

Cover art from Aimé Césaire's *Ou l'athanor d'un alchimiste*

Worlds of hope colonised? Tracking imaginations of modern sustainability in the 21st century

Cian O'Donovan

Dept. of Science & Technology Studies
University College London
c.o'donovan@ucl.ac.uk | @cian

Saurabh Arora

SPRU – Science Policy Research Unit
University of Sussex
s.arora@sussex.ac.uk

4S – Open panel 43 – October 8th 2021

Confronting Worlds: The Concept of "World" and its Stakes

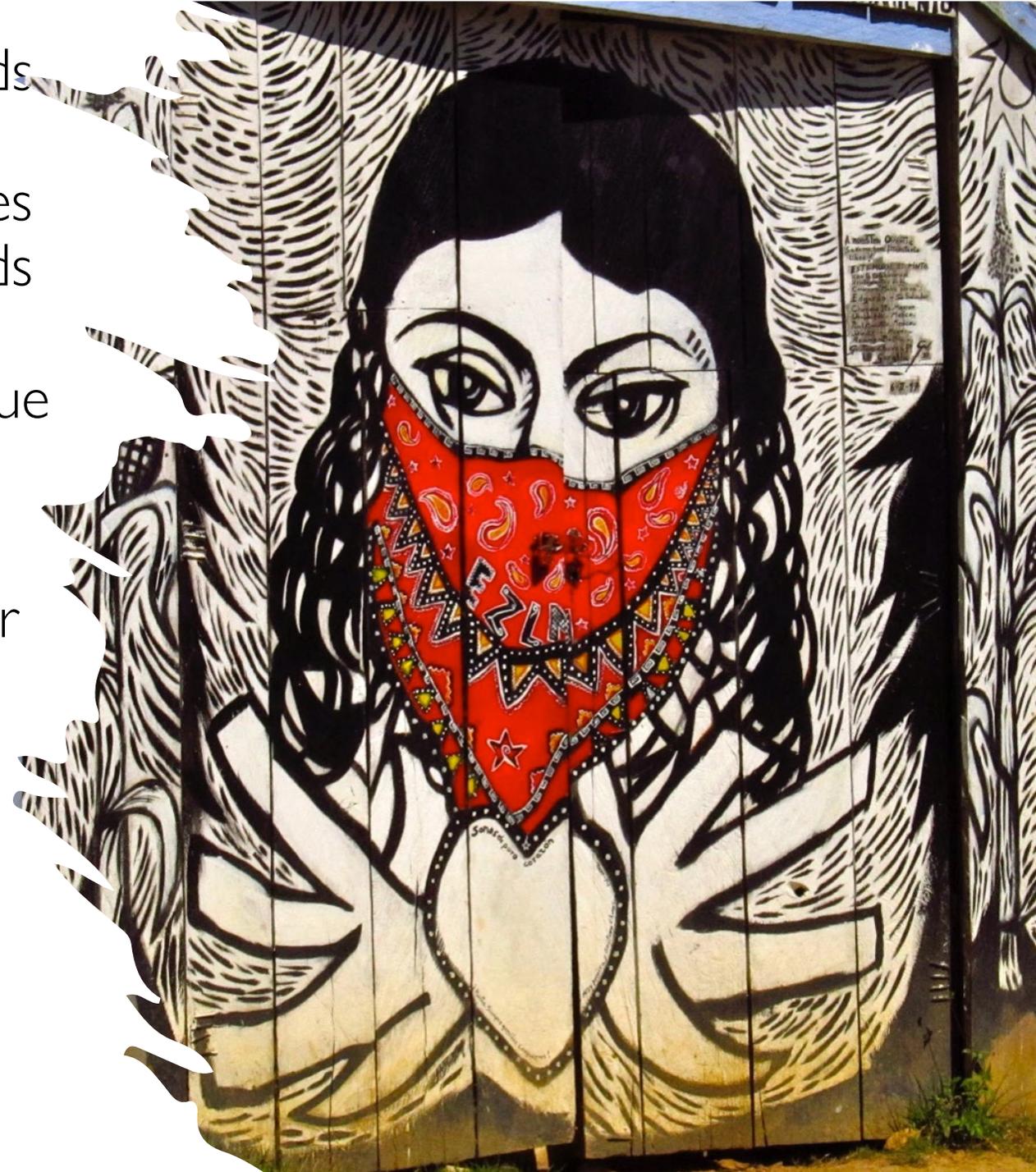
Many words walk in the world. Many worlds are made. Many worlds are made for us. There are words and worlds which are lies and injustices. There are words and worlds which are truths and truthful. We make true words. We have been made from true words.

