

The changes won't be. But the cost of doing nothing, of letting a runaway global warming take hold — the very path humanity is treading — will be much higher. The limits of the planet, of nature, will assert themselves. Yielding to natural limits now will come with much disruption, but having limits

imposed on us in the future will surely be much worse.

Pete Dolack writes about the ongoing economic crisis on the Systemic Disorder blog. His book *It's Not Over*, an analysis of 20th century attempts to create alternatives to capitalism, is due to be published by Zero Books in late 2015.

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## Climate Justice: Uniting Struggles Across Latin America

by Cory Fischer-Hoffman

With the conclusion of the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP20) in Peru, nearly 20,000 people filled Lima's streets on Wednesday, December 10 to join in the people's climate justice march. As the climate justice movement unites and builds new sources of power, one of its greatest potentials lies in creating a politically viable framework for demanding reparations for over 500 years of extraction, contamination and abuse in Latin America and the developing world.

The core issues tied to climate change in Latin America today, such as mining, petroleum exploitation, deforestation, agriculture, indigenous rights, land rights, gender equity, and self-determination, have their roots in the process of European conquest and colonization of the Americas. The demand for climate justice weaves these struggles together by demanding fundamental system-change and providing a glance towards the past as a means of charting out a new future. The movement for climate justice is unifying struggles across Latin America and seriously advancing the call for reparations to indigenous communities, even if it is not directly using that language.

Even within the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the theme of "historical responsibility" has opened up a space to discuss the repercussions of centuries of resource extraction, uneven development and the consequences of industrialization fueled by colonization.

### Mining: Gold, no! Water, yes!

Just over a year before Lima hosted the UN Climate Change Conference, Peru's capital city hosted the Latin American Mining Summit. The website for the Summit announced "Latin America is Now the Primary Destination for Mining Exploration Investment in the World!" and then asked, "Are You Ready to Capitalize on the Boom?" Similar enticements were used to recruit during the conquest of Peru (the world's 6th largest gold producer today) and Mexico (the world's 8th largest gold producer). The conquest of Latin America is inextricably linked

responsibility." The report highlights how an open-pit mine in Guatemala, owned by a subsidiary of the Canadian company Goldcorp Inc., contaminated the water supply and resulted in structural damage to people's homes from the use of explosives. Since the indigenous communities did not give free and prior consent to the mine before it began its operations, they began to protest the mine after they were faced with devastating impacts. Popular protests have been met with violent repression.

In Peru, the conflict around the proposed Conga mines continues to grow in the northern Andean region around Cajamarca. Local community members are fighting the proposed project, which would contaminate the water of a largely agricultural region of Peru, but the US-based Newmont Mining Corporation is pushing forward along with its partners Peruvian-based Buenaventura and the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank. There has also been an increased criminalization of dissent, as leaders in the fight against the Conga Mine have been arrested and charged with trumped up crimes.

During the people's climate march, delegations from Cajamarca wore "No Conga" hats and people chanted, "Gold, no! Water, yes!" demonstrating that the two stand in conflict with one another, that it is impossible to extract gold without contaminating the water supply. The fight for clean water is a serious public health concern that comes up whenever mining projects are proposed. Transnational corporations have not only been contaminating water supplies through mining. In some cases large corporations have purchased the entire water supplies of cities as part of a move towards privatization of public services.

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### The movement for climate justice is seriously advancing the call for reparations to indigenous communities.

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to the search for gold: over 500 years later the hunger for gold continues to ignite human rights violations across the region.

Canadian mining companies are responsible for 50–70% of gold mining in Latin America, according to a May 2014 report called "The Impact of Canadian Mining in Latin America and Canada's Re-

The 2001 Cochabamba water wars culminated in the popular rejection of the privatization of the water supply of Bolivia's 5th largest city as the people demanded, "The water is ours, damn it!" Alejandro Ribas traveled from Bolivia to attend the people's climate march and he said, "Water is important because it's what makes life, plants, all of us alive." In the background, marchers chanted, "We will not sell our water, we will defend our water."

