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DEMOCRATIC  
ECO-SOCIALIST  
ALTERNATIVES IN  
SOUTH AFRICA

## THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND A 'JUST TRANSITION' IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN ECO-FEMINIST-SOCIALIST PERSPECTIVE

Jacklyn Cock

The climate crisis presents us with a historic opportunity because to solve it we need radical transformative change in how we produce, consume and organise our lives. It is in this sense that a 'just transition' from the current fossil fuel regime in South Africa could both address the climate crisis and contain the embryo of a new, democratic, eco-feminist-socialist order.

This chapter suggests that reclaiming the hybridised and travelling discourses of feminism, environmentalism and socialism could give strength and coherence to a just transition to a post-carbon future. While there is no blueprint, all three discourses contain flashes of a vision of a post-capitalist society driven by a different energy regime and promote the solidarities necessary to drive transformative change. A major difficulty is that in contemporary South Africa all three discourses are, to some extent, contaminated. Feminism is widely viewed as elitist and individualist; environmentalism as focused on the conservation of threatened plants, animals and wilderness areas to the neglect of social needs; and socialism as productivist, authoritarian and repressive, as evidenced in the historical experience of the Soviet Union and – with more immediacy – the practices of the South African Communist Party (SACP). The chapter argues that the concept of social reproduction is especially relevant to this process of reclaiming.

## THE MARXIST–FEMINIST APPROACH TO SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Grounded in a Marxist–feminist analysis, this concept is important for six reasons. Firstly, it points to the possibility of unifying different struggles in the name of a reclaimed and reinvigorated feminism, environmentalism and socialism. It does so through building on the powerful Marxist capacity to *explain* different forms of domination through reinserting the special relevance of class into conceptions of intersectionality. It also does so through relating these struggles to material conditions of life. As Meg Luxton writes:

Politically, a social reproduction perspective validates a wide range of struggles that directly relate to standards of living. These include wages and working conditions, a living income for all, access to housing, healthy food, and communities and households free of violence. *Issues such as climate change and other environmental concerns are clearly connected, inviting alliances.* (2015: 7, emphasis added)

Secondly, it directs us to the class-based, material realities of the everyday. As David Harvey writes, 'the politics of everyday life is the crucible where revolutionary energies might develop' (2014: 34). Thirdly, it focuses us on one of the most serious of the many dimensions of the climate crisis, which we face in contemporary South Africa – the impact of droughts and floods on food production and food prices. The food crisis is defined by the coexistence of hunger, extravagant overconsumption on the part of the elite, and waste. This is one of the most serious dimensions because twenty-five per cent of children under the age of six are showing signs of stunted growth, both physical and mental, due to malnourishment. These are poor, black children and much of the daily experience of the crisis takes place in the privatised sphere of the black, working-class household.

Fourthly, the Marxist–feminist approach to social reproduction provides us with an exposé of how capitalism operates, including the expansionist logic which is driving climate change. Fifth, it validates other anti-capitalist struggles and, lastly, it points us to alternative social forms.

The core of social reproduction is the insight from Karl Marx that 'the most indispensable means of production' is the worker and the 'maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the

reproduction of capital' (Marx 1976: 718). What Marx neglected was that this 'maintenance' and 'reproduction' involves a great deal of work done by women.

Marx was not gender blind. He argued that women were an important element in the resistance to capitalism and was especially impressed by the role of women in the 1871 Paris Commune (Brown 2013). But Marx lacked the feminist analysis necessary to reveal the systematic character of unequal gender relations. So while he looked behind the sphere of exchange into what he called the 'hidden abode of production' in order to understand capitalism, Marxist-feminism takes this further to explore the 'hidden abode of social reproduction'.

The core of the integration of Marxism and feminism lies in this concept of social reproduction. It refers to the complex tasks and processes that ensure the production and reproduction of the population on a daily and on a generational basis. It means meeting caring and provisioning needs, including child rearing, producing and preparing food. In much of this work, a reliance on fossil fuels means additional expense and health hazards.

While women's work is often naturalised, obscured or trivialised as non-work, Marxist-feminist analysis has shown how women's unpaid care work that reproduces the working class acts as a subsidy for capital. It does so by externalising the costs of social reproduction. The wage labour on which capitalism depends could not exist in the absence of domestic work. As Nancy Fraser writes, 'Social reproduction is an indispensable condition for the possibility of capitalist production' (2014: 61).

