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HOME

ABOUT ▾

ACTION

AGENDA

ANALYSIS

CONVERSATION

hares



Agenda

Conversations

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Towards A Radical Pluriverse

A dialogue between Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Alberto Acosta and Federico Demaria, moderated by Ashish Kothari

Ashish – How would we describe the world we live in and what are its dominant trends?

Ariel – In our time now, the question for me is how to integrate the four key movements: workers' struggles, women's struggles, peasants' and indigenous people's struggles, together with ecological politics. Most activists

Defending The Street

They have
scattered the
fireflies
over the river's
anemic face.
The algae they
drag are the
skirts
of prostitutes,
lovers of fish
and roots.

I close my hand,
Repress a blue
laugh tangled in
stories
of city squares,
movie houses,
sweltering nights
asphyxiated by
the loneliness of
echoes.
Between my
fingers children
clamor
displaying their
nakedness to the
sun.
They get away
along the

prioritize one or other movement. This may reflect their regional circumstances; it may reflect their personal interests or skills; or it may be simply a strategic choice. Yet I also see people's political energies flowing between these movements. For instance, a peasant struggle often mutates into a womanist intervention.

Over the years, my own sense of urgency and activism has tended to move around within the movements. But I feel strongly that ecological integrity is the critical "bottom line", globally. It has to be the common denominator of all our politics, since humanity itself is nature-in-embodied-form.

On the other hand, taking an historical view, none of today's political crises would have come about without the original deforming move into patriarchal domination thousands of years ago. This has its modern expression in capitalism, and the violent resourcing of women, colonized peoples, and nature at large. Looking at contemporary global crises from this depth perspective tells us that all political action needs to be feminist, if it is to get at the roots of the systemic abuse affecting life on earth. In fact, the very earliest ecofeminist actions called themselves just that – Women and Life on Earth. You can do everything possible to stop climate change, but if you don't get to grips with the sex-gendered culture that's driving it, then nothing will change.

Right now, I feel that the struggles led by peasant and indigenous peoples around the world are the most energized. I see our 21st century as a denouement of the last four or five centuries of colonization. The World Social Forum is a testament to that; or intercultural collaborations like our post-development dictionary project. Ecofeminism, too, was always a civilizational critique, a decolonizing version of feminism. But as for women's political struggles *per se*, I expect it will take another 300 years before the various "cultures of masculinist entitlement" dissolve.

The Workers Struggle, I think, is presently the weakest

lifeline;
triangles.

Periods part
their lips
counting wrinkled
bits of memory;
and the rain, the
hail, slap them
into submission.

Blood escapes my
hands.
Humanitarian
blood. Shamed
blood.
Vegetable sap and
the babble of
hunger and
boredom.

A man with
creased brow
passes by
his breath as
sour as his eyes.
I clasp him to me
until I feel his
hunger
sinking its teeth
in my flesh
and watch him
traveling on the
rails
of my blood . . .
I watch him; my
blood is agitated
and tries to spit
him out;
but I don't hold
him back and
shout:
go deeper, more .
. . more.

I am tired of
holding other
worlds



Chikukwa Project, Zimbabwe is a community led effort promoting economic self reliance through the adoption of traditional agricultural practices

movement, in the sense that “the mission” of the proletariat as handed down to us by the 19th century philosophy of Marx lost direction, becoming re-absorbed by capitalism. That particular agent of history has lost its *raison d’etre*, because a sustainable and socially just high tech industrial future based on automation is an oxymoron.

Arturo – I’ll follow up on what Ariel said about the dominant trends seen from the perspective of dominant classes, dominant groups, dominant ontologies. But, I would like to use the concept of “expulsions” that sociologist Saskia Sassen has used in her last book. She says what characterizes the contemporary moment is a new architecture of power that combines financial, technological, economic and cultural domains but in different ways, in new ways, which we’re unable to understand completely, yet. So, she talks about expulsions – expulsion of life from the biosphere; expulsion of workers and local economies from the larger sphere of the economy; expulsion, obviously, of people from places through land grabbing and water grabbing and so forth. But,

in my fist.
I open it
suddenly.

The wind shudders
and the children
and the blood and
the sap
are covered in
mud;
on earth they mix
with time’s
excrement,
with the gobs of
spit of the
yankee god,
the European god.

The soles of my
feet are on fire.
I feel a horde of
figures passing
by
parting the doors
of my entrails,
of my nerves, of
my soul . . .

