

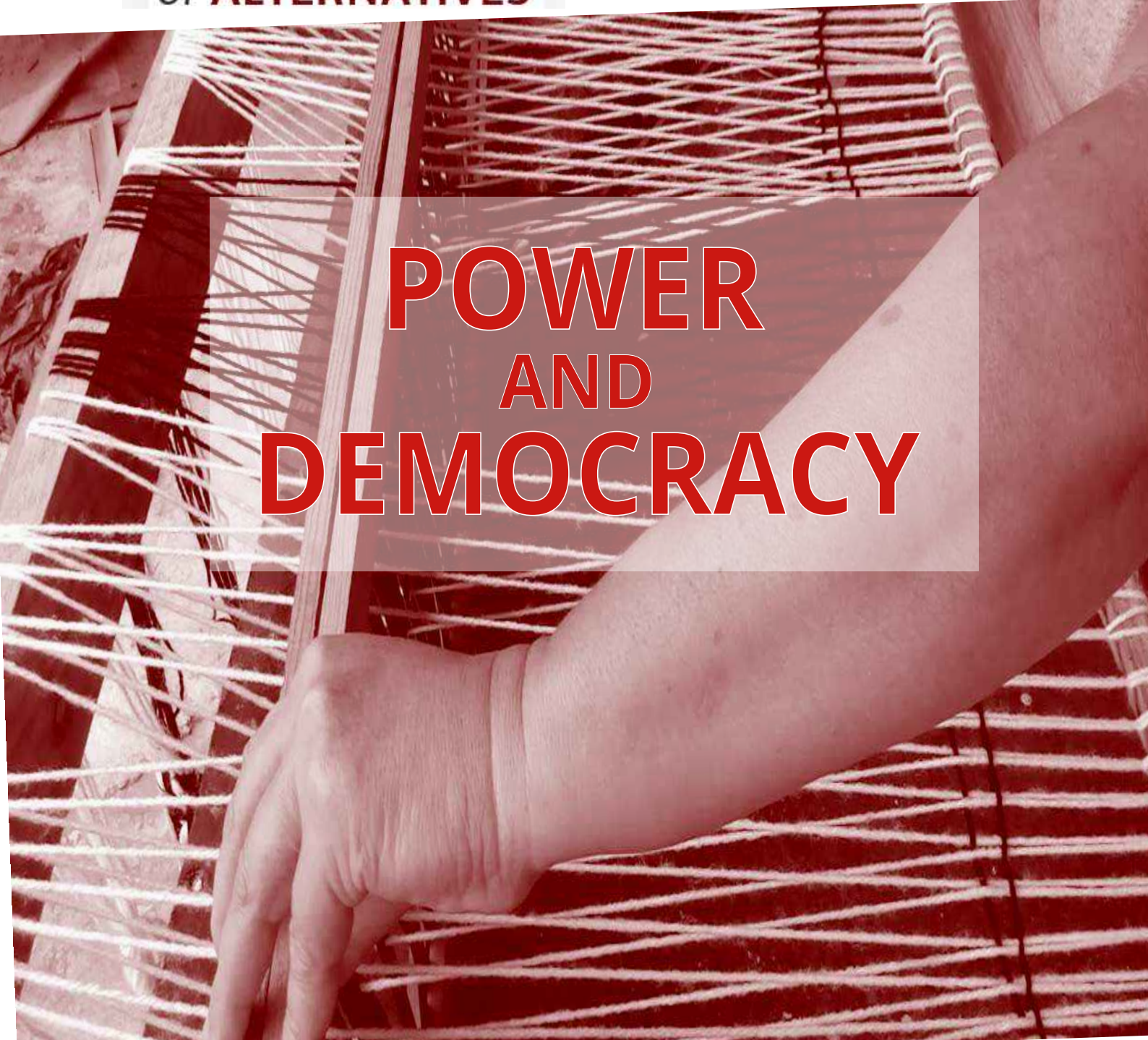
WEAVING ALTERNATIVES



A periodical by

GLOBAL TAPESTRY
of **ALTERNATIVES**

issue **#5**



**POWER
AND
DEMOCRACY**

WEAVING ALTERNATIVES

A periodical by
Global Tapestry of Alternatives, 2021

GLOBAL TAPESTRY
of ALTERNATIVES

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The Global Tapestry of Alternatives (GTA) is an initiative seeking to create solidarity networks and strategic alliances amongst all these alternatives on local, regional and global levels. It locates itself in or helps initiate interactions among alternatives. It operates through varied and light structures, defined in each space, that are horizontal, democratic, inclusive and non-centralized, using diverse local languages and other ways of communicating. The initiative has no central structure or control mechanisms.



Editorial Team:

- Shrishtee Bajpai
- Franco Augusto
- Upamanyu Das
- Anna Hedin

In this issue:

- Patricia Botero-Gómez
- Simon Mitambo
- Servîn Nûdem
- Ashish Kothari
- Justin Kenrick
- Eva Schonveld
- Frédéric Vandenberghe

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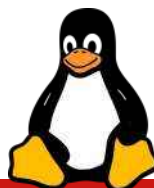
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INDEX

Editorial Page
5



Alternatives to the State
the march from the Kumanday and Cali-Colombia
bio-territories for all the worlds 7
By Patricia Botero-Gómez
(Center of Independent Studies & Color Tierra)



Radical Ecological Democracy Gaining Root in Africa
By Simon Mitambo (SALT & ABN) 12



Challenging Power by Building Democratic Autonomy
in Rojava / North and East Syria 15
by Servîn Nûdem (Jineolojî Academy)



The Promise and Peril of Democracy 21
by Ashish Kothari (Kalpavriksh)



How can we safely collapse systems of domination,
and so, flourish? 26
by Justin Kenrick and Eva Schonveld
(Grassroots to Global Assemblies)



Multiconvergence of Global Networks: Expe-rimental
Democracy at the Planetary Level 35
By Frédéric Vandenberghe
(Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas Rio de Janeiro)

GTA GLOBAL TAPESTRY OF ALTERNATIVES

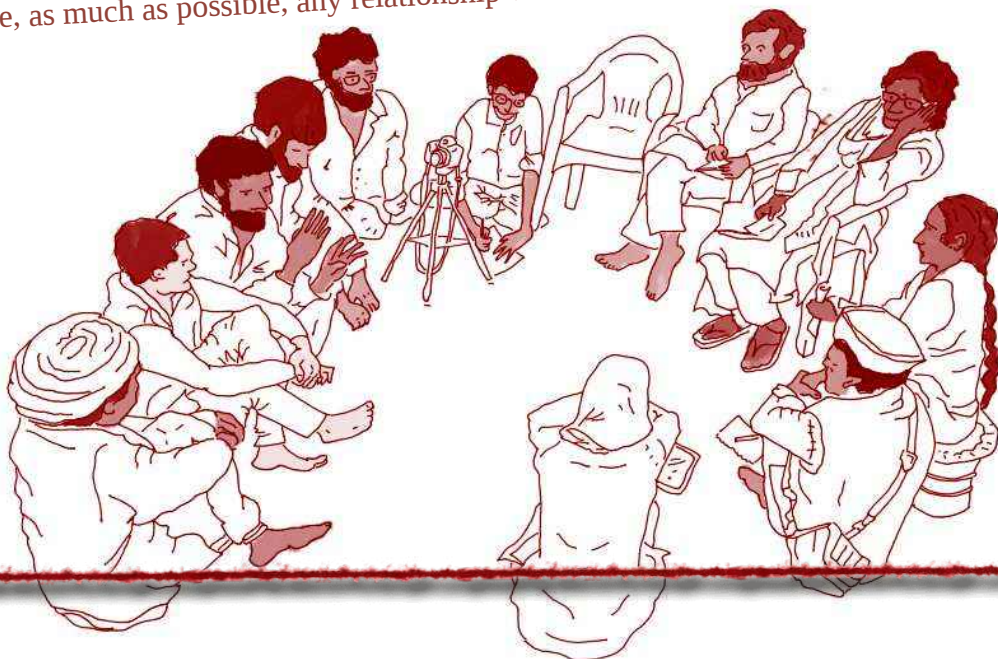
TAPESTRY The weaving of networks of Alternatives

WEAVER

A local, regional, or national network or organization that connects or consists of multiple Alternatives. It should be a collective process of some kind, rather than only a single individual. By being a “weaver”, they are committed to participate in the GTA, developing ways of dialogue, interconnection, collaboration and solidarity with other Weavers.
Examples: Vikalp Sangam and Crianza Mutua.

ALTERNATIVE

Are activities and initiatives, concepts, worldviews, or action proposals by collectives, groups, organizations, communities, or social movements challenging and replacing the dominant system that perpetuates inequality, exploitation, and unsustainability. In the GTA we focus primarily on what we call “radical or transformative alternatives”, which we define as initiatives that are attempting to break with the dominant system and take paths towards direct and radical forms of political and economic democracy, localised self-reliance, social justice and equity, cultural and knowledge diversity, and ecological resilience. Their locus is neither the State nor the capitalist economy. They are advancing in the process of dismantling most forms of hierarchies, assuming the principles of sufficiency, autonomy, non-violence, justice and equality, solidarity, and the caring of life and the Earth. They do this in an integral way, not limited to a single aspect of life. Although such initiatives may have some kind of link with capitalist markets and the State, they prioritize their autonomy to avoid significant dependency on them and tend to reduce, as much as possible, any relationship with them.