Asking who does this work of social reproduction, who benefits and who bears the cost, exposes how power operates and how it is experienced in people's lives. For example, in South Africa this work of social reproduction is mostly performed by black, working-class women, either in their own homes or in a commodified form in the households of the dominant classes as domestic workers. Much of the highly racialised privilege of apartheid remains intact and means that women of the dominant classes continue to have the power to displace a great deal of this domestic labour onto women of the subordinate classes. Furthermore, it is black, working-class women who are the shock absorbers of the current climate crisis, experiencing most intensely the health hazards of exposure to carbon emissions and the devastating impacts of rising food prices, water pollution and energy poverty (Jacobs 2012; Munien & Ahmed 2012). These factors all mean that women have to work harder to stretch inadequate wages and social grants further. It was poor, black, working-class women who were most affected by the forty per cent increase in

the price of maize in 2016. Their interests should be at the centre of the process of reclaiming feminism in South Africa.

## RECLAIMING FEMINISM

It is a broad generalisation, but feminism is widely seen as problematic and sectarian. In various encounters in the research for this chapter, feminism was described as 'contaminated', as 'divisive' by depicting 'men as the enemy', as linked to lesbianism and as elitist. As one informant said, 'there is a distrust throughout the southern African region about feminism' (Interview, key informant, Johannesburg, 8 August 2014). For many women, feminism means 'gender equality', which some viewed as a thin notion that is inadequate to the task of transformation. An informant said, 'Gender equality is a very bourgeois concept – we can do it under capitalism – it is not transformative' (Interview, key informant, Johannesburg, 9 August 2014).

Other comments were that feminism has been reduced to issues of representation. The first democratic parliament included the highest number of women in any parliament in the world, and many women have been appointed to parliamentary committees, government departments and parastatals. But informants frequently expressed the concern that these women have not furthered the interests of working-class women. A feminist analysis of the centrality of the gendered division of labour to women's oppression is largely absent. It is not questioned but simply asserted and thus affirmed.

The reasons for this 'contamination' are multiple and complex. They include the deep historical roots of patriarchal understandings and practices in which a gendered division of labour is deeply ingrained and normalised. As Shireen Hassim writes, 'Zuma has shifted the public debate to the right on issues of gender and crude patriarchalism is far more evident under his presidency' (2015: 16). During apartheid the struggle against racial oppression was prioritised and the African family was generally seen as a space to be defended against the depredations of capital and the state, rather than as the site of women's oppression in the vein of 1970s radical feminism, exemplified by the notion of the family as an 'anti-social institution' (Barrett & McIntosh 1982). The African National Congress Women's League is socially conservative, has smothered radical demands for redistribution and is best described as 'womanist', meaning promoting values of 'family centeredness, community building, mothering and nurturing ...' (Mabawonku 2010: 4).

A reclaimed feminism could give strength and coherence to current scattered and ephemeral struggles. The multiple, extreme and racialised forms of inequality in South Africa demolish any conception of feminism as limited to challenging patriarchal power. As bell hooks (2015: 22) writes:

Feminism, as liberation struggle must exist apart from, and as a part of the larger struggle to eradicate domination in all its forms. We must understand that patriarchal domination shares an ideological foundation with racism and other forms of group oppression, and that there is no hope that it can be eradicated while these systems remain intact.

This is at the core of the black feminist critique of white 1970s feminism which emanated from the US – a feminism concerned with individual advancement rather than collective struggle, in which white feminists tended to project their experiences of female oppression as universal. This is the crucial insight in ‘intersectional analysis’ which takes account of the multiple, interconnected sources of oppression to which different women are differently subjected (Crenshaw 1988). It stresses that we must understand how relations of domination reinforce each other but also how they are experienced differently, for example how black women experience racism differently from black men. An intersectional lens exposes ‘how power actually works and can promote struggles against power’s multiple and differentiated effects’ (Chun, Lipsitz & Shin 2013: 920). In the South African context its significance lies in how it forces white feminists to acknowledge race and class privilege and the benefits deriving from living in what Yvette Abrahams has named as a ‘white supremacist heteropatriarchal capitalism’ (2010: 2).

But intersectional analysis asserts that all forms of oppression are equally oppressive as they have an equivalent value, whereas Marxist–feminism gives a special relevance to class in capitalist society. According to Marxists, class is more than an identity category; it is a relational category, part of a system of power relations, a constituent of capitalist accumulation. Martha Gimenez (2001) points out that ‘the flattening of oppressions and their lack of anchor shed no light whatsoever on their possible causes or why they persist’ (cited in Aguilar 2015: 213). Class analysis has an explanatory primacy – it enables us to comprehend race and gender oppression and how these identity categories are activated to promote accumulation. Oppression is multiple and intersecting but its causes are not.