## Petroleum exploitation

The countries with the highest level of oil production in Latin America are Venezuela, Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Ecuador and Peru, respectively. The case against Chevron illustrates some of the most devastating impacts of contamination due to oil exploitation. In the northern region of Ecuador's Amazon rainforest, Texaco (now Chevron) began exploring for oil in 1964. This pristine rainforest is home to indigenous peoples of the Cofán, Siona, Secoya, Kichwa and Huaorani nations, and they were not consulted before the drilling began.

According to Amazon Watch, "Texaco dumped 18 billion gallons of toxic waste water directly into the region's rivers and streams depended upon for drinking, cooking, bathing and fishing." The contamination of the rivers killed the fish, which ended people's ability to make a livelihood and created hunger in communities that relied on the river and other wildlife for sustenance.

The oil contamination led to heightened levels of cancer in contaminated areas as well as increased levels of birth abnormalities and miscarriages. In addition to these severe health problems, many people in surrounding areas also suffer from skin rashes and diarrhea. The oil company also buried toxic waste in unlined pits and deforested pristine Amazon rainforest to pipe the oil out. After 22 years in court, Chevron refuses to pay for clean-up and damages to the Oriente in the Amazon.

A recent report by the Carbon Tracker Initiative stated that in order to keep the global temperature rise below the average of 2 degree Celsius—beyond that is widely considered a "danger point"—80% of known fossil fuels must stay in the ground. Indigenous communities that are fighting against oil and coal extraction are the front-line defenders who are assuming the risks and responsibilities of meeting that goal for the entire planet.

Indigenous communities continue to resist oil and coal exploitation in and around Big Mountain in Arizona, US; in the Sierra de Perija in Venezuela, near the Colombian border; the Mapuche Confederation of Neuquén continues to fight oil extraction and fracking in Argentina; and the list goes on. These are the communities that are putting their bodies on

the line, not only to protect their immediate environments but also the health of the planet.

In a creative attempt to keep the oil in the soil, President Rafael Correa asked the international community to donate \$3.6 billion to not drill for oil in Ecuador's Yasuní National Park (half of the projected value of the oil in the park). The resources would go to funding social programs through a United Nations fund. When the attempt to collect these funds failed—only a small fraction of that amount had been donated—the government announced that it would proceed with drilling.

## Deforestation

"Our forests include the most important biotic reservation in the world as well as the biggest amount of living material per superficial unit in the planet, producing approximately 75% of the world's oxygen," declared a statement released by the Coordinator of the Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA), which comprises indigenous organizations from nine South American countries.

A 2013 study released by the Brazilian government showed that a total of 5,843 square kilometers are estimated lost between August 2012 and July 2013, an increase in deforestation of 28% compared to the previous year.

Hilda Macifue traveled for six days from Ucayali, Pucallpa, Peru to attend the people's climate march. "We as indigenous people are most impacted because the illegal deforestation that companies are doing is taking all of our wood, so it is important for us to defend our land," she said as we ran to catch up with the marchers ahead. Just days before

he was scheduled to speak at the People's Summit on Climate Change, José Isidro Tendetza Antún, an Ecuador indigenous activist

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against illegal logging, was found dead. Despite superficial legal protections for much of the rainforest, logging continues and indigenous communities in the Amazon are the ones fighting to preserve the largest oxygen supply in the world.

One controversial proposed solution is called reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, or REDD. While there are still many questions about how this would be implemented, the basic idea is that forests would be seen as "carbon stocks" and could therefore be recognized as a means of reducing emissions or could be traded on the carbon market. Some argue that this would offer protection from degradation and deforestation, but many activists have concerns that a conservationist approach will not protect the rights of indigenous peoples and only sees the forests as resources to be traded instead of as an ecosystem with inhabitants. An NGO called REDD Monitor notes concerns that "REDD could prove to be another 'resource curse.'"

