

The Colonisation of the Climate: Thinking through cities and the anthropocene

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I would like to begin with a simple interpretation of the Anthropocene as:

how we relate to one another as a multispecies, through our effects and our reciprocities.

If the vocabulary of the Anthropocene evokes the limits and possibilities of our shared planetary future, then I would argue that we need to decentre the position that the environmental crisis occupies as *the* essence of the immanent collapse of human and natural interrelations. To quote Janae Davis et al., 'Since the climate catastrophe appears as a universalised and universalising threat, the notion of the Anthropocene may seem an appealing descriptor for an era of accelerating and converging environmental crises.' (2018).

This is not to subdue the urgency of the crisis in which we are enrolled. Nor is it to render as secondary the impacts of profound wreckage caused by our human and natural violations, in which escalating carbon emissions is a crucial signifier.

Perhaps because I work outside of the vocabularies of the Anthropocene, and more directly from within the lexicons of global migration and urban marginalisation, I'd like to engage with you about the limits and possibilities of our shared planetary present in three ways:

-The first is the provocation of 'the colonisation of the climate' where I want to think about our incumbent regime of over-extraction, over-development and over-consumption, and an assertive, professionalised framework of knowledge, in relation to the uneven production of calamitous as well as racialised inequalities.

- The second is 'the intersection of multiple displacements' that prompts us to address how the accumulation of capital is inherently tied to the dis-accumulation of people. Thinking about the connections between multiple displacements encourages us to engage more with what it means to produce what Gargi Bhattacharyya refers to as a residualised, surplus population (2018).

- The third is 'a societal-state assemblage of "energy"' in which latent capacities – human, material, technological, grammatical, atmospheric – are harvested so that both structural transformation and new modes of being become viable.

Let me begin then with 'the colonisation of the climate' and the place of cities in an extended system of coloniality and asymmetrical power relations, to think about the following questions, the first being:

- Who transcends ecological limits and how?;

The colonial captures a global scale of dispossession and a wider arc of extraction and depletion that not only depends on subordination, but also on rendering invisible the profoundly damaging impacts of these extraterritorial subjugations. Today's broader logic of offshoring - whether in mining for resources, in contracting low-paid labour, or in dumping waste - is that it effectively authorises a severance between the impacts and the outputs, thereby permitting a detachment of responsibility. We need to think about how the climate is colonised, from the excessive exploitation of natural and human resources, to the unequal and unmitigated distribution of impact. In the latest UN Special Rapporteur's report on 'Climate Change and Poverty' released last Friday, there is an indication that 'Developing countries will bear an estimated 75-80 percent of the costs of climate change.'

So what are some of the implications of addressing the colonisation of the climate in cities?

- It might include finding cultural and political ways of confronting the city's offshoring practices, starting with eliminating the shipping of waste for offshore processing.

- It might include tracing the excessive use of resources and generation of emissions by corporate and household over-consumers.

Emerging easy wins include confronting congestion excess through ultra-low emission zones. But this must extend to more difficult questions of tourism and its carbon excess, and the kind of taxes and distributive gains that will be required to live in a world of less travel. It extends to even more difficult confrontation to the limits and alternatives to our globalised grammar of 'regeneration' and its brutal *tabula rasa* commitment to both displacement and construction.

A second question is:

- How does colonisation's insistence of a humanity divided up into hierarchies and categories articulate how we relate to one another?

Perhaps we can start with the inadequacy of the current schisms in climate change discourse that is laden with the divisions of rich and poor, and with its assumptions of innovation makers and innovation recipients in meeting the climate challenge. We need to be alert to the ways in which the climate crisis might exacerbate how categorical divisions are deployed, both in how blame will be cast and in how solution-makers will be positioned. The climate offers us a further prompt for thinking about a political economy that produces wide-reaching inequalities that are actively pursued and endorsed.

How might this relate to the emerging populisms that feed off racialised hierarchies of benefactors and causalities, and of insiders and outsiders? It is not so much that liberalism, as Putin has claimed, dies in the wake of populism, but that an excessive inequality, coupled with the confined categories of nativism, feeds a fearful view of how we relate to one another. Here I turn to the powerful beginnings of the Barcelona en Comú's project of transformation, which claims, before anything else, 'To resist hate'. This prompts us to learn and act with a wider schema of reciprocity that may well incorporate Donna Haraway's idea of 'kin' as 'a multispecies assemblage' (2015). It might also compel us to think in the context of this conference, about a citizenship of the Mediterranean and a region of multispecies refuge, understood from the interrelations of its southern and northern shores.

Moving on to the intersection of multiple displacements, I'd like to propose how we might think more relationally about varied dislocations in relation to crises that are preceding, ongoing and projected. This is important because it helps us to think about a conjuncture of crises, and it helps us address the shared rather than the separate consequences of displacement. The climate crisis is framed and projected through its exceptionalism and is in the words of UN rapporteur Philip Aston 'an emergency without precedent' moreover one which is 'among other things an unconscionable assault on the poor' (2019). It is also, to quote Joseph Stiglitz, 'our third world war'. Stiglitz goes on to suggest, 'The war on the climate emergency, if currently waged, would actually be good for the economy.' (2019)

We need to be aware of the instrumental context of these quotes, procured to compel big capital and big governance in the stakes of risks and gains. While we cannot ignore what Haraway refers to as 'intensive, systemic urgency', it is the system rather than the urgency that requires fundamental reconsideration.