'A feminism that speaks of women's oppression and its injustice but fails to address capitalism will be of little help in ending women's oppression' (Holmstrom 2002: 8). Reclaiming feminism and achieving gender justice means challenging capital's dependence on women's unpaid labour in social reproduction and experimenting with alternative social forms, institutions and practices outside of capitalism, such as collective arrangements for child-care; cooperatives; bulk buying; decentralised, community-controlled forms of renewable energy; the development of 'people's restaurants'; community food centres and seed sharing, to mention a few examples. It means promoting solidarities with working-class women's struggles against oppression in the workplace and beyond.

Current organisational initiatives with specifically feminist perspectives include WoMin (Women in Mining), a regional alliance of organisations formed in 2013 which emphasises the theme of solidarity among African women against extractivism (Interview, WoMin organiser, Johannesburg, 3 June 2014). In 2015, WoMin began convening gatherings of activists of different organisations in the region, calling for building 'popular alliances against Big Coal' and a new form of development 'that recognises and supports the work of care and reproduction' (WoMin 2015: 2). It pointed out that women's cheap and often unpaid labour subsidises the profits of polluting coal corporations.

WAMUA, the Women's Wing of Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA), focuses on the impact of mining on livelihoods in Mpumalanga, which contains the most fertile land in the country and, as of 2017, is threatened by forty new coal mines. A WAMUA organiser explained:

It was decided to form a separate organisation because when men and women are together men tend to dominate ... there are very limited numbers of such separate and autonomous women's organisations in which women organise independently of the influence of men ... but we include many strong, energetic, young women. (Interview, Johannesburg, 8 June 2014)

The Rural Women's Assembly, formed in 2009, brings together some 500 community-based organisations working on food, energy and land issues. It describes itself as 'a self-organised network or alliance of national rural women's movements, assemblies, grassroots organisations and chapters of mixed peasant unions, federations and movements across eight countries in the SADC



[Southern African Development Community] region'.<sup>1</sup> It emphasises women's unpaid care work and has established a number of 'feminist schools'. In 2016 it brought together 160 women from nine countries, representing 100 000 small farmers.

These organisations are building solidarities, organising exchange visits across Africa, directing protest actions and promoting alternatives to fossil fuel capitalism, such as 'food banks' which operate as redistribution mechanisms, biogas digesters, solar heating, seed saving and agro-ecology. They are developing an understanding of how black, working-class women are subject to multiple forms of oppression and that what are often experienced as individual problems have social or structural causes and solutions. This approach could change the focus on singular issues such as gender-based violence in isolation from their social context. Contextualising would involve connecting domestic violence to frustrations relating to the high rate of unemployment which limits black men's ability to conform to hegemonic notions of providing for their families, or to the specific tensions involved in prolonged strike violence by employed workers. This illustrates how a social reproduction approach can potentially validate and link separate struggles.

## RECLAIMING ENVIRONMENTALISM

Analogous to ways in which feminism has been somewhat 'contaminated' by its associations with elitism and many activists are reluctant to call themselves 'feminists', 'environmentalism' and the label of 'environmental activist' also carry negative connotations from the past. However, working-class black women are active and often drive environmental and social justice initiatives confronting climate change, sometimes in survivalist, defensive and ameliorative ways, but also in challenging neoliberal capitalism, building solidarity and promoting alternatives.

Women are active in many of these struggles because their role in social reproduction means they deal most directly with the damaging effects of toxic pollution of the air and water on health and life. Women are leading resistance to the threat to their land and livelihoods from extractivism: for example, the women of Xolobeni, who are opposing titanium mining on their land,<sup>2</sup> and the women of Somkhele's struggle against anthracite mining.<sup>3</sup> Many of these women's organisational initiatives are building 'transformative power' (Wainwright

