Holroyde, and *Hummingbird Salamander* (2021) by Jeff VanderMeer. Science historian Daisy Hildyard privileges nature's perspective in *Emergency* (2024), her novel about the interconnectedness of life.

A growing theme is familiar to many of us: climate anxiety, the psychological toll of waiting for the end of the world as we know it. *Weather* by Jenny Offill (2020) is centered firmly on the day-to-day life of a Brooklyn woman who must carry out her usual tasks with the threat of climate change always looming in the background.

Why We Need Fiction About Climate Change

In an interview with author David Thorpe, Dan Bloom pointed out that fiction can express what cold facts can not:

“We need to go beyond abstract, scientific predictions and government statistics and try to show the cinematic or literary reality of a painful, possible future of the world of climate change. I do believe that cli-fi is a veritable cultural prism, a powerful critical prism that we need to cherish and nurture among our artists and visionary storytellers.”

In 2019, climate writer Dominic Hofstetter asked former European commissioner for Climate Action Connie Hedegaard what it would take for humanity to get serious about our common plight. Hedegaard's reply was simple: “We need compelling narratives.”

Bluntly, storytelling is the best way—maybe the only way—to inform, persuade, and inspire people to act. It helps us assimilate facts, contextualize them, and understand and share their meaning. A good story moves us emotionally, allowing us to register its import “in our gut.” As author and story coach Lisa Cron, author of *Story or Die*, says, “We don't turn to story to escape reality; we turn to story to navigate reality.”

An engaging story is not just persuasive; it also has the potential to build community. A Princeton University study revealed that when a group of people listened to an emotionally engaging story, their brain activity synchronized during the telling—as a group, they imagined the same world and felt the same emotions.

Barbara Kingsolver, speaking of her book *Flight Behavior* (2012), explained why fiction, in particular, is valuable as a medium for communicating urgent environmental issues:

“Fiction has enormous power. It's funny—people talk about political fiction or apolitical fiction. That's nonsense. I think all fiction has a point of view, and all fiction has the power to create empathy for the theoretical stranger. It has the power to bring the reader inside the mind of another person. Only fiction can do that.”

For author, psychologist, and futurist Dana Klisanin, author of the young-adult novel *Future Hack*, stories are a way to travel to a different universe:

“I was an avid reader as a child. Even when I was told to turn off the light and go to sleep, I would grab a flashlight and hide under the bed covers to finish a story. In other words, I was completely absorbed in the world of the book.”

This experience, familiar to many of us, is known to scientists as “narrative transportation,” which happens when readers assume the thoughts and feelings of a character and when they mentally simulate a narrative world.

In Klisanin's words:

"This deep engagement leads to greater absorption and enjoyment and can profoundly impact the reader's attitudes and behaviors, making the lessons from the story more likely to be internalized. High narrative transportation has also been shown to enhance empathy, supporting understanding and connection with the emotions and experiences of others."

Considering its influence on attitudes and actions, storytelling has the potential to make an outsized impact on things like community engagement, and many governments and organizations are starting to pay attention to this.

In 2017, the American Public Health Association (APHA) launched an initiative encouraging people to share personal stories about how climate-related events affected their health and what actions they or their community took to address the situation. The idea was to build a sense of community, resilience, and hope. According to an APHA guide to storytelling:

"Stories make climate change relatable by drawing on common experience and core human values, like health. Compelling stories generate empathy and understanding. They take listeners on an emotional journey and offer a sense of hope that inspires positive change."

Visions of Hope

The most important emotion fiction can inspire is a sense of hope, a necessary factor for climate activists working toward the best possible outcomes in the face of impending catastrophe.

In an interview with NPR, Imbue says she derived the hopeful aspect of her protagonist Tula from the writing of revolutionary figures like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.:

"I mean, you have to have a whole different level of hope to believe that you can bring an

American oil company to justice, an American oil company that has resources and lawyers and all kinds of powers at its disposal. But Tula does believe that. And that is something that I learned from reading, from looking at their lives."

Another hopeful cli-fi writer is Kim Stanley Robinson, who weaves scientific findings into a compelling narrative. A prime example is his bestselling *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), which posits a body whose political mission is to advocate for the people of the future. Responding to a description of the work as a utopian novel, he welcomes the judgment:

"You could probably name the most important utopian novels on the fingers of your hand. ... But they get remembered, and they shape people's conception of what's possible that could be good in the future."

Klisanin has a similarly positive yet realistic view. Her novel *Future Hack* features young characters who face climate-related problems with boundless energy and a problem-solving spirit. Her intention is to reassure and inspire confidence. Klisanin wrote:

"I hope that *Future Hack* will inspire readers with a sense of hope and possibility for the future and embolden them to take action to protect the environment and endangered species. As the series unfolds, I also aim to help readers struggling with eco-anxiety by showing them that they are not alone and by introducing them to some coping methods."

The climate crisis has not yet generated a single written work as powerful as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) was in mobilizing mid-twentieth-century audiences against DDT and other toxic chemicals. But we can at least be cheered by the number of talented writers who, in varied ways and multiple genres, are working to produce such a story.

From Argentina with Love, and Rage

Clarisa Neztor interviewed by Alexandria Shaner

We have been interrupted.

As Clari and I regrouped after the latest violent attacks by Arauco, a multinational forestry company burning homes and arresting pregnant women in northeastern Argentina, I couldn't help but reflect on the dismal iteration – our interview exploring Clari's journey from a childhood interrupted by the violence of the climate crisis to a life of eco-activism, was itself interrupted by the violence of the climate crisis.

Perhaps we now live in an era when all of our lives have been irrevocably interrupted by the climate crisis, landing on some directly and enveloping others as a foggy yet inescapable presence. In that case, it's appropriate that we can't tell our stories of resistance without a reminder of what we're up against – no time for romance. The window for avoidance, complacency, and even for optimism without action has shut. It's now or never.

Clarisa Neztor is a young activist and environmental engineering student from Misiones, Argentina who needed no reminder to act now. In this interview, we discuss the anti-extractivist struggle in Misiones alongside the indigenous Mbyá Guaraní people, the carbon credit scam, developing regional solidarity in Latin America, and organizing under the extreme right wing government of Javier Milei. We consider strategy and paradigm via the inseparability of human rights and the rights of nature, as well as advice on resilience and how to fight by loving. When I asked Clari why she does it, through a fever brought on by several days of scrambling to assist the now homeless families, organizing regional support for the release of prisoners, and engaging with the press she replied, "I do it because the love I have for life is infinite." I have translated Clari's words from Spanish and edited them for clarity.

Please introduce yourself and how you become involved in environmental justice activism.

My name is Clarisa Neztor and I'm a socio-environmental activist from Misiones, a province in the northeast of Argentina. The Misiones Jungle is home to 52% of the country's biodiversity and is now threatened by extinction. I study environmental engineering and accompany the struggle of the indigenous Mbyá Guaraní people.

I first became aware of the climate crisis at a very young age. By the time I was 10 years old, I had seen extreme floods, forest fires and the sad reality of native fauna killed by these disasters and through ecocide committed by extractive corporations. These experiences deeply sensitized me and led me to dedicate myself to the protection of nature.

When I was 12, I was in charge of 'Save the Planet,' a radio program that aired from the Cristo Rey de Apóstoles School. When I left for the radio during the afternoon, my mother would joke with me 'nobody listens to you,' but I was happy to go anyway. Action was not optional.

The first time I read an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, as a teenager, was the solidifying moment that set me on a determined path to dedicate my life to the defense of nature.

Today, my mission is to ensure that future generations can enjoy a livable planet. To achieve this, we need to eliminate the extractivist production models that are destroying our ecosystems as well as immiserating and dispossessing people, especially in the Global South and among indigenous people. I work to help raise awareness and organize for collective action to bring about this change.



Clarisa Neztor

What organizing work are you currently involved in?

I am active locally with Extinction Rebellion Misiones, where we accompany the indigenous Mbyá Guaraní people in their struggle against forestry corporations.

XR is a decentralized, international movement that seeks to influence governments and environmental policies through non-violent resistance, and operates with three rules: tell the truth about the ecological and climate crisis, pressure leaders to act now in proportion to the crisis, and increase democracy through binding citizen participation.

I have also been elected by all our regional chapters as XR's regional liaison for Latin America, responsible for making the voices of the Latin American people heard and expanding our claims, weaving a network of activists around the world.

I am currently focused on publicizing the true impact of the carbon market – a greenwashing strategy of oil companies to continue polluting at the expense of ecosystems in the Global South

and the blood of indigenous communities. I am engaged in popular and scientific outreach with universities as well as direct action.

While we worked on this interview, we were interrupted by a violent attack followed by specious arrests of five Misiones residents on the orders of Arauco, one of the forestry companies active in the province. Please describe what happened this week and also elaborate on your work accompanying the struggle of indigenous communities in Misiones.

Yes, as you said, just this week Arauco, a Chilean multinational company against which we have an ongoing struggle, burned down the houses of two local families, attacked them, and arrested five people, among them a pregnant woman. Their crime? Living in their ancestral land while capital pursues its enclosure.

XR Misiones and fellow activists from all over the country immediately began an outreach campaign calling for their release. We broadcasted interviews with the families so that this ongoing violence does not remain hidden and to exert pressure to free those who have been arrested.

This is not the first time something like this has occurred. Arauco has been invading the jungle and stealing the lands of indigenous people and peasants since 1996. All over the world but especially in the Global South, extractive companies like Arauco clear cut the forest to sell the native wood and then replace it with exotic species like pine and eucalyptus monocultures. They also drive out indigenous and local forest dwellers from their land. This practice is not only ecocidal but it displaces communities and destroys livelihoods. XR Misiones has done many local and regional campaigns to give visibility to the damages of monocultures in forestry.

