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ENACTING THE FUTURE: ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM WORLDWIDE

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Contents

- 5 ANTJE DANIEL, MARIE JASSER, LORENA E. OLARTE-SÁNCHEZ
Enacting the Future: Environmental Activism Worldwide
- 33 NICOLE DOERR, MARÍA FLORENCIA LANGA
Images of Nature in Online Climate Activism in Germany and
Argentina: Science, Affect and Non-Human 'Everybodies'
- 64 ALICE POMA
'You Can't Let Yourself Be Overcome by Fear'. The Experience of
Mexican Climate Activists
- 88 NORMA TIEDEMANN
Ecological Uprisings in the European Periphery: Serbian
Environmental Movements against Authoritarian Extractivism
- 107 VALERIE LENIKUS, MARCELA TORRES HEREDIA
Defending Livelihoods: Reflections on Environmental and Social
Movements and Examples of Social-Ecological Conflicts in
Colombia and Ecuador from a Materialist Perspective
- 129 BROTOTI ROY, GEORGE MONIPPALL
An Open Pit of *Procedural Violence*: Insights From an Indigenous
Struggle Against Coal Mining in Jharkhand, India
- 157 SOPHIE VON REDECKER, CHRISTIAN HERZIG
Ackern gegen das Anthropozän. Der kleinbäuerliche Weg der
Revolution

Essays and Interviews

182 NOMBULELO THOLITHEMBA SHANGE

The Paradox of Environmental Conservation in South Africa:
Marginalising Indigenous Sustainability Practices and Ideologies

191 PHILIPP WILFINGER, ANTJE DANIEL

Auf dem Weg zur globalen Klimagerechtigkeit: Fünf Jahre Fridays
For Future

Research Project

200 ANTJE DANIEL, PETRA DANNECKER

Is Fridays for Future a Phenomenon of the Global North? Youth
Activism of Fridays for Future: An Intersectional and Global
Perspective

210 FRANK ADLOFF, STEFAN C. AYKUT, CHRISTINE HENTSCHEL

Zukünfte der Nachhaltigkeit: Zur Aktualisierung eines
Forschungsprogramms

234 Book Review

238 Editors and Authors of the Special Issue

244 Publication Detail

ANTJE DANIEL, MARIE JASSER, LORENA E. OLARTE-SÁNCHEZ
Enacting the Future: Environmental Activism Worldwide

ABSTRACT *The consequences of environmental changes are notable on a worldwide scale. Recent forms of self-organisation emerge to address these and their possible causes, in the process becoming a global phenomenon. While these different forms of environmental activism operate on a multinational scale, there is a disconnect with many ‘local’ movements, especially from the Global South. In this introduction, we emphasise post- and decolonial perspectives on environmental movements and find three key differences between environmental activism in societies of the Global North and the Global South: these are the movement’s understanding of nature, the forms of mobilisation, and the contexts and material conditions.*

KEYWORDS *environmental movements, future, coloniality, activism worldwide, post-colonialism*

1. Why is it important to study environmental activism from a global perspective?

The increasing frequency of extreme temperatures make the immediate impacts of climate change evident. July 2023 was the hottest month ever recorded, and August 23, 2023, marked a new record temperature both in the northern and southern hemispheres. On this day, multiple temperature records were broken around the globe, with 44.4°C registered in Salindre, France, and 45°C in Yacuiba, Bolivia (Livingston 2023). The high temperatures were accompanied by scorching wildfires across multiple continents (NASA Earth Observatory 2023a, 2023b) and other extreme weather phenomena such as storms, floods, and prolonged droughts.

The effects of climate change are notable worldwide. Yet, just as the causes and effects of environmental change are global phenomena, environmental activism is as well. Recent forms of self-organisation have emerged on a global level to address the climate crises. A notable example is the Fridays For Future (FFF) movement, a global youth movement that emerged in 2018, with great mobilisation strength in 164 countries across the world. FFF fights for compliance with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and thus for keeping global warming to a maximum 1.5 degrees (de Moor et al. 2020, see also the interview with one of the founders of FFF in this special issue). At the centre of the movement is the demand for global climate justice (de Moor et al. 2021; Neas et al. 2022). Another example, the UK-based Just Stop Oil, points to the unequal impacts of climate change between the Global South and the North, while focusing their actions on local government (Just Stop Oil 2023). Likewise, the *Sí al Yasuní* initiative in Ecuador has successfully campaigned and won a referendum in 2023 to keep fossil fuels in the Yasuní National Park under the ground in order to protect the Amazon region, protect the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain their voluntary isolation, and to combat climate change (Sí al Yasuní 2023; Rosero 2023). In Mexico, as in other Latin American countries, the re-centring of life as the primary demand has been key for the social movements organisation and mobilisation in their attempt to defend the life and the territory (Cabnal 2019; Navarro et al. 2023 Ojeda 2021).