2014). For example, Earthlife Africa, which focuses on climate change, the impact of coal mining (especially on food security), the cost of electricity and the dangers of nuclear power, is empowering grassroots women. According to an Earthlife Africa official who founded a Women, Energy and Climate Change Forum,

people were having problems with pre-paid meters. The majority of people in the protest marches and memos to the authorities were women. We focused on education, on the impacts of climate change. We connected electricity with women's everyday issues ... In the Forum we had to demystify policy, especially climate change and energy policy which is often written in scientific, technical language. We had workshops, we went to people's homes, we met with parliament, Eskom and government. We insisted on using our own language. So people became confident. Young women are beginning to stand up and feel confident about talking about energy issues. Women are putting a human face on the issue. (Interview, Johannesburg, 12 July 2014)

Another initiative which is empowering grassroots women involves concretising the food–water–energy nexus through Earthlife's Sustainable Energy and Livelihoods Project. On seven sites throughout the country, the project is establishing renewable energy technologies such as solar panels and biogas digesters, as well as tanks for rainwater harvesting and food gardens. The focus of this project is on building resilience to climate change but it also demonstrates a post-carbon future (Interview, Earthlife Africa official, Johannesburg, 15 August 2014).<sup>4</sup>

These are examples of how the Marxist–feminist stress on social reproduction validates other struggles, particularly the struggle for environmental justice. The explanation of women's preponderance in these environmental struggles is not essentialist; it is not based on any natural affinity which women have with nature. The explanation lies in the gendered division of labour which allocates women to caring work. Women's experience in the production and provision of food could mean that they are more positioned to promote a new narrative about our relationship with nature – a revaluing of nature as something more than a store of natural resources for economic activity to be utilised for short-term gain without concern for long-term survival. The notion of environmental justice represents an important shift away from the traditional

authoritarian concept of environmentalism to include urban, health, labour and development issues (Cock & Koch 1991).

Many of the new initiatives confronting the climate crisis are drawing from this travelling discourse of environmental justice, which is broad and inclusive. It originated in the US in opposition to practices termed 'environmental racism', meaning the disproportionate effects of environmental pollution on racial minorities (Bullard 1993). The discourse was radicalised in the process of translation in South Africa. Fusing equity with ecological sustainability, it is foundational to many current struggles. These target the persistence of environmental racism in the form of exposure to toxic pollution and a severe lack of environmental services in many black communities.

This pattern continues despite the democratic constitution proclaiming the right of all 'to live in an environment that is not harmful to health or well-being' (Section 24 of the Bill of Rights). Millions of poor, black South Africans are exposed to what Rob Nixon (2011) has called 'the slow violence' of toxic pollution in a process which is insidious and largely invisible. Many black South Africans continue to live on the most damaged land, in the most polluted neighbourhoods, often adjoining working or abandoned mines, coal-fired power stations, steel mills, incinerators and waste sites or polluting industries, without adequate services of refuse removal, water, electricity and sanitation. In Gauteng province alone, over 1.6 million people live either on or adjacent to mine dumps in conditions contaminated with uranium and toxic heavy metals, including arsenic, aluminium, manganese and mercury.

Recently, the notion of 'environmental inequality' has emerged 'to encompass additional factors associated with disproportionate environmental impacts such as class and gender ...' (Sze & London 2008: 1333). The discourse is a powerful challenge to the anodyne concept of sustainable development, and the increasing commodification and financialisation of nature, packaged as 'the green economy'. In this sense, it is a potential carrier of transformation that is not class, gender or race blind. Addressing climate change involves addressing racism, both globally and locally. It has been suggested that racism is one reason for the failure of twenty-one years of international negotiations to achieve any binding global agreement on the reduction of carbon emissions: '... racism is what has made it possible to systematically look away from the climate threat for more than two decades.'<sup>5</sup> In the US, it has allowed the worst health impacts of fossil fuels 'to be systematically dumped on indigenous communities and on the neighbourhoods where people of colour live work and play' (Klein 2014: 3).

Furthermore, racism also makes it possible to look away from Africa, which contributes only four per cent of global carbon emissions but is the worst affected by climate change (see Terreblanche and Bassey, both in this volume).

Paradoxically 'there is no clearly identifiable, relatively unified and broadly popular environmental movement in South Africa' (Death 2014: 1216). Instead, environmentalism is fractured and diverse and much popular mobilisation is related to access to services, such as water and energy, and is localised, episodic, discontinuous and not framed as 'environmental struggles'. However, a new, embryonic environmental justice 'movement' could be emerging. Older organisations such as Earthlife Africa, Groundwork, the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) are consolidating. Newer anti-extractivist organisations that bridge ecological and social justice issues include the Mining and Environmental Justice Community Network of South Africa, which formed in 2012 and has seventy organisational members; MACUA, which brings together over a hundred different organisations; the Highveld Environmental Justice Alliance, made up of some twenty-five grassroots organisations; and WoMin. Furthermore, there is growing collaboration among environmental justice organisations.

