


# WEAVING ALTERNATIVES



A periodical by  
**GLOBAL TAPESTRY**  
of **ALTERNATIVES**

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**Climate Change  
and  
Alternatives**

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A periodical by  
Global Tapestry of Alternatives

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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

## In this issue:

- Shrishtee Bajpai
- Upamanyu Das
- Franco Augusto
- Kumi Naidoo
- Michal Kravčík
- Hannibal Rhoades
- SabinaEnéa Téari
- Amitav Ghosh
- Ashish Kothari

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# GTA GLOBAL TAPESTRY OF ALTERNATIVES

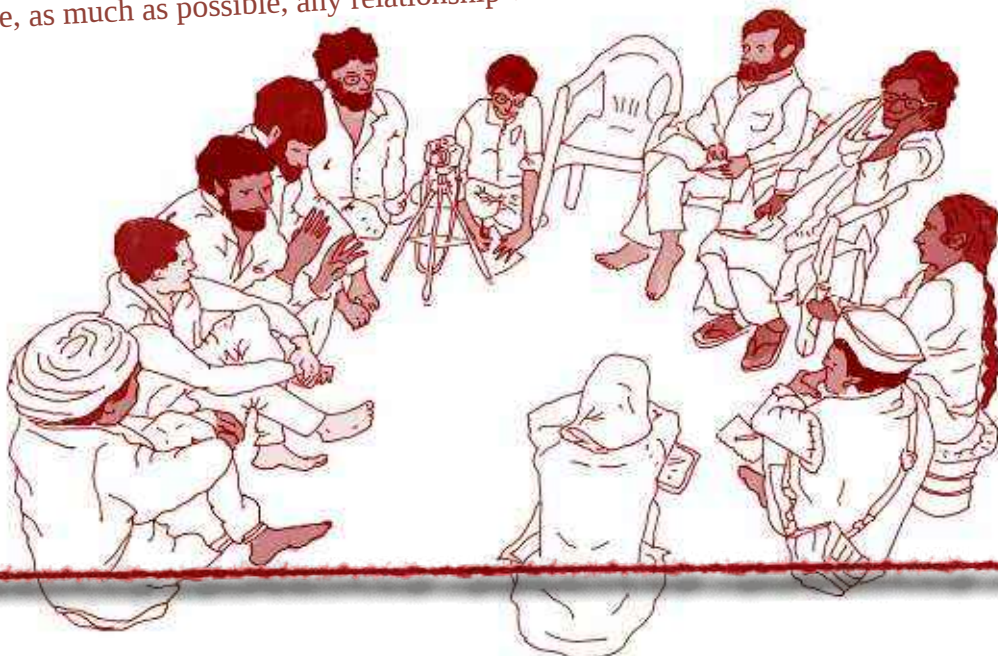
**TAPESTRY** The weaving of networks of Alternatives

## 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 and Upamanyu Das

Dear readers,

It is our pleasure to share the Global Tapestry of Alternatives' sixth newsletter with you. This is our second thematic newsletter on "Climate Change and Alternatives", with the intent to critically explore various dimensions of climate change, especially from the perspective of the grassroots and other practices and concepts that provide an alternative to the capitalist-statist-patriarchal-racist system that has led to this crisis.

In the midst of this crisis, pro-system policies and false market/techno fixes are continuing to thwart real socio-environmental change. Governments can only seem to focus on vague "plans" for the future, putting their faith in (or diverting attention by talking about) technological and other measures that are yet unproven. As the dust has settled after the conclusion of the COP26 summit, the global public now has a clearer picture of the outcomes of the Glasgow Climate Pact, which has been acknowledged as a 'compromise deal' which paves the way for the further colonisation of lands and forests of indigenous peoples and local communities.

In such a context, it is more than urgent to look at constructive alternatives being conceptualised, practiced and proposed by various communities as ways of building actionable responses for radical change. In this newsletter, we have wide-ranging contributions exploring the issues of COP26 and ways forward to alternative practices and articulations bringing forth radical transformations, both individual and systemic.

Kumi Naidoo, human rights and environmental activist in his contribution reflects on the recently concluded COP26 and the issues with it but also celebrates the intersectionality, more artistic expressions brought by the civil society. Hence, re-asserting the need to intensify the building of power from below to keep bringing alternative/pluriversal worldviews, knowledge systems, visions and conceptual frameworks to fight climate change. Michal Kravčík, of People and Water International, Slovakia, shares a practical example of a recovery plan being attempted in the Košice region of Slovakia that aims to increase the water retention capacity of the damaged landscape as an effective strategy to combat climate change. This piece is followed by beautiful animations from Uganda, Zimbabwe and Kenya, put together by Hannibal



# EDITORIAL

→ Rhodes of Gaia Foundation which illustrates the power of indigeneous knowledges their earth-centred cultures in challenging climate change.

Sabina Enéa Téari of Foresta Collective writes a beautiful refractory piece exploring the dimensions of the ecological self, body and the relation with the more-than human around. She calls for a 'Relational Space' being nurtured at Foresta Seasonal Academy that seeks to build more earthbound, collaborative, attentive and generative ways of relating as means to tackle the climate and other ecological crises that we face. Our last contribution is a conversation between Amitav Ghosh, writer-novelist and GTA core team members (Shrishtee Bajpai and Ashish Kothari). In the conversation around Ghosh's new book the Nutmeg's Curse, they explore the power of storytelling & voices of more-than-human, sources of counter power, geopolitics, readings for readers especially in these times as well as the need of re-centering the stories of land.

All these contributions by activists, researchers, philosophers, writers, and community members share wide-ranging conceptions and processes to tackle the climate crises. They give suggestions for avenues for citizens/activists/social movements to organise and affect radical political change along with practical examples from the ground that need to be visibilized and shared widely. Importantly, they offer hope and solidarity when it is most desperately needed.

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.

The team would like to thank Christine Dann, Ashish Kothari, Ana Cecilia Dinerstien, and Urvi Shah for supporting the production of this newsletter.



# From grassroots resistance to revolutionary reconstruction: The GTA at the COP26 People's Summit

The Global Tapestry of Alternatives recognizes climate change as one of the multiple crises that are affecting our worlds. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a global commitment to address climate change by world leaders. To date, there has been sadly little significant action coming from the Conference of Parties for the UNFCCC nor has the process been very inclusive to a plurality of voices. As a result, civil society has begun to mobilise around the annual COP events through a People's Summit focused strongly on climate justice and creating systemic change. Aligned with the COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland in November this year, a People's Summit was held in Glasgow and online bringing together thousands of activist and civil society members from around the world. The GTA contributed to the dialogue through a session on radical alternatives from grassroots communities. The main aim of the session was gathering and promoting visions and demands of peoples from the grassroots of the world we want to create - one that is socially just, equitable, and environmentally sustainable. The session was organized collectively with the International League of People's Struggles, the Southern People's Action on COP26 and Adelante. Two parallel sessions were held on 09 November 2021, with one in

person at the Glasgow Theatre and the other online, with approximately 80 participants joining each of the sessions. Each of the sessions included keynote addresses by Max Ajl and Ashish Kothari as well as four community leaders sharing their experiences and lessons of climate resistance and resilience. Shrishtee Bajpai moderated the session and Vasna Ramasar made closing remarks. Subsequently, a reflection session on COP26 was held on 03 December moderated by Shrishtee Bajpai and with presentations from Vasna Ramasar, Nnimmo Bassey (GTA endorser), Beverly Longid, Lia Mai Torres and Harjeet Singh. A key message that came from the discussions of all three events was the importance of grassroots voices being connected to the global discussions and the need to bring real examples of radical alternatives so that resistance can go hand in hand with reconstruction of a pluriversal world.



Some resources to know more about this:

The online event recording: [https://fb.watch/9TDwPII\\_wo/](https://fb.watch/9TDwPII_wo/)

The report-back activity:

[www.facebook.com/APNED.DefendEnviDefenders/videos/1782997901910062](http://www.facebook.com/APNED.DefendEnviDefenders/videos/1782997901910062)

# Reflections on COP26

Kumi Naidoo (\*)

**We find ourselves in the most consequential decade in the history of humanity. The choices we make now will determine what kind of future we'll have, or whether we will have a future at all..**

**R**eflecting on being in Glasgow recently, I think the first point is that the outcome of this COP was another reminder that our present governments and the systems they represent will not be able to deliver us from the climate crisis with the urgency and solidarity for which the situation calls for.

The second point is that we now need mobilisation on a scale never before seen, both in terms of putting pressure on governments to do the right thing, and also in building practical alternatives within our limited, though not inconsiderable, capabilities.

Thirdly, the question of 'who is in the room', and the need for transparency on the part of the UNFCCC, really matters. The fact that the fossil fuel industry sent the largest delegation to Glasgow is strange to say the least, but illustrates the extent of their influence. It's as if Alcoholics Anonymous were having a global conference and the largest delegation by far was the alcohol industry. As Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, put it, COP26 was "pale, male and stale."

However, just having all the right people in the room does not necessarily mean you get the right outcomes, because in reality when it comes to negotiations, some countries are more equal than others. In the end, rather than the phase out of coal, what we saw was a commitment to phase down

coal. This language was adopted in the last moments of the conference, when India pushed the compromise forward, with the support of China, and a few others. Other countries were put in a situation where they were forced to agree, or allow everything else that had been negotiated to fall apart. The Glasgow Climate Pact also noted 'with deep regret' that rich nations had also failed to provide the \$100 billion they promised over a decade ago to help deal with mitigation and adaptation of the climate crisis.