They run and once
again take refuge
in my hands,
like pores, like
skin, like blood
. . .
I close my eyes .
. . I do not stop
them.
I close my eyes!

On all sides the
river’s screams
confuse
themselves
with the claws of
a sky that
pretends to
sleep.

I think this process has been going on forever, it's a long process, evident certainly from the advent of capitalism and colonialism.

I would, now, like to use the term "occupation" to explain my point further. You expel in order to occupy, or you occupy in order to expel, whatever way you would like to consider it. So, patriarchy occupies the space of the earth and the space of women, and colonialism and capitalism occupy people's spaces, globally speaking. And, it's an ontological occupation as it's a way of living. And, it's a dominant cosmivision, a patriarchal, capitalist, modern cosmivision that occupies other ontologies, other ways of being which are relational in their orientation. By relational I mean ontologies and ways of being, doing, thinking and knowing which are based on the assumption of the radical connectedness of everything that exists. So everything is connected to everything. And, that not only is the universe connected but that it is alive as well. Many indigenous peoples are part of that cosmivision. So, it's an occupation of that cosmivision by the dominant ontologies of appropriation, hierarchy and war. This has a civilizational dimension to it and that's why it's important to search for alternatives, which attempt to re-weave, rebuild the interconnectedness and some of the relational fabric of life especially through re-communalization of social life, re-commonization and re-localization of food, energy and the economy.

Alberto – It seems to me that we need to contextualize what Arturo has just said in a broader framework of time and space. The fact that there are expulsions and appropriations is something we've known for a long time now. They originate in the patriarchal civilization but have been intensified by capitalism. It is also important to take into account globalization and the capitalist economy, which integrates and expels simultaneously, and that can be seen almost everywhere with variable intensity.

To me it seems that we're witnessing a new version of

By Rita Valdivia

(Translation by Margaret Randall)



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medieval power predicated upon domination by modern technology, where elite groups at global, regional and local levels are fundamentally securing their own interests and dominance. They are also seeking to physically sequester themselves by building walls and fences around themselves, as is happening currently in Europe, where barbed and razor wire fences are coming up on the national borders. That is a remarkably medieval idea when walls were built around cities to defend themselves. But, this practice is also being duplicated within cities, both, in the global north as well as the south, where prosperous communities now prefer to live in gated communities. This kind of separation is being made possible by highly developed communications technologies.

In the medieval times there wasn't that much information going around, even though it was under the total control of the powerful sections of the society. In our times, however, while the information has increased enormously, it is still under the efficient control of an elite. So, for example in the middle ages the church was very much a part of this power relation but it was also offering you a better future. And, in our times there are new forms of those churches such as the International Monetary Fund, which are also part of this power relation and are simultaneously promising you a better world particularly through consumerism.



Nuit Debout protesters widely expressed their

Innovation Japan

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Economy Social **Society**

Sustainability

Tribal Urban

discontent with the current state of affairs through rallies and community meetings in 2016/ Photo Ian Langdon EFA

The perverse aspect of this new reality, however, is that while only a small minority has access to consumerism, the majority still has that consumerist chip in their minds. And, so even if they would like to consume like the elite, the circumstances imposed by the system itself prevent them from being able to do so. In this scenario, then, there is always the possibility of rising frustration, which can turn into violence. German analysts, Ulrich Brand and Marcus Wissen have likened this to the creation of an “imperial mode of living”.

The multiple crises that the system faces today are progressively becoming more and more intense, and the power elite is grappling for immediate solutions to them. In response groups like the G-20 and G-7 are consolidating the idea of a technological medievalism. And, while we are all integrated into this technological apparatus, we don't possess the democratic choice to create an alternative to it. So, it is obvious that technology itself has become the larger tool of domination and oppression.

Federico – In my view, appropriation, expropriation, dispossession, all of them seem to have the same meaning. Marxist David Harvey's expression of “accumulation by dispossession”, for instance, has become quite popular. I am interested in another dynamic – the idea of “accumulation by contamination”. In the act of dispossession you appropriate certain resources from someone to eventually do something with them to advance your own position. Contamination, however, implies destruction at a level where you endanger the continued existence of a group by impairing their means of livelihood. Rather than focusing on what mainstream economists call “externalities”, we shall pay attention to “cost-shifting” as outlined by ecological economist Karl

William Kapp. This refers to social costs shifted on to economically and politically weaker sections of society without compensation. Cost shifting includes contamination, but also many other types, such as care work shifted to women. I'm interested in trying to understand how this process works. In fact, the ecological crisis mainly emerges out of simultaneous processes of dispossession and contamination.