All over the world, environmental justice struggles are challenging neoliberal capitalism. The particularistic and ameliorative nature of many of these struggles means that the challenge is not immediately evident. 'Contesting a waste dump here or rescuing an endangered species or a valued habitat there is in no way fatal to capital's reproduction' (Harvey 2014: 252). But, as an understanding of the ecologically destructive impacts of capital's logic of expansion spreads, particularly in relation to carbon emissions, this could change. 'The environment movement could, in alliance with others pose a serious threat to the reproduction of capital' (Harvey 2014: 252). The 'others' could include feminists and socialists with a clear vision of an alternative post-capitalist social order.

## RECLAIMING SOCIALISM

A diverse socialist tradition has historically made strong claims regarding human emancipation, justice, democracy, freedom and equality. Marx conceived of socialism as 'an association of free human beings which works with common means of production' (cited in Löwy 2006: 307). For Marx, 'socialism

is the point where we begin collectively to determine our own destinies. It is democracy taken with full seriousness rather than democracy as (for the most part) a political charade' (Eagleton 2011: 75).

But for many people socialism is discredited because its claims have been marred by a history of authoritarianism, productivism, human rights abuses and environmental destruction. In the Soviet Union especially, 'productivist methods, both in industry and agriculture, were imposed by totalitarian means while ecologists were marginalised or eliminated' (Löwy 2006: 296). For many, this contamination is irreversible. Dennis Wrong (2000: 177), for example, writes, 'Despite the authentically democratic and egalitarian credentials of most western socialists, the economic failures of the communist states ... are likely to prove permanently devastating to the future of socialism as an ideal.'

Furthermore, twentieth-century socialism denied many freedoms and rights, especially the right to disagree. The vanguardist, anti-democratic practices of the SACP illustrate this, in addition to an emphasis on industrialisation and economic growth that ignores environmental issues and promotes a 'statist' approach to social change. The party failed to mount a challenge to the government policy document, the New Growth Path released in 2010, which promised a move away from the stranglehold of the carbon-intensive minerals-energy complex which continues to dominate the economy. Increasing dissent and tension within the SACP has led to a dramatic decline in membership from the 75 000 claimed by Martin Legassick in 1995 (Legassick 2007: 522).

Both globally and locally many activists now talk only of 'anti-capitalism' because socialism has been stripped of its earlier positive meanings. The outcome is that today, much of the global opposition to capitalism is reduced to protest rather than the formulation of alternative visions. Hence, the 'reclaiming' has to involve building a 'new' form of socialism that is democratic, ecological, ethical and feminist, as well as building public ownership and democratic control of productive resources.

There are many inspirational accounts of an alternative socialist vision, demonstrating how it is necessary for survival. For example, Michael Löwy writes of 'a new eco-socialist civilisation, beyond the reach of money, beyond consumption habits artificially produced by advertising, and beyond the unlimited production of commodities that are useless and/or harmful to the environment' (2006: 302). Justice means that eco-socialism is necessary because

the present mode of production and consumption of advanced capitalist countries, which is based on the logic of boundless accumulation (of capital, profits and commodities), waste of resources, ostentatious consumption, and the accelerated destruction of the environment, cannot in any way be extended to the whole planet. (Kelly & Malone 2006: 62)

Furthermore, 'Capitalist expansion threatens human survival. The protection of the environment is thus a humanist imperative' (2006: 62). This means we have to 'reclaim planning from the failed practices of authoritarian communism' because democratic planning is indispensable 'for an ecologically viable socialist society' (Panitch & Leyes 2006: xiii). While in disarray at present, the labour movement could be the carrier of a new socialism that is ethical, democratic and ecological.