It was not all bad news though. The Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), a gathering of the most vulnerable countries in the world, succeeded in pushing for an annual review process. This means countries will have to update their climate plans every year between now and 2025, as opposed to every five years as required by the Paris agreement, which creates the opportunity for countries to ramp up their level of ambition to move us closer towards limiting global warming to a 1.5 degrees celsius target, rather than the pathetic 2.7 degrees celsius negotiated. In some of the world's most vulnerable countries, the slogan has shifted from '1.5C to stay alive' to '1.5C we might survive!' Bearing in mind that at 1.1C we are already seeing extensive devastation in so many places, it is clear that limiting global warming to 1.5C will be inadequate for many small island states and least developed climate vulnerable countries.



The most important problem I see is that the core system that brought us to this point of climate catastrophe is seemingly to be kept intact. There's a high level of denial and cognitive dissonance displayed by political leaders, which has not shifted that much, even though extreme weather events have visited more of their own doorsteps in the past year. According to Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the IMF, their staff estimates that, "global fossil fuel subsidies amount[ed] to around \$6 trillion in 2020." This figure means that if you count what each government in the world gave to fossil fuel companies, it amounts to almost 11 million dollars every minute. The wording of the Glasgow Climate Pact talks about phasing out inefficient subsidies, rather than moving to scrap all fossil fuel subsidies. When we say 'subsidies' it's just a nice way of saying that this is taxpayer money given to the fossil fuel companies because it's 'in the national interest', in energy provision, building pipelines and such like. Yet major infrastructure and research projects tend to be paid for by our governments, not by the fossil fuel companies, so when our governments talk about the scale of the climate challenge and not having resources to make the shift to renewable and clean energy, I'd say a good place to find that money is to redirect the fossil fuel subsidies.

We have to ask the question, what channels do the most vulnerable people and communities have for survival? What can we do to reverse the situation? At this COP, I participated in two sessions regarding carbon dioxide removal, which I did with some measure of trepidation. In these sessions, I was

reminded that it's not as if carbon removal is not already happening; it's happening, and we need to try to see how it can be conducted in a transparent, accountable and productive manner. However, how we go about making that happen, and how quickly, is open to question. I believe we need to pursue science-based strategies that give



people of the small island states and other vulnerable countries a fighting chance against runaway climate change.

Furthermore, whether we pursue natural or technological solutions for carbon removal, having these independently verified by recognised scientific bodies should help ensure that we are not being sold exaggerated claims for approaches that fail to deliver as promised. The Global Carbon Removal Partnership that was launched at COP includes the following five principles:

- Durability - Carbon removal solutions must be highly durable (be able to sequester carbon) with low risk of reversal over centuries to millennia. A monitoring framework should be established for any carbon releases.
- The performance of carbon removal sys-

tems matter - A carbon removal project's emissions must be measured through transparent emissions accounting, and carbon removal credit given only for net climate benefit.

- There must be equity - Carbon removal solutions must be implemented in a socially and environmentally responsible manner considering land and resource sovereignty, prior and informed consent from 'impacted' communities and, protecting existing natural carbon resources and biodiversity.
- We must ensure the best possible transparency - Measurement, reporting and verification standards must be adopted and implemented to foster transparency and accountability thereby increasing credibility, trustworthiness.
- Inclusivity is key - Carbon removal needs global cooperation inclusive of perspectives from and benefits to the Global South in carbon removal solutions.

Many civil society actors, myself included, have hitherto voiced scepticism about this sort of approach. But circumstances have changed in that there is now much wider acknowledgement that climate change demands urgent action, and greater momen-

tum behind bringing the fossil fuel era to an end. We need to recognise that the carbon removal train has already left the station, and hundreds of millions of dollars, a lot of it badly spent, are being invested in this space already. We also need to recognise that even if we were magically able to switch off all emissions tomorrow, we would still be stuck with legacy carbon in the atmosphere. For these reasons, it will be important for civil society to engage with these processes.

If this COP has taught me anything, it is that unless we have leadership from below, there is no possibility that those at the top will of their own accord affect the changes we need and have been demanding for decades. The People's Pathways to Climate Justice Framework draws on observations I've made from years of activism efforts around the world. People are already exercising their agency, drawing inspiration from that; sharing that around the world would be a good thing to do. Mobilisation has to be different. It needs to be on a scale not seen before, and a lot more powerful than in the past. There is a huge gap between what the science is telling us, and



what we are witnessing in extreme weather events, on one hand, and where political leaders and economic thinking are on the other. We absolutely have to find an accelerated change strategy:

We must follow the money - We need to look at the different manifestations of the financial system, from pension funds to central banks, and put pressure on them to develop climate friendly regulatory policies which could redirect bad climate financial investments to climate protecting investments.

We can start to speak plainly - Young people said it loud and clear in Glasgow: 'no more blah, blah, blah.' Too often the climate struggle is talked about in technical or scientific terms that can be alienating for non-experts. We need clear, simple language that talks about climate change in terms of how it affects our soil, air and water, and how it affects the very things we need to survive. This is happening more now, but there is considerable room for improvement.

We need to see potential where we have always seen problems - Notwithstanding all that people have been through, and all the marginalisation, exclusion, displacement and other impacts of climate change, people still have resilience, capability, and agency. We need to build on this.

We often say that the current system is broken, but some now correctly say, no, it is not broken; it was designed to do exactly what it's doing. We need to ensure the post-COVID recovery does not repeat the error after the global financial crisis when those in power responded with system recovery, system maintenance, and system protection. What was needed then, and more urgently now, is system innovation, system redesign and system transformation. Given that, how do we move from where we are to where we need to be? We clearly need to imagine a very different, more just, inclusive, and sustainable economic system, but

we have to move from where we are to get there. This transition is clearly going to be a very difficult and challenging process, and trying to figure out how we do not lose more public resources and time in the process will be tricky. While campaigners are securing very important wins in individual battles with fossil fuel companies, often against tremendous odds, we really do not have enough time to go after every polluter or deforester, because there are simply too many of them, and it will take too long when time is against us. While these struggles must continue, we also need to be smart by focusing our efforts on stemming the flow of resources to polluting industries at source. Instead, we need to push for those resources to be invested in sustainable economic activities that help us pull back from the climate cliff edge.

In short, the outcomes of COP26 reflect the world's current power structure and relations. The limited progress that was made would not have been made had it not been for the voices of people within civil society, especially young voices. Notwithstanding COVID-19, this COP saw a deepening of participation from citizens and campaigners who came together from diverse backgrounds to make alliances for struggles ahead. There were musicians, visual artists, writers, and others from the artistic community organising events, and bringing the world of arts and culture and the world of activism together. Overall, there was a much more intersectional approach to campaigning, and less of the logo-obsessed large NGO-type organising.

We've seen evidence of this rising power and we can be proud of that. The major lesson I'm taking away from COP26 is that we have to intensify building power from below. Civil society mobilisation needs to intensify and we need to encourage and support a diversity of people's pathways towards climate justice for all.

# How to effectively heal the climate?

## An example of the recovery plan for the Košice region of Slovakia

Michal Kravčík

A lot has been said about climate change. The scientific community perceives climate change as a consequence of human anthropogenic activity by increasing the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> greenhouse gases. Let's compare the graph of average temperature growth since 1960 with the growth chart of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> for the same period (Figure 1). We can see they are nearly identical, and there should be no doubt about the direct correlation of CO<sub>2</sub> on the temperature regime of the country. Therefore, most scientists working on climate change models do not doubt anything else could cause climate change.

### Are we asking the right questions?

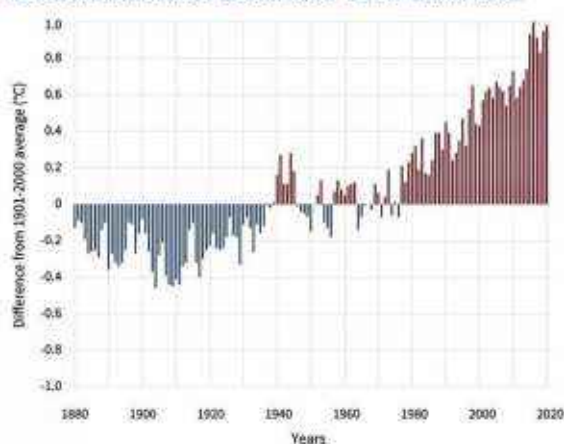
Suppose we focus on the physical processes of the temperature regime of the planet Earth. In that case, we need to consider all impacts on climate change and examine water as the most abundant greenhouse gas.

There are at least two laws of physics that offer a different explanation for the anthropogenic impact of humankind on climate. The law of conservation of energy and the second law of thermodynamics look beyond CO<sub>2</sub> as the primary driver of climate change and offer answers.