Indigenous people, who have always lived in harmony with nature, are the ones who are on the front lines of suffering as extractivism advances. As I understand it, the struggle for the rights of nature and for human rights is one, it's all a struggle for life. Together, activists and indigenous communities must defend life. We are intimately aware of the damage and know that it depends on us not to allow it to continue. We cannot rely on governments who protect corporations above life.

In 2021, local indigenous leaders asked me for help after seeing my struggle for the defense of nature. Since then, I have accompanied them, denouncing the forestry companies and doing non-violent direct actions with XR against Arauco. This union has made me see the much more vulnerable reality of indigenous communities. When the forest is set on fire, the first to suffer are its inhabitants, the Indigenous Mbyá Guaraní. They are part of the biodiversity of the Paraná rainforest.

Could you share more about your work to expose the truth of the carbon credit scam?

The government in Misiones has made a deal with the Swiss oil company Global Phoenix Resources to trade carbon credits through the REDD+ mechanism (reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation plus increasing carbon stocks). This deal was made under a provincial law that allows the CO₂ captured by the entire Misiones rain-

forest (1500,000 hectares) to be traded through carbon credits for the benefit of the oil company.

This is ridiculous and dangerous on many levels. First of all, why should the ecosystem of Misiones be enclosed and used to mitigate pollution produced by an oil company on the other side of the world? The jungle cannot and should not be commercialized. Second, this business of capitalizing on the atmosphere does not actually stop CO₂ emissions, nor the increase of the temperature of the planet. The carbon credit certifiers themselves are financed by oil companies.

The REDD+ mechanism is sold as a solution to climate change but it clearly is not. It only generates guarantees for corporations to continue polluting.

The carbon market causes further harm as it often fails to recognize land rights so that rural and indigenous communities are displaced, usually violently. REDD+ has been implemented for more than 10 years in other countries with disastrous human rights consequences. In the Congo, women living in their villages were killed, in Kenya communities were burned, in Brazil they were banned from using their water, and in Peru they even militarized forests. REDD+ turns indigenous labor, child labor and rural labor into carbon credits and it is a scam.

Another specific problem in Misiones is the vast hectares of pine and eucalyptus monocultures that I previously mentioned. Yes, these trees can capture CO₂ from the atmosphere but monocultures also increase soil degradation, decimate biodiversity, increase deforestation of native forests, increase pollution from agrochemical use, increase the likelihood of fires, and increase the violent dispossession of communities.

Overall, the whole process of the carbon market increases damage to local ecosystems and populations, while allowing big polluters to continue polluting with greenwashed reputations. The carbon market benefits big oil corporations and in this particular case, forestry corporations like Arauco,



Protesters face heavy repression and criminalization of dissent. Argentina's new constitution restricts demonstration against the active expansion of extractivism. | Image: Johana Arce / Sisas Medio

who distinguish themselves as “carbon neutral” for owning more than 230 thousand hectares of monoculture plantations capturing CO₂. The carbon market's true effect is to greenwash extractivism, enable and legitimize land grabs, dispossess indigenous and rural communities, and to privatize public resources like forests and air.

Are there any campaigns or projects you'd like to point to and explain regarding your work developing regional and international solidarity?

Atlanticazo, the defense of the Argentine sea from oil companies, has been a great national and international campaign over the past two years. It arose from the coastal assemblies of Argentina and grew with participation from different regions and countries. XR joined to collaborate and help expand it as much as possible, and we thank the entire international XR community for their cooperation.

More than ten cities mobilized during the arrival of the seismic vessel of the Norwegian company Equinor. The campaign denounced the actions of the government, the complicity of the judiciary,

and exposed how the deepening of the extractive model is to obtain dollars for the IMF.

Another example of regional solidarity was seen on Earth Day in 2023. Each of the countries of Latin America where there are XR groups participated in a campaign called Tierras en Rebeldia. It was a call for the protection of nature made with love, where activists demonstrated artistically, held citizen assemblies, festivals and non-violent direct actions to proclaim that we must defend the Earth and its ecosystems that are in extinction. It was an embrace of the brotherhood of all the XR Latin American community.

Many countries in the world are experiencing significant rightward shifts causing activists to face harsher conditions. Could you talk about life as an organizer under Milei's right wing government?

In Argentina, not only are we vulnerable to climate, ecological, economic and social crises, but we are now openly attacked from the highest echelons of power. Even under Argentina's previous progressive government we experienced extractiv-

ism and criminalization of dissent. Under President Milei and the ultra-right, persecution, harassment and violence against activists has intensified, to the point of being accused of being terrorists. Milei's government utilizes highly violent fascist rhetoric that openly promotes hatred and polarization against those of us who defend the rights of nature. This means that we have to take extreme care of ourselves and our support networks, as well as pay attention to our mental health.

We have living memory of the resistance to Argentina's previous civil military dictatorship and there is broad recognition of the importance of fighting for human rights. However, many human rights organizations still look the other way regarding the consequences of extractivism. As socio-environmentalists, we are working to spread the understanding that the struggle for human rights and for the rights of nature are inseparable.

Of course, indigenous paradigms have a big influence because they are the ones whose rights have been and continue to be least respected. Even though agreements enshrining the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples exist, like the ILO Convention 169, governments and corporations do not respect them. Indigenous people are never consulted in the official decision making process and have been deprived of their rights for 500 years.

These days, the strategies of colonization, discrimination and theft of indigenous land have new forms and names, some of them falsely labeled sustainable like the example of the carbon market, but they are still forms of violations of human rights. Indigenous communities have taught us a lot about resistance and resilience. We constantly learn from their walk on Earth about care, love and respect for all living beings. This deep, loving interdependence is the antidote to fascism.

You mentioned that your experiences with climate crises and ecocide in your youth influenced you to become a socio-environmental defender. Why do you think that you were able to translate

these experiences into agency and resistance? Could you describe that process as you experienced it? Were there any other factors which contributed, like other community members, mentors, or perhaps inspiration from afar?

I feel that I was able to turn my pain into action, because besides having lived through strong climatic experiences as a child, I continued to see up close how corporations and state policies destroyed nature right under our noses. It is not only heartbreaking to feel the smoke of fires for more than two months at a time, but it is unavoidable and unforgettable. Experiencing these fires made me hyper aware of the irreversible and irreparable damage that comes with burning a forest that took more than 100 years to develop, knowing that it will never be there again and that its biodiversity will never be there either. Something has to be done.

Being an activist, for me, means being a voice for nature that is crying out to be defended. It means protecting Mother Earth with all my being. I do it because the love I have for life is infinite. Though these experiences have caused me to feel much pain, I also saw the strength in the fauna, in all of nature that does its best to resist. I saw it in and have been inspired by the indigenous people. Their fighting and protective spirit towards all life has been a guide and inspiration.

But also the love that comes from me towards each cell of life moves me. I am aware that the time to act is today and not tomorrow, that we can no longer waste a second without protecting what is left. We depend on healthy ecosystems for our very survival.

All this love has been given to me by my parents and my beloved grandfather who always taught me respect and to develop courage and wisdom. He taught me everything I know about the visible universe and my parents have transmitted to me the love for everything that exists. I am grateful for that.



Military police stop a performance about uranium mining in front of the seat of state government in Brazil. After centuries of unchecked extractivism, 23 XR groups, including chapters in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela, united under the 'Earth in Rebellion' (Tierras en Rebelión) banner to tell governments and corporations that they've had enough. | Photo: barbarafreixs

What advice would you give to someone reading this who has either experienced similar crises at home or is aware of them happening all over the world? What can they do?

Advice is difficult because it depends on the context and experience of each person and place. But in my experience, it is always best to weave a network with people and generate community. Create alliances with local assemblies and with indigenous communities, listen to each other, feel what is happening, walk slowly but surely. Sometimes we want to solve a thousand problems but we can't do everything. We must develop patience, contemplate everything that happens, understand that everything takes its process, embrace the people who suffer, and do what we can in the place where we are.

When we give all our love to nature and thank her for each step we take, she listens to us and guides us. We are activists for life in extinction, we must learn to listen to nature and be one with her and our environment. Everything we do from the heart will always be the right thing to do. Never give in or give up, there is a long way to go and a lot of life to regenerate.

My heart breaks when I see what is happening in Misiones. The devastation caused by forestry companies like Arauco is irreparable for communities and nature. Every day there are more pine trees and less native forest. It is devastating to see how indigenous and peasant communities are violated and repressed in complicity with the government of Misiones. I do not understand how people continue to support a political system that always favors the corporations and not the people. It is crucial to confront the government's complicity with corporations.

This pain drives me to act every day. My daily walk is to work for a paradigm shift that prioritizes life and nature over capital.

We are going through and enduring with our bodies the collapse of all ecosystems. We know that we depend on ecosystems being healthy for our survival, and yet must remember that part of healthy ecology is also dependent on being more united as we protect all that we love to move forward and ensure a livable future.

My advice? Do not leave me alone. We need all of us awake, united, and moving more than ever. There is no other time to act. With love and rage.

The Problems with Purism and Reformism (Not Reforms)

Ted Glick

Over 20 years ago I wrote one of these columns examining the issue of “purism” versus “pragmatism” when it comes to organizing for systemic and desperately needed change in this world. I wrote about two essential ingredients that are sometimes in conflict.

One essential is conscious political organization motivated by principles and a genuine desire and plan for improving the lives of the disenfranchised and downtrodden, ending militarism and war, and stopping and reversing environmental devastation. But this alone won’t bring about change.

As a once-great revolutionary once said, “the masses make history.” It is only when large numbers of people identify with a movement for fundamental change and support it, verbally or actively, that we have any hope of winning political power and transforming society. In the USA that means not tens of thousands, or hundreds of thousands, or even millions, but tens of millions of people.

Is this possible? Yes. One big example is the 15 million votes independent socialist Bernie Sanders got in 2016. Another is the NY Times report that 16-25 million people all over the country took demonstrative action in the spring of 2021 after George Floyd was murdered.