## THE LABOUR MOVEMENT AS THE DRIVER OF A JUST TRANSITION

In South Africa, there are different groupings within the labour movement that claim a strong socialist identity and understand a just transition to mean the possibility of revolutionary change. Zwelinzima Vavi, former general secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), claims that recent struggles within Cosatu reflect 'contradictions between those leaders who have been won over to the side of the defenders of a neoliberalist South African capitalism' and 'those who are determined to continue the struggle for socialism' (cited in Satgar & Southall 2015: 4). Certainly many trade unionists emphasise the links between the climate crisis and neoliberal capitalism. This found organisational expression in two Cosatu committees established in 2010 consisting of representatives from all affiliates and from key environmental organisations. These structures conducted educational workshops with many affiliates, promoted shared research into coal mining, chemicals and poultry farming with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Food and Allied Workers Union, as well as collaboration with key environmental justice organisations such as Groundwork and the SDCEA. This collaboration also produced a Climate Change Policy Framework, which stressed that capitalist accumulation has been the underlying cause of excessive greenhouse gas emissions, leading to global warming and climate change (Cosatu 2012). This was

an important organisational step towards strengthening the linkages between labour and environmental activists, and could continue in a new labour federation that is closer to civil society.

However, there is little consensus within the labour movement as a whole. Two broad approaches to the notion of a just transition exist within the global labour movement: the minimalist position of the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Labour Organisation, which emphasises shallow, reformist change with green jobs, social protection, retraining and consultation. The emphasis is defensive and shows a preoccupation with protecting the interests of vulnerable workers. An alternative notion views the climate crisis as a catalysing force for massive transformative change (Cock 2012), with totally different forms of producing and consuming, perhaps even moving towards socialism, but a new kind of socialism which is democratic, ethical and ecological.

However, this could be a false binary, a distinction which fails to distinguish between the long- and short-term interests of labour. As Naomi Klein (2014) powerfully demonstrates, addressing the climate crisis ‘changes everything’ and is in the long-term interests of labour, but the short-term, immediate needs of vulnerable workers in extractive industries have to be met. This is particularly true in relation to increasing unemployment and poverty in South Africa, what Irvin Jim of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) has called a ‘bloodbath’.<sup>6</sup> It implies that more attention needs to be paid to strategic rather than principled positions, in other words, to the modalities of a just transition led by labour. Clearly, the needs of workers in extractive industries must be addressed. They will be crucial to solving the climate crisis through meaningful, decent and productive work in alternatives such as renewable energy, public transport, home insulation, energy efficiency and mine rehabilitation. Meticulous research by the collaborative, cross-sector Climate Jobs Campaign has demonstrated that three million such jobs are possible in South Africa (see Ashley in this volume).

There are elements of both the defensive and the transformative approaches to a just transition in the Cosatu policy on climate change, which affirms that ‘a just transition towards a low carbon and climate-resilient society is required’ (Cosatu 2012: 56). While this policy statement was endorsed by all affiliates at the time, strong differences have emerged between the NUM and Numsa, for example. The NUM is increasingly defensive of the interests of some 90 000 coal miners in the face of the threats of job losses from mine closures, falling

coal prices (sixty per cent since 2012), mechanisation, demands from environmental activists to 'keep the coal in the hole' and the divestment movement. Differences over models of economic growth also need to be addressed because while many environmental activists advocate 'deindustrialisation' and 'zero growth', labour prioritises economic growth for job creation. Furthermore, efforts to restore the 6 000 abandoned or ownerless mines in the country have been largely unsuccessful. The NUM favours 'clean coal' from expensive and untested technological innovations such as carbon capture and storage. One source claimed that 'the just transition' is 'a thin notion which has not been sufficiently debated within the labour movement' (Interview, Cosatu social policy coordinator, Johannesburg, 12 November 2014). Numsa has argued that the shift to a low-carbon economy, and particularly that the development of the privatised renewable energy programme, is being dominated by green capitalism. Numsa's vision was of a socially owned renewable energy sector and other forms of community energy enterprises where full rights for workers are respected. Social ownership means energy being claimed as a common good that can take a mix of different forms such as public utilities, cooperatives or municipal-owned entities. It means 'energy democracy' which 'offers perhaps the only feasible route to a new energy system that can protect workers' rights and generate decent and stable jobs, make just transition real and be responsive to the needs of communities' (Sweeney 2012: 3). In the South African context, this notion is spreading and is understood to involve resisting the agenda of the fossil fuels corporations and reclaiming the energy sector as part of 'the commons', meaning part of public resources that are outside the market and democratically controlled. But as one informant commented,

there is a conflict of interests within the labour movement which needs to be balanced. For example, the case of workers in the car industry, versus the call for more public transport . . . we need to manage competing interests. Numsa is focusing on manufacturing and energy efficiency, neglecting the issue of mass based public transport and the manufacturing of buses and rail . . . leaving that up to Satawu [South African Transport and Allied Workers Union]. (Interview, Cosatu official, Johannesburg, 4 September 2015)

Furthermore, until the current heteronormative model of gender relations is truly challenged, women's oppression will continue within the labour



movement. A social reproduction perspective also directs attention to women's position within the labour force, to their low-paid work as nurses, cleaners and teachers as well as their unpaid work in the household. This could counter a powerful masculinist interpretation of socialism that subordinates the struggle against women's oppression to a narrow view of class struggle or a distraction.