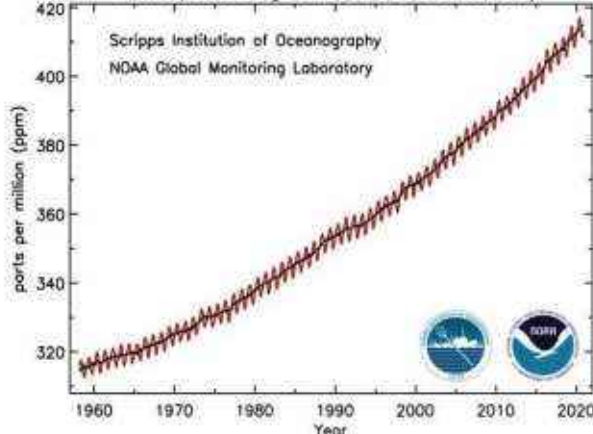
Figure 2 explains how solar radiation transforms when it hits the Earth's surface. Provided there is enough water in the ecosys-

tems, a significant part of the Sun's radiation is absorbed through evaporation and the ongoing transpiration of water through the vegetation during intensive photosynthesis. Up to 70-80%! The remaining solar radiation will contribute to soil heating (5-10 percent), reflection (5-10%), and warming of the troposphere (5-10%). It is worth noting that the evaporation of one cubic meter of water consumes 700 kWh of energy from the Sun. According to the law of conservation of energy, solar radiation is transformed into latent heat, which is carried by the evaporated water to the colder layers of the atmosphere. The evaporated water condenses in colder layers and forms clouds. At the dew point, rain forms, and

GLOBAL AVERAGE SURFACE TEMPERATURE



Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> at Mauna Loa Observatory



latent energy is released into the atmosphere and warms it per the energy conservation law mentioned earlier.

Suppose we damage the existing lush ecosystems, drain and cause the landscape to dry up, or cover and seal it with impervious surfaces. In that case, we disallow the rainwater to permeate into the soil, and the natural evaporation will decline. In other words, the Sun's energy absorption will decrease when the water evaporation decreases. In such circumstances, less water evaporates, and fewer clouds form, causing more sunlight to reach the Earth's surface. With the decrease of natural evaporation from the degraded area, the production of sensible heat, which accumulates in the troposphere, increases, and the environment overheats and creates a thermal island (heat dome).

It's a unique biotic pump that has been drawing the heat from the troposphere for thousands of years, like a car engine radiator. It works unless the radiator breaks down. Let me explain. What happens if the existing balanced ecosystem holding an abundance of water gets damaged and dries up? What happens when a degraded ecosystem offers no water to evaporate from the landscape? If we dehydrate "a balanced ecosystem", the sunlight absorption on the water vapour can drop to zero. What happens to the incoming solar energy, then? The water vapour

cannot result from evaporation and plant transpiration and is absent in such a case. If solar energy is not transformed into water vapour, it is transformed into sensible heat, overheating the troposphere, and generating heat islands (heat domes).

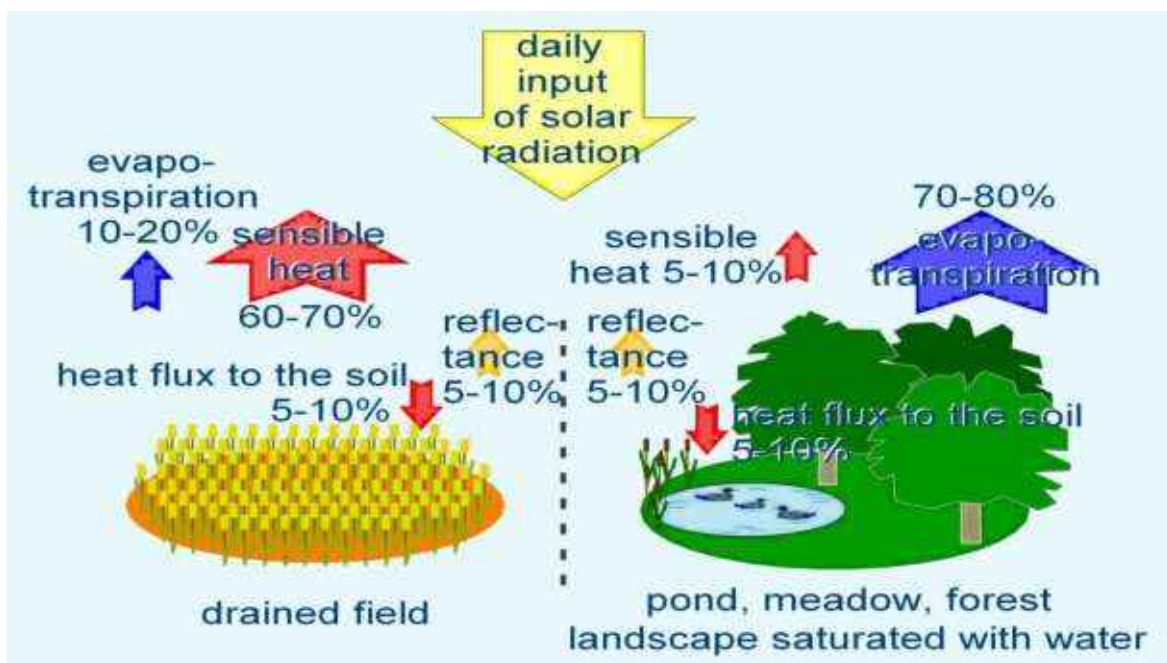
The left side of Figure 2 tells of a landscape in which we have made holes through and drained water from an ecosystem. (Like when a car radiator gets pierced). Therefore, less water evaporates from the Earth, less energy gets transported to the colder layers of the atmosphere, and even fewer clouds form in the sky.

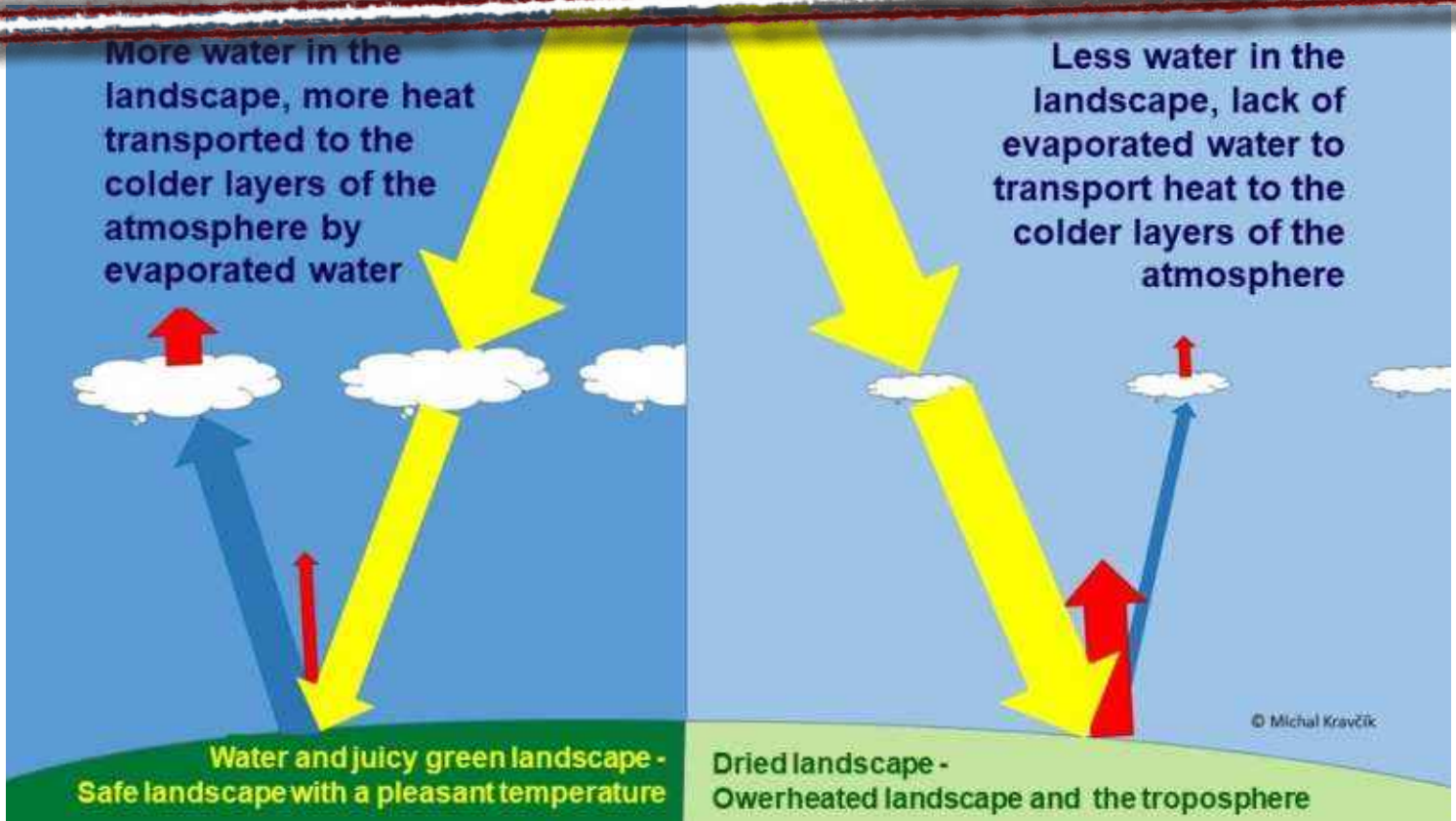
As a result, more sunlight reaches the Earth's surface. It transforms into more sensible heat that accumulates in the troposphere over those arid parts of the Earth. In this way, heat islands (heat domes) are formed, overheating the landscape, especially in cities, and in poorly managed and drained agricultural land.