Ashish – I want to add to the discussion by talking about two issues. For me the contemporary crisis is also “a crisis of illusions”. For instance, we carry an illusion about democracy where we become a part of the electoral process every four or five years. In India, for instance, after every such exercise, we declare ourselves to be the largest democracy in the world. But, in my opinion we are, in effect, letting go of the precious power that we possess, and which should intrinsically be ours. We hand this power over to someone else with the hope of that person being responsible towards our wellbeing just because we've elected them through the electoral process. We also entertain an illusion of choice – choices as a consumer, we can choose from hundred of brands of soaps and numerous social media platforms, choice of relationships, choice of who I like or dislike. All these choices, however, are not genuinely autonomous. The hidden hands of the neoliberal economy and the state are, in fact, dictating them.

We also carry an illusion about belonging to a place – people, today, are being uprooted from their homes, towns and villages by climate change and ensuing conflicts, but have no place to go to subsequently. They are either herded into random, faceless camps or have to take perilous journeys to reach a safe destination, which, ironically, they're not allowed to enter most often, leave alone settle down. On the other hand, however, if you have the resources you can move from place to place with comfort and convenience. You could, in fact, belong to several places simultaneously.

The last illusion I want to talk about is that of communication. We think we are communicating a lot with the kind of information overload we have subjected ourselves to. But, as we stuff our brains with information we are losing the space as well as the faculty for more knowledge and wisdom. In fact, the current deluge of information is eroding whatever wisdom we had as a society.

So, for me, this is one of the two defining paradigms of the current crisis – the crisis of illusion being the first. The second issue is that of “alienation”. It started with our gradual alienation from nature, along with the alienation created by patriarchy – even men are alienated from their feminine selves, forced to play out a charade of masculinity, which is obviously not natural. I remember reading an article by Margaret Mead where she states that gender violence is not just against women; it’s also against men because they’re not allowed to express their complete set of emotions. Growing up I was given to believe that men were not supposed to cry because that was a feminine thing to do.

Ariel – I agree. Feminism is definitely about liberating men, too. We’re all basically androgynous beings carrying a range of human capacities.

Ashish – Yes, absolutely. So, we’re alienated from our own multiple selves as well as from the larger community. We have more “likes” on Facebook but we have a receding relationship with real people. Ultimately, we’re carrying these multiple kinds of alienation – deep within ourselves, with other people, and from nature itself.

Ariel – I like that idea of ‘illusion’; although perhaps by using the word “ideological” you can emphasize that it is power relations which are holding us down. My concern is that the actual word illusion is not quite socially grounded.

Arturo – Yes, I was thinking of something similar. The term that came to me was the “social construction” of illusion. I mean illusions are socially constructed and these are forms

of hyper liberal individualism, which Ashish has mapped so well. The issue with the term illusion is that it implicitly refers to something, which is not an illusion but a truth. And that is complicated. We should try to analyze this by trying to understand what is false and what is true, but without a modernist way of doing it where we say that we know something because we know science. So, I think a social construction of illusion, which is ideological, makes sense to me.



As state and corporate repression grows in society, so does resistance to that apparatus. Protesters confront riot police in Paris. Photograph: Dominique Faget/AFP/Getty Images

Arturo – In my opinion the illusion of democracy leads to the frustrations linked with the failure of democracy. That ultimately leads to a desire among the people to abandon politics itself and also to question the very idea of state. The illusion of choice also generates another series of frustrations. And the obvious difficulty in dealing with these frustrations leads to alienation from that so called democratic system. For example, people have increasingly embraced various religious sects in Latin America because of that sense of alienation from politics and the state. The illusion that you can choose where you want to be, to live,

also generates frustration because capital can move wherever it wants but people can't. But, at the same time, the violence caused by the system is forcing people to move — as we've seen in Syria, Iraq and Libya. Communication technology generates its own set of frustrations if you're not connected or the connection is spotty. I came across a restaurant in Mexico, which didn't provide Internet access, and there was a notice on the wall saying, "here there's no Wi Fi, you have to talk to each other."