We need to go about our organizing work in a way which doesn’t undercut either, which avoids the temptation to be so committed to being principled that one becomes purist and narrow, on the one hand, or to be so committed to being with and interacting with “the masses” that problematic positions are taken and political relationships are built that end up deflecting energies into reformist and dead-end approaches to change. We need

reforms, yes, but our broader objective must be to build upon successful struggles for major reforms in a way that leads to truly revolutionary, justice-grounded, social and economic transformation.

Purism versus reformism—the twin dangers of serious efforts to bring about the kind of change that is so, so needed today.

What can be done to lessen these dangers, to increase the possibilities that more of us will keep our eyes, minds and hearts on the prize?

One is the building of independent and progressive organizations that are truly democratic in the fullest sense of the term. As difficult as the process of democracy sometimes is, it is also a way to keep the group as a whole and the individuals within it centered on the stated objectives. Democratic process, sooner or later, frustrates individual power plays on the part of any person in leadership who lets power go to his/her/their head and who becomes either purist or reformist as a result. These things have happened much too much historically, but in this third decade of the 21st century, there is a growing consciousness of this danger increasingly expressed in how more and more of us are going about our organization-building.

Another necessity is an explicit commitment to the testing out of theories and ideas in practice and a process of constant evaluation based upon input from the people the ideas are being tried out on. If an independent candidate is running for office, for example, and has what they think is a great platform but the vote totals are very low, perhaps the problem is that the issues being addressed, or the way they’re being expressed, don’t connect with



peoples' understandings. Since just about any issue can be addressed from a progressive standpoint, a much better approach is to identify what the issues are to speak about because of day-to-day listening to and communicating with working-class people and people of the global majority.

The same with forms of direct action. It may feel good and righteous to some to stand up to the police during an action, but if that is done in a way which makes it easier for the government and the corporate-dominated press to call us violent, that will not generate sympathy for our cause among the wider public. Expressing our sense of urgency and anger is a good thing, if done wisely. Expressing it without political consideration of an action's impacts is not a good thing.

Ultimately, our ability as a movement to navigate between the dangers of purism and reformism comes down to how each of us live our lives. Do we live in such a way that, on a day to day basis,

we are in touch with working class people, regular folks, those in need of change? Do those of us who are white ensure that, in some way, we have regular communication and interaction with people of color so that we are constantly reminded about racism and its pernicious effects? Do we make time for meditation, allow our conscience to make itself heard over the daily demands on our time and energies? Do we interact with others in a way which prioritizes listening and objective consideration? Do we struggle to keep from responding defensively when others make constructive, or not so constructive, criticisms of us?

In the words of the late Rev. Paul Mayer, "What history is calling for is nothing less than the creation of a new human being. We must literally reinvent ourselves through the alchemy of the Spirit or perish. We are being divinely summoned to climb another rung on the evolutionary ladder, to another level of human consciousness."

New Totalitarian is the “New Normal”

Davor Džalto

Julian Assange is, finally, free (as much as one can be in a world dominated by capitalist logic). This is primarily the greatest news for Assange, his family, and friends. Many people around the world, interested in old-fashioned things such as freedom, democracy, and human rights, are cheering. It is, after all, a great victory against long-lasting persecution. And yet, it is bitter-sweet news.

Decades of heinous crimes, regime-overthrows, launching illegitimate and illegal wars, torture, etc., all under the pretext of being committed to “democracy” and “human rights,” have not been sufficient; the Empire has also had the urge to go after individuals. The Empire uses all the standard instruments that the “good old” totalitarian regimes used against dissidents: illegitimate arrests and detention, media character assassination, and torture. Physical elimination was, thankfully, avoided in the case of Assange, and it is reasonable to suppose that this was due to the constant pressure of many individuals and organizations fighting for Assange and his rights over many years.

Assange was exposed to what John Pilger calls “the Stalinist trial,” which would be unthinkable in any society with at least a basic level of understanding of democracy and human rights. “I have never known a smear campaign like it,” notes Pilger. We have witnessed to “the fabricated character assassination of a man who refused to join the club: who believed journalism was a service to the public, never to those above.”

As Pilger points out, Assange “exposed the fraudulence of wars promoted by the media and the homicidal nature of America’s wars, the corruption of dictators, the evils of Guantanamo. He forced us in the West to look in the mirror. He exposed the official truth-tellers

in the media as collaborators: those I would call Vichy journalists. None of these imposters believed Assange when he warned that his life was in danger: that the ‘sex scandal’ in Sweden was a set up and an American hellhole was the ultimate destination.”

The case of Assange and Wikileaks has removed the last figleaf pretending to hide the oppressive character of the Empire and its readiness to employ even the most horrific brutalities when it deems them to be proper. In the name of freedom, democracy, and human rights, of course. Everyone who is not hopelessly indoctrinated (or paid to think only “the right way”) can clearly see that the Empire has no credibility, that it has actively been suppressing freedom, democracy, and human rights whenever and however it finds fit. To quote Pilger again, “The extradition hearing in London this week is the final act of an Anglo-American campaign to bury Julian Assange. It is not due process. It is due revenge. The American indictment is clearly rigged, a demonstrable sham. So far, the hearings have been reminiscent of their Stalinist equivalents during the Cold War.” A “democratic” country has allowed “a malign foreign power to manipulate justice” and has engaged in a “vicious psychological torture of Julian – a form of torture, as Nils Melzer, the UN expert has pointed out, that was refined by the Nazis because it was most effective in breaking its victims.”

The face of a merciful angel turned out to be a mask hiding the demon behind it.

But, hey, there’s Putin over there! And there’s China, as well, so... we should be given a carte blanche to do whatever we want, how we want. Because we are the “free world.” If you don’t buy that story, we may need to persecute you, campaign against you, and torture you until you

realize that it is so. If you're too stubborn, and the contemporary version of the Gulag does not really work on you, we may need to kill you as well. But only for the benefit of freedom, democracy, and human rights. And, after all, for your own benefit as well, since it is wise to realise there can be no world outside the imperial sway. At least no world in which it is worth living.

Why has the Empire employed such brutality, with such commitment, over many years, against one individual? To send a message. The message is "you don't disobey the Godfather." All those who take seriously the ideas of freedom of speech and thought, democracy, and human rights have thus been warned that they may be exposed to similar persecution if what they do stands in the way of imperial interests.

In this sense, the Empire has made its point. Yes, it finally allowed Assange to walk away, but only after it had inflicted enormous pain and suffering on Assange and his family, forcing him to spend some of his potentially most productive years fighting for survival and sanity. He was allowed to leave prison on the condition that he plead guilty. The imperial pax has thus been preserved and symbolically reaffirmed. Comrade Stalin would be proud.

The bittersweet outcome of the Assange saga has allowed us to repeat some of the lessons from the long history of fighting against oppression and totalitarianism. Yes, all unaccountable power structures, including non-democratic governments, have a tendency to hide their secrets. As in the "good old" totalitarian systems, so in the contemporary liberal "democratic" ones: government business is not to be discussed, let alone handled by mere mortals. The mainstream media are there to sustain the official ideology and uphold the imperial pax, going after everyone who dares to challenge the official narrative. John Pilger makes valuable points in this regard as well:

"It is said that whatever happens to Julian Assange in the next three weeks will diminish if not destroy freedom of the press in the West. But which press? The Guardian? The BBC, The New York Times, the Jeff Bezos Washington Post? No, the journalists in these organisations can breathe freely. The Judases on The Guardian who flirted with Julian, exploited his landmark work, made their pile then betrayed him, have nothing to fear. They are safe because they are needed."

Not only the media but intellectuals in the West expose the same mentality, characterized by moral corruption, cowardice, submissiveness and spinelessness, merged with greed and the quest for power (no matter how insignificant that power and influence may be). Western intellectuals who are eager to talk about the crimes of the Putin regime but who choose to remain silent about the crimes of Western governments (and the case of Assange is only one of them) expose themselves as hypocrites, worthy of disdain. Moreover, they are complicit in those crimes by siding with the propaganda industry, where silence can be as dangerous as an open participation in propaganda.

And yet, there is another important lesson to be repeated (or learned anew) from the Assange saga: there is always a chance for a positive change, for a victory, even a small one, when there is a sufficient number of committed people who are ready to work honestly and diligently, over many years, fighting the repression in the name of human freedom and dignity. What Pilger says about freedom of the press is valid for other domains as well – freedom of conscious, thought and speech, without which human dignity and a fulfilling human life are unthinkable: "Freedom of the press now rests with the honourable few: the exceptions, the dissidents on the internet who belong to no club, who are neither rich nor laden with Pulitzers, but produce fine, disobedient, moral journalism – those like Julian Assange."



Gaming the System: Military Recruitment in the Digital Age

Matthew Alford interviewed by Jack Clarke

Today, we delve into the fascinating and controversial world of military recruitment through video games. Dr. Matthew Alford, was one of the producers of the eye-opening documentary *Theatres of War* (2022), which explored the US military and CIA's influence on Hollywood. Since then, Dr. Alford and I have collaborated on examining how the military uses video games for recruitment and favourable representation.

From the early days of simulators to the immersive experiences of modern military-themed games, we'll discuss the historical evolution, ethical implications, and political impact of this digital recruitment strategy. With the recent *Black Ops 6* trailer marketing itself on themes of government truth and deception, our conversation couldn't be more timely.

Dr. Alford, you've explored various aspects of media and military intersections in your works. Can you provide a historical overview of the military's engagement with video games for training and recruitment?

Well, Jack, there wasn't much of this when I was playing *Pac Man* (1980) and *Jet Set Willy* (1984)! The military's engagement with video games began in the 1980s with simulators like *Battlezone*, which was adapted for training tank gunners. But it really took off after the Gulf War in 1991, when the industry saw a surge in military-supported games such as *LHX Attack Helicopter* (1990), *Super Battletank* (1992), and *Desert Strike* (1992)—all set in the Middle East. Similarly, *Rainbow Six* (1998), and *America's Army* (2002)—the latter the most downloaded game in the early 2000s.