EDITORIAL

Editorial team:

Shrishtee Bajpai, Franco Augusto, Upamanyu Das and Anna Hedin

Dear readers, It is our pleasure to share Global Tapestry of Alternatives' fifth newsletter issue with you. This is our first thematic newsletter on "Power and Democracy", with the intent to explore varied dimensions of power and democracy with focus on two broad points:

[1] The role of Representative democracy within the framework of the Nation-State, its crisis of legitimacy and the co-optation by the pro-capitalist perspectives and increasing fascist tendencies; [2] The practices of radical democracy or direct democracy taking place in social movements, grassroots organizations and community processes, along with the emerging frameworks of power for radical transformations. We intend to bring out the tensions and complementarities between local, national and global dimensions.

Our contributors, who spread across Central Asia, Africa, South Asia, Europe, and Latin America, explore challenges posed by statist-capitalist dominations but also how people are organising on the ground to subvert these. Şervîn Nûdem's piece on building democratic autonomy in Rojava, powerfully illustrates peoples' struggle in a war-torn region and the process of building-up self-organisation based on the pillars of radical democracy, ecological justice, and gender liberation. The question of imagination of democracy from a more-than-human perspective is beautifully argued in Simon Mitambo's piece that describes peoples' processes of reasserting the traditional and customary decision making process that are rooted in earth justice. Mitambo's piece is complimented by Patricia Botero-Gómez's piece from Latin America, where communities in the margins are weaving a politics of 'life-place' and regenerating their bio-territories. Both these pieces explore how the political boundaries of the current nation states are accidents of

EDITORIAL

history or are results of colonialism and how communities are challenging that. Ashish Kothari's piece further explores the perils of liberal democracy and argues for alternatives by giving several examples from India and the rest of the world that are embodying radical democracy in their everyday practices. Two of the pieces explore how the movements and networks are challenging the currently predominant notion of what power is, which is 'power-over', power to dominate over, or hierarchical power. Justin Kenrick and Eva Schonveld from Grassroots to Global Assemblies explain their process of creating spaces of learnings, innovation, rituals and creativity, in order to prefiguratively model a politics of wholeness from the grassroots to the global. Our final piece by Frédéric Vandenberghe of Multiconvergence Alliance describes their attempts to experiment on radical democracy by initiating a Global Citizen's Parliament.

All the pieces weave together powerful examples of organizing from below offering visions of Pluriversal democracy: where all people, rather than being under a political occupation of globalized, capitalist, hetero-patriarchal, liberal democracy, have the right to exist as they are, with their own ways of being, doing, and thinking. They also offer interesting lessons on transnational organizing while also thinking through power and alternatives.

We invite you to engage, reflect and dialogue on these ideas. We see it as a start to a long-term process of knowing each-others' work, engaging with ideas, facilitating collaborations and initiating co-writing, co-learning and dialogical processes.



Members of Palenque San Basilio (palenquesanbasilio.blogspot.com)

Alternatives to the State

The march from the Kumanday and Cali-Colombia bio-territories for all the world

Patricia Botero-Gómez

Young people, women, peoples from their socio-territorial struggles in movement disobey the order imposed in the midst of the pandemic, especially, massive struggles of young people and their mothers in the streets during the streak in Colombia seem to indicate that the structures that cement the spoliation and they enable us to transit and re-imagine (1) the world for all worlds.

The theories of steps, Socioterritorial Theories in Movement (TStM) are reformulating the questions and expanding the meanings of democracy, moving further from the configuration of alternative States to the transfiguration of alternatives to the State of things, the de-patriarchalization of the world and the more than human relationship (2) (Akomolafe, 2017, XXIII); Akomolafe, et al., 2017 and with all beings. “When a people rises up in the midst of the pandemic it is because the government (and the state of affairs) is more dangerous than the virus”.

In the face of a biological and media warfare, mainly what is at stake is a war of imaginaries that mixes fictions and realities with sordid arguments, because only communicate ideological echoes of the violence caused by the partisan ghosts. What

is collapsing? How do we register the roots and the machinery of the impoverishment and annihilation of the life of human and more than human generations? What indicators of autonomy allow us to organize ourselves? (3)

We could affirm, from the studies carried out with communities, collectives, peoples in re-existences, that generations in movement and generational movements anticipate the spirit of the time, announce new worlds while denouncing the crimes and tyranny of the global-nationalist-State, a model emptied of meaning for the peoples when it maintains the (neo) extractivist, alienating, patriarchal and recolonizing gear of the world. What are the emergencies that are making (r)evolutions - re(in)volutions to de-patriarchalize the power taken for granted?

1 As we underline it with María Campo in the Tissue of Transients in the Geographical Valley of the Cauca River and the Group of Academics and Intellectuals in Defence of the Colombian Pacific (Gaidepac).

2 The word more than human comes from the African philosophies and the diaspora in the world, in which the divinities are found on earth, in the same way, in the philosophical practices of the Abya Yala peoples, relationships with non-human beings They are part of the ancestral resistances that survive between times and between their own maps, see for example, minga of images in the PLMT (2020). To enlarge, see the page and the documentaries in The Process of Liberation of Mother Earth in the north of Cauca.

3 We need to inhabit the State, and we build indicators from autonomous resistances, see Almendra (2017) and conversations in Uniterria (junio 1 y 2 de 2021).

The gear of the system speaks of dialogue in its own paradigmatic monologue that reduces any argument to the framework of growth and employment to keep everything the same. More than for a reform, the young people are denouncing the political-electoral businesses that steal the educational, health, and work possibilities: Studying is useless; the networks affirm that it is easier to die young than to die old; and, in the midst of the lack of life expect-

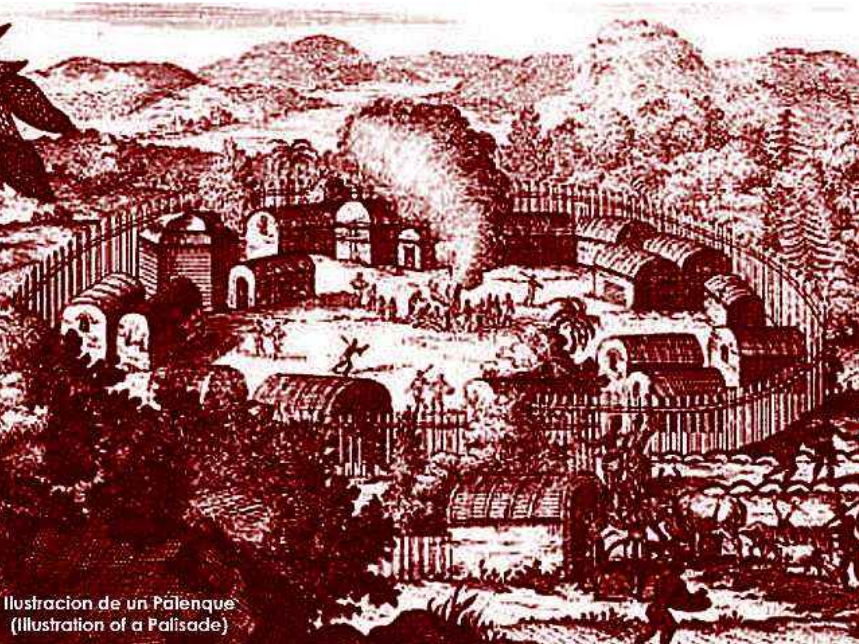


Ilustración de un Palenque
(Illustration of a Palisade)

tancy for young people, the streak vindicates the institutional discredit that we have seen for more than three decades as apathy towards the State on the part of the new generations, in this way, their interpellations seem make the collapse of the dominant power structures more visible than the assertion of Leviathan.

What strategies are being configured in the electoral plan of the so-called post-politics that creates chaos to become necessary in the maintenance of order and rotten power? How do we face the co-optation of

dreams reduced to employment and the Euro-centrist welfare state already the negotiation of minimums in the Leviathan in a cosmopolitan and republican version?

It is important to highlight that, within the turn to the Latin American left between 2009-2021, no progressive government specified the aspirational contents of the plurinational constitutions and the socio-territorial state of law. The national development plans in a global network of (new)extractive politics, no matter how much they are adjective in the territorial development plans (PDT) of the different governments, are mere insertions to the colonial State. The multicultural state offers the CCPLI (4) but maintains the sale of the subsoil as a general interest over the communal. Multiple sentences won by the peoples in their territories remain in impunity, hence the regulations give Leviathan a break and prevent the State from being inhabited.

Some practices that do not collapse and that constitute examples of politics in everyday life have been manifested in the parade: Buying locally and directly from the peasant, without the intermediaries of the large supermarkets and monopolies food agribusiness has made it possible to guarantee food autonomy, increase the planting of urban gardeners in the neighborhoods, heal and care for young people on the front line that the State is massacring.