For energy not transformed into vapour, it is transformed into sensible heat

For a better understanding, I offer a heat distribution scheme in two environments.

(Figure 3). There are more clouds in the sky in an environment where there is plenty of water (left part of the picture) because more water evaporates from the ground. Through the clouds, less sunlight enters the troposphere. At the same time, less sensible heat and more latent heat are produced from





the incoming sunlight on the Earth's surface as more water evaporates from the soil.

The right side of the picture talks about dry land. Less water evaporates from the ground, less energy is transported to the colder layers of the atmosphere, and even fewer clouds form in the sky. As a result, more sunlight reaches the Earth's surface. It transforms into more sensible heat that accumulates in the troposphere over those drier parts of the Earth.

During the condensation of evaporated water vapour in the atmosphere, clouds form, which reduces the permeability of solar energy through the clouds and alleviates the overheating of the atmosphere below them.

The solar radiation that does not get reflected but penetrates the clouds is absorbed by the vapour (blue arrow) when it hits the Earth's surface. The solar energy that is not consumed by the vapour is converted into heat (red arrow) and heats the above-ground atmosphere (troposphere).

In a landscape with enough water, solar energy transformation by the vapour is dominant (blue arrow), as liquid water molecules are available to consume the incoming solar radiation and change the state from liquid to gas. In a landscape where

soil moisture is low, the unabsorbed heat transforms into sensible heat. It overheats the ground layers of the atmosphere (red arrow).

According to the second law of thermodynamics, the converted solar energy is transported by the evaporated water to the colder layers of the atmosphere and heats them. This reduces the temperature gradient between the ground and upper layers of the atmosphere, preventing the growth of weather extremes.

Let's look at a city like Budapest, Hungary. Before the people of Budapest developed its land with buildings and roads, the rainwater would evaporate, and saturate the ground, supplying the vegetation and ground-water aquifers. These days, at least 100 million m<sup>3</sup> of rainwater collects annually in the regulated drainage infrastructure and empties to the Danube River. In the past, this water would evaporate into the colder layers of the atmosphere. Instead, more than 70 TWh of sensible heat per year is now released from this territory into the troposphere. Therefore, summer temperatures have been 3-5 degrees Celsius lower in the past. Interestingly enough, the Hungarian economy utilises 70 TWh in 1.5 years (Hungary's total energy consumption in 2018 reached almost 40 TWh).

**This Plan will contribute to creating 3200 jobs and the annual sequestration of 6.6 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub>**

On this principle, we have developed a Green Restoration Plan for the Košice Region of Slovakia, which was approved by the Košice Regional Parliament on 19 February 2021. It is an integrated landscape and watershed programme that will benefit several, providing a roadmap for ecosystem restoration. The Plan's implementation will increase the water retention capacity of the damaged landscape of the Košice Region by 60 million m<sup>3</sup> with a total cost of 400 million €.

This Plan will contribute to creating 3200 jobs and the annual sequestration of 6.6 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> to vegetation and soil, a yearly increase in the fertility of the agricultural landscape by €30 million, the res-

toration of dried water springs of 12,000 liters per second, an increase in latent heat production and the return of more regular rainfall, the formation of horizontal precipitation (dew), a decrease in the production of sensitive heat and the mitigation of atmospheric disturbances with a reduction in the incidence of weather extremes and flood risks, as well as an average temperature drop of 0.77 degrees Celsius. The projected return on investment in this programme is well below ten years. Such a model can be implemented in all parts of the world, increasing climate, environmental, water, and social security.



**Michal Kravčík**, of People and Water International, Slovakia, is a hydrologist and environmentalist. He was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize in 1999, for his contributions to the water management of the Torysa River..

# Decolonizing stories from Uganda, Kenya and Zimbabwe

Hannibal Rhoades (\*)

**New animations explore the revival of land, water, seed, and Earth-centred cultures by Indigenous and traditional communities in Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Kenya. In the midst of the climate crisis, Indigenous and traditional communities across Africa are taking matters into their own hands, reviving their climate-critical lands, waters and Earth-centred cultures.**

**I**n three new animations launched by the African Earth Jurisprudence Collective, storytellers from Uganda, Zimbabwe and Kenya explore how communities are turning the tides on a recent history of loss and destruction in their homelands.

Each story is told in the words of Earth Jurisprudence Practitioners Simon Mitambo, Method Gundidza and Dennis Tabaro, who have been accompanying these communities on their journey towards revival using holistic methodologies learnt from Indigenous communities in the Colombian Amazon, including community dialogues and eco-cultural mapping.

## **Buliisa, Uganda**

From the shores of Lake Mwitanzige (Lake Albert) Dennis Tabaro shares his own story of transformation, from accountant to Earth Jurisprudence Practitioner, as well as how the Indigenous Bagungu People in Buliisa, Uganda, are restoring their sacred natural sites, respect for custodians and clan governance systems in the shadow of oil extraction by oil major Total.

“The Bagungu had been told their traditional ways of living were backward, even satanic. Elders who still held deep knowledge of how to care for Nature were called witches and had to hide away. But now, custodians are reclaiming and protecting







sacred places, where fish are spawning and birds are nesting once again. They have gained confidence and the local government is listening to them – a law has been passed to protect their sacred natural sites that recognizes the role of the custodians. This is a first in Africa. The Bagungu are walking a path towards decolonisation that others will be able to follow,” says Dennis.

### **Bikita, Zimbabwe**

In Bikita, Zimbabwe, Method Gundidza narrates the story of how five nearby communities have catalysed a transformation in their food and farming system, as well as in their relationship with wild places and sacred natural sites, by reviving indigenous varieties of millet, their most sacred crop.

“We are on a mission to revive the traditional crop varieties suited to our lands and climate. Our success in this task is exemplified by millet, which has helped weave our community together again. The old varieties of millet are now growing in our fields once again. The elders and women who know these seeds have regained con-

fidence and respect. We have brought back our collective harvest and millet ceremonies, strengthening our community. The granaries we use to store our seeds have been rebuilt, preserving enough seed each year to see us through,” says Method.

### **Tharaka, Kenya**

From the red hills of Tharaka, Simon Mitambo shares how his people are turning the tide on a recent history of cultural and ecological loss in their ancestral lands by reviving their traditions, including beekeeping, traditional dress and the ecological governance of their territory.

“Seeing the losses, feeling the pain of the bees, we decided something must be done. For the past five years we have been working to turn the tide on this history of loss in our own lands. We are protecting the plants we use to make our hives, the trees they will hang in and the wild places where bees feed. We are encouraging everyone to abandon pesticides and use organic farming methods,” says Simon.

## Reweaving

Each animation demonstrates the immense value of Indigenous knowledge and practices in navigating the multiple ecological and social crises of our times.

They are a testament to the fact that alternatives to the industrial growth economy and the crises it is forcing on all humanity already exist. That the damages and losses suffered since colonization can be healed. That, by collaborating with other species in our home territories, we can reweave the fabric of life

## More information

The new animations are produced by animator Tim Hawkins and founding members of the African Earth Jurisprudence Collective- SALT in Kenya, AFRICE in Uganda, EarthLore in Zimbabwe and South Africa and The Gaia Foundation in the UK.

Watch them here:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/9046498>

Find out more about the African Earth Jurisprudence Collective:

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**Hannibal Rhoades** is currently Head of Communications at The Gaia Foundation. He works with Gaia's partners from the Amazon to Africa to protect land, water and life from unwanted mining projects. As Coordinator for Northern Europe for the Yes to Life, No to Mining Global Solidarity Network, Hannibal is working with allies around the world to advance the case for going beyond extractivism. He is also a member of the ICCA Consortium.

# Becoming a Forest: Caring for Entangled Relationship

**There's an old Turkish song, unfolding as the author is searching for what or who he is. In our humble translation the song goes...**