Environmental activism can be found worldwide; partly as globally networked activism or integrated into spatially limited transnational activism, partly as locally oriented. The struggles for environmental justice are nevertheless part of a global dynamic, namely the increasing emergence of environmental and climate movements. Environmental activism addresses different areas of the crisis, for instance, global or national environmental politics, resource extraction, pollution, or extinction and deforestation. The specific demands are just as diverse as the forms of action, which range from petitions, lobbying or demonstrations to artistic resistance, media-effective occupations, or civil disobedience. Each of these varying repertoires of contention (Alimi 2015) draw on different histories of activism and are shaped by their respective cultural, social, political, and economic contexts. Beyond the need to consider the context, we want to highlight

post- and decolonial perspectives on environmental movements. Building on these perspectives, we critically reflect on the applicability of concepts, mostly developed in the ‘West’ or so-called Global North, and the multiplicity of understandings of nature, environment, and climate beyond the dominant ones (cf. Daniel 2022). We also interrogate ongoing (neo)colonial dynamics and attempts to overcome those structures of historically shaped inequalities, for instance through the notion of climate coloniality (Saltana 2022) and through mutual recognition, dialogues, or alliances. By recognising the inherent inequalities regarding the distribution of environmental burdens and benefits that often disproportionately affect Southern countries and especially marginalised communities, we want to underscore the need to challenge the North’s historically dominant role and highlight its historical responsibility of setting the global environmental agenda and directing resources.

Against the backdrop of environmental activism mobilising for a liveable global future, we want to examine the respective struggles and connections between these protests. By addressing the different struggles, we aim to overcome the dominating debate in Europe and more generally in the Global North on youth climate activism (see also Daniel/Dannecker and Shange in this special issue). Environmental activism from the Global South(s) is underrepresented in anglophone and German-speaking literature, despite their abundance. A consideration of this activism is not only important against the background of the globality of the climate crisis, but also because of the fact that in the Global South activism is organised in response to underlying structures of inequality which are historically shaped by coloniality. Post-colonial power structures still persist and undergird a contemporary recreation of structures of inequality and exploitation. Therefore, conditions of activism and resistance in the Global South might differ from those in the Global North. Post-development approaches have shown that the conceptions of the good life, and more generally, of future imaginaries in the Global South, are diverse, and thus the objectives of activism are quite different, as are their self-organisation and strategies, which are also a result of their specific historical, cultural, social, and political contexts.

In the following, we offer a brief sketch of the history of environmental activism and discuss the notion of environmental activism (section 2). To

explore environmental activism worldwide, we examine three differences between the dominating features of activism of the Global North, and of the so-called Global South (section 3).¹ While in this instance, we highlight differences, we would also like to stress their global interconnect-edness (section 4) and finally reflect on the debate from a postcolonial perspective (section 5).

2. A sketch of the history of environmental activism

The history of climate and environmental movements has developed according to the respective contexts. Struggles over land, and over the appropriation and access to nature have existed for centuries. For instance, resistances which emerged from anti-colonial struggles may be revisited, as environmentalists since the impact of the Spanish invasion can be historically identified (Bulmer et. al 2006). Also, the Maji Maji fighters organised themselves against the German colonial rule in East Africa by drawing on their connection to nature (see below). In contrast, in South Africa and some other African countries, activism predominantly emerged under colonial rule with the idea of protecting nature in the context of increasing industrialisation (Cock 2006). Also, in the Global North, environmental activists were first linked to the idea of the ‘conservation’ of nature, and emerged at the time of industrialisation, when the need to protect nature arose against the backdrop of urbanisation. In Europe, for example, the so-called ‘Wandervogel’ movement emerged at the beginning of the 20th century. This movement is characterised by a cohort of youth that is affected by industrialisation and urban life, and who strive for a renewed experience of nature (Aufmuth 1979). Frequently called life reform movements, they explored new ways of living beyond industrialisation, including the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services and new way of living beyond a binary relations of humans to nature.

There is a rich history of diverse movements across various regions that were linked to different struggles against inequality, to protect nature, climate, and the environment (Sonkar 2024). Another global peak of environmental activism was in the 1970s. During this time, environmental and

climate activism emerged in many countries. One such instance was in Brazil in the 1970s where the Seringueiro movement of unionised rubber tappers linked the conservation of the Amazon rainforest and of rubber trees to their livelihood (Porto-Gonçalves 2016; Moreano Venegas et al. 2023). In another instance, the first animal and environmental protection movements emerged in South Africa, aiming to protect the living and natural space from poaching (Cock 2006). In the US, environmental activism emerged at the end of the 1970s in the form of environmental justice movements (Sicotte/Brulle 2018). Emanating from the Global North, it was prompted by perspectives on human rights, health, and safety. In this context, the influential work of Rachel Carson (1962) played a crucial role in the formation of new social movements and ecofeminism (Hynes 1989). For decades, environmental and climate movements have existed, elucidating a broad scope of demands, including climate justice, environmental protection, sustainability, and the green economy (della Porta/Parks 2013). As a result of the increasing interest and advocacy regarding the environment, the first UN conference addressing the environment as a major issue was held at this time. It was the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment of 1972 that brought environmental issues to the forefront for the first time. Similarly, the radical ecological movement of the 1970s (Doherty 2002; Dietz/Garrelts 2013) laid the groundwork for the 1979 World Climate Conference. Through the involvement of the UN, many environmental movements were institutionalised and professionalised (Dryzek 2003). Important successes were achieved, including the establishment of global environmental regimes such as the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and in 2015 the Paris Agreement. Yet, over time, these incremental approaches have been challenged for ignoring issues of climate justice, for failing to transform dominant economic paradigms, and for their naivety in the face of repeatedly failing climate summits (de Moor 2018). Against this backdrop, new climate justice movements have emerged, including the recent global youth movement with the leading activism of FFF. While at the beginning climate justice movements were engaged primarily at the UN level (della Porta/Parks 2013), FFF took the demand for climate justice back to the broader public (Daniel et al. 2020).