Games can be effective in preparing soldiers for real combat scenarios. According to a Georgetown Security Studies Review article, they can “maximize

the combat lethality of our existing combat personnel and weapon systems.” One example is *ARMA 3* (2013), a simulation game used by various armed forces for training. Ukrainian tank commanders have used tactics learned from such games. Similarly, while *Doom* wasn't technically supported, it was modified as a non-commercial training simulator—*Marine Doom*.

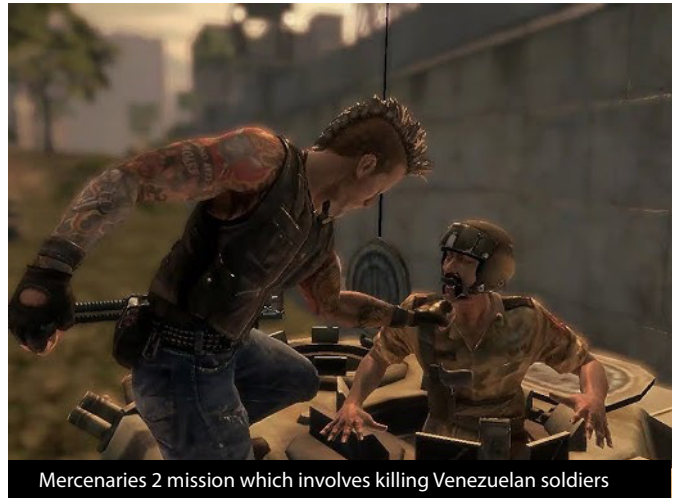
Could these games impact perceptions of war among younger audiences?

Dr. Alford: Yes, games like *Mercenaries 2: World in Flames* (2008) depict implausible scenarios, such as Venezuela using nuclear weapons. Similarly, in franchises like *Call of Duty*, players are tasked with missions that involve assassinating characters resembling real-world leaders like Vladimir Putin. These games portray the USA as under constant threat in a hostile world, as in *Homefront* (2011), where North Korea invades South Korea and annexes parts of Japan, then commits genocide against Americans. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009) and *Battlefield 3* (2011) depict scenarios where the USA faces invasion or nuclear threats from Russian or Iranian forces.

Games like *Medal of Honor Warfighter* (2012) show US Special Forces collaborating with Philippine counterparts to rescue hostages held by terrorists, but when Philippine command opts for negotiation, the US squad disregards orders in favour of force. In *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009), the gamer participates in a terrorist attack inside Russia for a mission called “No Russian,” i.e., the main character chooses to participate in a mass shooting of Russian civilians at an airport to gain the trust of a Russian terrorist. So, Russians are terrorists AND you are encouraged to shoot Russian civilians—as many as you can. Of course, now we are doing that for real. In



Controversial “No Russian” mission from Modern Warfare



Mercenaries 2 mission which involves killing Venezuelan soldiers

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare (2019) you are tasked with assassinating an analogue for top Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, who President Trump killed in real life. In the same game, there is a “Highway of Death,” caused by the evil Russians. In real life, The Highway of Death was the nickname given to an actual road leading from Kuwait City toward the Iraq border. It is so named because US Marines destroyed 2,000 Iraqi vehicles as they withdrew from Kuwait.

What other ethical issues arise?

Military games can be generally dehumanizing. In Call of Duty: Black Ops (2010), one mission features Special Ops character Hudson forcing Dr. Clarke, a renegade scientist, to ingest broken glass during interrogation to extract information about the chemical weapon Nova 6. Splinter Cell: Conviction (2010) does something similar. This is akin to what the TV series 24 did so famously in the aftermath of 9/11—making the viewer sympathize with extreme violence.

Furthermore, the gaming industry buys licenses for real weapons. And on TikTok, influencers blend military imagery with playful content. There are CIA recruiters on TikTok and Twitch, too, who mess around with whether they’re officially with the Agency or not. So it’s all a bit blurry.

Are there military games which are more challenging to established narratives?

Yes, in fact, the last game I played personally was many years ago, but it was a good one—Metal Gear Solid (1998)! That series is renowned for its critique of military-industrial complexes, nuclear proliferation, and the ethical implications of warfare, reflecting on the psychological toll of conflict through its characters. There have been games like Papers, Please (2013), in which you play a corrupt customs official who is forced to reflect on his actions.

The upcoming Black Ops 6: The Truth Lies includes sinister footage of Margaret Thatcher and Saddam Hussein, which is intriguing.

Army of Two (2008) explores the moral complexities of private military contractors, where players assume the roles of former military personnel now working for the Security and Strategy Corporation (SSC). Initially deployed to combat terrorists in Afghanistan and Iraq, the narrative unfolds to reveal collusion between terrorists and SSC.

Call of Duty: Black Ops (2010) explores problematic periods of American history, such as the Vietnam War and the Bay of Pigs invasion, justifying American military action. At the end of one mission, you kill a man who appears to be President Castro but is then revealed to be a double, and the real Castro is working alongside Russian ultranationalists and a former Nazi scientist to develop a nerve agent to kill millions of Americans.

This War of Mine (2014) offers a poignant critique of

war's effects on civilians, focusing on ordinary people trying to survive in a war-torn city. It highlights the human suffering and collateral damage caused by military conflicts, offering a sobering perspective on the realities of war.

Spec Ops: The Line (2012) and *Spec Ops: Stealth Patrol* (2000) critique military operations by depicting the dangerous and morally dubious nature of special operations missions. A major theme of the game is heroism, where being a hero may bring more harm than help.

Valiant Hearts: The Great War (2014) provides a historical reflection on World War I, criticizing the glorification of war and examining personal stories of soldiers and civilians. It portrays the futility and human cost of large-scale military conflicts, emphasizing the impact on individuals.

Medal of Honor (2010) critiques US political leadership and military strategies through gameplay that confronts decisions affecting battlefield outcomes and moral implications in Afghanistan.

How do you compare the effectiveness and ethical implications of video game-based recruitment to more traditional methods, such as military advertisements or school visits?

Video games like *Operation Flashpoint* (2001) offer an immersive military experience that traditional methods like school visits cannot match. This immersion can captivate potential recruits more effectively by allowing them to experience realistic scenarios firsthand. Popular games like *Fortnite* (2017) and *Escape from Tarkov* (2017) have been leveraged for recruitment efforts, tapping into their massive Gen Z player bases. The US Army's involvement in esports tournaments, including games like *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* (CSGO) (2012), has proven effective in generating thousands of leads.

Where has the military had the most political impact on the narrative of the game?

The vast majority of games I'll discuss had military

support, though it's less clear how political and invasive its role is because the paper trail on gaming is far from complete. But I sure have questions—for example, we know that *Starship Troopers* (2005) had ties to both the CIA and the Marines, making numerous military-themed games including *Starship Troopers* (2005)—I wonder if that narrative was toned down from the original antiwar movie (1997), which the director said was inspired by Noam Chomsky.

We know that originally, the multiplayer mode of *Medal of Honor* allowed players to take on the role of the Taliban. Due to backlash and pressure from military bodies and families of soldiers, EA changed the name from “Taliban” to “Opposing Force.” This game also faced controversy for promoting “tactical gear” with sponsorships from private weapons manufacturers on its website, which Dr. Alford's research highlights as an example of the blurred lines between entertainment and military promotion.

Games like *Call of Duty* and Tom Clancy's *Ghost Recon* exemplify close partnerships with military advisors. For instance, *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* (2017) highlights special operations with an emphasis on competence and moral justification, reinforcing positive perceptions of U.S. military capabilities.

Six Days in Fallujah (2021), initially developed with input from Marines involved in the Second Battle of Fallujah, faced controversy and delays due to sensitive content concerns and amendments. The game was postponed mostly due to public backlash over its depiction of real-life events.

By participating in esports and sponsoring tournaments in games like *Fortnite* and *CSGO*, the US Army targets younger audiences, enhancing positive perceptions of military service.

Let me finish by emphasizing how much you have done to guide me on this topic since we met, Jack. My research into the Pentagon's role in video games has only begun to become substantive since we started talking. This has been a team effort with Tom Secker and Roger Stahl, and I hope a solid overview of the problem. So, thank you.

South Africa's 'Government of Neoliberal Unity' is Constructed on Shaky Ground

Patrick Bond

On June 30, South Africa's leader Cyril Ramaphosa announced his new Government of National Unity (GNU), including 31 ministers in his Cabinet. In the national and provincial elections that had taken place a month earlier, Ramaphosa's African National Congress won 40% of the vote and the white-led Democratic Alliance won 22%, following which a variety of horse-trading scenarios were then tested. The two largest parties' centre-right forces, respectively holding 20 and 6 ministries, managed to consolidate across racial lines in spite of their very different traditions of liberalism: ANC democratic-enlightenment (in common with most anti-colonial liberation movements) and DA corporate neo-liberalism. (The other five ministerial positions were spread out between parties ranging from the leftwing PanAfricanist Congress to the Freedom Front Plus of hard-core right-wingers.)

The two core parties' elites converge on an economic policy characterized by steady privatisation and outsourcing, budget cuts, extremely high interest rates and deregulatory finance, which have held sway in most periods since the society's 1994 escape from apartheid. (And since Ramaphosa came to power in 2018, add attacks on labor rights.) The GNU deal's 60% 'sufficient consensus' minimum allows DA leaders John Steenhuisen and Helen Zille to enjoy what is an effective veto on state policies decided in the Cabinet, thus probably derailing the two main progressive (albeit hollow, unfunded) promises Ramaphosa had made in May to opportunistically catch votes: a National Health Insurance programme and a Basic Income Grant.

But all of this has played out in a manner that ultimately jettisoned the third and fourth parties: former president Jacob Zuma's MK Party (15%) and Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF,

10%). Both had wanted Ramaphosa to resign and insisted that any GNU exclude the DA as their two negotiating conditions. This left a strong residue of grievance and indeed a sense of the ANC anti-apartheid tradition's betrayal.