**"Am I a human or a creature or a weed**

**Am I a cultivable plant**

**Or am I an adjective**

**Am I a bee or a flower or a honey...**

**...I couldn't find myself in any way**

**...I couldn't find myself in any way..." .**

**Sabina Enéa Téari (\*)**

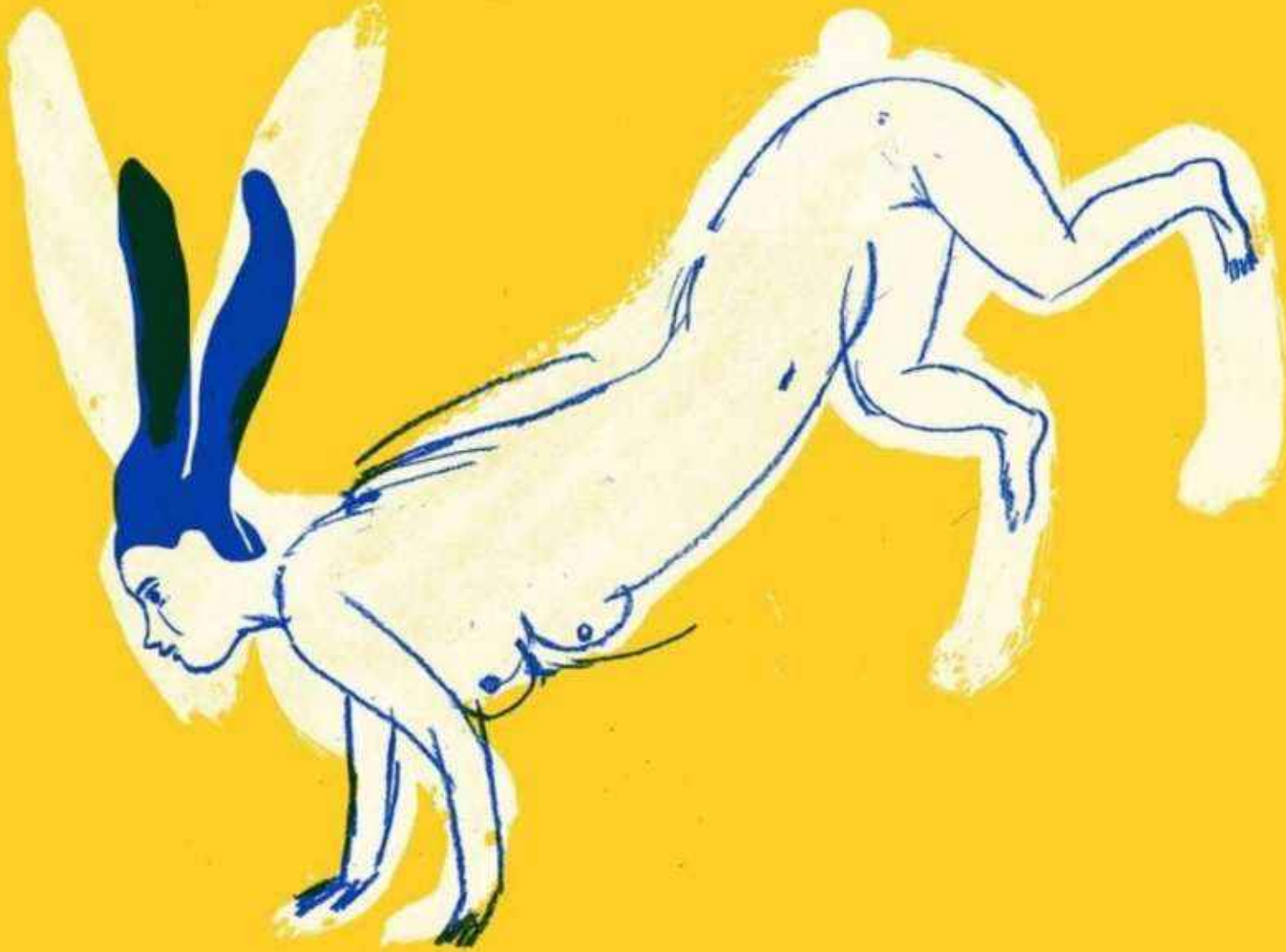
**A**s we're nearing the winter solstice, and the winter season generously offers space and time for deep reflection and restoration as well as creation of space for the seeds of spring, we are pondering deeper about the complex webs of entangled relations each of us is involved in. Relational space of course cannot be separated from personal ecologies. Just like the environment cannot be separated from the inner environment. We are ecosystems within ecosystems. Which is particularly useful to remember if we think of the context of climate change.

For the past 2 months we've been diving into the subjects related to personal ecologies at the autumn trail of Foresta Seasonal Academy. What we experience is a tickling sensation, or rather, a broadened perception, that makes it somehow hard to perceive a self in separation. From the objects in the house we are in, the birch tree we see every morning through the window, and the little bird with a bright peach chest that comes and seems to enjoy watching us just as we rejoice in watching her, from the

landscape, from each other. Without losing the beauty of the unique amalgamation of parts that claims its own (fluid) identity amidst the diversity of other beings, each of us still is a holobiont, as Linn Margulis and other scientists put it, where those millions of bacteria are me and I am them, a multitude of ecosystems entangled in a web of other ecosystems, a process where each encounter shapes me and is shaped by me. A larger, more expanded and deepened sense of self is what is emerging from the exploration of the ecological that we have set onto.

How can we expand our perceptions and awareness beyond a reductionist view of 'nature', both human and more-than-human? How do we overcome distance from the world and move away from alienation? How do we live in diversity, where conflicts are inevitably arising? How could a non-alienated being in the world, that may offer conditions for bonding, be possible?

As David Abram writes, "nature" it would seem, has become simply a stock of "resources" for human civilization. The way we think about and experience nature is inevitably influenced by our particular cul-



ture with its specific habits of exchange and interaction.

If alienation is a particular mode of being in which there is no responsivity, no meaningful inner connection or genuine relation to whatever it is we come in contact with, we need to carefully examine the role of instrumental interactions in cultivating our exchange with one another, both among humans and with other beings inhabiting this planet. If we just come in contact based on what we need from others, under time pressure and full of expectations, we will not be able to come into bonding. Bonding requires a more sincere and vibrant exchange, it demands a true connection.

**Where does an ecological body end?  
Where do we end?**

Individuality seems to be meaningless if it's separated from the larger being, a larger ecology. Cut off from the rest it then resembles a cancer cell in a way, as those individualised cells not willing to communicate, to collaborate, to die when it's time. Some cancer researchers say that the increasing trends of this disease are related to social

and economic development, mentioning factors like diet, nutrition and physical activity. Is there also a relation to a growing social and environmental separation and alienation? Is environmental climate change just a symptom of that condition? And what is this 'thing' called environment anyway? Do we have to objectivise, anonymise the world around that is pulsing alive and includes our aliveness right into the very depth of its entangled and complex beat, reducing it to just what "surrounds" us (en-vironment = *Umwelt*)? Or, perhaps, it would do more justice to speak of this matter in-between us, the air we all share, breathing in what other creatures like plants and plankton are breathing out, and giving back to those beings the carbon dioxide as we exhale? As David Abram put it, we do not live on the Earth, but on the Earth, speaking of the atmosphere we are immersed in and constantly exchange, this vaporised matter that connects living beings now and our endless lineages from times immemorial. Or, like some of the Andean indigenous cultures view it, "the place is not where I am from. It's who I am", thus we cannot separate ourselves

from the environment without affecting our “individuality”. Something we learn from Marisol de la Cadena, is that we become the place, just as it is part of us, borders are blurred. So we are human, but not only.

Remaining with this image of living life being in intra-relation, the relationship being the basic unit of life, as Donna Haraway and other thinkers put it, and all of us - human and more-than-human - immersed in this air we call atmosphere, what is climate change then? What is this heating up, if perhaps not the fever from the accelerated hyperactivity, over-activity of our eyes, minds, muscles, and other tissues, as we make our bodies execute more effectively and more efficiently, faster, as well as our livelihoods, called “busy-nesses”, springing, struggling, and even almost dying in the agony of rapid growth, competition and so called victory? Without separating the pragmatic from the poetic, the mundane from the invisible - because in the spirit of the interconnected life, whose manifestation and particle we only are, there can not be such separation - we like to think of climate in both its direct and metaphorical meanings at the same time. Climate as the long-term properties of the atmosphere on this Earth, the very properties of this relational space that both envelops our life forms and is constituted by them. This relational space is characterised by its bloated Yang element (in the Zen tradition) and the colonial dominance of the Cain archetype (in the way we learned it from Joseph Campbell, and Jonathan Kay), just as it is by the polluted spirit, in us and the spirit around us that we call air, or the lack of resonance and reciprocity, as the strangling effect of the all-prevailing instrumentalisation of relational spaces.

As human borders get blurry, so do our cosmologies and interpretations of what is our place in the world. Can I, human, still decide for the “others” that they are too many or too few, that I should be able to protect them or demolish, decide where they should dwell or move? How does this change if the “other” is a plant, an animal, a fossil fuel, a person on the move from a-

nother house, another country, another continent? How does moving away from anthropocentrism happen? And how is this parti-ular Anthropos we are speaking about? And if our worldview is changing, what would a cosmology that welcomes diversity and intra-relational becoming feel like?

A fascinating take on the intra-relational is ubuntu. In Zulu it means “I am, because you are”, and talking about a person with ubuntu we talk of someone who is a person through other people. Yet if we are who we are through the others, how do we walk into and move inside this relational space? Meaningful connections are the natural state for our being. Meaningful connections often are tricky. How do we hold this contradiction? Do we risk losing our personality, as we seemingly acknowledge that dissolving quality of being part of a larger whole?

Something we've been learning from the work of Lynn Margulis, as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, what we now started calling the holobiont rhizome, is that expanding connections goes well together with keeping the awareness of and care for the unique process that each of us is. Complexity thinking is a potentially rewarding emergent strategy. Acknowledging complexity, moving away from simplistic solutions that tend to reduce, shrink and separate, we might move towards the ecological, that cannot be reduced to a single meaning designating interdependencies in biology.

Seeking to live more earthbound, collaborative, attentive and generative ways of relating, where collective flourishing from the compost of the modern ideas of progress can take place, moved us to call Relational Space, the Winter trail at Foresta Seasonal Academy, into being. We dedicate Relational Space to discernment within relationships that make life possible. We dedicate this learning experience to Lifescapes, as Marisol de la Cadena puts it, and as we call the alumnae\*I network at our Seasonal Academy. Lifescapes imply criss-crossing of relations that make life. It's a way of thinking, in which place implies



‘humans’ and ‘more-than-humans’ coming together, making place, emerging from place.