Environmental activism in this sense involves individuals or groups taking action to address environmental or climate issues through

campaigns, advocacy, and direct engagement, often utilising rallies, demonstrations, lobbying, petitions or strikes. While environmental movements are a collective endeavour that include diverse individuals, organisations, and institutions working toward conservation, sustainability, and policy changes (Rootes 2003), we use the notion of environmental activism to address a wider array of activities, including scientific research, education, and community, which aim to initiate environmental challenges on a larger scale (Snow et al. 2004).

3. A global perspective: Exploring differences

Examining the literature, the analysis of social movements in the Global North dominates research; this is also the case with climate and environmental movements (cf. Daniel 2022, Daniel/Neubert 2019). Most theories of social movements, when not based on case studies, have been developed with a supposed universal character without reflecting the specific cultural, historical, political, and economic context involved. Consequently, the question arises as to whether this Western perspective can adequately explain the struggles of the Global South. Are these struggles fundamentally different? Are there more similarities than expected? How do they interrelate? Recognising broader forms of collective social action in the relationship with the natural world, environmental activism has taken other forms and has long existed beyond the Global North. Therefore, we aim to understand environmental activism and other social movements both from the Global North and from the Global South, and their connections, commonalities, and possible divides, as well as differences. While we address the differences in this section, we will continue to explore the entanglements in the next section. Examining environmental activism around the world, the differences are striking. We want to address three differences in more detail, but we should bear in mind that there are much more: in this introduction we address how social movements differ in their perceptions of nature, their forms of mobilisation, as well as their contexts and material conditions.

First, it is important to recognise that environmental movements are highly diverse. This diversity draws upon distinct conceptions of nature,

and the various forms of environmental activism are deeply rooted in these perceptions (see Doerr/Langa in this special issue). Moving beyond Eurocentric viewpoints, environmental epistemologies in South-East Asia, Latin America, and Africa differ significantly in how they conceptualise the relationship between nature and humanity. Relational perspectives on nature are prevalent in social movements in the Global South. They go beyond an anthropocentrism which is dominant in the Global North, and acknowledge the intrinsic value of both nature and of humans as part of it. The narrative of the Anthropocene is based on a binary concept of humans and nature in which humans regulate, use and exploit nature (Adloff/Neckel 2020). In light of this, the anthropocentric understanding of nature has been criticised as being Western-centric (cf. Muraca 2020). In many world regions, non-dichotomous understandings of humans and nature exist, highlighting the inextricable links between cultural identity, biodiversity, and responsible land stewardship. Such perspectives are also evident in various ‘good living’ alternatives from around the world, characterised by striving for harmonious coexistence with nature. From African *Ubuntu* to Latin American concepts such as Sumak Kawsay/Suma Qamaña or Buen Vivir (Colón-Ríos 2015; Kothari et al. 2019), these practices underscore the connection between people and nature, emphasising the preservation of the delicate balance crucial for the well-being of all living things. They also emphasise the importance of community and collaboration and are based on the awareness of our interconnectedness (Mendoza 2020). For instance, in Bolivia and Ecuador, despite their contested and flawed implementation, holistic understandings of nature have been incorporated into their political constitutions, recognising nature as a legal entity with inherent rights. Across the globe, rivers, mountains, forests, and valleys are conceived as more-than-human entities with their own agency (Escobar 2020). In India the Ganges and Yamuna, as well as the Whanganui River in New Zealand, have been granted legal person in 2018 (O’Donnell/Talbott-Jones 2018). In Europe, the Spanish lagoon Mar Menor is a recognised rights-bearing ecosystem since 2022 (Giménez 2023). Moreover, a strand of communitarian feminisms regards nature as an extension of one’s body, especially women’s bodies, illustrating the struggles against colonialism, exploitation, and patriarchal societal structures that not only wound one’s body but also nature, in symbolical “body-territories” (Cabnal 2019; Cruz 2022).

Ubuntu has been frequently cited as a prime example of an indigenous ontology in southern Africa. It can be translated as humanism or humanity and has been widely captured by the Zulu aphorism ‘A person is a person because of others’ or ‘I am because you are’. The ontological meaning of *Ubuntu* is the communal or relational nature of being. Starting from the idea that a person has inherent dignity, the self can be developed in the community. From this follows a morality which underlines that being a complete person depends on the quality of relationships in the community and in the relation to nature (Metz/Gaie 2010: 13; see also Shange in this special issue). Many indigenous movements across the globe would take their understanding of nature as a starting point for framing inequalities and articulating their demands. Particularly in Latin America, the earth and nature are at the core of their demands for justice and recognition, viewing humans as an integral part of nature, rather than separate from it. This understanding of nature emphasises interconnectedness between humans and non-humans and their dependence on nature, rather than its exploitation and commodification (de la Cadena 2010; Rivera Cusicanqui 2018). Consequently, struggles over land and access to resources such as water, often led by peasant movements and their communities, can be regarded as environmental conflicts.