The communities affirm that “employment is not the same as work”, before, during the pandemic and now in the strike-the parade, we have seen that in the territories of life there is work and payment when there are seeds, collective and peasant plantings in small plots inhabited and life-sustaining.

Currently, the deepest and most forceful sub-alter-nativities consist of enrooting ourselves from all the worlds and returning to the earth to sow polycultures and sow ourselves in ecomunalities. Its millennial-contemporary philosophical practices have called us to create alternatives to the State from weaving between peoples, collectives and our own organizations to find other ways to take care of ourselves and protect ourselves with the people who are sowing ecomunalities in the middle of the worlds that do not have to fully agree, they invent new millenary worlds, weaving in small (5), in the most intimate as the place where the deepest transformations take place (6).

The global exists on an abstract scale (7) and abstracted from the realities and worlds that are re-inhabiting the earth. The only certain thing that we make visible is the insecurity produced by the security offered by the State, for this reason "we all take care of each other", "No one saves anyone, "we all save each other" (8), hence

we must demolish any institutional form of subordinate control based on counterexamples from the vicinity, the implications, the contact and the proximities.

The alternatives to the State, to the electoral representative democracy that young people and peoples vindicate in this month and a half of unemployment in Colombia, enable us new views, senses, sensitivities and effective changes that allow us to let the premises of the barbarian civilization model die, the colonization, looting, usurpation and dispossession of people, peoples, animals and seeds.

It smells of times of dictatorship in Latin America; Juvenicide, infanticide, massacres, are traces left by the emergence of the unviable model that democracy at the ballot box has to offer. How do we create courts that do not merely judge individuals but the system that produces them? And more than judge them, what critical-transforming court of judgment



5 Marichuy mandate from the National Indigenous Council in the nude of electoral politics in Mexico, 2018. Unitierras Seminar (2017-current) "Beyond capitalism, patriarchy and democracy".

6 Weaving sentipensares, resonances from the heart of the Atis and their breeding practices in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. You talk with Nora Día, Maestro Narciso Ramos, Jesús Ortiz, Aldo Ramos, Natalia Giraldo in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Cosmos and ancestral poetics, animating the possibilities of pluriversity in the black line.

7 See pluriversal Politics (Escobar, 2020).

8 Afro-descendant, black, palenqueras and raizales women in the Oriente Network, especially, mobilizations of the women of the Casa Cultural el Chontaduro in Santiago de Cali, see also, CONPA Afro-descendant National Peace Council .

manages to repair-heal the damages and historical debts that they have caused?

Communities on the margins and peripheries are not only precarious, usurped, dispossessed, but their forms of resistance, of re-existence, manage to marginalize the system, expanding the meanings of economy and democracy from rhizomatic, hologrammatic alternatives, underground, in networks and weavings from other possible political horizons and indicate practices of declassifying classes in communal processes between peoples and with the land in between us. (Anzaldúa & Keating , 2002). Beyond the subordination between struggles, peoples, worlds, its socio-territorial practices continue to open the way from the politics of life and hope (9).

So we exist in small weavings, in many places, in small revolutions of everyday life and in different forms and ways of life. You create a new possible of life that does not confront, but escapes from the subtle dominating powers. There is one of the many subtle forms of domination of power, which comes with many handouts, for example, aren't rights part of the distracting sophistry of legal schizophrenia?

We create a new place to live life not only because we do not agree with others, or because we live in many worlds and realities; but also, because there are no more ways and possibilities to support the unsustainable in the relationship of subordinate power and power of domination. It is not a mere ontological conflict, but also

a situation of exploitation, spoliation which denies the possible existence.

In this sense, we enrooted with a new ancestral word *empalencarnos* (10) We flee from the power of domination to a creative power (divergent from thought, feeling and forms of life). The one who escaped and was able to dismantle the macrostructures of powers of domination, to creator power of places where the possibilities of keeping lives alive.

There is a place to live in small tissues, from the base of the bases that do not go through the rights, disciplines, institutions and normative worlds, the politics of life, healing and suturing, (sewing) the damage (of the socio-ecopathic and schizophrenic separations) so we need to avoid and not run the risk another time to be assimilated, usurped, raped, or in a situation of re-victimization, and simply erase and eliminate).

These non-colonial languages come from the millenary philosophical practices of a non-colonized place that still survives and becomes contemporary by divergent creative-feeling-thought. This type of forms of creation of possibilities (sub-alternative, –new millennial births–).

These non-colonial languages come from the millenary philosophical practices of a non-colonized place that still survives and becomes contemporary by alternative ways of creating, feeling, thinking and being.

9 As the weaving of Collectives from University of Land, Caldas and southwestern Colombian (2017) re-writings politics of life and hope.
10 There are words that have no translation for the languages of the colonizer because in their world these realities do not exist. For example, the palenques are territories of freedom created as a place of escape-flight by Afro-descendant peoples, Palenqueros, Negroes, Raizal in times of enslavement, still updating themselves in deterritorialization in a new extractive model and collapse of civilizational ways of life.

Radical Ecological Democracy Gaining Root in Africa

Simon Mitambo

Radical ecological democracy is different from the conventional representative democracy that dominates the world. It is a democracy where the indigenous peoples and local communities in Africa are asserting their rights to decision-making by incorporating local citizens' assemblies, ecological responsibility, and livelihood sovereignty. For instance, communities working with Society for Alternative Learning and Transformation (SALT) are recalling their clan governance system and customary laws and, with it, their ancestral responsibilities to protect their territory and cosmology.

With support from the Gaia Foundation and Siemenpuu Foundation, they have begun reviving and documenting their customary laws to secure legal recognition of their customary governance system, which will in turn help them protect their sacred natural sites and ancestral lands.

Rather than completely rely on top-down national laws and interventions to protect their African ecosystems, these communities are taking the lead in reviving and enhancing their deep ecological knowledge, practices, and governance systems. They are doing this to re-establish indigenous seed diversity and food sovereignty, and strengthen customary governance systems derived from the laws of nature. Nature is their primary text and source of law.

Growing Recognition of Alternative Democracy in Africa

The understanding and recognition of the intrinsic value of customary laws have been gathering pace over the last two decades -supported by a growing body of international instruments and initiatives - together with broad acknowledgement of indigenous communities as the custodians of their ancestral lands and territories. These customary laws act to regulate human activity and provide the necessary care and guardianship towards our environment. In 2009, the African Commission made the first ruling of an international tribunal to recognise indigenous peoples in Africa and their rights as custodians of their ancestral lands. The Commission interpreted Article 8 of the African Charter to mean, “religion is often linked to land, cultural beliefs and practices, and freedom to worship and en-

gage in such ceremonial acts is at the centre of the freedom of religion.” The Commission also interpreted the meaning of ‘culture’ as, “including the spiritual and physical association with ancestral land, knowledge, belief, morals, values, law, customs and any other practices.” A further milestone in the interpretation of the African Charter regarding ancestral lands and customary governance systems has

been the Endorois case, where the

African Court confirmed the value and importance of the Endorois peoples’ traditional rights to their land and

culture. Since

then, a growing number of tangible cases of reviving and asserting legal recognition for the same have been emerging.

It recognises that Africa’s indigenous peoples, guided by their custodians, maintain the a priori indigenous knowledge, innovations, values, practices,

laws, and governance systems that connect communities in a deep and spiritual relationship with the biodiverse ecosystems of their ancestral lands.

Passing of the African Resolution: ACHPR/Res. 372 (LX) 2017

The Gaia Foundation and its partners including ABN have been closely working with the African Commission to push for the passing of the African Resolution: ACHPR/Res. 372 (LX) 2017. In 2017, persuasive and substantive arguments for the recognition and protection of sacred natural sites formed the basis of a new Resolution (ACHPR/Res.372 (LX) 2017). It was presented by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) and adopted at the 60th Ordinary Session of the ACPHR in Niamey, Niger. ACHPR/Res.372 has been applauded as heralding a new chapter in Africa’s acknowledgement of sacred natural sites, ancestral lands and the traditions that have protected and sustained them for generations. Its successful passage has been cause for celebration as it represents an important step towards the decolonisation of African legal systems and conservation practices by strengthening Africa’s pluri-legal systems. The African Charter, which guides the African Commission and its resolutions, calls for the decolonisation of Africa’s legal system and for the revitalisation and valuing of her cultural and natural heritage. ACHPR/Res.372 embraces this vision and highlights the centrality of sacred natural sites in protecting and supporting the relationship between people, land, spirituality, and culture - especially for indigenous peoples and local communities. It underlines the importance of customary governance systems for ensuring ecological integrity as well as cultural, ecological and spiritual values.

Through ACHPR/Res.372, the African Commission has acknowledged the critical role sacred natural sites play in the protection of African ecosystems and in the realisation of African people’s rights - including



the right of peoples to their own form of economic, social and cultural development. The resolution goes further than promoting human and peoples' rights in Africa - it represents a convergence of rights and responsibilities. It calls for the just, equitable and effective participation of indigenous peoples and traditional communities in the recognition and protection of their rights, beliefs and practices in relation to sacred natural sites as well as customary laws and governance systems. It calls for the recognition of custodian rights, the right to religion and cultural beliefs, the right to healthy ecosystems, and the rights of nature.