This learning experience invites to explore sensitivity and ways of listening, reciprocity and conflicts, walking together the circles of ecological intimacy, and proposing to engage into radical attentiveness to relationalities, to notice other beings inhabiting the landscapes we walk during our lifetime, multiple intelligences and pluralities of organic forms of sensitivity with which our (each of us) existence is entwined and is inseparable from.

Perhaps, you, dear reader of this, would like to join this guided journey into collective practice, nurtured by impulses in words and images, as well as close connection with the natural environments, embodied awareness practices, and a process of larger-self-discovery, with the wish to recognise relations as meaningful with intensity and nuance. Well, one of the methodolo-

gies we use we call art-thinking-and-making. This means we also invite you to playfully join the collective choir of stories in various media. The focus this winter 2022 will be on writing and drawing, as part of our research practice into thinking-through-making and different ways of knowing.

Sensing that we are not contained between our hats and boots, as Walt Whitman put it, we move towards the subject and being of relationalities. So how do we move towards a change of paradigm? Towards an enlarged sense of self, togetherness, synchronicity; towards a deeper experience of relational nature of reality; and how will it change our interconnected reciprocities with other humans, interspecies, and indeed everything we come in contact with? How do we change climate together, in ways that makes this Planet liveable for all creatures, in ways that (as Robin Wall Kimmerer puts it) all flourishing can be mutual?

# Interview with Amitav Ghosh

**GTA speaks with Amitav Ghosh, an Indian-born scholar, novelist, and nonfiction writer. His many books include *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* and *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*.**

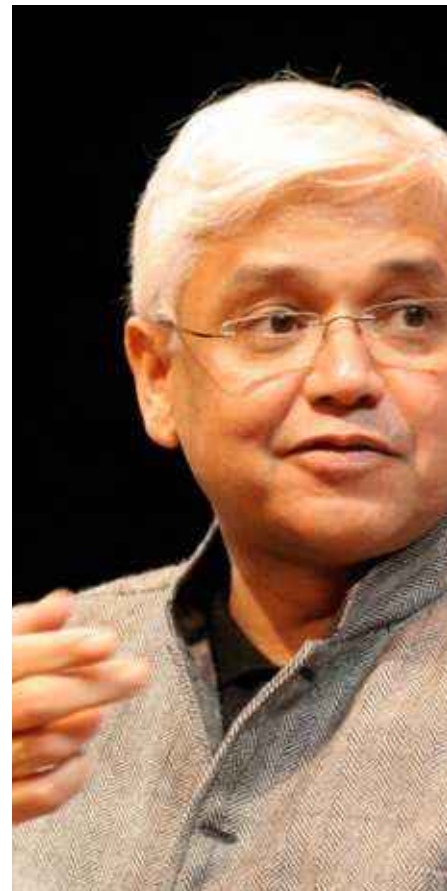
**Shrishtee Bajpai:** *Thank you for speaking to us. Let's get straight into the questions. These are put together by Christine Dann, Ashish, and I. Christine couldn't join us today. She's our GTA colleague based in New Zealand. The subtitle of "The Nutmeg's curse" is 'Parables for a planet in crisis'. We are curious to know why you chose the word parable, what is its intended meaning, and why storytelling-which is quite central to the book, is so important for you?*

**Amitav Ghosh:** In my book "The Great Derangement", I had written about trying to find new literary forms that are better suited to this age that we are in, and I had said that one such form could be the parable. The word parable has sort of biblical references for the Bible is filled with parables. Of course, I'm not using the word parable in any kind of scriptural or biblical sense. Rather, I've used the word parable because the structure of the book is parabolic. It's not a linear narrative, it progresses through disjunctions and ranges very widely. So that's the principal reason why I decided to call it a parable.

**Shrishtee Bajpai:** *That's useful. And so the next question that I had, which is connected to the non-human aspect. You speak a lot about the inanimate Earth which is a concept of the Western cognitive empire. Something that personally stayed with me while reading the book was that our ability to see meaning beyond spoken languages is so limited. So why do you think that is important and how can we revive it?*

**Amitav Ghosh:** Well, this is the real problem, isn't it? We, humans, use languages and because we use languages, we think that other species have no agency, no communicative abilities, and so on. In an ordinary sense, it's not like you and I can communicate with, let's say, trees, even though we know that trees have very complex systems of communication. In forests, trees communicate in very complex ways. They send nutrients, they respond to cries of distress from other trees. So all of this is known to us, yet within a certain Western tradition, language is paramount so much so that we restrict the whole idea of communication to language.

But of course, there have always existed many kinds of human beings who believe that they can communicate with other species. Some of these are specialists, like shamans. But many ordinary human beings can also communi-



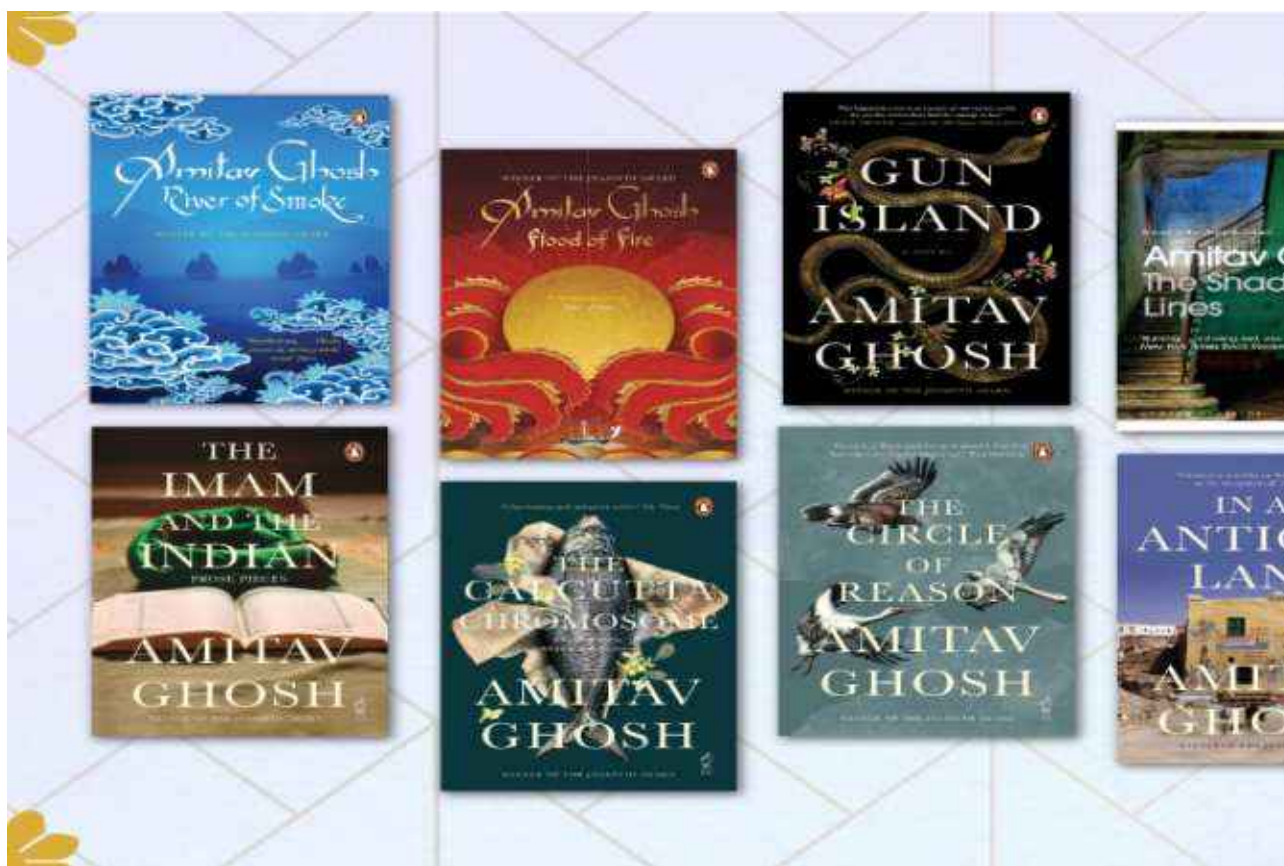
cate with animals, for example birds. There was a very interesting article recently in the Atlantic, about people who communicate with crows. Crows are among the most intelligent of birds and they do communicate with humans in all sorts of complicated ways. If you've ever gotten on the wrong side of a crow, you'll see how they remember this for years! They have very long memories, and they store this information in various ways. So in that sense, to me, it doesn't seem at all unlikely that there do exist many people who have some sort of communicative ability with non-humans. We know that there are people who can work very well with dogs or with horses. So certainly, there is some kind of communication ... obviously non-verbal.

This doesn't mean that we have to take every claim of communication with non-humans seriously, there are a lot of charlatans out there in the world as well. But many of the people who make these claims are not charlatans. In Southern India, there's a very strong 'rationalist' movement which goes about debunking all such claims. But I think they are caught in a kind of myopia.