In the same vein, studies on Latin America suggest that environmental claims have influenced ‘peasant/agrarian’ movements, and their context has been shaped by the decolonisation of knowledge and critical approaches to the territory where ‘ecologies of difference’ and an ‘alternative rationality’ shape the understanding of the world (Escobar 20202; Leff 2015: 34). These politics of difference are deeply embedded in diverse socio-ecological imaginaries and histories, ultimately influencing the unfolding of environmental conflicts in each unique region.

However, we also find a non-anthropocentric worldview in environmental activism in Europe. While new forms of environmental activism in Europe have led collective actions, they also transcend their platforms, forms of network (Giugni/Grasso 2015), confronting new types of repression and coercion (Earl et al. 2022). For example, extractivism² also occurs in Europe and North America, as we see in *Ende Gelände* protests in Germany, the indigenous resistance of the Standing Rock Sioux challenging the Dakota Access Pipeline in the US, or uprisings against mining

and extractivism in Serbia (see Tiedemann in this special issue). In societies and among individuals, these various conceptions of nature often coexist. The interplay of these different worldviews, both in the Global North and South, can therefore influence environmental activism, and activists may draw from multiple perspectives to develop comprehensive strategies to address environmental issues.

Second, spirituality related to nature may be a distinguishing aspect. We are witnessing numerous examples of environmental movements where nature is integral to the mobilisation efforts or strategic practices of activists. For instance, the Maji Maji fighters who organised themselves in colonial German East Africa believed that they would become bullet-proof by the application of special magic water (maji). Similarly, this pattern of political protest, and the belief in salvation and the power of magic, also characterised the Ugandan Holy Spirit Movement led by Alice Lakwena (Behrend 2000). In both cases, political aims and mobilisation tactics are mixed with religiosity and magic, and a strategy of violent protest. Both cases show that nature and its spirituality is part of political activism and likewise expand the understanding of what can be perceived as environmental activism. In Latin American indigenous communities, religious aspects also play an important role in the activism against mega-projects. Assemblies to ‘defend life and territory’ in the Sierra Norte of Puebla, Mexico, always include rituals at the four cardinal points, and involve altars and religious dances. Indigenous beliefs about the conflict between good and evil inspire new narratives that metaphorically represent their environmental struggles, exemplified by the ritual of the Papantla Flyers Dance (Beaucage et al. 2017; Olarte, forthcoming). Moreover, there is a strong connection between the demands for autonomy and self-determination and the need to protect ‘natural resources’, sacred territory, and ‘socio-cosmic communities’ where shamanism and distinct relations of humans to nature play a significant role (Neurath 2018; Torres/Rodriguez 2023). For instance, the conflict surrounding the Mexican Wirikuta desert is not confined to traditional practices alone; rather, it encompasses strategies intricately linked with pilgrimages and religious dimensions.

Third, environmental activism operates under different financial, social, and political conditions that mark the axes along which they organise. In some cases, environmental activism contests persisting post-colonial struc-

tural inequality in the Global South. These social movements are often engaged in multifaceted struggles against not only environmental degradation, but also the ongoing legacies of colonialism, including dispossession, resource extraction, and environmental racism.³ Their efforts frequently aim at addressing deeply entrenched colonial structures, while advocating for land rights, self-determination, and environmental justice, as well as autonomy and dignity for marginalised communities (see Roy/Monippally in this special issue). While those struggles happen across the globe, we want to draw from Latin American movements as an example of how environmental and anti-colonial movements are intertwined. Struggles for land reforms and against the extreme land concentration across the continent or against resource extraction are both anti-colonial and can be part of environmental struggles (see Lenikus/Torres Heredia, Llanos Ramírez and Roy/Monippally in this special issue). These social movements confront racialised social hierarchies entrenched in historical colonial structures, challenging the enduring influence of former colonial elites on wealth distribution, and advocating for a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the environment. Social movements in the Global south that operate under those conditions, show the fundamental difference as reflected in divergent historical and socio-political contexts. These environmental activisms are intricately linked with broader processes of decolonisation and social justice struggles (Jasser et al. 2021). Examples are the peasant movements of the 1980s demanding land restitution, indigenous movements struggling for territory, and anti-extractivist struggles which have been termed an “ecologism of the poor” (Moreano Venegas et al. 2023). Those struggles are also extremely dangerous compared to those of Europe or the US. Lethal state and para-state violence against environmental activists is more prevalent in South America than in Europe (Le Billon/Lujala 2020). In fact, three-quarters of lethal attacks against environmental defenders occur in Latin America, primarily targeting women. Furthermore, Asia accounts for a growing number of cases in India and the Philippines, where almost half of the victims are indigenous activists (Global Witness 2022).