The resolution draws its lineage from the diversity of African cultures and a priori, or customary laws - which have been undermined since colonial times - rather than from the modern and human-centric western legal system. It highlights the role of custodians, custodian communities and their ancestral responsibilities to the land. It recognises that Africa's indigenous peoples, guided by their custodians, maintain

the a priori indigenous knowledge, innovations, values, practices, laws, and governance systems that connect communities in a deep and spiritual relationship with the biodiverse ecosystems of their ancestral lands.

The African Earth Jurisprudence Collective, alongside six partners working with communities in six African countries, is working to demonstrate how custodian communities are striving to protect their sacred natural sites and to revive or strengthen their customary governance systems, thereby showing the way for implementing the resolution ACHPR/Res.372 on their own terms.

We call upon African governments and the world to support such emerging initiatives to counter the threats to the continent's most precious ecosystems and to revive ways of life that restore the relationship between communities, their lands and their waters after centuries of colonial harm.



Simon Mitambo is an Earth Jurisprudence Practitioner and Co-Founder of the Society of Society for Alternative Learning and Transformation (SALT). He is currently the Regional Programs Coordinator for African Biodiversity Network (ABN).

Challenging Power by Building Democratic Autonomy in Rojava / North and East Syria

*"The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House."
(Audre Lorde)*

Şervîn Nûdem (*)

In the past centuries various anti-colonial and revolutionary struggles have been led with the aim to liberate people and the land from exploitation. Their declared aims have been to gain peoples' self-determination and self-empowerment, a life in freedom, welfare and justice for everyone. Many liberation movements in Africa, Latin-America, Asia and the Middle East were able to force colonial powers to retreat physically from their territories. However, many movements have not been as successful in realising their declared aims. Former colonial elites were often replaced by new national elites exerting power over people and the land. Hereby the hopes of many people -including those of many former freedom fighters - were shattered. Many in the following generations also became disenchanted. Instead of thinking and organising in an alternative way, people tended to arrange themselves in the structures of state and power. It seemed like Margaret Thatcher's hail to capitalism 'There is no alternative!' had been tacitly accepted as a destiny.

Even so, in reality the problem is of a different kind since we do know that there are many alternatives out there. For example, if we look at the first formations of communal life in human history where women played a leading and uniting role, or if we listen to the pluriversal cosmovisions all around the world, we become aware that ecological, political and ethical societies based on the values of democracy, solidarity and justice have always existed, and are still existing.

So, the greatest challenge we face is rather: how can we establish a radically democratic system, mentality, and ways of life that does not reproduce hierarchical power

structures? And how can we defend democratic, egalitarian social structures against the chokehold of the capitalist hydra? These questions have also been key issues of reflections by Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the Kurdish people's freedom struggle and the Kurdistan Worker's Party PKK. Analysing that only beyond state, power and violence, the liberation of life and society can become possible, he laid the foundation of building democratic alternatives in Kurdistan that are rooted in the ideas of paradigm change, autonomy, and Democratic Nation. Even though he was -illegally captured in 1999 and has been isolated on the prison Island Imrali in Turkey since then; Öcalan's thoughts have



continued to inspire new and comprehensive discussions in the movement as well as in the Kurdish society in all four parts of Kurdistan and the diaspora.

Rejecting widespread Machiavellian approach according to which ‘the end would justify the means’, Abdullah Öcalan stated that ‘revolutionary means have to be as clean as the revolutionary aims’.

Similar to Audre Lorde’s conclusion that it is impossible to dismantle the house of the master with the tools of the master, he resumed that the state, power and violence have been means of oppression and therefore cannot become instruments of liberation.

These key points of Öcalan’s analysis paved the way for a freedom struggle based on the pillars of women’s liberation, ecology and radical democracy. During the last two decades, the Kurdish people together with people of other cultures and ethnicities in the region have started to build up

structures of self-organising in all four parts of Kurdistan as alternatives to oppressive, patriarchal and nationalist state structures.

Due to the different colonial policies of the authoritarian regimes in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria the conditions have been very difficult in Kurdistan. Despite this, the

Kurdish people have been able to regain a common spirit which is described by the term Democratic Nation. This means that communities and individuals directly participate in decision making and in the creation of a democratic society. In contrary to the nation-state it is based on plurality of languages, ethnicities, religions and cultures that

co-exist across state borders. Democratic Nation refers to the culture of living together on the basis of a shared economy, common ethical principles and values, while also respecting different cultural, social and religious communities. This spirit has found its body in the structure of

**Maybe we
complain about
miseries but do
not see it as our
task to generate
changes (...)**

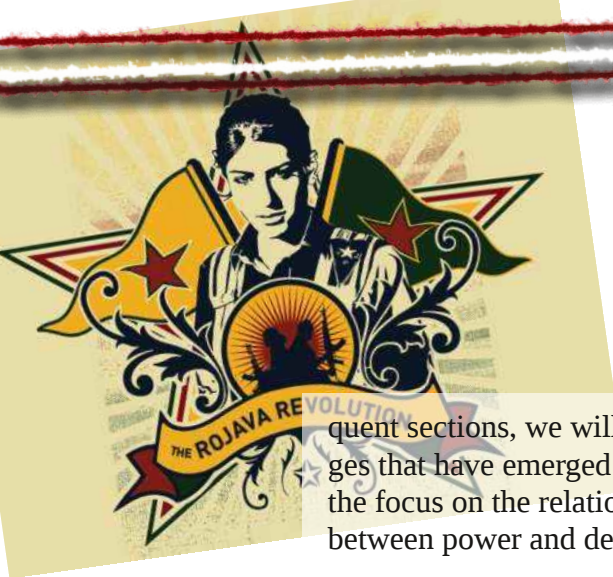
peoples' self-administration - the Democratic Autonomy and Democratic Confederatism. Democratic Autonomy means that despite of and parallel to the oppressive structures of the nation-state, local and regional people's councils, cooperatives, academia, and self-defence forces are being built up. Through these structures of grassroots democracy, the society can develop its own ways of politics, education, economy, health system and fulfil many needs by themselves without being dependant on the state. Hereby the state becomes less able to exert power over the lives of individuals and society.

Since 2005, the first steps towards building Democratic Autonomy have been made in North Kurdistan, a region with majority of Kurdish people occupied by the Turkish State. This region has a long history of organising for national liberation and resis-

ting fascism. With the people's uprising against authoritarian regimes and dictators in North Africa and the Middle East in spring 2011, the Kurds too, in Syria took the initiative to claim their rights and declare their political will. Despite repression and nationalist chauvinism of the Syrian Arab Republic, the women and peoples of Rojava (West Kurdistan) have started to build up various forms of organising in order to meet the vital needs of people. This has been done through more than 30 years of clandestine political work and community organising. Assemblies, committees for women, workers, youth and children, arts, culture, language and furthermore has created a foundation for people to take control of their lives. It has been the foundation of peoples' democratic self-administration in Rojava/North and East Syria which was officially announced as Democratic Autonomy in 2014. In the subse-

A women's workshop in Rojava. Pic. Jineoloji Research Center. .





quent sections, we will address the challenges that have emerged in this process with the focus on the relation and contradictions between power and democracy.

Challenging Power by the Strength of Communal Resistance and Organising

There are two different expressions that we can use for translating the English term 'power' into the Kurdish language: It can be either *hêz* or *desthilatî*.

Hêz also means strength and can be connected to an understanding of a natural 'authority' that resists injustice and cares for the well-being of society and the respect of everyone's dignity. In Rojava we can experience this *hêz* in the personality of women – especially mothers – who went out on the streets to make the Syrian army forces withdraw from the Kurdish regions in 2012. We see this *hêz* in the eyes of the women who have taken up arms to defend their homeland against the attacks of ISIS and Turkish army. And we can feel the *hêz* of women who are rejecting patriarchal norms that perceive them as the honour and property of the family through insisting on speaking and deciding for themselves. This *hêz* is present in the attitude of women who celebrated their liberation from ISIS by burning the black niqab and wearing their colourful clothes again. It is the *hêz* of women who became Kurdish teachers although they had been refused to go to school, either by the state due to being undocumented Kurds or by their parents due to being a girl. The *hêz* of women is manifested in the active and leading role that women play today in politics as equally responsible co-chairs in all structures of the Democratic Autonomy. This *hêz* of wisdom and creativity led women to establish an autonomous women's system based on women's cooperatives, academies, health care centres, justice committees, self-

defence units, and culture & art centres. Thanks to this willpower and strength, principles of women's rights and freedom were also acknowledged by the general assembly of the Autonomous Administration of Rojava. Although we are aware that the actual challenge of patriarchal power does not happen through laws and sanctions against perpetrators but many women emphasize that the principles set out in the law have given them courage to take up the fight against sexist violence and discrimination in public as well as in their private lives. In this way the collective understanding of social ethics as well as family and partnership models has started to change.