That tradition is indeed formidable, for two of the parties that the EFF had attracted into a so-called Progressive Caucus – later joined by MK – were ANC spinoffs: the PanAfricanist Congress (which split from the ANC in 1959) and United Democratic Movement (1997), which bolted into the GNU as plum positions were dangled by Ramaphosa, as had the Inkatha Freedom Party (whose founder – dating to 1975 – also left the ANC). The EFF had split from the ANC in 2013 and MK leadership left in 2023.

Against a potential unification of African nationalists, the DA leadership and negotiating team apparently had several objectives:

- to swing state policy in an even more neoliberal, Western-gazing and low-intensity-democracy direction;
- to gain sufficient national ministries so as to impose such policies on line departments, and likewise take provincial ministry slots (in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal – which hold 44% of the country's residents) and also demand restructured metropolitan and municipal coalitions that include local leadership and allow a slightly different version of crony patronage to begin;
- to position DA cadres for more effective attacks on ANC elites (e.g. through resumption of parliamentary investigations into various scandals), in preparation for major 2026 municipal and 2029 national electoral gains; and



- to help the ANC's centrist and openly neo-liberal factions to push the EFF and MK back into parliamentary irrelevance, and to suppress civil society resistance.

The DA can therefore be expected to emphasize its version of a so-called “Basic Minimum Programme” by highlighting select parts of the GNU deal: “Rapid, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, the promotion of fixed capital investment and industrialization... infrastructure development, structural reforms and transformational change, fiscal sustainability, and ... Macro-economic management must support national development goals in a sustainable manner... Building state capacity and creating a professional, merit-based, corruption-free and developmental public service. Restructuring and improving state-owned entities to meet national development goals... Strengthening law enforcement agencies to address crime, corruption and gender-based violence, as well as strengthening national securi-

ty capabilities... Foreign policy based on human rights, constitutionalism, the national interest, solidarity, peaceful resolution of conflicts, to achieve the African Agenda 2063, South-South, North-South and African cooperation, multilateralism and a just, peaceful and equitable world.”

These words will provide DA entry points in attempts to attract more multinational corporate investors, in part through lower taxes (e.g. the Special Economic Zone level of 15%) and more parastatal privatisation and commercialisation, price hikes on crucial services (electricity and water/sanitation), and intensified austerity (except when it comes to already-generous corporate subsidies such as the ones long enjoyed by Mercedes before this month it fires ¼ of its workforce). And the DA will stress Law & Order, and a stronger sub-imperial military capability.

However, given the declining standard of living, an elite transition of this sort won't stick nearly as well as Nelson Mandela's 1994-99 reign. It may be a matter of just months before the centre can no longer hold, due to a wide variety of local and especially international divisions that could shatter the core ANC-DA deal.

Five international wedge issues

Although early rumours (from News24) suggested that pro-Palestine foreign minister Naledi Pandor would be reappointed as foreign minister, instead that position went to Ronald Lamola, who has been minister of justice and who gave voluble support to South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court since January. For Palestine solidarity, this is extremely good news, because most alternative candidates do not have such a firm commitment to the ANC's long-standing alliance with Palestinian Authority elites.

Of interest, though, are how the new government addresses four main sites of armed conflict and the BRICS+ scene, which itself suffers worsening internecine military friction: on the Sino-Indi-

an border, and between Iran and traditional U.S. West Asian allies. And there are also profound intra-BRICS+ ideological, economic and practical contradictions that the DA will exploit. These five hotspots are:

1) *Gaza*: against DA objections, Pandor valiantly led the “genocide!” charge, resulting in both the empowerment of Palestine solidarity across the world, but also in Tel Aviv’s “Hague Schmague” reply and heightened bombings, plus threats from U.S. Congressional imperialists to end South Africa’s membership in the African Growth and Opportunity Act (with its slight trade preferences). But with the limitations of international court action now evident, heightened Boycott Divestment Sanctions activism and Pretoria’s state commitment are vital, especially following the recent commitments to cut trade by governments in Ankara and Bogota. However, one very serious contradiction in South Africa is the ongoing export of thermal coal from mines an hour’s drive east of Johannesburg to the Richards Bay harbour and onwards around West Africa and Gibraltar to Israel. Already in the first half of 2024, SA was the third largest supplier behind Colombia and Russia, ahead of China. But Colombia is apparently no longer exporting as of June 22, so that may mean traditional South African coal exporters like Glencore and Thungela (formerly AngloCoal) will help fill the gap, as an Israeli official told Ynet in early June.

2) *Vast methane gas fields offshore northern Mozambique’s war-torn Cabo Delgado province*: 1200 SA soldiers served unceremoniously, with occasional controversies, for three years as part of a regional team. They were deployed immediately after French President Emmanuel Macron visited Ramaphosa (and Paul Kagame in Kigali) in May 2021, so it is widely understood that the regional mission aimed to protect the \$20 billion in existing and planned facilities built to process a huge gas field – by TotalOil, ExxonMobil (in a joint venture with China National Petroleum Corporation) and a few other oil firms – against attacks by a local Islamic insurgency that began in 2017.

Hopes were even expressed to Parliament by Pandor in September 2020 that in return for military assistance, South Africa might gain access to more fossil fuels – notwithstanding the (unmentioned) climate catastrophe whose cyclones had laid waste to the area 18 months earlier (“Great opportunity also exists for SA to import natural gas from Mozambique, thus the security of Cabo Delgado is of great interest to SA...”).

3) *The eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo*: 3000 SA troops (which include many from Mozambique) are now replacing UN peacekeepers, to be based mainly in Goma in the vicinity of at least six million ‘resource curse’ civilian deaths since the late 1990s, and millions more refugees. We can blame the carnage partly on predatory corporations from the West and BRICS+ – especially China and South Africa – extracting enormous amounts of natural resources, more often than not entailing child labor (and to some extent favouring SA mining houses which operated there even during the worst warlordism and mass murder, e.g. AngloGold Ashanti when it was still SA-based during the early 2000s)

4) *The Russian invasion of Ukraine*: Moscow’s move is tacitly – sometimes openly – supported by Pretoria, along with many other nationalist and ‘left’ forces (e.g. in the MK Party, Economic Freedom Fighters, SA Communist Party, Congress of SA Trade Unions, and National Union of Metalworkers of SA), but which is opposed by the DA and SA’s weakened liberals, and for different reasons, by the anti-imperialist independent left (e.g. SAFTU, GIWUSA and other social critics, who also oppose NATO’s eastward creep).

5) *Debilitating BRICS+ controversies*: the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa bloc began its annual talk shops in 2007, and at the 2023 Johannesburg leadership summit, five new governments – Iran, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia and likely Saudi Arabia – were invited to join. But contradictions scream out, with the most extreme example being the New

Delhi, Cairo, Riyadh, and Abu Dhabi capitalist class actively supporting Tel Aviv's military. The former do so through Delhi-Tel Aviv geopolitical and trade alliances as well as via bulldozers and bombs that kill Gazans directly. In the wake of Yemen's attacks on Red Sea shipping, the latter now reroute containers sent from Asia to Israel along their own highways. Alongside Jordan, on April 13 they also provided intelligence used by the U.S. and Israel ("with the support of Russia" according to Seymour Hersh) to defend an Israeli military base under attack by Iran (in the wake of Israel bombing that country's Syrian embassy on April 1). And along with Egypt, military leaders from Saudi Arabia and the UAE also met generals from the U.S. Pentagon's Centcom and the Israeli Defense Forces on June 11. As Haidar Eid wrote on June 28, "Neighbouring Arab regimes have done nothing more than issue timid statements of condemnation, while mediating between oppressor and oppressed. Indeed, Arab regimes have let Palestinians down since 1948, through a combination of cowardice and hypocrisy."

Such BRICS+ hypocrisy is partly explained by the profits their companies are enjoying, e.g. India's Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone and the Shanghai International Port Group which both facilitate lethal arms imports through (privatized) Haifa Port berths (although these now appear highly vulnerable to disruption by drone attacks). And Moscow, Pretoria and Beijing still (in 2024) allow coal shipments amounting to millions of tonnes. Brasilia hosts an Israeli Elbit arms company branch, albeit an activist-inspired pause was imposed on one recent deal. Even Ethiopia typically votes 'abstain' on UN resolutions condemning Israel.

Of the BRICS+ capitals, only Tehran consistently opposes the genocide. Will the DA's look-West versus the ANC's look-South perspectives come into increasing conflict, especially as Putin hosts the BRICS+ in October, or does the BRICS+ tilt towards Israel tell us that an overarching sub-imperial agenda is actually in play, so DA Zionists can relax?

However, it is also important to observe that new disincentives are rising thanks to Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping. Russian coal was apparently unloaded from the MV Tutor ship in Israel's south-Jordanian port neighbour of Aqaba on June 9, and three days later the bulk carrier was sunk in the Red Sea (en route to India), after being hit by a small Houthi fishing vessel remote controlled (carrying three mannequins to disguise its intent). And on June 22, the Transworld Navigator coal ship was attacked twice (having in 2022 traversed from a Russian coal export terminal to Israel). With the Houthis also claiming to have capacity to hit long-range shipping targets in the Mediterranean, and Hezbollah easily capable of firing on the Ashdod and Hadera terminals next to the Rutenberg and Orot Rabin coal-fired power stations, no shipments to Israel can now be considered safe. (One Russian load of iron and steel was reported to have been hit by Hezbollah while in the Haifa Port on June 12, but it turned out to have been an engine room fire caused by inadequate maintenance.)

These problems of mixed BRICS+ loyalties may be exacerbated by DA leader Steenhuisen's Zionist posturing. Although now merely the new minister of agriculture, Steenhuisen had in March expressed open support for Israel's attacks on Gaza, blurting, "One side's genocide could be another side's freedom fighting." Typical of white South African liberals, he is against Russia's role in Ukraine, and the DA also opposes troop deployment in the DRC. (This contrasts to the DA's opportunistic support since 2021 for South African troops' deployment in Mozambique, given the DA's desired contracts not only for Blood Methane gas imports, but also for a resumption of TotalEnergies' procurement deals there with white South African subcontractors.)