## Peasant agriculture and food sovereignty vs. “climate smart” agriculture

Farmers are bearing the brunt of the changing climate. Rains and weather in general are arriving at unpredictable times which impact the schedules for planting and harvesting. Farmers are searching for new varieties of crops that are suited for their changing environments. Despite farmers being some of the hardest hit by climate change, the UNFCCC has largely approached climate change by looking towards reducing greenhouse emissions. Peasant organizations, small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples are fighting to put a spotlight on agriculture, and specifically the issue of adaptation to a changing climate for farmers.

In Latin America, small-scale farmers are also up against huge industrial mono-crop agriculture and the agro-chemical companies that produce genetically modified seeds and harmful pesticides and herbicides. In Latin America, 87% of the seeds on the market are patented with 77% of those being owned by 10 companies, and half being owned by Monsanto, Dupont and Syngenta. Despite their track

There is disagreement among indigenous communities, organizations and individuals about the best mechanism for maintaining collective stewardship and the right to territories. Some people argue that fighting for legal titles to the land is the best approach whereas others do not recognize the granting state as a legitimate authority over land.

Indigenous rights also implies a different relationship with “Pachamama,” (mother earth in the indigenous Quechua language). Carlos Martín Sáez Asto, from an Andean musical group that participated in the people’s climate march, said that he “understands Pachamama as our mother, not as a resource.” This different relationship means different policies, economies, and ways of being and knowing. “There is no word for Revolution in our language,” Sáez Asto said. “We only have a word for restoring harmony, and that is what we need to do.”

### Gender equity

“Climate change is a feminist issue,” Alina Saba of the Mugal Indigenous Women Uplift Institute (MUWUI) stated resolutely, as she stood with her delegation of indigenous women. Her argument is that while women have the smallest carbon footprint and have contributed least to the problem of climate change, they are the ones who bear the brunt of the problem and they are the ones that are developing the grassroots strategies to address and adapt to climate change.

When water is contaminated, or scarce, it is often women who must find solutions. It is often women who are responsible for the cooking and cleaning and the management of the household.

In many rural communities, women are the subsistence farmers and are therefore the ones confronting the agriculture changes mentioned above. As extractive industries move into isolated rural areas, there are social repercussions to the creation of hubs of temporary precarious work that is often done by men from outside of the community. Women from such communities talked about the increase in alcoholism, domestic violence and sexual assault and the dangerous situations for girls, women and whole communities as a result of this type of employment.

Conversely, as rural communities face challenges in making a livelihood through traditional means such as agriculture and fishing due to contamination and displacement, many men and women are forced to leave in search for precarious work. This cuts at the fabric of the community, and it is often women who bear the brunt of caring for children in addition to making a wage to support their families.

At an open panel featuring the voices of women in the climate crisis, a number of women referred to the capitalist system, based on resource extraction, as the literal rape of Pachamama. And the contamination that results impacts the bodies of women through higher rates of cancer and miscarriages.

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## Agro-chemical giants are branding genetic modifications as the new “climate-smart” agriculture.

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record of ecological disaster and human rights violations (e.g., GMO Soy in Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil), these agro-chemical giants are branding further genetic modifications, industrializations, and new agro-toxins as the new “climate-smart” agriculture.

“Climate-smart agriculture is a trap! It is a vague concept which could easily be used by agricultural corporations to rebrand their transgenic seeds and pesticides as climate-smart alternatives,” said Jean-Baptiste Chavannes, member of the Haitian movement Mouvman Paysan Papaye and Via Campesina. “Real smart agriculture is peasant and indigenous agriculture! We grow 70% of the world’s food with only 20% of the arable land while the agribusiness only grows 30% using 80% of the land.”

### Indigenous rights, land rights, cultural rights

The struggles against mining, petroleum extraction, deforestation and industrial agriculture disproportionately impact indigenous peoples. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN DRIP) lays out a framework that is rooted in self-determination, the right of communities to determine their own future. If respected, this document lays out a useful framework for placing indigenous rights as central in climate policy.

The UN DRIP also describes the right to “free, prior and informed consent,” that communities be given adequate information and advance consultation of policies and projects that will impact them. This right was violated in all of the examples above.