Ashish – I want to follow up on this discussion and pose a question about another kind of illusion or false promise. Has the performance of the current Left governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador caused you any disappointment?

Alberto – I'll talk about my personal experience in Ecuador and also a bit about Venezuela and Bolivia. The time for illusions is already over and we're very much in the time for frustrations. All the promises that we made, and that includes me during my time in politics, were a part of the new Constitution that we promulgated after coming to power – the rights of nature, water as a human right, right for a good life. These rights didn't crystallize into reality; and this has led to a lot of disillusionment. The Left, in a broad sense, is disoriented in Ecuador. In the recent elections, for instance, the ostensible aim was to get a progressive presidential candidate elected, but the real intention is to modernize capitalism. The other part of the so-called Left ended up supporting a candidate who had spent his life in the banking industry. It's a difficult thing for me to say but the Left and the socialist movements are sliding towards disintegration. The options and opportunities for change, however, are once again to be found within the communities, and these are women, indigenous peasants, workers, and environmental groups. The movements are, however, very fragmented and dispersed. The most well established relationships are between women and

environmentalists, and indigenous people and environmentalists.

Ariel – Often, they are the same people. When our Beyond Development group visited Nabon in southern Ecuador, we met indigenous women who were restoring ‘maldeveloped’ rural lands using traditional skills and hand technologies to achieve food sovereignty. They had invented water-harvesting techniques themselves, without any need of loans or outside expertise from multilateral agencies.

Arturo – Yes, that’s an important point. They are fragmented but often we contribute to this fragmentation by viewing these groups as separate categories – indigenous communities, women, environmentalists and peasant workers ... while, they may actually have overlapping identities. As I understand, women through their everyday practices, for instance, create autonomy in the Zapatista communities, and to this extent it could be seen as being created by women who are also indigenous peasants and environmentalists.

Ariel – We’ve seen this in other parts of the world, too. In Mississippi, for example ordinary, concerned mainly black mothers started the ‘environmental justice movement’. But, once established, the men moved in and took over as spokespersons. The ecofeminist point is that initiatives for sex-gender literacy need to go on simultaneously inside all reconstructive political projects. To go forward historically, each movement needs a deeper understanding of how the competitive and controlling cultures of “masculinist entitlement” undermine democracy in everyday life.

Alberto – Nabon, in fact, used to be among the poorest areas of Ecuador but after the leadership was taken over by women it has climbed up to the middle rankings in social and economic indicators. Their model of community organizing is very interesting and most importantly it doesn’t come top down from the intellectuals. These are processes, however,

which come from grassroots resistance and that fact is quite important in the case of Colombia, for example, which is the country where my hope resides today – and hopefully it will not be an illusion.

Arturo – In the Marxist tradition we used to talk about the social creation of “needs”. Now, it seems it’s more proper and productive to talk about the social creation of illusions. But, we need to ask what is new in terms of contemporary illusions because some of them like democracy have been around for a long time, and are only being viewed as illusions, now. And, the second question is how do we challenge these illusions and then what is their contra-positive construct? Is it truth? I don’t think it is truth, rather it’s hope. So how do we re-articulate illusions into hope and, then we have to elaborate what we mean by hope? And, then, finally turn all that into action.



Podemos was a credible step towards reintegrating people into a new form of progressive politics in Spain/
Credit Thierry Ehrmann

Federico – I think this would be good place to talk about the Left trajectories in southern Europe and Latin America, which are somewhat similar but also quite different. In this context,

I want to talk about the Spanish political party Podemos founded in 2014. They've essentially evolved from the progressive struggles that have emerged and ebbed in Spain over the last couple of decades, most notably the anti-austerity movement "indignados". If you are conversant with the literature on populism by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, it is very interesting to see how Podemos used their analysis as a manual for their own growth. They were simply following protocols, which actually worked and were quite successful. The view of Podemos was that various left struggles were fragmented and so they wanted to re-politicize the scene by creating a joint platform for their demands. They also introduced a touch of patriotic appeal to the struggle of the disempowered in Spain, which also resonated with a lot of people. It was a strong attempt at gaining power, though Podemos did not eventually win a majority (although they became Spain's third party with 20% of the vote). They were, however, victorious in municipal elections with local grassroots candidacies in many big cities including Madrid and Barcelona. And the case of Barcelona is quite interesting because there it's not just Podemos, but a larger municipal government called "Barcelona en Comú" (Catalan for Barcelona in common), which is led by a woman anti-evictions activist called Ada Colau. She came into prominence because of her activist work addressing the mortgage crisis. Barcelona en Comú is a good example of the integration that is taking place between environmentalists, workers and other activists such as the ones who were in the forefront of the mortgage crisis. Many of the workers are migrants from outside Spain and from other parts of the south of Spain as well, and were hard hit by the final crisis and the austerity policies also. They're trying to organize and work at the municipal level though I'm not sure how successful they are. They are facing the usual teething problems faced by people's movements, which come into power. Yet, in my opinion the Podemos and its affiliates are a good template for the global north, certainly more than what Syriza was.