In other foreign policy hotspots in Africa, the Horn (especially Sudan and South Sudan) and West Africa are also roiled by conflict. But these are considered too far afield to entail a major commitment by Pretoria.

Hence in spite of Lamola's ascent, vital struggles lie just ahead over SA's schizophrenic anti-imperialism (i.e. against the U.S. and Israel in the Middle East and against NATO expansion), alongside Pretoria's sustained (apartheid/post-apartheid) sub-imperial agenda favouring multinational extractive-industry corporates as well as most forms of Western-dominated multilateralism. For example, South African financial elites successfully led the campaign within BRICS against de-dedollarisation at the Johannesburg summit last August, in spite of some rhetoric to the contrary – and in spite of the world's desperate need for an alternative to U.S. monetary and currency hegemony.

For Palestine activists, the most obvious site of tension is the ANC's leadership's long involvement in Glencore coal exports to Israel: Ramaphosa's Shanduka Coal was until 2014 (when he became deputy president) Glencore's main South African black-empowerment partner, and his brother-in-law Patrice Motsepe is the Swiss firm's current lead partner, dating to profitable exports during the era of Xstrata (later swallowed by Glencore) when the firm bragged: "Outside of Europe, Israel was the largest purchaser of the South African operations' coal production" of 20 megatons annually. Glencore senior board member Gill Marcus was formerly Nelson Mandela's early -1990s spokesperson, but on May 24 at the firm's annual general meeting in Switzerland she ignored a shareholder's plea to stop fuelling Israeli genocide.

A vibrant review of some of these sites of struggle can be seen on the SABC Big Debate tv show last Thursday, regarding Pretoria's inconsistent human-rights advocacy. Indeed the participants there generally agreed that civil society will have to work far harder to get genuinely consistent state support given the incoming Government of Neoliberal Unity's propensity to serve big capital. On this front, like others, we can expect an Elite Transition 2.0 in which Lamola will help Pretoria with talking left, yet simultaneously the walking right will logically speed up, unless tripped up by international-solidarity activists.

After the GNU cracks

Those who are unhappy (mainly from the left but also the populist right) are apparently stymied and increasingly appear to fall into three fractions:

- the Progressive Caucus parties outside the GNU, led by Zuma's MK and Malema's EFF, initially had 28% of MPs (though that fell to 26% as several small ones were assimilated by Ramaphosa since mid-June), and their leaders will be grumbling in frustration at how little the period immediately ahead will serve their interests, and hence they will be permanently located outside this GNU, even if it means losing a share of municipal ruling coalitions in which they are junior members;
- the internal Tripartite Alliance of the ANC-SA Communist Party-Congress of SA Trade Unions forces are opposed to Ramaphosa's DA deal-making but lack a way to let off steam aside from grudgingly quitting the Alliance (a highly unlikely scenario); and
- the independent left which will probably thrive in a milieu in which the Ramaphosa-Steenhuisen pairing fumbles in imposing austerity, service delivery cuts (e.g. Johannesburg's current extreme morning-evening electricity load-reduction in black neighbourhoods) and more intense labor battles (in the tradition that life sometimes has to get worse, before anger rises and gains are won through struggles).

In sum, as ANC neoliberal-nationalism must give way to an uncomfortable black-white limping-zebra politics – even more neoliberal than at present, and likely a bit less 'anti-imperialist' on the foreign policy front – the ruling crew requires a renewed version of talk-left, walk-right. If this deal breaks, as can be reasonably expected, a more complicated version of Ramaphosa's assimilation politics lies ahead, if the ANC ditches the DA and instead imposes neo-liberalism through the MK and EFF as his Plan B. But that prospect is on the distant horizon.

María Corina Machado: What the Mainstream Media Isn't Saying About Her

Steve Ellner

For every decision Venezuela's opposition has made in recent months, the far-rightist María Corina Machado has had the last word. Center-right leaders, meanwhile, have ended up capitulating to her demands. Her success has much to do with the backing she has received from two faithful allies: Washington and the mainstream media.

With all the hype over María Corina Machado being the only real hope for Venezuela to overcome 25 years of autocratic rule, the mainstream media loses sight of several key factors surrounding the nation's presidential elections slated for July 28. First, the U.S. has played a central role in favor of Machado's candidacy and, once it was clear that the government of Nicolas Maduro would not allow her to run, Washington backed the notion that she had the right to choose who would represent the so-called united democratic opposition at the polls.

Second, it was never clear on what basis Machado claimed to have that right, especially in light of the fact that there were contenders who were as anti-Maduro as her pick and were infinitely more qualified.

And third, Machado's rise as the supreme leader of the Venezuelan opposition is part of a world-wide trend in which far-right leaders and movements have achieved major inroads.

Machado is not the godsend for the opposition portrayed by the media and her close supporters. But opposition leaders have more cause for hope than in the past. Unlike the 2018 presidential elections and subsequent electoral contests, all opposition parties, large and small, have opted for electoral participation. Even those most stridently opposed to the Chavistas (the followers of Hugo Chávez)

now recognize that electoral abstentionism had been a losing game. Furthermore, the four main opposition parties known as the G4, and its broader alliance, the Plataforma Unitaria Democrática (PUD), are united behind Machado. Last October, she was pronounced the winner in the opposition primaries with a whopping 92 percent of the vote.

The Venezuelan government has disqualified Machado from holding public office for a number of reasons. The initial one was her acceptance in 2014 of a diplomatic position from the government of Panama enabling her to address the Organization of American States, where she called for foreign intervention in Venezuela. In June 2023 the National Controller reimposed the ban.

After that, Machado insisted that popular support at home coupled with international pressure would force the Maduro government to back down. Shortly before the deadline for registering candidates this March, Machado switched gears by choosing a surrogate to run in her place. In a surprise move, she convinced Edmundo González Urrutia, a little-known former diplomat with no charisma and admittedly no desire to run for office, to be PUD's presidential candidate. Upon accepting the candidacy, González revealed that he had no intention of barnstorming around the country, adding "María Corina is doing it very well."

González has participated in only one of Machado's 10 large presidential campaign rallies held to date. "Machado dominates the stage," wrote Resumen Latinoamericano, adding "she converted herself into the queen of the [rally] platforms" and in the process has eclipsed all other PUD leaders.

In spite of the opposition's unity, or at least the appearance of it, two major political currents supporting the candidacy of González Urrutia are in some ways at cross purposes. For the center-right (led by the G4 parties Acción Democrática [AD], Un Nuevo Tiempo and some of the leaders of Primero Justicia), unseating president Nicolás Maduro is the one and only priority and to do so the unity of the opposition is essential. In fact, it almost doesn't matter who the united candidate is because the opposition's principal message is that the removal of Maduro from office will put an abrupt end to the country's economic hardships.

The center-right's strategy for reaching power differs from that of Machado and the far-right in two aspects. First by focusing its message on unseating Maduro, as opposed to specific policies, the center-right hopes to guarantee unity of the opposition by avoiding divisive positions. And second, a less aggressive discourse would stand a better chance of convincing the Chavistas to accept unfavorable electoral results.

Eduardo Fernández, a presidential candidate in 1988 who aspired to be PUD's candidate in 2024, called for national unity and "reconciliation" as a way to guarantee unity of the opposition and to convince the Chavistas to relinquish power without fear of retribution. Another presidential runner, Antonio Ecarri, who is outside the PUD's fold, has pledged to retain Vladimir Padrino López as Defense Minister. The proposal is designed to convince the Chavistas that repression against them will not be forthcoming, much as Violeta Chamorro attempted to do in 1990 when she named the Sandinista Humberto Ortega to head the Army.

In another sign that he is a stand-in, González Urrutia stated that his government program is the same as that put forward by Machado in her bid for the presidency. His candidacy's program embraces *laissez faire* economics with a vengeance. Indeed, its position on privatization says it all: "The attraction of private capital is the solution and privatization is the strategy to achieve it."



The prospect of the privatization of oil can't sit well with AD and its offshoot Un Nuevo Tiempo, which take credit for the industry's nationalization in 1976 by an AD government. Un Nuevo Tiempo's Manuel Rosales, who Bloomberg stated "tends to be more leftist in his ideology" than Machado, launched his presidential candidacy supported by the Fuerza Vecinal party, which explicitly opposes oil privatization. Machado supporters criticized another presidential aspirant, Henrique Capriles, for saying "the oil is the people's."

In spite of differences, Machado has gotten her way at each instance. For example, Primero Justicia's Henrique Capriles, who was also prohibited from running, dropped out of the primaries in order to avoid giving the government an excuse to keep the PUD completely on the sidelines. But Machado refused to do the same. Then she insisted on her right to choose the opposition's main candidate. The PUD heavily debated the issue but again ended up giving in to her demand. Some PUD leaders supported Machado out of fear that she would opt for electoral abstentionism, a possibility that Capriles alluded to during the primaries campaign.

Since Machado chose González Urrutia, she has given orders to her allies not to refer to the total privatization of health, education and the state oil company PDVSA. Furthermore, González raises the possibility of implementing “transitional justice,” which implies leniency toward leading Chavistas. However Machado is too closely identified with radical positions on the right to think that the new line is anything more than a pragmatic campaign tactic. Furthermore, González lacks the political capital to be able to buck the will of Machado, even if he has the intention to do so.

Carlos Ron, Venezuela’s Deputy Minister for North America, told me “Machado isn’t fooling anyone by not talking about mass privatization. Throughout her political career, this has been her most cherished banner.”

Washington: Machado’s Faithful Ally

Among the leaders of the Venezuelan opposition, Machado is Washington’s unmistakable favorite. The Biden administration backs her even though she expressed sympathy for Trump on the eve of the 2020 U.S. presidential elections. Certainly, from an ideological viewpoint, the centrist Biden has more in common with PUD leaders like Rosales and Capriles than with Machado.