While emblematic territorialised social movements led by peasants and indigenous peoples in Latin America strive for decolonisation through self-governance and autonomy, they do not necessarily declare themselves envi-

ronmental activists, nor do they act in a unified way. However, indigenous movements often claim stewardship over land and non-human beings, including rivers, mountains, flora, and fauna (Andreucci et al. 2023). For example, indigenous struggles over territory cannot be reduced to struggles over land, but relate to the possible loss of livelihood, dispossession, and forms of knowledge and community organisation (Scheidel et al. 2023, see also Lenikus/Torres and Llanos Ramírez in this issue).

However, environmental activism cannot be exclusively understood from the lens of structural marginalisation in the Global South. If we look at South Africa, the first environmental activism was mainly brought forward by ‘white’ people, and it emerged for purposes of conservation and nature protection. To this day, environmental activism is attributed to the ‘white’ middle class, an attribution which clearly falls short and overlooks a multitude of other groups (Cock 2006). Another widely ignored example of environmental activism in the Global South is the large number of Islamic-inspired environmental activisms, such as in Tanzania, which argue for the protection of nature based on the Koran (cf. Müller 2020) When it comes to the different conditions for activism, it is equally important to mention that both the socioeconomic position and the political spaces for action, in general, are formative for activism, including not only the reality of authoritarian states but also fewer (financial, material and human) resources for activists to finance their political engagement (Daniel/Neubert 2019). The role of development cooperation, and its impact, especially against the growing importance of the global governance regime of the UN on climate, must also be considered in this context. The influence of donor organisations on social movements can be an important driver of mobilisation but can also have a thematic and restrictive influence (Daniel 2016). Environmental activism in the Global South must therefore be analysed against the background of the corresponding historical cultural, political, and social contexts.

4. Global entanglements of environmental activism

Beyond these differences, we would also like to emphasise that the manifold protests, although emerging in different world regions and poten-

tially different in their demands and situatedness, are globally entangled. As early as the late 1990s, social movement scholars unpacked the protests that do not necessarily address or organise themselves in relation to the state; rather, they overcome ‘methodological nationalism’ (Beck 2000) by engaging across borders. Some scholars differentiate between *globalisation* as processes encompassing major parts of the world and *transnationalisation* as processes crossing nation-states (Neubert/Daniel 2012). However, many scholars use them interchangeably. Analytical perspectives on global protests deal with a fundamental tension in globalisation, namely between the thesis of increasing global relatedness leading to the homogenisation of protest, and the reality of emerging heterogeneity. Without going too deeply into this debate (for these different positions see Andretta et al. 2003; Della Porta/Tarrow 2005), we want to point out that protests in different regions of the world are often entangled. One early and prominent example is the Zapatista movement in Mexico. Originally perceived as a movement for the autonomy and self-determination of indigenous communities in Chiapas, their claims first centred on better conditions for rural economic activities such as agriculture, in the face of the inequalities of the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Yet, as one of the first social movements to access digital communications, its internationalisation has reached activists, academics, and associations from many parts of the world. This heightened exposure has dynamised those demands to the point of them being recognised abroad as ‘defenders’ of nature and mother earth (Noriega 2021). During their last European campaign in 2021, this social movement strengthened the support of the ecological cause. They showed mutual solidarity with many environmental collectives and sent out a clear message about indigenous knowledge’s participation in the protection of nature (Brand et al. 2021). This perspective contrasts with the prevailing view in Mexico, which does not specifically recognise the Zapatista movement for its socio-ecological claims. Other collectives, often with differing viewpoints, have been advocating for the defence of life and territory long before the Zapatistas.

Further, transnational relationships arise in climate activism, beyond national borders, from the shared objective of striving for a socio-ecologically sustainable future (see also Adloff et al.; Daniel/Dannecker; Doerr/Langa; Redecker/Herzig and Poma in this special issue). Partly in conjunc-

tion but also quite independently, activism worldwide puts other futures on the political agenda. Beyond this shared macro-framework of a socio-ecological future (cf. della Porta/Parks 2013) however, there are different positions on the ways forward, but also on the concrete meaning of what a climate-just global future should mean. In turn, the visions of the future vary, from green capitalism and thus ecological modernisation, degrowth and post-growth models or feminist and care-related forms of socio-ecological transformation, to eco-socialist visions of the future (cf. Brand 2022; see also Adloff et al. in this special issue). However, the dominant visions of the future in the Global South are those that have emerged in the context of post-development debates and combine post-capitalist and cosmological visions of nature, such as the concept of *buen vivir* or *Ubuntu*.