This masculinism takes a variety of forms, from the trivialisation of 'women's issues', demeaning treatment, sexual harassment and marginalisation to violence. It is a further instance of where the Marxist-feminist emphasis on social reproduction could forge new alliances. The issue of access to healthy and affordable food connects the workplace and the community. The relation between rising food prices and climate change requires more attention from trade unionists. Food inflation, at 9.5 per cent at the time of writing compared to the usual figure of seven per cent, should feature in wage negotiations. Placing the food crisis on the agenda of the labour movement could strengthen campaigns for food sovereignty.

## A DEMOCRATIC ECO-FEMINIST-SOCIALIST TRANSITION

There is no blueprint for a democratic eco-feminist-socialism. Such an alternative has to be built from the bottom up in a process of extensive, democratic participation. However, several core values which contrast with the values of neoliberalism, such as materialism and an intense individualism, could provide a kind of compass for a vision of an alternative social order.

The aim of the struggle for socialism is, in the first instance, to replace a society based on profit with one based on satisfying the needs of people. This would involve access to decent work, quality and affordable education, health care, public transport, housing and energy.

At the core of a democratic eco-socialism is the link between the principles of sustainability and justice. To illustrate: the key question in terms of ecological sustainability is not only to protect limited resources but to ensure that they are used for the benefit of all, not only the privileged few. For example, in South Africa twenty-two per cent of households lack access to energy, either due to the lack of infrastructure or to unaffordable pre-paid meters. Justice demands the provision of affordable energy for all. Linking justice and sustainability demands that energy not only be affordable but also clean and safe, which means renewable energy that is socially owned and democratically controlled.

A democratic eco-socialism implies that the socialist emphasis on collective ownership and democratic control of productive resources must be connected to several other imperatives, especially gender justice, participatory democracy and a new narrative of the relation between nature and society. New social forms involving relations of reciprocity, solidarity and cooperation are emerging around these ideas and they embody fragments of a vision of an alternative post-capitalist future. The foundational concepts of food sovereignty, transformative feminism, energy democracy and environmental justice are among the building blocks for eco-socialism. The localisation of food production in the shift from carbon-intensive industrial agriculture to agro-ecology as part of food sovereignty could promote not only cooperatives and more communal living, but also a more direct sense of connection to nature. The mass rollout of renewable energy in the name of energy democracy could mean decentralised, socially owned energy with much greater potential for democratic control. As Harvey writes, it is these 'struggles of the everyday that contain the possibility of revolutionary energy' (2014: 3).

A just transition implies a new, more participatory form of democracy. In a parallel recognition that growth (now in the form of 'green growth') is intrinsic to capitalism, there is a growing understanding that western-style democracy legitimates capitalist inequalities. As Walden Bello writes, 'Even more than dictatorships, Western-style democracies are ... the natural system of governance of neoliberal capitalism, for they promote rather than restrain the savage forces of capital accumulation that lead to ever greater levels of inequality and poverty' (2014: 5).

It also implies a new narrative of relations with nature, grounded in the acknowledgement that humans exist as part of an ecological community. This involves rethinking economic growth and development (particularly extractivism). The recognition is growing that further economic growth could mean ecological catastrophe. As Maude Barlow expresses it:

Let us be clear no amount of talk of green futures, green technology, green jobs and a green economy can undo the fact that most businesses and nation state leaders, as well as UN and World Bank officials, continue to promote growth as the only economic and development model for the world. Until the growth model is truly challenged, great damage to the earth's ecosystems will continue. (Barlow & Clarke 2012: 250)

Finally, an eco-feminist-socialist society could be based on relations of trust, cooperation and reciprocity, rooted in a confidence in human beings – in the capacity of both men and women to reason, to share, to learn from mistakes, to cooperate, to care for each other – and, most importantly, in our capacity to work together to create a more just and equal world. This confidence implies social relationships that are marked by solidarity, meaning a commitment to collective empowerment rather than individual advancement. It is diametrically opposed to ‘Capitalism as a system (which) thrives on the cultivation and celebration of the worst aspects of human behaviour – selfishness and self interest, greed and competition. Socialism celebrates sharing and solidarity’ (Angus 2009: 197).