By working, organising and learning collectively, women have gained the possibility to see more options in life. Up until very recently it was hardly possible to imagine a mother living on her own with her children after a divorce or the death of her husband. Today, projects like women's cooperatives or the women's village Jinwar have enabled single mothers to determine their lives and care for their children within a community of women. The co-chair system in which women and men collectively represent the will of the people and coordinate the works in all communes, people's councils and in all fields of life has empowered women's role in society as well as in many families. Women who once were seeking for help are today working themselves actively in the communes and women's councils to solve problems or have joined the women's defence forces to protect the lives and rights of other women.

Building our own Houses with our own Tools

During the last decade we have experienced the creative *hêz* of society in many discussions and actions. It is a process of regaining the ability to express one's own

thoughts and opinions, to take part in decision making processes and to take responsibility. This is not easy, however, since for thousands of years a hierarchical state mentality as well as feudal and patriarchal codes have taught women and society not to think but to obey the master's orders and accept their 'destiny'. Therefore we often tend to delegate responsibilities. Maybe we complain about miseries but do not see it as our task to generate changes - either because we never felt entitled to think and act upon our own will or because we are afraid of punishment or failure if we take any initiative.

The *hêz* – namely the courage, the democratic will, dignity and collectivity of women and society – has been constantly in conflict with and attacked by another form of power which we translate in the Kurdish language as *desthilatî*. Literally this term means 'raised hand'. It is the opposite of 'bindestî' which literally means 'being under the hand' and is translated into English as 'subjection'. The dichotomy of *desthilatî* (power) and *bindestî* (subjection) is fundamentally contradicting with *hêz*, the ethical values and political attitude of democracy.

Desthilatî – namely patriarchal oppression, colonial occupation and capitalist exploitation - is the source of the severe problems that we are struggling to overcome. Along with military threats of military occupation, one of the biggest problems are insufficient water supplies. The Turkish state has not only cut off the natural water supplies of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers towards Syrian territory by big dam projects, but also occupied the Alok water station. Hereby, since winter 2019, hundreds of thousands of people in the big city Haseke and the surrounding region don't have access to clean drinking water. Even so, in spite of

many difficulties, the communes and autonomous administration have been working hard to cover the people's basic water needs by organising water transport from other regions in tank vehicles or through digging new wells.

Moreover, the drought and field fires ignited by sabotage acts of ISIS and the Turkish state have devastated the biggest part of the harvest in 2019, the main source of life and income in North and East Syria.



Construction starts on a women's center. Pic. Media Team, Jinwar.

Together with the embargo and the rapid inflation caused by the US "Caesar Act" sanctions against Syria, the shortage of basic supplies and poverty have increased dramatically in the whole of Syria. In addition, the Autonomous Administration in North and East Syria has been exposed to an embargo of the Syrian regime. This situation means a difficult challenge and a touchstone for the Autonomous Administration.

Trying to find solutions to the economic problems caused by external power politics, in May this year (2021) the General Council of the Autonomous Administration decided to increase the prices of fuel and



gas. This decision was met with immediate public protests. People criticized that the communes had not been sufficiently included in the decision-making process, and that the people's economic situation could not cope with the increase of fuel and gas prices at present. Against this background, the General Council reconsidered and cancelled its former decision 3 days later.

Now, in line with the people's demand, discussions and counselling meetings are organised in all communes to ensure the best possible solution in the interest of the people. This recent example ensured people's confidence. It shows that the awareness and *hêz* of society to shape politics can defend the people's will and interests.

We can conclude that democracy is not a form of capitalist state that allows its citizens every 4 – 5 year to give their vote to MPs who are supposed to represent them. Democracy is an alternative to the state. It is the *hêz* of the communities to resist against any oppressive *desthilatî*-power and to govern themselves without the state and without becoming a state.

Democracy is inherent in an open and free society, where individuals and groups are political subjects and govern themselves on the basis of collective consensus.

This model is still in a continuing development process. The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria is still not

recognized by the international community, although it could serve as a model for creating peace and grass-root democracy for the whole of Syria and beyond.

Generating Alternatives

In a time of deep despair, human and ecological crisis, we have learned that democratic confederal organisation of society can fulfil many spiritual and material needs of society. We have learned that democratic transformation is a continuous process that requires constant reflection and self-reflection. None of our gains is assured forever, if we do not protect and advance it.

As women from different communities, by discussing and listening to each other, by sharing our experiences of life and struggle, singing songs and telling stories of our ancestors, we learned about our common pains and aspirations. We have learned that we can find solutions for many problems in our lives when we unite wisdom and spirituality, our analytic and emotional intelligence, our strength and courage and our deep solidarity with each other. These are our tools for dismantling the houses of the masters. At the same time we have created our tools for building our own houses and gardens of a democratic society by uniting our political thoughts and statements with our way of life and actions. We know: There are alternatives!

The Promise and Peril of Democracy

The grand drama of national elections across the world, filled with promises that each party makes of bringing paradise on earth and promptly forgets them once elected to power, hide a deeply troubling phenomenon. There is something pathetic about the human condition, if our fate (and that of the planet) is dependent on a few individuals who rule over us with our willing consent.

Ashish Kothari (*)

Lets go back to basics. Democracy = demos + cracy, rule of (or by) the people. The power to take decisions is inherent to each one of us, it is part of being human. And if politics is about the relations of power, than being political beings is part of our human nature. And yet, the seduction of liberal democracy has been such that we are willing to give up our inherent power, ostensibly so we can go about living our lives while others take over the decision-making for us. In theory, we convince ourselves, we have the power to change them through elections if they don't do what we want or need; but as we know, that is not necessarily the case. And even if we do manage to vote another person or party into state power, they too may fail to do what we want or need. The chances of this being the case if we are already on the margins of society, even if by dint of sheer numbers we form a substantial part of the population and manage to influence the elections, is especially high.

Some governments have been better than others at pro-public welfare policies, constitutional and legal reforms, and social safeguards (such as free or cheap healthcare and education) for many impoverished or marginalized people. Whatever I say below should not be taken to belittle such gains, and certainly not to argue that there is no difference between a progressive (leftist, feminist, green) party and a right-wing party being in power, all other things being equal.

The problem with electoral politics

But lets look at fundamentals again. A considerably reliance of liberal democracy is on elections, where those who get the majority (with variations on the theme) form the government.

Electoral politics reveals many faultlines, showing how elections can be actually undermine democracy in its true sense. In many other parts of the world such as India, politicians get elected even if they have only 20% of the vote, with the rest of the electorate split amongst several opponents; or even if they have no majority but, as in USA, gain enough voting blocks.



Modern electoral processes are extremely costly (the 2020 USA elections were projected to cost about US\$14 billion), and since most countries do not have a public fund for this, it is mostly really rich folks or parties who get voted in. In 2019 in India, for instance, out of the 542 members analysed, 437 (80%) have assets of Rs. 1 crore (10 million) or more, i.e. they were amongst the richest 5% of Indians.

Secondly, political elections bring out the most competitive aspects of our personality, that too in spiteful, divisive, often violent ways. Given the power that comes with the post, there are very high commercial stakes of winning. Elections have also encouraged or engendered the most blatant instances of fraud, manipulation (now increasingly on 'social' media), bribery, corruption, intimidation, across the world. A systematic review of Pakistan and India shows how much these are seeped into the very nature of electoral politics.

In many countries this hostile competitiveness also runs along historically prevalent lines of hierarchy and discrimination and division; race in USA, caste in India, and gender and class everywhere. This is not a distortion of electoral politics, it is hardwired into its DNA; after all, if its about winning at any cost, why not exploit available lines of division? Trumpism and the reli-

gious polarization in India's 2019 polls are stark recent examples.

Elections also give credence to majoritarianism. The belief that the majority is right is a dubious proposition at best, downright dangerous and divisive at worst. The fact that minorities may have talents, knowledge, skills, and abilities to aid in decision-making and governance, and special needs that any decent society would have to be considerate towards, are ignored or set aside.

Parties that 'capture' power in liberal democracies, inevitably centralize power at central or provincial levels. The notion that the public is supreme, that the electorate is the one whose bidding is done by the elected, has rarely if ever actualized. Day to day decisions including crucial ones that impact a large number of people, are predominantly taken by elected politicians and the bureaucracy serving them, with little or no involvement of the electorate. Some countries have systems like referendums to provide greater public participation in crucial decisions, but these are limited, and suffer from the same problematic politics of majoritarianism.

Democracy, development and environment

Given that liberal democracy and the na-

tion-state system that it supports has arisen and spread at the same time as modern capitalism gained a global foothold, there is a very close relationship. Indeed, such democracy is eminently suited to exploitative economic regimes and relations, providing a convenient garb of legitimacy. If the party running such a government then finds it ok to be funded by corporations, openly or in a hidden manner as in the case of India's recently established electoral bonds, this too would seem to be entirely acceptable. No wonder that social movements challenging the actions of corporations and their government cronies are automatically labeled not only anti-development but also anti-national, seditious, or in some cases, 'extremists' who can be legitimately thrown in jail (or, frequently, simply eliminated). This is the case not only in right-wing governments, but in left-wing ones too; for instance, Rafael Correa's 'revolutionary' left party in Ecuador went hammer and tongs after civil society groups like Accion Ecologica and several indigenous people's organisations, for opposing destructive mining operations in their territories.