Additionally, women are often charged with caring for their sick family members.

### **Freedom from corporate control, free trade agreements and workers' rights**

Impacted communities have a clear common enemy. Multinational corporations, which have been given unprecedented access to their countries through free trade agreements, are largely the obvious culprits behind the contamination and extraction. In many countries, leaders and communities in resistance also face direct threats of violence from local and national police who are working at the service of multinational corporations. In some cases paramilitary organizations, or privatized thugs, are working to defend corporate interests by repressing social protests and attempting to intimidate communities into silence.

For the last two decades plus, protections for the environment, workers and national sovereignty have been stripped away through neoliberal reforms aimed at encouraging foreign investment. National laws that created an “unfriendly environment for investment” were seen as barriers to free trade. Through bilateral trade agreements, NAFTA and CAFTA-DR the rights of corporations have been expanded while the rights of the people and protections for the environment have been eroded.

The multinational corporations have promised jobs in Latin America, but of the jobs that have been created most are precarious with high risks for health problems. Labor unions in Peru and internationally have come on board to join in the struggle for climate justice by demanding better jobs as the economy transitions away from fossil fuels. This means that workers who are employed in sectors traditionally thought of as “polluters” are looking to redefine their work as the economy transitions towards alternative forms of energy.

### **Redefining development, rejecting neoliberalism and neocolonialism**

The climate justice movement has become an overarching struggle that challenges the very concept of development and redefines the priorities of living well (together). The Quechua concept, which also exists in many indigenous languages, of *Sumaq Kawsay* or *Buen vivir*, living well, has become the alternative framework that stands in opposition to neoliberal capitalist developmentalism. The concept of *buen vivir* that inspired the declaration of the rights of Mother Earth was hatched in Bolivia in a 2010 law establishing mother earth as having rights beyond the use of her resources.

While governments in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela have adopted—and some might argue co-opted—this concept of *buen vivir*, it still has a deep resonance at the grassroots. It means living well, so that others may live well; it implies thinking of future generations; it insists on a balance between the individual and the collective; and it means “restoring harmony.” *Buen vivir* offers a counter to the neoliberal

model of development, in which the individual reigns and the tyranny of the market and multinational corporations takes precedence over all.

Today’s struggles are directly shaped by how Latin American colonies and indigenous and African peoples were incorporated into the global economies as enslaved and cheap labor for the production of goods and resources that were destined for export. And today, as front-line communities define the historical responsibility of the developing countries which profited off of these relationships, the climate change talks have become one of the most promising venues for making a legitimate case for reparations.

### **Conclusion: climate change policy as a case for reparations**

The UNFCCC framework on “Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capacities” is a tool in what the Zapatistas call “the war against forgetting.” It was the wealth, labor and resources of the developing world (largely Latin America) that fueled the industrialization of Europe and North America. The framework of “differentiated responsibility” which is rooted in historical analysis is exactly the lens that can shine light on the process of underdevelopment in Latin America and use this as a tool for demanding reparations in the form of financing alternative energy sources and

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## **Buen vivir, living well, has become the alternative framework in opposition to neoliberal capitalist developmentalism.**

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technology, education and healthcare as a means of adapting to climate change, and financial compensation to communities who are on the front line of the climate crisis and have defended their mother earth, for the benefit of us all.

While the word “reparations” may not be the focus of the climate debate, a climate justice policy built on “differentiated historical responsibility” is a viable and promising opportunity to enact policies of mitigation, adaptation and financing that embody reparations for centuries of exploitation. It is essential that the financing of adaptation, alternative energies, education, training, technology and healthcare respects the sovereignty of indigenous peoples and developing countries and builds relationships that do not recreate dependencies. Action on climate change holds the potential to create mechanisms for reparations to impacted communities for those historical and ongoing injustices.

Cory Fischer-Hoffman is an organizer, scholar and media maker, and she has been covering social movements, politics and the economy in South America. She is currently producing an audio documentary and doing dissertation research on the Venezuelan prison system.