**Shrishtee Bajpai:** *That's true .... many communities that we work with articulate about communicating with the spirits in the forests and so forth.*

**Ashish Kothari:** *Just jumping in ... I recall when I was in the Sapara indigenous nation territory in the Ecuadorian Amazon, they told us how their lives are partly lived through the interpretation of dreams. They mentioned how in their dreams, both their ancestors and the spirits of the natural world around them, come to them. They try to arrange their life around a constant dialogue with the spirits of the river, of plants and animals, etc.. It is quite fascinating.*

**Amitav Ghosh:** Yes. And there's a lot of anthropological work on that. I am sure you know of the work by the guy who wrote "How forests think" (Eduardo Kohn).





**Shrishtee Bajpai:** So let's move on to our next question, which is around the geopolitical footprint. You speak of geopolitics in a very different and interesting way, and also mention how it is harder to imagine the end of the absolute geopolitical dominance of the west. Why do you think that is the case? There are so many approaches of communities claiming rights over territories emerging now. And there are also aspects of bioregionalism. Could they be an alternative to what you mentioned about geopolitics?

**Amitav Ghosh:** I think those movements are very important and that's why I've written about them at some length in the book. I think they are very heartening and that we should pay very serious attention to them, and it's quite possible that they do offer some alternatives and they've certainly made some headway in the world. But we can't forget that, in the end, war is the father of all things. And every time any country has tried to shut down energy companies, they've faced the geopolitical might of the United States and Great Britain. That's been a consistent theme, going back centuries. And it would be Pollyannaish to imagine that that is going to change. I don't want to sound overly pessimistic. But it's clear that the Western powers and especially energy corporations will go to great lengths to keep their hold on very large tracts of the Earth where they're engaged in extractive industries. We see this everywhere. If anything, it's expanding. Look at the recent incursions of coal mining companies into the forests of central India. So yes, I think it's possible and is important for there to be these alternative movements, but we should be realistic. This is going to be a fundamentally conflictual process. Any indigenous person, any Adivasi in central India can tell you that because they face this violence and conflict. And in this process, the ultimate instruments of violence are in the hands of geopolitical superpowers. We cannot choose to ignore that.

**Shrishtee Bajpai:** Yeah, very true. And we see that happening quite a lot with recent climate COP also, how they completely dominate the discourse. Mo-



ving on ... our colleague Christine suggests that for a non-indigenous person to accept the complete reorientation of the dominant definition of reality presented by indigenous thinkers, and work through the implications when it comes to effective action on climate change, would require some serious transformations. For instance, it seems to mean that our political actions should pay far greater attention to place, to knowing it and our relations there, and telling their stories, and to defending and restoring each specific place, rather than most of our energy going to the human-to-human, non-place-based activities which currently constitute the bulk of climate change activism? Or does it? It would be great to hear what your ideas on it are.

**Amitav Ghosh:** Well, what she is pointing to is absolutely right. For most of us who are educated - what education essentially does is destroy your sense of the non-human, the place and it replaces space with time. So, yes, it's very hard for us to work our way back towards any kind of understanding of that sort. Almost everything that we subscribe to really over the last 100-200 years is designed to destroy those beliefs. If you just take psychoanalysis for example ... for Sigmund Freud, the idea that dreams could be about real entities speaking to you would be absurd. Ultimately, for him, the dream comes back to the human psyche and human sexuality. So, yes, to recapture that sense of the land, and of non-human voices, is very difficult for most of us. The most we can do is just pay very close attention to the people who do see the world in those ways and that's one of the things I've tried to do in my book.

As we've seen, the few environmental movements that have succeeded in the long run are almost all built around certain ideas of the relationship between humans and certain spaces. This is true of the Niyamgiri case in Odisha, India, and the big environmental protests around the Dakota pipeline in Canada and North America. These protests have had a certain success, and that is because they're not purely political protests. Their successes come from the fact that they refuse the dominant paradigm in many ways. I can't speak about the Niyamgiri protests because I haven't read that much about them. But certainly, with the Dakota pipeline, the protests were about rituals, sweat lodges, the beliefs in sacredness of which prayer was a very important part. Relationships with elements of the land were a very important part of it. So all of this went into it in a very important and powerful way.

I think it's possible that what we are seeing is the beginning of a certain kind of biophilia, what some scholars call green religion, if you like. These beliefs are spreading not because humans have suddenly woken up, but because the Earth has inserted itself into the conversation with great violence. We are seeing that almost everything we once believed is just nonsense. Of all ways of thinking, the most deluded is that of economics. We can see that now. And yet we live in a society that worships economics. So, it's very clear that we have to relate to the land in different ways and I think that is happening. However, I think we do also have to state certain caveats because that kind of biophilia can very easily slide over into a certain kind of eco-fascism, with people imagining that there's a sort of blood and soil kind of connection between people and the land. But actually, what's so interesting about the Niyamgiri protests and also the Dakota Pipeline protest is that even though they were led by indigenous people, they were by no means limited to indigenous peoples. People from all over the world went to join these protests. So I think those are the models that we should take seriously.

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**It's very  
important that  
movements are  
built around  
space.**

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**Ashish Kothari:** *We did a small case study on Niyamgiri and the articulation of the Dongria Kondh adivasis on why they were opposed to mining in the hills. It was not simply because they would lose livelihoods, but also that, who were they to even allow or give permission for mining? The land belonged to Niyamraja, their deity, the one who laid down the laws of the land ... it didn't belong to them. But also, can we expand a little further on different notions of time? Compared to the linear time frames the Western civilizations have used, many Indigenous peoples or non-western cultures have very different notions of time. So is that also something important that we need to bring in?*

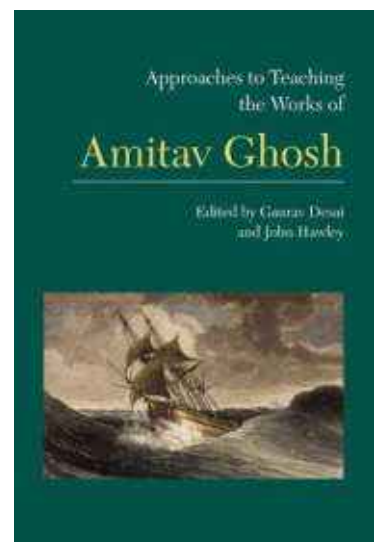
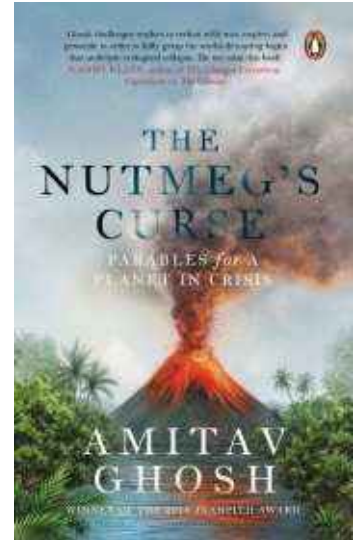
**Amitav Ghosh:** Yes, certainly because Western ideas of temporality are so brief, everything has to happen within one electoral cycle. Whereas people historically always thought about the generations ahead and that's what we've lost. Our time is not just intensely linear, but it also doesn't wait for anyone. So everything has to be done in this sort of mad hurry and that's one of the problems of proceeding with business as usual.

**Ashish Kothari:** *So in terms of the sources of counter-power that we can see in the world, what do we have? We're faced with incredibly powerful forces like the military, market-economy among others. In the last century, there was a lot of counter-power that was built around just the ability of workers' unions to mobilize and to say that they would simply stop production if our needs and demands weren't met. What do you think in this century would be the sources of power? Would they be material, cultural or spiritual sources?*

**Amitav Ghosh:** I think you're probably much better placed to answer that question than I am because you've been involved in activism for a long time. One thing that strikes me, though, is that the analogy with trade unions doesn't hold, because one of the things that have happened over the second half of the 20th century is the breaking of trade unions. The whole manufacturing process has become so dispersed that you don't have the huge concentrations of people in one factory or in one place. Now you have this up-to-the-minute manufacturing, which brings a huge range of subcontractors together, each producing a single thing, and they're all connected by logistics: I've written about this at length in *The Nutmeg's Curse*. So in that context, I would say it's rather difficult. But even with trade unions, I think we have to remember that from the 19th century onwards, the relationship between trade unions and the capitalist class was very conflictual, and I'm sure that is what it's going to be again.