One of the main constraints to achieving such a vision is an understanding of a just transition limited to the goal of a low-carbon economy. This could contain the embryo of a very different order. But it could also mean a nuclear energy programme in which electricity becomes totally unaffordable for the mass of South Africans. The expansion of the present privatised renewable energy programme is problematic. Kolya Abramsky has pointed out that ‘Renewable energy at the service of capital accumulation could result in even harsher patterns of displacement and appropriation of land than those brought about by other forms of energy’ (2012: 349). Without the social ownership and democratic control of production, exploitation will continue. Environmentalists’ call for a reduction of consumption could mean the simplification of middle-class lifestyles, with reduced waste, extravagance and ostentation, but deep-seated inequality would remain. Without a shift in the gendered division of labour, working-class women will remain the shock absorbers of climate change, working harder to stretch the wage or social grant further as food prices rise. In other words, we need total transformative change and not the minimalist change envisaged in the green economy with its emphasis on expanding markets and new technology.

## CONCLUSION

There are several immediate political tasks involved in promoting a transformative just transition from fossil fuel capitalism. For many people socialism is discredited because of its history of authoritarianism, human rights abuses, intolerance of dissent and environmental destruction. Reclaiming involves

stress on a new kind of socialism that is ethical, democratic and ecological. It means building a strong, unified labour movement as an important driver of a just transition. Reclaiming feminism means women acting in solidarity to challenge corporate and patriarchal power as part of a larger struggle to end all forms of oppression. It involves supporting the black, working-class women who are confronting the climate crisis and challenging extractivism. Reclaiming environmentalism means a new relationship with nature based on the notion of an ecological community. This means changing the instrumental approach to nature as simply a store of resources for economic activity, or a sink for our waste products. But most important is supporting the diverse cooperative social forms involving relations of mutual sharing, support, reciprocity and cooperation. These are the building blocks for a just transition. They demonstrate an alternative paradigm, a different relationship between human beings and between human beings and nature – what Hilary Wainwright (2014: 38) calls 'power as transformative capacity'. And these social forms are important because capitalism systematically obliterates any notion of alternatives.

But to achieve an eco-feminist-socialist order as an alternative to a fossil fuel capitalism which threatens human survival, we need a new political imaginary, an imaginary which links these diverse forms. We have to move beyond 'denunciatory analyses' to ask 'what do we want?' (Ferguson 2009: 167). This chapter is intended to provoke debate on this question. As Donna Haraway once admitted, 'If I had to be honest with myself, I have lost the ability to think of what a world beyond capitalism would look like' (1991: 23). This inability is being further eroded by commentaries on the deepening ecological crisis that promote 'catastrophism', an apocalyptic vision of a future in which human existence is uncertain. The outcome is what Harvey calls a 'double blockage': 'the lack of an alternative vision prevents the formation of an oppositional movement, while the absence of such a movement precludes the articulation of an alternative' (2010: 227).

Exploring alternatives and strengthening analytical and strategic capacities for a more unified collective action from below is where a revolutionary potential lies. This is the potential within the notion of a just transition. Change is inevitable. As Jason Moore writes, 'Capitalism will give way to another model – or models – over the next century' (2015: 292). Our challenge is to draw from reclaimed notions of feminism, environmentalism and socialism to ensure that the change means a shift from fossil fuel capitalism to ensure both justice and sustainability.

## NOTES

- 1 See <https://ruralwomensassembly.wordpress.com/about/> (accessed 7 September 2017).
- 2 See for example <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/xolobeni-villagers-are-tired-of-being-abused-20170415> (accessed 7 September 2017).
- 3 See <http://aidc.org.za/women-defending-water-land-life-northern-kwazulu-natal/> (accessed 7 September 2017).
- 4 Earthlife Africa, Report at the Annual General Meeting, Johannesburg 2014, unpublished.
- 5 Naomi Klein, 'Why #BlackLivesMatter should transform the climate debate', *The Nation*, 12 December 2014, <https://www.thenation.com/article/what-does-black-livesmatter-have-do-climate-change/> (accessed 7 September 2017).
- 6 'Numsa demands a socially owned energy renewables programme', *Daily Maverick*, 5 May 2017, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2017-05-05-numsa-demands-a-socially-owned-energy-renewables-programme/#.WbEMtLhGTng> (accessed 7 September 2017).

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