Arturo – So, you do continue to be enthusiastic about the Podemos experiment?

Federico – Well, I'm not naïve. Nothing is perfect. But, within the contours of the Spanish democracy, the strategy that Podemos adopted and was able to execute has been quite successful. But, I think Alberto has a difference of opinion on that matter.

Alberto – In my opinion it was good that Podemos lost the general elections because now it can rethink its politics from the perspective of the communities. And this will also give them the opportunity to free themselves from the politics of charisma.

Ashish – In India we had a somewhat similar experiment, that of the Aam Aadmi Party or Common Man's Party. They had an anti-corruption platform, which resonated with a lot of people. Thousands came out on the streets to support their agenda. The party also asked many social movements to help them with the formulation of their policy framework and their manifesto. They made a mistake, however, of jumping into national electoral politics without actually forming a mass base. They achieved a thumping victory in the state election in the capital, Delhi but a huge loss in the national elections. The party also got entangled in charismatic politics with the leader of the group becoming all-powerful. Its focus on elections also distracted the party from its core agenda of political reform and as they were expanding fast they were bringing in people with dubious social and political records. These developments were questioned by a group of leaders but those who expressed dissent were eventually forced to leave the party, and the party kind of strayed from many of its initial principles even though on many counts it is still somewhat more progressive compared to the older mainstream parties.

Eventually, I think, the issue is a larger one, faced by the Left in Latin America, by Syriza and probably by Podemos, also.



The betrayal of the progressive cause by Syriza has forced people to think of new radical initiatives

The problem is that what they are attempting is to capture state power rather than changing the nature of the state. And, secondly, there is no attempt at changing the existing economic model. In Ecuador's case, for instance, the dependence on extractivism continued and in case of the Aam Aadmi Party, it had some progressive policies but did not challenge the fundamentals of the neoliberal platform of development in India. And, thirdly all these attempts have been mired by a significant neglect of the cultural, ethical, spiritual and personal domain. Unless we are able to interact with the spiritual and psychological spheres in which people exist, given the contemporary illusions and frustrations, it's the right wing fundamentalists who will monopolize that space. In the case of India, it's clear that the Hindu fundamentalism of the ruling party, the BJP has moved into that sphere with a lot of success. In the case of the United States, the driving force could be the latent racism, which has existed within the society for so long, as well as the cultural discourse on guns. These issues are well cultivated and processed in the operational manuals of the right wing.

So, these are three fundamental failures of the Left that I can think of, and I'm sure there are more. But, when we think

about alternatives it has to begin with the exercise of deconstructing the notion of “the state” followed by its reconstruction based on an alternative paradigm of political governance with significantly higher forms of direct democracy.

Ariel — And in this deconstruction, remembering always that “the state” is at base the brutal institutional legitimation of “masculinist entitlement” bequeathed to us from ancient patriarchal times. The illusion of the “social contract” privileged a few men at the expense of most others; and at severe cost to its so-called “other natures” – women, children, animals, and other lesser embodiments.

Ashish — We need to confront that alienation from our own individual power and reclaim it from those to who’ve taken it from us on the pretext of representative democracy. Secondly, we need to reorient the economy completely, move away from extractivism and fossil fuels and move towards relocalization (without being xenophobic or “walled in”) by putting the economy back in the hands of the community. Thirdly, to rebuild the cultural, ethical and the spiritual space which we’ve got alienated from, and in the process to retrace the path to nature which we’ve been disconnected from for a long time.