Liberal democracies have pursued fundamentally faulty economic growth models that underlie modern 'development' and globalization, responsible for the ecological and climate catastrophe the planet faces. The money required to fight elections, and then to prop up centralized state systems, is not possible to generate in ecologically sustainable, socially non-exploitative ways. A global economy based on nation-state competitiveness, requires ruthless exploitation of nature and of labour, and the continuation of patriarchal, racist, and casteist relations. Finally, nation-state boundaries and the 'nationalism' they are founded on or engender, artificially block ecological and cultural linkages, and do not enable sensitive, sustainable governance of landscapes that are dependent on such linkages. In the South Asia region, for instance, the division of the subcontinent into several nations has severely disrupted river

flows, or wildlife movements, or the nomadic patterns of pastoral communities, with negative consequences for millions of people and for future generations.

Is there an alternative to liberal democracy?

There are many alternatives, some building on ancient systems of governance such as amongst many indigenous peoples, others that advocate more radical, even anarchic people-centred power. Crucial to all such forms is the recognition of our inherent power, but also the distinction between 'power to / with', and 'power over'. In other words, we harness power to do good, to benefit all (including the non-human), rather than dominate others.

Several initiatives around the world have attempted to establish such grounded, responsible power. Perhaps the largest in scale are the experiments in radical, distributed autonomy and self-governance amongst the Zapatista in Mexico, and the Kurdish people in West Asia. In varying forms, neighbourhood or commune assemblies and institutions run local affairs, and are federated across larger landscapes. Mechanisms like mandatory representation of women and multiple ethnicities or marginalized section, and frequent rotation of representatives, ensure widespread participation and less likelihood of power concentration.

In India one of the earliest to say 'in our village we are the government' was Mendha-Lekha village in central tribal heartland; more recently in the same area a federation of 90 villages, the Korchi Maha Gramsabha, has moved towards relative self-rule. Indigenous peoples and other local co-

Liberal democracies have pursued fundamentally faulty economic growth models that underlie modern 'development' and globalization, responsible for the ecological and climate catastrophe the planet faces.

mmunities in many parts of the world have also struggled for self-determination and self-governance in diverse ways that build on traditional systems. Such governance is based on a pluriverse of worldviews that respect all humans and the rest of nature, most of which have been suppressed by authoritarian regimes or disempowered by liberal democracies. Many are making a come-back. A number of examples for localized governance along with accountable representative institutions, are also emerging in cities, such as in feminist municipalism.

Though by no means perfect, such direct democracy can provide far greater levels of participation in decision-making to 'ordinary' people than do predominantly representative democracies. But struggles for social justice and gender equality and against racism, casteism, etc have to go hand in hand with radical democracy. In the Korchi Maha Gramsabha process mentioned above, the recognition that men have traditio-

nally dominated collective decision-making, has led to a self-empowerment process amongst women. Sometimes, progressive policies or global human rights and social justice instruments can help with this. Also crucial are forums of dialogue and healing. And the democratic control of the economy, with localization for basic needs and essential services, a stress on the commons rather than on private property, and the central role of caring and sharing, also have to be part of the transformation.

Radical democracy works best when people can deliberate face to face. At larger scales, there is a need for delegated or representative institutions; and indeed it is at times from these that checks against local caste, gender, and other repression can come. But even such larger scale institutions can be made more responsive and accountable to the units of direct democracy on the ground, e.g. through the right to recall, nomination of delegates rather than (or



additionally to) election of representatives, their frequent rotation to discourage amassing of power and wealth, complete transparency of finances and decisions. Movements in several countries have brought in policy and legal changes towards such accountability, such as a fundamental right to information, and social audit processes. But more is needed, such as the Right to Participate, and enabling local rural and urban units of decision-making to have financial and law-making powers. Some kind of elections may still fit into such a system (e.g. multi-layered system in Switzerland), but are not the dominant core.

There are at least four conditions for successful democracy. First, everyone has to have the right to participate, in decisions affecting his/her life. Such a sweeping right does not exist anywhere in liberal democracies. Second, people need to have accessible forums for engaging in political decision-making - physically proximate, free from fear, in a language and atmosphere that is understandable. Third, the capacity to participate meaningfully has to be facilitated in everyone; over centuries of centralized decision-making this capacity has been systematically destroyed in most of us. Finally, the most important but most difficult, the maturity and wisdom of responsible decision-making has to be infused, which would make people sensitive to the marginalized, to minorities, to not only other humans but also other species. This would be a genuine radical ecological democracy.

In an ideal sense, and in the long run perhaps, radical democracy would be about a state of statelessness.

Gandhi's notion of *swaraj*, or some anarchist Marxist traditions, as also several

utopian visions, have no centralized state as a governing principle. Such a future could be conceived of as millions of self-governing units, autonomous and self-reliant but also responsible for the autonomy and self-reliance of others (which necessarily means limits to consumption, and behavior oriented towards respecting the commons, the very essence of *swaraj*), interconnected in cultural and material ways that do not undermine the self-reliance of any unit. Nation-state boundaries would dissolve, to be replaced by governance at biocultural landscape level. Such bioregionalism is gaining ground in various parts of the world.

But it is also important to look within ourselves. As citizens (especially those of us who are enfranchised, and privileged in some way), we need to examine our own responsibility for the mess democracy is in. Every few years, we willingly give over our inherent power to someone else to rule over us. If the Zapatistas and the Kurds and the Gond adivasis of central India have claimed, and in varying degrees achieved radical democracy, why are the rest of us not trying for this, including in cities? Admittedly, such governance is difficult, it needs our time and commitment, and we will then be squarely to blame if things go wrong. But we can also congratulate ourselves if the ends of justice are achieved. COVID, like all the other global crises we are going through, has shown us that self-reliance in all, with ecological sensitivity and social justice, is the only pathway to a just and sustainable future. *Swaraj* has to be an essential part of this, if, queuing up outside poll booths, we don't want to keep deluding ourselves.

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How can we safely collapse systems of domination, and so, flourish?

Climate chaos is symptomatic of a system of domination - an expression of the violence of inequality. The climate chaos that we are witnessing makes it inescapably clear that dominating others harms oneself, and that this system of domination will inevitably end - whether through ecological disasters or our collective action.

Justin Kenrick and Eva Schonveld(*) from Grassroots to Global Assemblies

The current global temperature rise is 1.2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels and already, climate impacts are multiplying exponentially. To aim and limit global temperatures increase to 1.5 degrees C or 2 degrees C is to aim at runaway feedback loops. We need to get back as close as possible to the safe pre-industrial levels. This will be impossible if we continue with the same system that is destroying biodiversity and human lifeways (as it tries and fails to reduce our emissions). We need to rapidly abandon the current system which is based on the exploitation of others.

How do we rapidly and safely abandon this system of domination?

This isn't a matter of needing new technologies or new policies, persuading politicians or identifying culprits, dreaming of utopias or imagining that realism means trying to tweak the system we have.

We need to start from somewhere else entirely.

This system has sold us a dream of a utopia that can never exist.

'Utopia' means non-place, and that is exactly the deception our current system is based on—exploiting others and dumping our waste in out-of-sight non-places. Of course, there are no non-places—all places are real and impacted, including the invisible atmosphere.

Recently, US climate envoy John Kerry said that 50 percent of the carbon emission reductions needed to get to net zero will come from technology not yet invented. The shiny new policy 'Nature Based Solutions' translates into realpolitik as 'appropriate indigenous lands as emission dumps so we can continue business as usual'. It is clear that the system's solutions are utopian. Meanwhile, its impacts are being faced by real people—the poorest are hit first and hardest.

The rapidly narrowing path to retaining and regaining a liveable earth starts from real places and from deepening the connections between them: To resist, subvert and compost the non-place utopianism of the 'global'.

Grassroots to Global (G2G) assemblies emerged in Scotland out of our experience

of trying to enable change within the current system. That engagement has taught us a lot about why the dominant system is incapable of making the changes so urgently needed, and also about how change really takes place.

Start from where you are: Scotland and Extinction Rebellion

We are writing from the perspective of our ‘place’, Scotland, and specifically from the small town of Portobello, long swallowed up by the city of Edinburgh but lately starting to reassert its autonomy.