Washington’s singular preference for Machado became particularly evident between January 26, when the Supreme Tribunal of Justice definitively ruled that she could not run for president, and April 19 when González Urrutia became the opposition’s candidate. During that period, a journalist asked Francisco Palmieri, head of the U.S. mission for Venezuela located in Bogotá, if “any opposition candidate would satisfy the Biden administration.” Palmieri went straight to the point: “We have and will continue to support María Corina Machado as the candidate of the democratic opposition.”

In assuming this stance, the U.S. discarded other options to unseat Maduro. Manuel Rosales, for instance, had much going for him. In addition to having been elected mayor of Maracaibo and then three

times as governor of the populous state of Zulia, his presidential candidacy was endorsed by Fuerza Vecinal, a new party with a good electoral track record. Palmieri justified U.S. support for Machado on grounds that she won the opposition primaries, but Rosales had not participated in them.

Furthermore, there are 9 candidates who are running against Maduro in the July 28 elections. The hardline opposition accuses some of them of “collaborating” with Maduro and calls them “alacranes” (scorpions). But not all of them, such as in the case of Ecarri, can even remotely be called collaborators.

The failure of the Biden administration to maintain a neutral position with regard to the internal divisions of the opposition raises a number of questions and issues.

First and foremost, given the attractiveness of other presidential candidates, Washington’s unconditional support for Machado is not only an intrusion in the internal affairs of Venezuela, but in the internal affairs of the Venezuelan opposition. Claudio Fermín, who had run for president on AD’s ticket in 1993 and is one of the 10 presidential candidates for 2024, said “I have never seen this degree of external intervention in a Venezuelan electoral campaign,” adding that it has received “exuberant approval” from some.

Washington’s unswerving support for Machado may be related to her extreme version of neoliberalism which includes the privatization of the oil industry.

Machado’s hard line on the Chavistas may also be to Washington’s liking. During the Trump administration, Machado even called on Washington to call off efforts to establish a dialogue with Maduro, calling such an endeavor a “fraud.” Echoing allegations coming from Washington, she rejected “impunity” for Chavistas who she called “criminals and mafiosos who have utilized money coming from drug trafficking and the food of Venezuelans.”

This hardline runs counter to the thesis put forward by opposition pollster Luis Vicente León that negotiations between the opposition and the Maduro gov-

ernment are necessary and even inevitable, regardless of who wins on July 28. León's position is especially compelling given that the new presidential term does not begin until 6 months after the July 28 elections.

Machado's decision to choose a surrogate and center the campaign on herself appears designed to mock the government and its decision to ban her from running. Her conflictive and confrontational approach is more likely to facilitate a radical break with the Chavista past and facilitate the implementation of the radical brand of neoliberalismo that she stands for.

The Mainstream Media: Machado's Other Faithful Ally

The mainstream media has meticulously reported each one of Machado's accusations against the Maduro government for violating democratic norms regarding the electoral process. However the most far-reaching violation of the principle of democracy is not reported at all, namely the devastating U.S.-imposed sanctions on Venezuela which will influence many Venezuelans to vote for the opposition as the only way to normalize relations with Washington.

A case in point is the declarations of Colombia's ex-president Ernesto Samper, unreported in the mainstream media, that the sanctions represent a form of "monetary colonialism" and an intrusion in the internal affairs of Venezuela and elsewhere.

The mainstream media has served as an echo chamber for Machado's claims, even those that some consider to be dubious.

Machado's claim that she enjoys overwhelming and unconditional domestic and international support buttresses two central arguments of hers. First, that she had the right to choose the opposition's candidate. And second, that this time around, unlike in previous years, electoral abstentionism was unnecessary. But are her assertions credible? Plain facts place them in doubt.

The corporate media, for instance, takes for granted the accuracy of the announced results of the opposition's primaries last October that gave Machado 92 percent of the vote. Machado had vetoed the participation of the National Electoral Council (CNE) in the process which Henrique Capriles and other center-right leaders favored on grounds that it promised greater logistical support including 5000 voting centers. Instead, the primaries were supervised by the NGO Súmate which Machado herself had founded and had been a vice president of and which opened just slightly over half the number of voting centers, some of them in people's homes.

In the past, Súmate had been denounced for being funded by the notorious National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Indeed, the late opposition leader Teodoro Petkoff had called Súmate authoritarian and refused to participate in the opposition's presidential primaries in 2006, which Súmate was to supervise, on grounds that the organization was not reliable.

The runner-up candidate for the primaries held in October 2023, Carlos Prosperi of AD, questioned the accuracy of the official tally, an accusation reinforced by the fact that Súmate failed to undertake an audit of the primaries and immediately burned the ballots.

Luis Vicente León also questions her claim of enjoying 80 percent support of the electorate and adds that the rallies of Capriles for the 2012 presidential elections were "absolutely and clearly superior to all of Machado's mobilizations."

León also argued that there were too many variables to predict that Machado would win on July 28. León has forcefully argued that without committing fraud, but through what he calls "electoral engineering," Maduro could win the elections. In way of example, León refers to the possibility of extremely long lines outside voting centers in middle-class areas that are opposition strongholds.

Machado and the Rise of the International Far Right

Back in 2012, Machado received less than 4 percent of the vote in the opposition's presidential primaries. Her rise as the "principal leader of the opposition" is a sign of the times and boosts the efforts to create what has been called an "emerging reactionary international," or what Steven Forti called in this Spring's issue of *NACLA* "a big global family" of the extreme right.

Most of the salient features of Machado's discourse and positions coincide with those of reactionary leaders and movements that have emerged in twenty-first century Latin America. Machado's embrace of *laissez faire* capitalism including deregulation to "stimulate private initiative" points in the direction of neoliberalism, "shock-treatment" style. This pattern manifests itself in Milei's commitment to "destroy the state from within" and his concomitant shock treatment policies, as well as the defense by Chile's far-right leader José Antonio Kast of Pinochet's "economic legacy."

Machado's positions on international relations also dovetail with those of the far-right elsewhere in the region. Machado makes no secret of being pro-U.S. and hostile to its adversaries including Russia, China and Iran. Along the same lines, she predicts that "once we achieve what we are going to in Venezuela, this will be the final sword thrust into regimes like Nicaragua and Cuba."

One of the salient features of the far-right is its expression of hate for the left which Machado's rhetoric reproduces. Thus she attacks the São Paulo Forum and implicitly accuses it of assenting to "criminal dynamics that go from obscene and ferocious corruption to financing drug trafficking...[and] terrorist groups."

To her credit, though, and in contrast to the far-right elsewhere, she adheres to moderate positions on social issues such as gay marriage, which she accepts, and abortion.

Machado is an internationalist. She not only assumes reactionary positions but has openly supported and

forged relationships with rightists in Europe, Israel and Latin America.

As the far-right does elsewhere, Machado takes sides in elections in favor of her ideological counterparts in other countries. Machado hoped for the "definitive defeat of Kirchnerism" in the 2023 elections in Argentina, at the same time that she called Milei "super-clear, bold, full of energy." She maintains ties with the rightist Popular Party of Spain, but also stresses her special relationship with the far-right Vox, which according to Jacobin played a "central role in an emerging reactionary international," and called its head Santiago Abascal her "friend."

The support Machado receives from her right-wing allies throughout the world is more emphatic and strongly worded than that from centrists. Thus, for instance, in a video interview with Machado, the right-wing ex-president of Colombia Iván Duque asserted that the Venezuelan opposition should be called "the resistance" and claimed, as Machado forcefully did at the time, that Chávez really lost the 2004 recall election, even though he was declared victor with 59 percent of the vote.

Machado, like Milei and Brazil's Bolsonaro, embodies features of populism: she is a charismatic, polarizing figure with a Manichean discourse who lacks the backing of a strong political party.

In many countries, the center-right (the Partido Popular in Spain and Republican Party leaders in the U.S.) have made deals with, or have accepted the terms imposed by, the far right. In other countries traditional centrist parties have been reduced to a shadow of their former selves and have been displaced by the far right (Colombia, Argentina).

The political polarization behind these tendencies is exactly what is taking place in Venezuela. There on July 28 voters will be choosing between a far-right candidate and Nicolás Maduro, situated on the left side of the political spectrum. Regardless of the electoral outcome, the center-right leaders of the PUD will not easily recover from the bruises received from far-rightist María Corina Machado.

Sharon Revisited: Netanyahu's Ultimate Aim in Gaza and Why It Will Fail

Ramzy Baroud

Israel never learns from its mistakes.

What Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is trying to implement in Gaza is but a poor copy of previous strategies that were used in the past by other Israeli leaders. If these strategies had succeeded, Israel would not be in this position in the first place.

The main reason behind Netanyahu's lack of clarity about his real objectives in Gaza is that neither he nor his generals can determine the outcomes of their futile war on the Strip, a war that has killed tens of thousands of innocent civilians.

And, no matter how hard he tries, Netanyahu will not be able to reproduce the past.

Following the Israeli occupation of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem in June 1967, Israeli politicians and generals saw eye to eye on many things. The government wanted to translate its astounding military victory against Arab armies into a permanent occupation. The army wanted to use the newly acquired territories to create 'buffer zones', 'security corridors' and the like, to strangle the Palestinians even further.

Both, government and military, found the establishment of new colonies to be the perfect answer to their shared vision. Indeed, today's illegal settlements were originally planned as part of two massive security corridors projected by then-Labor Minister, Yigal Allon.

The Allon Plan was predicated on several elements. Among other ideas and designs, it called for the building of a security corridor along the Jordan River, and another along the so-called



Green Line, Israel's pre-1967 borders. The new demarcations were meant to expand the Israeli borders – which were never defined, to begin with – thus providing Israel with greater strategic depth. The plan was the original annexation scheme, which has been resurrected by Netanyahu in 2019, and is being advanced by current Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich.