Transnational linkages have also been facilitated by social media. In many cases, social media have been crucial for mobilisation as well as for transnational solidarity, such as during the Arab Spring. However, we are witnessing the fact that global entanglements not only lead to increased spaces of possibility and solidarity, but can be accompanied by a variety of processes that are both in favour of and against social movements (Khagram et al. 2002). This is particularly evident in recent social media events. While social media activists provide a transnational space for attention, they are also often the victims of hate speech. Expressions of civil disobedience by Extinction Rebellion (Berghlund/Schmidt 2020) and Fridays For Future may gather more transnational media attention, but fallout may include short-term detention and public harassment (Gruber et al. 2023). Moreover, these media spotlights often reproduce power structures and perpetuate the invisibility of Global South activists (see also Doerr/Langa in this special issue). The incident involving Ugandan activist Vanessa Nakate, who was cropped out of an associated press photo, leaving an image of only white young environmental activists, underscores this inequality (Evelyn, 2020).

The latest wave of climate movements connect to one another because climate change is experienced as a global problem. We also observe similar features in current climate and environmental activism partly independent or even without global interconnection. For example, it is becoming clear that the protests worldwide are increasingly being undertaken by women. While street protests have often been perceived as a male domain, women

are increasingly at the forefront of activism. This is demonstrated on Fridays For Future and its founder, Greta Thunberg. Thunberg has been stylised as the leading figure of the FFF movement (on leading figures see Robnett 2013; Daniel/Graf 2020). In 2019, she travelled through Europe and the USA, speaking on the international stage, and her actions are being discussed in the media. While the commitment of young people to environmental movements is not new – 12-year-old Canadian activist Severn Cullis-Suzuki spoke at the first United Nations Climate Change Conference in 1992 – her efforts received significant attention. Thunberg's age, appearance and speeches are perceived as unusual, remarkable, or worthy of criticism. Consequently, Thunberg was named by the scientific journal *Nature* as one of the 10 most important people who played a decisive role in science in 2019 (Zeit Online 17.12.2019), indicative of her significant influence. Greta Thunberg has particularly impacted the participation of protesters and especially women, notably in the early years of the of Fridays For Future.⁴ As of today, women constitute over 50% of the youth movement, both in Austria and many other places (Daniel/Deutschmann 2020; de Moor et al. 2020).

An overrepresentation of women in climate and environmental protests is also evident in other regions of the world, such as in Latin America and Africa. Despite frequently encountering intersecting oppressive systems, women often take the lead in anti-extractivist movements and social movements in the defence of territories (Jenkins 2015). Particularly in contexts of anti-mining resistance that often produce fragmentation within local communities and social movements, the exclusion of women from decision-making regarding allowing or resisting extractivist practices within the community now propels organisations of indigenous women to the forefront. First, women often do not benefit from mining activities through wage labour as much as their male counterparts. Second, they stay in the communities and bear the difficulties of providing care, clean water, and food (Jenkins 2015, Chávez/López 2018). Their engagement extends not only to the conventional aspects of environmental activism, but also centres on reproductive labour, such as caregiving, subsistence agriculture, and community support. These forms

of reproductive work are fundamental to the sustainability of anti-extractivist resistance, sustaining communities, and providing a robust foundation for collective action. Furthermore, the male-dominated decision-making spaces that have historically characterised these movements are gradually undergoing transformation, as women assert their agency and bring to light their unique experiences and perspectives.

An intersectional perspective underscores the importance of recognising the interconnected struggles of environmental justice, gender equity, and indigenous rights within the context of anti-extractivist movements, as well as their challenges (Calla 2020, see also Daniel/Dannecker in this special issue). This is best captured by the principle of ‘putting life at the centre’ within socio-environmental struggles across the Americas. It refers to an approach applied by social movements that advocate for the defence and conservation of “the spheres that guarantee life, but also to try to regain control over the means of existence that have been expropriated and contaminated by the extractivist offensive” (Navarro et al. 2023: 412); that is, over nature and territory. The strategy to defend and regain collective control is through building community and commons, mobilising multiple affected communities against expropriation as well as against, for example, pollution as a result of mining activities. An important strategy in the resistance against extractivist activities is to centre the discourse on maintaining liveability of the region and the planet, instead of seeking profit at all costs. Movements that have successfully defied extractive projects focus on strengthening or rebuilding community ties and to ensure the means necessary to reproduce life and community (Linsalata 2019; Navarro et al. 2023).

Against this backdrop, it becomes evident that while we may observe analogous phenomena, such as the rising involvement of women in environmental activism, a closer examination is essential. This is because within apparent sameness and similarities, underlying differences also manifest. Thus, if we want to understand the similarities and differences of environmental activism in their global entanglements, it is important to understand transnational connections and cleavages in the same way in order to highlight the complexity of transnational relationships.

5. Conclusion and outlook on the special issue: A needed post-colonial reflection

Finally, we want to argue in favour of educating the debate on global environmental activism, and social movements in general, from a post-colonial perspective. The perspective of European climate activism and social movements continues to dominate academic and public debates. Scholars and intellectuals from different world regions have even questioned the usefulness of the notion of social movements in describing collective actions that have different historical origins and unfold in distinct ways (Daniel 2022; Gutiérrez 2017; Zibechi 2007). A post-colonial reflection means to critically engage with the notion of climate activism and to contest Western domination in academic debate by highlighting the structural and context-specific features of environmental activism. Post-colonial reflections on environmental activism reveal a complex interplay of historical legacies and contemporary power dynamics. They prompt us to confront the complexities of knowledge production from and about social movements and to take insights and forms of organisation beyond Europe and the US into account. With the impacts of climate change as a global but highly unequal phenomenon, it is crucial to connect global environmental struggles.