For a couple of decades, we championed the Transition Town movement trying to help communities wean themselves off oil, as a contribution towards a society- and planet-wide transition. However, after realising over time that governments wouldn’t even recognise the emergency (let alone act), we were delighted to join others to form Extinction Rebellion (XR) Scotland. We took to the streets with our own democratically-decided demands for the Scottish Government to (1) tell the truth about the climate crisis (“and commit to enabling a rapid and just transition to a sustainable and fair society”), (2) reduce emissions to

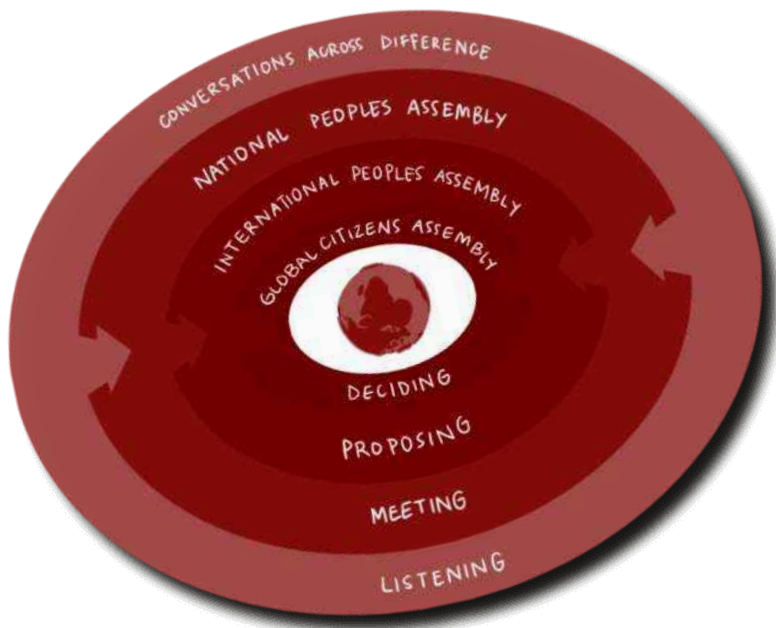
zero by 2025 (“including by replacing a system based on accelerating consumption with one based on ensuring the wellbeing of all”) and (3) create a Scottish climate citizens assembly to decide the changes (“as part of creating a democracy fit for purpose and a society that cares for all”).

Perhaps, unlike XR United Kingdom, which saw climate change as an existential threat that required buy-in from across the political spectrum, the three demands of XR Scotland were focused on utterly transforming the system.

And, to some degree, we were very successful.

Despite all other parties voting down a Scottish Green Party call for the declaration of a climate emergency in March 2019, the school strikes and XR Scotland’s April actions led to the Scottish Government declaring a climate emergency soon after. We campaigned for a climate citizens assembly, including by occupying the Scottish Parliament debating chamber, and in September 2019 we secured Government backing for the same.





Change from within? The Scottish Climate Citizens Assembly process

Between March and October 2020, two G2G organisers were the XR Scotland reps on the stewarding group shaping the Scottish Government's Climate Citizens Assembly. We joined because we had agreement from the civil servants that the assembly

would be able to listen to the science, decide what level of response was needed, and would be able to decide for themselves on the causes and solutions. We pulled out of the assembly in October 2020 as it became clear that assembly members were not going to be allowed to neither assess the science nor assess the economic drivers.

However, we still tried to have an impact from the outside - occupying the roof of the parliament to

try and draw assembly members' attention to our ten minute video summarising the evidence they had heard. In the end, their recommendations were a scattering of dozens of good ideas, rather than

coherently directed at system change (as they might have been with a more enlightened process). This was no surprise, given that the Assembly was, in effect, shaped and chaperoned by civil servants and their advisers who - however well-meaning- are committed to upholding, rather than transforming, the status quo. In an interview after the assembly process was finished, the academic in charge of deciding what evidence the assembly should consider remarked that he was surprised they had only given members 10 or 20 minutes to assess the science (when we had been absolutely clear that they needed a full weekend of a seven weekend process); this reminded us just how deeply unconscious that bias towards retaining rather than challenging the status quo can be.

In contrast, climate scientist Kevin Anderson remarked on his experience of the assembly that, unlike experts, ordinary citizens are not biased towards one line of expertise, and so, is far better at assessing policy options. What became clear was that 100 ordinary citizens (a randomly selected representative sample of the population) were far better at deciding policy than experts and better at reaching agreement than politicians, albeit within the limits imposed on them:

"The fact that it's random means you break the link with vested interests... If you choose people that aren't the usual suspects, who aren't typically politically engaged, what we find is that people are aware of their own lack of information and take their role very seriously. They're really willing and open to change their minds and change their opinions." – Brett Henning

The assembly process confirmed to us that (1) putting democracy back in the hands of ordinary people is the way forward, and (2) that the new democracy has to emerge from the people and not be controlled by the government.

The assembly process confirmed to us that (1) putting democracy back in the hands of ordinary people is the way forward, and (2) that the new democracy has to emerge from the people and not be controlled by the government.

De-traumatising Politics through Engaged listening

So, G2G emerged out of our experience in Scotland of making demands of government and finding them incapable of changing their ways. Alongside the Climate Assembly process, we were developing an approach to politics that is trauma-aware: Aware of the ways that our system traumatises those who become wielders of power as well as those on the receiving end of the violence that power wields.

Instead of seeking change within this trauma-driven system, and instead of reacting to it in a way that replaces it with yet another trauma-driven set of players, how can we create the safety to dismantle the system, and to decolonise our politics? Here, we are using ‘decolonisation’ to refer to the need to acknowledge and dismantle the ways a system of domination operates between us and within us.

This approach was encapsulated in an article ‘Politics, Trauma and Empathy: Breakthrough to a politics of the heart?’ Politics needs to meet our real needs and bring out the best in us, not be in thrall to a traumatised impotence wielding a fantasy of power. To enable this, we need to develop ways of meeting with each other and deciding together—ways that are not only anti-oppressive but trauma-aware.

To that end, in early 2020, we put our climate focus to one side, and reached out to understand how others experience the systemic crisis we face. We planned to reach out to others in all manners of unlikely ‘non-political’ spaces (including outside football grounds) to undertake an ‘engaged listening’ process. We did this in order to better-shape the invitations to local or city-

wide Peoples Assemblies on our way to building towards an international Fractal Assembly just prior to COP26 (there’s a toolkit if you want to do your own here).

Then, COVID-19 swept in and we decided to preface the three questions we had intended to ask with one about what people would like to keep from the COVID-19 period, and what they would never like to



experience again. The three questions we asked were “What are the biggest challenges facing us? Why are they happening? How can we tackle them?” The responses were profoundly honest about the crises, about inequality, about what work matters, about vulnerability, and about how fast society can change. The team we developed interviewed over a hundred people, a cross section of society in Scotland, and what was clear was that the early COVID-19 and lockdown period enabled peoples to see three things:

- 1- The inequality of a system where key workers are paid a pittance,
- 2 - That health, care, community, and nature matter far more than excess money and status, and

3 - That unimaginable change can happen overnight (even if lockdowns were badly handled).

Reworlding Gathering: assembling a politics of wholeness

While retaining our feet on the ground here in Scotland, we have reached out to learn from others struggles, including through developing strong links with Global processes such as Global Tapestry of Alternatives (GTA), and participating in GTA's excellent events at the 2021 World Social Forum. From September 2020, we interviewed a huge range of people engaged in transformative politics, building international connections and developing a powerful methodology which shaped the 'Reworlding Gathering' (May 2021) on 'assembling a politics of wholeness'. These brought together enduring indigenous and emerging transformative approaches, focused on how and why deliberative democracy can transform representative systems, as well as oppose authoritarian ones.

The learnings from the Reworlding process were at two levels: Process and Substance.

Process: In contrast to a normal activist, academic, campaigning or political conference gathering, where there are parallel sessions for people to choose between, punctuated by 'more important' single plenaries, the process and shape of Reworlding was 15 sessions (or 'streams') over 5 days, feeding into the 2-hour daily reflective sessions (the 'river') which received and processed the learning from the streams. Participants could attend everything, but if they were to attend the 'river' they needed to commit to attending it for all 5 days. So, instead of the crucial aspect being 'important' people only having the time to make it to the plenaries they are presenting in, the crucial aspect was determined simply by commitment to reflecting on the streams and deeply listening to each other.

Substance: Even over a month after 'Reworlding', it is very hard to summarise the multifaceted nature of the core extraordinary learning from both indigenous enduring and emerging experimental experience, which is that a politics that works is way simpler and more challenging than we had realised. A politics of wholeness is about:

1 - Presence, patience and proximity: Not passing power to anyone else to decide for us, but instead gathering in place to deeply consider the issues, (i) being willing to bring our whole complex selves, gathering as whole human beings, not as representatives of anyone else—let alone a movement or party; (ii) having the patience to listen deeply to each other, to prioritise voices that are usually marginalised, to out-listen or work to defuse the trauma of those who seek to dominate, and to be aware of impacts on non-present others, until (iii) a clear and coherent response/way forward surfaces that everyone (except those generating division for their own ends) is in agreement with.

2 - Place and Peoples assemblies: Recognising the importance of embodied experience, that the personal is utterly political, that everything happens in place, that locality is reality, and globalism is often a move to appropriate power. Key here was hearing about the anti-patriarchal struggle and peoples assemblies in Chile, and how when Chile voted earlier in May to elect members of a constitutional convention to decide the post-Pinochet constitution, so many of those elected came to prominence through the assemblies, and the majority were pro-feminist.