Here it is useful to think about how varied forms of displacement intersect in a system of poorly regulated capital and under-resourced state compliance:

- We need to think about the displacement of work through the new economies of casualisation, and how this limits resilience by overburdening individuals with extensive working hours, while reducing the time and capacity required for self, family and community care. Privileged calls for a four-day working week need to be coupled with explorations into a minimum income, in parallel with a living wage.
- We need to think about the displacement of affordable living and working space through the financialisation of the urban land market, including the financialisation of debt. This

displacement looks like a million houses foreclosed per year in the US following the financial crisis; it looks like a 40% increase in suicides following the European debt crisis and enforced austerity measures in Greece; it looks like the unprecedented nation-wide sale public assets, particularly secure council housing, across the UK.

- We need to think about the displacement of citizenship, mobility and belonging within the punitive and deathly migration regimes that span across Europe. The sanctimony of these border regimes are curiously myopic to the immense scale of emigration from Europe in the 19th and 20th century, amounting to over 60 million Europeans. These borders are unable to incorporate more itinerant and seasonal migrations that have historically been part of regional systems of exchange. These borders embrace a regime of illegality that now renders two-thirds of the world population illegal, by virtue of their movement, to quote Nicholas de Genova (2017).

In thinking about the intersection of multiple displacements I am connecting the Anthropocene to a comprehension of systemic crises in which the climate is one key aspect, as well as to draw out the combined impacts of global and urban displacements. In my view this means that the emerging thinking around the innovative liberalisation of the climate crisis, even within the distributive promises of a Green New Deal, fails to address the systemic nature of the conjuncture of crises.

This brings me to my third and final frame for 'a societal-state assemblage of "energy"' in which new modes of being become viable. Here I want to start by thinking about energy as an inert atmospheric, biospheric, human, material, grammatical and technological resource. Once activated and deployed, it has the potential to produce a different kind of politics, and

a different kind of space. This is about addressing what Noel Castree refers to as ‘the unsettled relations between quantitative change and qualitative transformation.’ (2017).

There are different logics for mobilising this energy, the first of which I eluded to earlier, as captured by Stiglitz’s idea of ‘progressive capitalism’ is very much at the forefront of the Green New Deal proposition (2019). This is essentially about marshalling resources within a system of capitalism that seeks to punish and reward corporations and citizens for relative compliance. It extends from the taxing of dirty industries; to the withdrawal of subsidies to fossil fuels; to redeploying underused human energies; to establishing a Green Bank to finance supply-side policies that focus on reequipping public infrastructures. What is crucial in this frame is an audacious interpretation of the power of the state to perform and produce substantial change. Despite the omni-presence of the market, I think that the directive optimism of powerful ‘stateness’ is something we have to fight for. At the same time, we need to be wary of an idea of capitalism that assumes the benevolence of the state as:

- i. prepared to engage in high levels of market intervention and regulation;
- ii. as immune from the lobbying of powerful interests of capital;
- iii. as willing to protect against varied forms of off-shoring; and
- iv. as willing to deliver equitable levels of social distribution.

Underscoring the audacious potentials of the various forms of a Green New Deal that will undoubtedly emerge, must be the question of ‘progressive for whom?’, and how the state will be held to account in this reckoning.

-The second logic is about radical repair, which is a term I borrow from Gautam Bhan (2019) that speaks to the potentials of the ongoing repair of existing resources – biological, human, material - working in opposition to the tabula rasa logics of depletion or raising to the ground. If we had to think about avoiding the displacement of our multi-species through repair, then this logic would establish a different attitude of governance. It would incorporate a much wider consortium of expertise, as well as a distributive system of resourcing to engage in the ongoing routines of repair.

Repair would range from the protection of affordable housing, to the protection of living wages and minimum incomes. It would incorporate small and medium-scale energies, as well as non-corporate energies, to the retrofitting and maintenance of alternative energy sources to hospitals, schools and so on. Repair would involve substantial re-planting schemes, which, like in the 'Working for Water' in South Africa, has sought to provide stable employment and training to the most marginalised sectors of society.

-The third logic of mobilising this energy is about the 'power of proximity'. We can think about both Bertie Russell's understanding as 'the local framed as an issue of proximity' where the municipal is 'a strategic entry point for broader practices' (2019), and Andy Merrifield's reference to 'encounter' as the radical possibilities and transformative energies released through connection (2014). A key part of the power of proximity is focused disobedience, exemplified most recently in the planet-wide youth climate strikes. In the simultaneously trans-national and local acts of street solidarity, young people are exposed to new questions and practices of harnessing their energies to challenge the status quo.

I think here too about the 'Black Supplementary School' movement started in Britain in the mid-1960s, set up by black parents for their children to create a forum for learning about how to confront racism, as well as to engage with a repertoire of knowledge outside of a western construct. This might suggest the role of supplementary educative forums for young people to think about the climate in relation to the world, in which questions of how we relate to one another as a multispecies, incorporates enduring histories of dominance as well as wider references to experience and knowledge.

Finally, it is important for me to end this set of ideas by paying homage to the Barcelona en Comú movement and its alliances across Spain, the Mediterranean and beyond. It shows us in political and practical terms, how we might invest proximity with transformative possibility at a municipal scale, and how this proximity extends to wider communities of co-operation.

A transformative politics is opened up through:

its mandate secured through a Citizen's Platform;

its accountability initiated through a Code of Ethics;

its strategy oriented towards the commons;

its delivery focused in a 12-month action plan,

It is a politics in which the colonisation of the climate, the bordering of humanity, and the financialisation of affordability, are understood and resisted as part of the same 'major system collapse'. It is a redress to how we might relate to one another as a multispecies, and how we liberate space and our assemblage of energy, by not liberalising it.

Moltes gràcies. Thank you.

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