# Intersectional and Multispecies Approaches to Climate Action

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'Climate Action: Transforming Infrastructure, Cultivating Attentiveness, Practicing Solidarity' – a special issue of the journal *Sociální studia* 19 (1/2022).

When we were writing our editorial introduction to 'Climate Action: Transforming Infrastructure, Cultivating Attentiveness, Practicing Solidarity', a special issue of the journal *Sociální studia*, in July 2022, Zoe, the first named heatwave of unprecedented temperatures was cascading across Europe. With train tracks on fire in the UK, the Mediterranean affected by underwater 'burning', and wildfires raging from Poland to Portugal, where over 1000 people died from heat-related causes, the urgency to address 'today's disastrous state of affairs' (Moore 2016: 78) was intensely felt in the northern hemisphere. Zhong (2022: 17) has suggested that 'heat is climate change at its most devastatingly intimate, ravaging not just landscapes and ecosystems and infrastructure, but the depth of individual human bodies'. And while many are concerned about heat deaths among the old, those living with disabilities, or working outside, Khullar (2022) reminds us that this year's spring heatwave in India, where half of the population works outdoors and lacks reliable electricity for cooling, was already the hottest on record with landfills igniting and overheated birds falling from the sky.

In her keynote address to the conference *Climate Justice, Technoecologies, and Alternative Energy Futures*, out of which this special issue emerged, Sheena Wilson (2019: 3) proposed that 'energy transition provides one of the most important material realities around which to organize climate justice action on the ground'. Based on research and activism with/in the Czech climate movement, Michaela Pixová, another conference participant, and Véronique Nebeská (2022: 134) observed that while the movement is 'overwhelmingly represented by women, the voices of men and technocratic discourses continue to be the loudest and lead the debate'. They argue that climate justice 'will only be truly intersectional if we stop framing the climate crisis in a "masculine"' way, as a technical and scientific problem that can be solved with the help of innovation and market-based instruments' (p. 127). And Meike Spitzner (2021) emphasised that a gender impact assessment is now obligatory in national action plans for climate change mitigation across the European Union. Taking the example of German transport infrastructure,

Spitzner showed how androcentric climate and transport policies can exacerbate gender inequalities. Conversely, when policy is gender-responsive and takes account of the care economy, it can strengthen gender equality and help countries meet sustainable climate targets.

These approaches to activism and policy making fall within the tradition of feminist, Black, and Indigenous scholarship that questions a pervasive nature-culture divide and suggests that contending with the climate crisis is an intersectional process that must address the infrastructures of violent resource extraction, as well as the racialised and gender-based violence that haunts the current trajectory of the climate emergency. As geographer Kathryn Yusoff makes clear, the end of the world or the apocalypse, is not something that is yet to come; 'other worlds have long since been surviving their enforced apocalypses of subjective deformations and ecological deaths raised in the context of colonialism and slavery and in the ongoing presents of settler colonialism and anti-blackness' (Yusoff 2019: 2). To reckon with contemporary conditions and reconceive the future, climate action must tackle head-on what Gómez-Barris (2017: 5) terms 'the extractive view'. This view 'refers to state and corporate logics that map territories as commodities rather than perceive the proliferation of life and activities that make up the human and nonhuman planetary' (p. 133); an opposition of nature and humanity conceived as 'ecologies without humans and human relations without ecologies' (Moore 2016: 78), which excluded Indigenous peoples and most women, as well as Slavs, Jews, and Roma from the remit of humanity, and enabled the 'appropriating the unpaid work of human and extra-human natures' (p. 92).

Moore (2016) finds this extractive view also in Central Europe, where fifteenth-century innovations in mining and metallurgy supplied the silver, iron, and copper for the emergent capitalist order. Whereas felled trees initially fuelled the smelting of metals in Europe, the oil of relentlessly hunted whales and now extinct Caribbean monk seals lubricated the machinery for processing sugar cane in the planation economies of the Americas. Alexis Gumbs (2020) attends to the intersections of black feminist thought, climate crisis, and multispecies relations in an ongoing colonial encounter. Thinking through connections of enslaved Africans who lived and died on slave ships and marine mammals, Gumbs points to the converging histories between nineteenth-century whaling and present offshore oil drilling that continues to threaten 'bowhead whales [that] have breathed so much history and outlived it too' (p. 47).