3 - Time and making molten moments: One huge unexpected theme was the crucial role of time. For example, a seven-generations awareness of ancestors and future generations in indigenous decision-making can enable decisions to be made in the context of a far broader sweep of human experience. At the same time, the emerging focus on precarious future gene-



rations in historically colonizing societies opens up a similar awareness of the need and possibility of enabling a decision-making molten moment where protest against a politics of theft becomes a pro-active replacement of it. This molten-ness of time is experiential: Each word and action resounds and aligns, and a vast amount can be achieved in an objectively short period. We will continue to explore the potential impacts of different experiences of time in assemblies.

Navigating Power: Stories of how success within the current system turns to dust the ability of the 'successful' to sustain real relationships (instead retreating into shrunken ego-based ones) abounded. In terms of navigating power within failing representative democracies, one strategy that emerged was to develop peoples assemblies at the local level that are built around genuine need-meeting (maintaining public services that are being closed, ensuring food or energy production and sharing, ensuring safety, child care or elderly care etc.) that may link with others to create city-wide or region-wide alliances. These assemblies also create parallel detraumatizing power structures that engage existing ones only in order to draw on the healthy aspects within them and to eventually replace them. Such processes within failing representative democracies could also help provide the leverage and support to those navigating power in increasingly authoritarian contexts. In the end, we cannot get through our current and near-future emergencies unless we all get through, by ena-

bling a molten moment of decision making that ends a system based on the exploitation of others. There is no future for anyone without it being a future that takes care of everyone.

Next Steps: Local, city wide and international assemblies

Scotland: COVID-19 meant a delay in organising the face-to-face Peoples Assemblies we had planned, but ground-level preparation for these are now well underway as we enter an experimental phase with very different peoples assembly processes in parts of Aberdeen and Edinburgh, and in an exploratory way in Glasgow. The enforced delay has allowed us to further develop a facilitation approach that is anti-oppression and trauma-aware, and a decolonisation approach to meetings. In relation to navigating power, one possibility is that this experience might inform the creation of a Scottish Peoples Assembly in 2022, possibly in the run up to the May 2022 local elections.

International: During the clearances, vast swathes of communities in Scotland were cleared from their lands so that the powerful could make a bigger profit from the land. This often led to such poverty that the powerful could then use the same displaced people to clear other indigenous peoples from their lands in the Americas, Africa, Australia and Asia. There is now a strong movement in Scotland seeking to take back land into community ownership, and over 75 percent of the population of the Western Isles now lives on community lands. This

position as colonised and coloniser gives Scotland a crucial resonance with everyone's experience across the world when it comes to COP26 being held in Glasgow. By now, we all know that the 25 previous COPs have been very successfully used to delay any meaningful action on the climate, and we expect nothing else from this one.

Fractal Assembly: However, the world's focus being on Glasgow and the climate makes Glasgow a perfect place to take our next step after the Reworlding gathering: an international Fractal Assembly. This Assembly aims to bring together frontline communities from the Global South and Global North (including those facing severe repression in eastern Europe) in an Autonomous Territory beside the River Clyde in Glasgow just prior to COP26 (27th to 30th October 2021).

It may include many of those who participated in 'Reworlding' (from Rojava, Zapatista, First Nations, rural and urban India, Kenya and Papua, as well as Municipalist movements in Europe and South America, and specifically Chilean resistance) bringing their experience of resisting colonialism and capitalism. All of them highlight the need to move from trying to impact a representative democracy (that becomes captured) to needing to enable direct democracy by the people (through peoples and citizens assemblies).

Part of the preparation for the Fractal Assembly involves a core group from Gal-Gael, FPP, Centre for Human Ecology, Scottish Communities Climate Action Net-

work and Enough who are focused on resourcing and developing effective, decolonial and detramautised intra- and inter-community decision-making. The shape of the Fractal Assembly has yet to emerge, but may involve holding a regenerative gathering of indigenous and other place-based communities: Rejoicing the life-giving places, grieving the destruction, and connecting to reimagine the future.

Instead of opposing and thereby strengthening the 'disembodied global', we are seeking to enable a reverberating, expanding and interconnecting meeting place. Instead of a 'disembodied global' non-place that steamrolls over our real places, we are seeking to enable meeting places where communities share what's going right (learnings, innovation, rituals, creativity etc.) and what's going wrong (intractable conflict, imposition of domination etc.) so that we help each other to not fall back into a dominating paradigm but prefiguratively model a politics of wholeness from the grassroots to the global.

We can crack the concrete with our blades of grass but we still need a molten moment to switch off the bulldozer's engine. As one small part of a vast creative uprising -when the time is right- our 'prefiguring' needs to become a 'replacing'. In such a molten moment, where time and events become fluid, we can collectively reclaim our world, so that the many worlds this world is made of can flourish and enable all others to flourish too. It needs to come soon, but it also needs deep preparation in place. To reclaim the future we need to relearn how to be fully present to each

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Multiconvergence of Global Networks: Experimental Democracy at the Planetary Level

by Frédéric Vandenberghe (*)

New times present us with un-known challenges and demand new concepts to solve them. But until these new concepts are conceived, we'll have to make do with the ones we have—power, people, nations, states, parliaments—while we are also re-thinking them. This is not easy to do since, depending on the conjuncture, the time and the latitude, the state can appear as part of the problem or part of the solution.

Over the past few decades, states all around the world appear to have been captured by transnational corporations and populist movements that abuse power to deconstruct and destroy the administrative state from within. It is hard to believe, but it wasn't so long ago that the state was considered an ally of social movements. Boaventura, for example, went as far to state that the state is a social movement.

Underneath and above the state's apparatus, by articulating the various territories, peoples and constituencies, there is space for experimentation with new forms of power, democracy, representation and participation at different levels. At the Multiconvergence of Global Networks (MRG), we are trying to set up an experiment in radical democracy at the global level. Our project is to constitute a Planetary Citizens' Parliament that would complement the organisation of the United Nations with an organisation of the United Peoples. This idea is relatively new. Since the Second World War, various projects to set up a world citizen's parliament have been proposed, but as far as we know, so far, none have really

succeeded. Given the urgency to solve the world's problems and avoid the extinction of the human species and other living beings, the time is ripe to try again. At the Convivialist International, one of our constituent networks, Alain Caillé put on paper an ambitious plan for a Global Citizens' Parliament. At MRG, we have adopted this plan, but also reformulated and redesigned it.

The parliament has two functioning chambers, the first chamber is called the Council of Wisdoms of the Earth's Peoples and the second chamber is called the Assembly of Planetary Citizens. To avoid hierarchies between the mind and the body, the masculine and the feminine, the aristocrats and the plebeians, we do not use the language of upper and lower chambers. While the Council is to be comprised of people who are recognised for their wisdom, moral exemplarity or leadership of service, the second chamber will comprise of citizens who are drawn by lot - by random sampling, similar to classical Greece and contemporary popular juries. The idea is that the Council of Wisdoms becomes, as it were, the head of the Parliament that sets the agenda, while the Assembly of Planetary

Citizens, which forms the heart of the Parliament, deliberates and decides on all matters. To be clear and to subvert (once again) the hierarchies, it is understood that the function of the Council is to be at the service of the Assembly.

We already have eight global processes working together to form an intentional collectivity that aims to bring about systemic change at the global level.

We have maintained the bicameral design of Alain's proposed parliament, but we have altered its scope. We still see this parliament as an experiment in radical democracy which joins elements of representative and participatory democracy in a single design. But, instead of trying it out on a grand scale, we want to test its viability in a more modest experiment, i.e., within and between the networks.

On the 29th of May 2021, the Council of Wisdoms gathered for the first time on Zoom. Eight global networks that are part of the Multiconvergence sent in two delegates with gender-equal representation. As always, we worked using simultaneous translation in four different languages: English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. The delegates were introduced to each other and now, they will have to start working together to figure out the details of the Parliament: What are the responsibilities of the Council? How will it be organised? What is the relation between the Council and the Assembly? How will the Assembly function? How will the networks select the members of the Assembly? What are the themes of concern on which the parliament will reflect, deliberate and decide?

People's Parliament, Sydney, Australia (Photo: 350 Australia).



The Project of a Planetary Citizens' Parliament is an experiment in real democracy. It is modest, because at first, we want to test the viability of the project on a minor scale as an experiment within and between the global networks that are part of MRG. But, it is also an ambitious project, because if it successfully functions within the networks, we can think about scaling it up towards the realisation of a real Planetary Citizens' Parliament. This presupposes that we resolve our problem of legitimacy and representativity while investigating the statistical techniques for selecting members of the Assembly by lot.

We already have eight global processes working together to form an intentional collectivity that aims to bring about systemic change at the global level. This is a spiral of political, cultural and personal transformation. We are a prefigurative and transformative social movement. We represent the world in all its diversity and we want to change it. That's why we are here. Right now, the Parliament is only an elusive dream, but if all goes well, it may become a reality before the end of the decade.



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