This special issue covers a wide array of analyses of climate activism, both from the South and the Global North. The aim is to explore the strategies, alliances, and tactics employed by diverse environmental movements. By delving into the complexities and the dynamics of these struggles through multiple lenses, we aim to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the social, political, and ecological implications of climate activism worldwide, their differences, similarities, conflicts, and entanglements.

The article of Nicole Doerr and Florencia Langa investigates digital images of nature in the climate movements of Fridays For Future in Germany and Argentina. With this approach, the article provides a comparative perspective on climate activism, ensuring the drawing of attention to the respective context and understanding of nature. The comparison shows that Argentina creates more explicit affective and diverse images of nature than in Germany, while the latter are mediated more by scientific

discourses. The images in Germany's FFF social media are predominantly urban images showing humans as agents of climate crisis and of controlling nature. In contrast, the Argentinian images show a deep relation to nature in the sense of depicting nature in its spiritual connection to humans, and as an integral part of life and as performing the 'we' function in humans' relation to nature. However, visuals also exist of activists wearing animal masks. Thus, activists aim to perform nature as part of the 'we'. By eliminating the separation between humans and nature, the affective relationship to nature is represented and is also staged as a political actor.

Also drawing on different affects in environmental movements, Alice Poma analyses environmental movements in Mexico. The author adds to a small body of literature concerned with the growing expansion of environmental movements from the Global North into the Global South. She addresses this issue by exploring relevant aspects of these collective actions and highlighting the personal experiences of activists in the newly formed Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion movements in Mexico. By focusing on the emotional dimension of protests, Poma examines the extent to which fear of repression in the violent context of Mexico might distinguish the Mexican formations of these collectives and protests. Furthermore, she highlights some contradictions between these groups and those in the Global North, such as concerning the distrust of renewable energy technologies.

In the realm of environmental activism, groups and collectives from the Global North are increasingly crossing borders into the Global South. Simultaneously, ideas originating from Global South activism and academia are spreading to new regions, including the Balkans. In her article, Norma Tiedemann analyses Serbian environmental movements which protest extractivism, illustrating the application of this concept within a European context. She highlights the contradictions inherent in an authoritarian extractivist model, which has served as a catalyst for ecological uprisings. These movements, initially perceived as 'apolitical', have strategically expanded to address broader issues of dignity, the rule of law, and equality. This perspective offers an interesting take on how the politicisation of ecological questions bridges national divides and creates new spaces to contest the authoritarian state, its patronage system, and the West's 'green' extractivist agenda.

Also concerned with extractivism as a development model, Valerie Lenikus and Marcela Torres Heredia conduct a material analysis of socio-ecological conflicts in response to extractivist activities in Colombia and Ecuador. In their analysis, they trace how power relations are (re)produced through the implementation and expansion of extractivist projects. They especially highlight overlaps of struggles for life and dignity by means of the access to territory, land, and work led by peasant, indigenous, and afro movements. Drawing on two cases of extractivist expansion, they show how 'nature' is socially produced, and analyse the multiple and sometimes contradictory resistances in zones of increasing commodification of nature. They also point to the ambivalent role of states that rely on extractivism as a development model while simultaneously promoting the rights of indigenous, peasant, and afro groups, finding that extractivist activities can not only lead to the social and spatial fragmentation of communities but also to collective resistance.

Brototi Roy and George Monipally address the states' and enterprises' response to collective resistances. The authors argue for the necessity of expanding critical decolonial environmental justice scholarship and activism in socio-environmental conflicts, especially regarding the involvement of indigenous peoples. To make their case, they trace the history and impact of the Indian Forest Rights Act, which was conceived as a strong legal tool to counteract the historic marginalisation of Adivasi in India. They review cases of litigation over coal mines in Jharkhand, India. In their intersectional analysis, the authors document how cases argued under this law are protracted and justice is subverted, for example through the falsification of documents. They propose the concept of *procedural violence* as a combination of procedural injustice and structural violence to better understand the dynamics of court cases between parties with extreme differences in power and disposable resources, especially regarding time, mobility, money, and information.

Sofie von Redecker and Christian Herzig focus on the radical futures that are embedded within the practices of agriculture and care of La Vía Campesina (LVC). They analyse everyday practices as political actions, parting from the notion that those practices already contain forms to organise life differently, and are therefore a guide towards different futures. In the analysis, they highlight the connection LVC establishes between

agrarian practices of food sovereignty and agroecology. Applying a prefigurative approach to change, that is, the understanding that revolutions or other events of social upheaval are not condensed into a moment of social cleavage but are processes that develop successively to overcome a present system, they contrast food sovereignty and agroecological practices with the agro-industrial model of production that is closely linked to the Anthropocene and the socio-ecological crisis.