**Ashish Kothari:** *Yes, I'm thinking that with this dispersed nature of work, you don't have the physical force to do the kind of mobilization that was possible earlier. But then there is some sort of a global, transnational or cultural phenomenon, that could include stories and parables. This whole thing that we are in some sense united or should be united against the structures that are bearing down on us becomes more of a cultural connection .... is this true?*

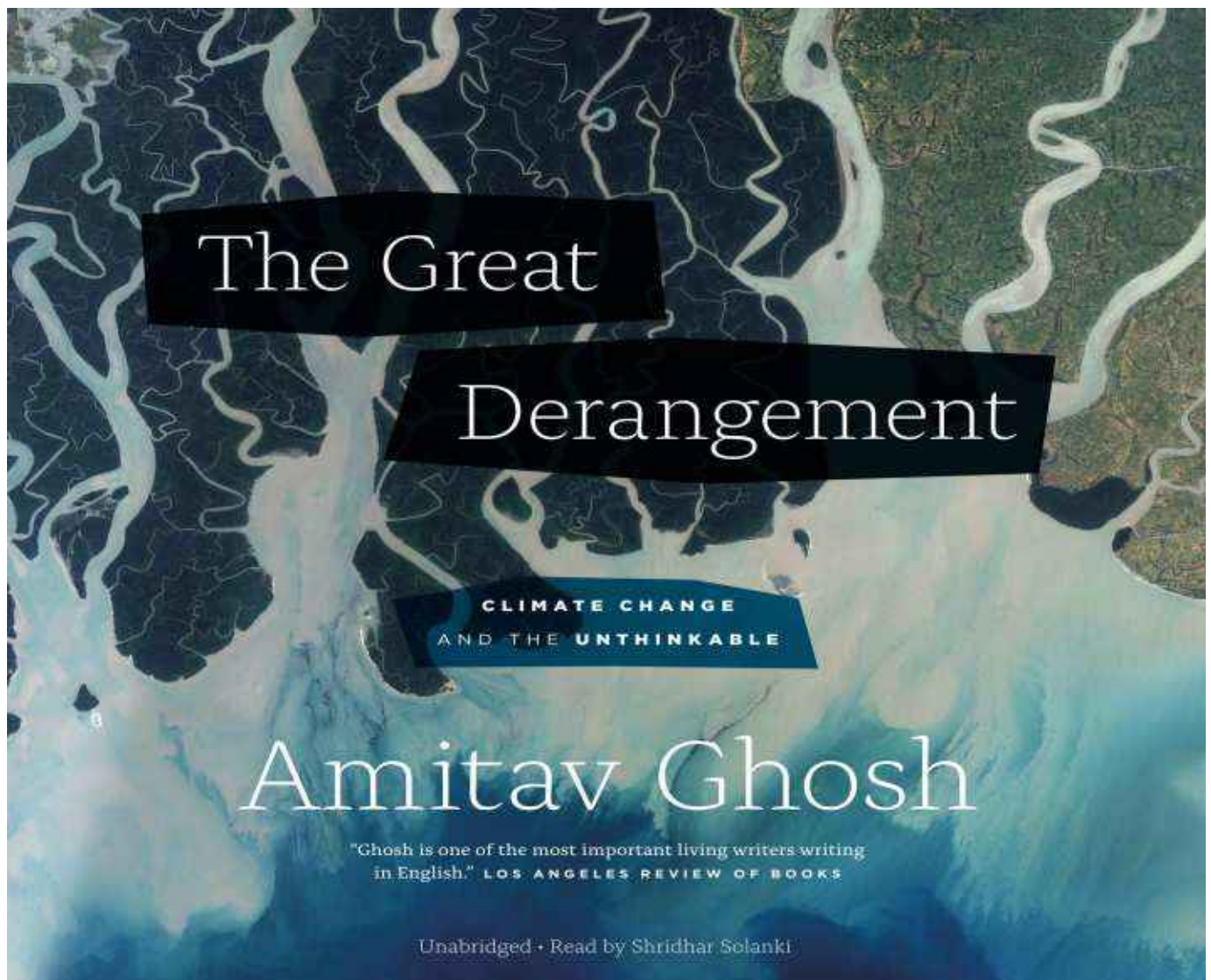
**Amitav Ghosh:** Well, I certainly do feel that that's the case. There's a certain kind of biophilia in the world today. There are also movements such as Fridays for the Future, led by Greta Thunberg and others. So, yes, I do think that's very possible, but let's not underestimate the difficulties. After the Bhopal disaster, the trade unions opposed pushing Union Carbide out of India because they saw it as a bread and butter issue, they felt that the company provi-



ded jobs. We see something similar playing out today as well. In many places, people who are worst affected are often the most reluctant to let go. We are talking about movements led by indigenous peoples but very large numbers of indigenous peoples also actually work in pumping up petrol and other extractive industries. And that's been the case for a long time. Some of them have also conspired with energy corporations because in any community there are some who want to make money. That happens everywhere, doesn't it? So we can't really underestimate the challenges that these forces pose because they're actually capable of disrupting anything.

**Ashish Kothari:** *Absolutely. This again tells us the importance of alternatives, because if we can give some sort of possible security to people who are going to be laid off because of factories or coal mining being shut down, and if there are alternative sources of employment, including rebuilding the earth in different ways, then perhaps that kind of resistance or internal divisions within the working class would be less? That's why movements talk about just transition, that includes issues of employment and livelihoods. Is that something that you think is possible?*

**Amitav Ghosh:** Yes, of course. But here again, when we talk about the energy transition, often the assumption tends to be that you can just replace one source of energy with another. And of course, you should be able to. We know that alternative energies are cheaper than coal. They are cheaper and less po-



lluting. They employ more people now than coal. There's every reason why people should embrace this transition and yet we see that Joe Biden's plan failed on exactly this. There was every reason to embrace the plan. There would have been more jobs and yet it failed because of resistance from coal mining interests.

Fossil fuels interact with human lives in very complex ways of creating not just structures of power, but intense loyalties. So the loyalties of coal miners in West Virginia, whose lives have been destroyed by the mining, are still very much tied to that way of life. Similarly, with fossil fuels; in Brooklyn, where I live every day around three or four o'clock, these are these huge motorcycles, making this tremendous noise going down the street. What is the point of that, of that noise? If they had electric motorcycles, they wouldn't make that noise. But to think in that way is to underestimate or to misunderstand what fossil fuels are. The people who ride those bikes like the noise. It's an assertion of power. This is the weird thing about the whole fossil fuel economy. Now there are people who deface Tesla cars in the US simply because they feel that they are a threat to the internal combustion engine.

Fossil fuels can generate a culture in extremely insidious ways. I remember when I first went to the United States in the late 1980s, I would see a single person driving by in a car. And I would think to myself that this will never happen in India because in my memories cars there were always filled with at least four or five people. There were always people who needed to go somewhere, so if a car was going it would never go empty. But you look around now, 30- 40 years later, everywhere in Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, you see cars with just one person in them. What happens is that the cars become ends in themselves. They are not there only to serve as a means to an end. If you go around suburban America now, or even fairly lower-middle-class neighborhoods, you'll see outside even quite modest houses, there are four or five cars. People just collect cars. Why? It's because people change cars as the mood takes them. You see this phenomenon also now in Delhi. Households have not just one car, but two or three cars and also motorcycles and scooters. So depending on their mood, they take one or the other. So we cannot forget that fossil fuels interact with human societies in very complicated ways. We think we control fossil fuels. But some botanical materials can exert a great degree of control over us. This has been the case with opium and then we see that with fossil fuels as well.

**Ashish Kothari:** *This also points to what are the sorts of ethics, values, and principles that take hold in society in particular moments in time. I remember because you were talking about when you were in your earlier days and I was in my childhood, our parents always used to tell us that if you're using a pencil, use it until it is very short and you can no longer use it. We used to call it a Gandhi pencil! So there wasn't a throwaway culture at all, which is now very prevalent. So our second last question is about ethics, values, or principles. What we see in many people's movements, especially the ones we've been working with on alternatives, there is an attempt to try and bring back a certain level of ethical sharing and caring, working collectively, of knowledge and nature as part of the commons rather than privatised and individualized. How important is this? Also, how do you think one can through literature, bring back dialogues on ethics?*

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**From a vitalist  
point of view,  
it's important  
not to  
underestimate  
fossil fuels**

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**Amitav Ghosh:** Well, I think it's very important to try and do that. As a writer, I try think of those possibilities. But again, let's not be Pollyannaish. I think the one thing that we see in India, most of all, is that culture does not protect you against any of this. In my childhood, I used to see my father roll a tube of toothpaste down right to the bottom. Nothing would be wasted. If you left the fan going when you left the room, you got into real trouble. But that has completely changed. Young middle-class Indians are just as wasteful now as people in the west. If I think back to India, one of the values that we were always taught was never get into debt because there was such a fear of money-lending. But today, if you open your computer, there's always some bank that's trying to push that on you. The so-called affluence that we see around us in India is completely debt-fueled.

The other day my sister, who teaches in a college in Calcutta, had to attend a virtual meeting with the chief minister. The CM was trying to push poor rural students to take out credit cards to finance their education. Trying to force them into these debt traps with absolutely usurious rates of interest, like about 29.5%. Can you imagine? It's unbelievable. Indian villagers don't know about these debt traps. They're brought up to believe that, unlike money lenders, banks are trustworthy. But what we've seen since the debt crisis is that the banks are not at all trustworthy, and that their whole business model is built on ensnaring naïve people. When I was bringing up my children, I would make them watch videos to show them how dangerous these debt traps are. This is something I would strongly recommend to you - whenever you have these with villagers, you should try to warn them against these debt traps.

**Ashish Kothari:** *Finally ... can you mention two or three writers of the last 15-20 years who young people should read, to inspire some of these thoughts about the planet, ourselves, and our collective futures?*

**Amitav Ghosh:** In India, we have a long tradition of environmental writing. Gopinath Mohanty was a great writer, and I think his book "Paraja" is a wonderful book about people and forests. Mahasweta Devi was a great writer in the same way. Just within the Bengali tradition also there is Adwaita Malla-barman. In the English tradition as well, there are many. I would say that Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath" is in a sense of a climate change novel. So there's a lot to read.

**Ashish Kothari and Shrishtee Bajpai:** *Well, thank you so much for this conversation. Truly grateful.*

**Amitav Ghosh:** Okay, thank you. Goodbye.

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