Joining Gumbs' quest for realising new forms of decolonial and multispecies alliances, the special issue 'Climate Action' contributes to engendering modes of analysis and resistance to the 'extractive view' and realise energy transition and climate justice. Bringing together research from the Czech Republic and studies

from Canada and the UK, the collection scrutinises food and energy infrastructure, explores the rising climate movement and its ethics of care, attends to ecologies of vulnerability, and discovers the potentials of transversal solidarity and a sustainable commons. It shows how social scientific research can be productively inflected by the energy and environmental humanities, feminist theories of body and affect, new materialism, and animal studies.

The contributions address climate action across three crosscutting analytical foci that offer paths to transformation, resistance, and transversal alliances in the climate emergency. First, they reveal the different modalities of 'transforming infrastructure' from industrial monocultures and automobility to climate camps and solar energy. Arnošt Novák (2022), for example, examines how climate activists collectively synchronise their bodies in blocking fossil fuel infrastructure in ways that not only disrupt it but in prefigurative politics generate new affects and practices of sustainable living. Offering the recursive practice of 'deep energy literacy' Wilson (2022) analyses the 'glitches' in infrastructural decision making in Canada, suggesting that Indigenous land claims, climate targets, and biodiversity need to be addressed together in the siting of solar energy. Learning from failure re-routes existing procedures towards a slowed down and 'staggered' form of decision making for decolonial energy futures.

Second, the articles suggest ways of 'cultivating attentiveness' to the small 'cracks' in infrastructural articulation, peripheral spaces and margins, and the refusal to cooperate in plantation regimes without reifying or romanticising them. Josephine Taylor (2022), for example, attends to fossil fuel's unacknowledged role in animal deaths by drawing connections between different responses to roadkill. Staying with experiences of discomfort, disgust and revulsion are, for Taylor, a way of not only registering nonhuman exploitation and violence, but of resisting it and configuring new forms of co-existence that open the possibility for a non-anthropocentric ethics of mutual bodily vulnerability and creaturely fellowship, linking to the broader movement of climate justice. Cultivating attentiveness is a way of reconfiguring hopeful horizons amidst scenes of environmental ruin and climate emergency that do not deny or diminish irreparable losses.

Third, the contributors activate practices and configurations of solidarity, while remaining mindful that solidarity is both necessary and 'an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict' (Tuck, Wang 2012: 3). Bob Kuřík (2022), for example, finds multispecies resistance to industrial farming in the unruly agencies of disobedient cows and mutated pests that enable more-than-human alliances. Like Kuřík, Dagmar Lorenz-Meyer examines what is typically left out or 'disarticulated' from infrastructural arrangements

but that can be seen as a productive limit and pointer for infrastructural re-articulation. Locating the possibilities for commoning photovoltaics in housing estates through practices of 'wasting' solar-generated electricity highlights the tensions and even violence *within* solidarity, as does the necessity of violent disturbance events to sustain multispecies refuges in solar plantations.

By distilling the modalities of infrastructural transformation, cultivating modes of attentiveness, and tracing non-innocent forms of solidarity and care, 'Climate Action' presents some alternatives to endless capital accumulation that are already emerging in the form of vulnerable collaboration, creaturely fellowship, and 'non-masterful politics' (Singh 2018: 15). That radical change is possible became strikingly evident when some of the smallest microbes – coronaviruses – temporarily brought much of the fossil-fuelled transportation and consumption infrastructure to a halt in 2020, which was accompanied by a measurable reduction of CO2 emissions. With the Russian war on Ukraine in its ninth month, ending European reliance on Russian fossil fuels has become a key priority in 2022. To what extent the REPowerEU initiative will contribute to a just energy transition, as climate justice organisations are advocating, remains to be seen. The contributors to Climate Action articulate spaces of hope in the wake of environmental ruin and the climate emergency, while exploring the forces of violence and solidarity that happen in and as the act of working towards a just energy transition.

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