In his article, Daniel Llanos Ramírez (in this special issue, available online) presents a comparative analysis of two socio-environmental conflicts in Colombia that, despite both being mining-related, differ in their outcomes. The author highlights Colombia's extractivist model as a source of dispossession, displacement, and death. The extreme violence in the world's most dangerous country for environmental defenders is a critical aspect of the political ecologies of Latin America – as also noted by Poma in this issue. This violence tends to be a common thread in the majority of cases, intensifying conflicts, discouraging political participation, and on the whole weakening the rule of law.

In the essay section, the special issue explores current debates and research agendas on environmental activism. The essay of Nombulelo Tholithemba Shange draws attention to the ambivalences of the climate crisis in South Africa, starting with the observation that environmental protection is predominantly perceived as a problem addressed by white people (white conservationists). In contrast, a perception exists of black, marginalised and poor people exploiting and harming nature (black destruction). Against this misinterpretation of black destruction the author argues for taking African cosmologies such as *Ubuntu* into account. *Ubuntu* is a cosmological understanding of protecting nature. The ontology of *Ubuntu* reinforces norms and values such as respect and reciprocity and stresses the relation between the material world and the spiritual. *Ubuntu* therefore shows that social and ecological behaviour are intertwined and should be based on respect and harmony.

Based on a synthesis of two interviews with Phillipp Wilfinger, one of the Fridays For Future founders, conducted in 2019 and 2023 by Antje Daniel, the interview essay describes the founding and transformation of the youth movement in Vienna. Born out of an encounter with Greta Thunberg in 2018, Fridays For Future emerged in Austria and reached a

high point of mobilisation in 2019. Disrupted by the pandemic and against the backdrop of global political challenges, the FFF movement has nevertheless managed to be socio-politically relevant and establish itself as a global actor with (global) climate justice at its core. The interview traces the stages of the movement and assesses the successes and challenges of the FFF mobilisation.

The essay of the FWF (Austrian Science Fund) funded research project Youth environmental activism and Fridays For Future provides an intersectional and global perspective (led by Antje Daniel and Petra Dannecker) to the new wave of environmental activism. With case studies on Austria, Bangladesh and Uganda, the research project, which is presented in this essay, analyses the local conditions of youth activism, and explores similarities and differences. Because less is known about climate movements in the Global South, the project provides an understanding of the diversity of the global crises and the multiplicity of collective actions. There has also been little intersectional research exploring which young people are represented and which remain unheard. Therefore, this project is a synthesis of youth and social movement studies, combined with an intersectional approach and a comparative case study design. It offers an original analytical framework for the investigation of global youth activism.

The DFG-funded research on the origins of sustainability presented in the essay by Frank Adloff, Stefan Aykut, and Christine Hentschel is based on the observation that sustainability has taken on the form of a hegemonic development model that conceals very different, sometimes conflicting processes and visions of the future. They observe three future visions: modernisation in the sense of green capitalism, a fundamental transformation, and control of the climate crisis by technological innovation. At the same time, new possibilities to regulate and to transform climate crisis emerge, for instance with the acknowledgement of the ecocide or with the right to nature debates. The researchers observe four areas in which future imaginaries are negotiated: the arena of political participation, the arena of legal law, the arena of taxonomies, where standards are set around sustainability strategies for industry, and the arena of meaning-making. This consideration of future imaginaries and areas of conflict shows ‘multiple sustainabilities’ and how these imaginaries are negotiated and influenced by dynamics of power.

- 1 The use of geographical and linguistic containers such as Global South and North must be questioned in a globalised world because the countries in the Global South have experienced different social, political, and economic developments. Different understandings of the Global South exist; they mostly highlight the marginalisation or socio-economic positioning of countries (cf. Kloß 2017; Schneider 2017). It is important to keep in mind that the terms are more complex than they appear. We may find the Global North in the geographical area of the South, and vice versa.
- 2 Extractivism refers to a specific form of appropriation of nature as a commodity. Extractivism as an economic model describes the exploitation and export of mineral resources and renewable raw materials (cf. Gudynas 2018).
- 3 Environmental racism examines the relationship between race and environmental issues in different dimensions such as environmental policy, unequal participation of BIPOC communities in environmental affairs, and disproportionate exposure to pollution and climate change effects, among other (See Pulido 1996).
- 4 However, Thunberg is hated, pathologized or seen as an extension of eco-corporations (Daniel/Graf 2020).

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ABSTRACT Die Auswirkungen der Klimaveränderungen sind weltweit spürbar. Doch ebenso wie die Ursachen und Auswirkungen der Klimaveränderungen globale Phänomene sind, gilt dies auch für den Umweltaktivismus. Weltweit entstehen neue Formen der Selbstorganisation zur Bewältigung der Klimakrise. Während einige Umweltbewegungen auf multinationaler Ebene agieren, gibt es eine Entkopplung mit vielen lokalen Bewegungen, insbesondere im globalen Süden. In dieser Einleitung legen wir den Schwerpunkt auf post- und dekoloniale Perspektiven auf Umweltbewegungen und stellen drei wesentliche Unterschiede zwischen Umweltbewegungen in Gesellschaften des globalen Nordens und im globalen Süden: Das Naturverständnis der Bewegung, die Formen der Mobilisierung sowie die Kontexte und materiellen Bedingungen.

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