Netanyahu is also sorting through previous governments' archives with the hope of finding a solution to his disastrous war in Gaza. Here, too, the Allon Plan is relevant.

In 1971, then Israeli General Ariel Sharon attempted to implement Allon's idea regarding complete control over Gaza, but with his own unique touch. He invented what became known as Sharon's 'five fingers'.

The 'fingers' were a reference to military zones and colonies, which were meant to divide the Gaza Strip into sections, and to separate the southern city of Rafah from the Sinai region.

To do so, thousands of Palestinian homes were destroyed throughout Gaza, particularly in the north. As for the south, thousands of Palestinian families, mostly Bedouin tribes, were ethnically cleansed to the Sinai desert.

Sharon's plan, an extension of Allon's plan, was never fully implemented, though many aspects of it were carried out, at the expense of the Palestinians, whose resistance continued for many years. It is that resistance, expressed through the collective defiance of the population of the Strip, which forced Sharon, then a prime minister, to abandon Gaza altogether. He called his 2005 military redeployment, and subsequent siege on Gaza, the 'disengagement plan'.

The relatively new plan, which Netanyahu rejected back then, and is trying to revive now, seemed to be the rational answer to Israel's unsuccessful occupation of Gaza. After 38 years of military occupation, the experienced Israeli general, known to Palestinians as the 'bulldozer', realized that Gaza simply cannot be subdued, let alone governed.

Instead of learning from Sharon's experience, Netanyahu is trying to repeat the original mistake.

Though Netanyahu has revealed little details about his future plans in Gaza, he has spoken often of retaining 'security control' over the Strip and the West Bank, as well. Israel will "maintain operational freedom of action in the entire Gaza Strip", he said last February.

Since then, his army began constructing what seemed to be a long-term military presence in central Gaza, known as the Netzarim Corridor – a large 'finger' of military routes and encampments that splits Gaza into two halves.

Netzarim, named after a previous settlement southwest of Gaza City evacuated in 2005, also gives Israel control over the area's two main highways, Salah al-Din Road and the coastal Rashid Road.

The Philadelphi Corridor, located between Rafah and the Egyptian border was occupied by Israel on May 7. It is meant to be another 'finger'. Additional 'buffer zones' already exist in all of Gaza's border regions, with the aim of fully suffocating Gaza and giving Israel total control over aid.

Netanyahu's plan is doomed to fail, however.

The historical circumstances of the '67 Israeli occupation of Gaza are entirely different from what is taking place now. The former emerged as an outcome of a major Arab defeat, while the latter is an outcome of Israel's military and intelligence failure.

Moreover, the regional circumstances are working in Palestine's favor, and the global knowledge of Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza makes a permanent war nearly impossible.

Another important point to keep in mind is that the current generation of Gazans is empowered and fearless. Its ongoing resistance is only a reflection of a popular reawakening throughout Palestine.

Finally, the Israeli unity that followed the '67 war is nowhere to be found, as Israel today is divided along many fault lines.

It behooves Netanyahu to revisit his foolish decision to maintain a permanent presence in Gaza, as defeating Gaza proved to be an impossible task even for far superior military men of his country.

Activist Diary: The Wisdom of Anger, the Battle For Our Lives

Tamara Pearson

How to handle scarcity

It's the end of May, and a storm is brewing. The sky is grumbling in preparation, but it may not release the rain. Sometimes, the sky seems to get worked up like this, provoke us, then simmer down and let the grey clouds wander off without giving us any water. We're going through a drought. Dry and wet seasons are normal here in central Mexico, but the dry season is getting longer and hotter.

I look out the window at the patio floor to check for rain drops. I pace, work, and look again. I have put buckets out to collect the rain. Free water. Hopefully. Because, while the Walmarts and rich suburbs, soft drink companies and nearby Volkswagen and Audi factories never run out of water, in the poorer parts of the city, we're trying to exist on just a few litres a day. The WHO says 50 to 100 litres are necessary to meet basic needs. Instead, we try to wash clothes, dishes, our hands, and ourselves with 5 to 10.

It's been like this for months, and I'm extremely stressed, and I can tell my neighbours are too. When important things are scarce, people have different ways of coping depending on the community and contexts they are immersed in and what experience they have in overcoming difficulties. Some people turn selfish and violent, defending what little they have with lies, corruption, threats. Others come together, recognising they need each other and that collective solutions bring better outcomes for everyone.

We have had deadly and destructive earthquakes here in Puebla, and I saw the way normally disinterested people organised to collect building and

food supplies and take them to where they were needed. When I lived in Venezuela and we faced three to nine-month periods without basic things like cooking oil or milk (there was rarely ever liquid milk, but then milk powder would become scarce) - as part of an opposition strategy to destabilise - communities came together to create or maintain community gardens, to distribute subsidised food among the neighbours fairly, and to collaborate with farmers.

Lately, here, I'm seeing a bit of both approaches. Neoliberalism, branded with US-imposed unfair trade deals and economic policies, and the on-going trauma of its imperialism and domination, sees a lot of people emulating the greed and individualism in their own relationships and philosophies. One neighbour has been stealing what little water there in our building's cistern just for herself, verbally abusing and threatening anyone who challenges her. Others have come together to pitch in for a water truck.

Climate change, resource looting by the Global North, organised gang violence and narcos (the private water company here has ties to organised criminals and two different gangs run my street) aren't theory for us. It's not a far away news story. It is a daily and real worry and interestingly, the water and heat issues also foster a deeper connection to the planet and her systems. Because one day of rain can make a difference — to us, to the plants we go, and to farmers and their vegetables that are then sold on my street.

We come first

For the first years that I became an activist, I thought that fighting for a better world involved



Photo: Tamara Pearson

sacrifice. I had read somewhere that Fidel Castro once said that shaving his beard was a waste of 10 precious minutes that could instead be used on reading and education or organising and so on. I roughly implemented that idea - that the struggle is the priority - in my own life. While I was never cruel to myself or others, I didn't rest very much.

Now, in some ways, I still do that. I work a lot and I make big life decisions, such as not having children, so that I can give us much time and energy to caring for life through movements, journalism, and writing. Like many, I really struggle with the idea of just getting on with my own life when there is so much systematised destruction, violence, hunger, injustice, environmental problems. But the stress I am dealing with and the anger I feel about these things means that when I fight and organise, I am doing it for me too.

Calm, measured neutrality is the myth of very privileged people and media companies who would like everyone else to believe that distance from an issue brings clarity and gives them more authority and expertise than others. Actually, outrage and empathy are wise. Interconnectedness, giving a shit, collective demands, and caring for each other is more insightful, clear, and intelligent.

There's a massive power imbalance when people or media try to speak for others or even when charities condescendingly claim to help others (loftily building wells or whatever for people in Global South countries as though they don't know how to build their own, as though that has anything to do with what is causing the water issues or poverty). Alternatively, when we are fighting alongside others and for ourselves at the same time, we are building our own agency. Condescension and distance aren't just attitudes, they

are relationships. Who is making the decisions? Who are they really making them for? The essence of sovereignty - from personal sovereignty through to communities, women, workers, and Latin America's sovereignty in the face of the US - is that we are looking after ourselves. We know what we need.

So putting ourselves first can involve rest (hell, rest is everything, just in terms of clear thought, joy, mood, and stress), but it isn't just about shaving a beard or using skin creams and fitness watches, as the marketing industry and mainstream media would make out. It is fighting for our rights. We deserve much, much more than memory foam pillows or ten types of tea. We deserve a world that listens to us, that treats us humanely and respectfully, and that puts us before the profits of arms companies and the mass production of shitty, useless, plastic goods.

Tomorrow night, I'm going to a protest against a rubbish dump. Indigenous communities in an area called the Cholultecas, about 45 minutes from Puebla city, have shut down the dump for almost three months now, holding 24-hour guards at its entrance. Symbols of rampant consumerism and plastic dependence, the dump is also deeper below ground than regulations allow, which means the toxic chemicals are making their way into the underground water system.

And so, as I hope like hell for rain, I know how important that water is. I'm going to the protest in support and solidarity, and to listen and learn. But in many ways it is my battle too. Everyone, everywhere, benefits from the struggles for water, for the environment, for women's rights - not just women, not just Indigenous compas. We would all benefit from cracking down on the world's biggest polluters - not just the Global South, which is facing the brunt of climate change.

Planting

The next day, at the rubbish dump protest.

There are green parrots in the nearby sunflower farms. In Spanish, sunflowers are called girasoles (girar - to turn, sol - the sun) because as the sun rises and sets, they turn to face it. The nearby volcano is backlit by a long and gentle sunset. The rubbish dump looms tall in front of us like an overly dull, skin-stripped, ugly, fabricated mountain.

The protest camp is a tarp-draped space, and we sit around on old chairs, sharing nuts, swatting away the red beetles that are drawn to the lights. Dogs stroll in between the chairs and demand attention. As it gets darker, people scratch at their arms and legs. The mosquitoes bite, then hide. In a meeting, they decide on various other actions; a protest and press conference in Mexico City, where the regulatory body is, and to plant trees near the edge of the rubbish dump. A call will go out and community members will bring fruit trees and native trees. And like that, they will use the trees to recover their land, and to restore life.

Growth

About ten days later.

Rain has become everything to me. It rained for hours yesterday. After about eight months, the rainy season is finally starting. The worst of the heatwave is dimming. It is still much hotter than it should be though.

Because there will be rain, I plant herbs and vegetables in pots on my urban, concrete patio. It feels good. In a week or so, shoots will show. In a month or a few, I should have chard, cherry tomatoes, capsicum, cilantro, basil, and more.

Activism can be less satisfying. We plant ideas and movements, but so often the compositional change that results is harder to perceive. Its subtly seems wildly disproportionate to our efforts. But like the way water erodes what seem to be the strongest rocks, you don't see it happening in the moment, but a hundred years later, the change is fundamental.