Arturo – I would say that the most interesting experience in relation to state power is the experience of the Zapatistas. They have explicitly and systematically rejected the idea of fighting to capture state power. And, they have a very sophisticated explanation for why that is so. Recently, they decided to participate in the national elections with an indigenous woman as a single candidate chosen by the National Indigenous People’s Federation. And they have a very powerful explanation of why they have taken that step, which they say is due to the intensification of the destruction of the indigenous people’s lives and territories. It would be very interesting to see how this experiment unfolds, whether they can put together a different coalition to vie for power,

but it would certainly be something quite new.

Federico – One of the points, which I think is common between Syriza, Podemos, and the Five Star Movement in Italy, is the tendency to put forward an alternative based on moral grounds and not on the basis of politics. “We are the good people and you are the corrupt politicians”. These political movements that challenged the two parties system in many states often do not explicitly self-define as left wing. They claim to go beyond the left-right binary. In the case of Podemos, I think this was simply an electoral strategy. In the case of the Italian Five Star Movement this issue has become more delicate. They increasingly appear to be right wing or are coy about those views. For example, they are taking very explicitly right wing stance against the migrants etc. But, that is not the point here. What I have seen with these parties is that they often claim that they want to introduce more direct democracy, both, within and outside the party in various institutions. But, that is another one of those illusions. The Five Star Party, for instance, introduced a very interactive Internet based platform for its members with all the pretense of democratic decision-making. But, as it turned out, it was just a façade, just another kind of an illusion, because their leader Beppe Grillo, a famous comic, continues to take all the important decisions.

The other point I want to address is that of the tension between what the grass roots organizations are doing and what the institutions are doing independently. We might not like the agenda of the institutions but they do have a lot of power and a lot of competencies, which are of some use for change. So, while we have to change these institutions eventually, we also have to take them along till we're able to do that. The other issue is that of the articulation of the grass roots vision and its efficacy. As long as the grass roots initiatives are tinkering with small changes, capital does not have any issue with them – you can have an urban garden, you can run a cooperatives shop in a university but the

moment you start talking about systemic change they come down on you with force, as it's happening in Mexico. Then, the question is how do you respond to that attack. Podemos is one attempt at a fight back. I don't approve of their economic policies, they are quite Keynesian but I would rather have them in power so that I could criticize them.

Ashish – The crucial thing, then, is that even if we support such parties we do so quite critically, while being clear in our mind that they are not the long-term solution we're looking for. That solution lies in all of us reclaiming the "care" once relegated to women, as basis for a direct, radical democracy where "ordinary" people are in control of their own destiny with full responsibility towards that of the others. Such a democracy, obviously, has to be combined with a constant striving towards social justice; transforming the economy to bring it to a human-scale; fostering respect for multiple cultures and knowledge forms ... and all of this based on ethical or spiritual values that we may all share even as we find our diverse paths towards the future. And, which take us also to the most urgent task of all, as Ariel pointed out early on today: to re-make peace with the earth, to learn again to live lightly, to re-integrate ecological sense into everything we do.

Arturo Escobar is Professor of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His main interests are: political ecology, ontological design, and the anthropology of development, social movements, and technoscience. Over the past twenty years, he has worked closely with several Afro-Colombian social movements in the Colombian Pacific, particular the Process of Black Communities (PCN). His most well-known book is *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (1995, 2nd Ed. 2011). His most recent books are

Sentipensar con la Tierra. Nuevas lecturas sobre desarrollo,

territorio y diferencia (2014),

Designs for the Pluriverse. Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds (In press).

Ariel Salleh is a scholar and activist, currently affiliated with Political Economy at the University of Sydney. Her books include *Ecofeminism as Politics: nature, Marx and the postmodern (2017)* and *Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice (2009)*. Her articles and chapters on social ecological thought, globalisation, people's science, water and climate politics and can be found at – www.arielsalleh.info. Her 'embodied materialism' is seminal to political ecology as an emerging study of humanity-nature relations.

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Alberto Acosta is an Ecuadorian economist and the country's former minister of energy and mining. He was the driving force behind the ground-breaking Yasuní-ITT Initiative, an offer by Ecuador to fight climate change by forgoing oil exploration and production in a large tract of untouched rainforest. Acosta is also the ex-president of the Constituent Assembly responsible for drawing up the now famous Montecristi Constitution, which took effect in 2008 and established protection for the rights of nature. Acosta ran unsuccessfully against Rafael Correa for president in 2013—one of eight presidential candidates. He is currently a researcher at FLASCO-Ecuador (Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences).

Ashish Kothari is a co-founder of Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group.

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