In the world of the powerful there is no space for anyone but themselves and their servants.

In the world *we want* everyone fits.

In the world *we want* many worlds to fit.

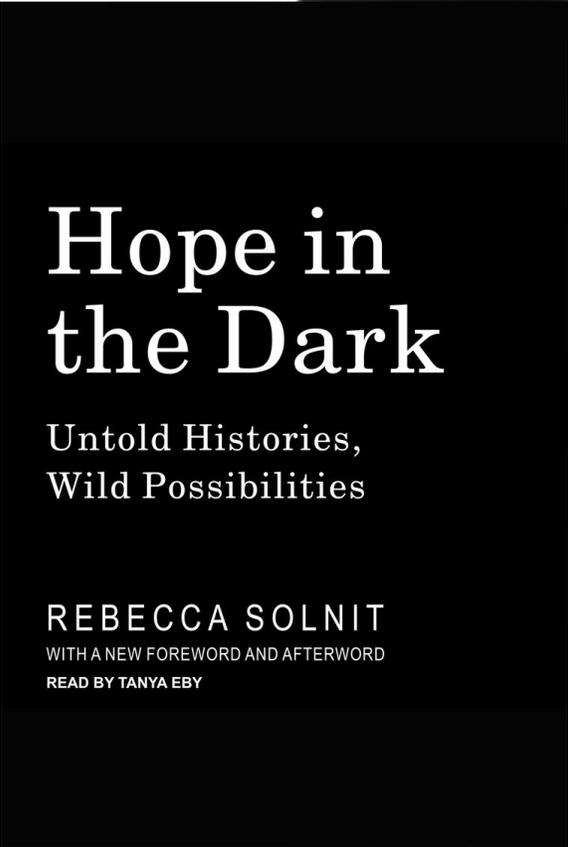
-- The Zapatistas, Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, 1996



Hope

Hopes are (emotive) visions of societies, akin to imaginaries and expectations, ...but *wilder*

- Hope is insurgent
- Hope is divergent and therefore *pluriversal*
- It walks in many worlds!
- Hope can offer alternatives to the power that closes down possibilities



Hope in the Dark

Untold Histories,
Wild Possibilities

REBECCA SOLNIT
WITH A NEW FOREWORD AND AFTERWORD
READ BY TANYA EBLY

Hope

Hope is performative: conditions action, central to activism

- It helps make socio-material futures
- But always in the "spaciousness of **uncertainty**" where there is room to be *influenced by* directions of change not just influencing them



Wild Possibilities



The *colonisation* of hope?

Colonisation not a metaphor, but rather a modern assemblage of practices that:

- ‘Inferiorise’ people on the basis of race, ethnicity and nationality, too often accompanied with violence and dispossession
 - Always intersecting in complex ways with patriarchal structures of power
 - 'Inferiorisation' helps lower the price of extracted resources and labour-value
- Deride and destroy ways of being-becoming-belonging associated with ‘inferiorised’ peoples
 - Settler-colonial elimination of ‘native’ differences in ways of knowing (Wolfe 2006)
- Aim to control socio-material futures of ‘inferiorised’ peoples
 - By trying to squeeze pluriversal hope (that is performative), into the ‘one world world’ of modernity (Law 2015)
 - Also through quests for sustainability and resilience...

Colonising
imaginations of
modern
sustainability?

If he who pays the bills
is king, call your house
a mighty ruler.



daylight. savings.
BP SOLAR

Why have an idea home? When you install BP Solar panels onto your roof, sunlight is converted into clean energy. If more energy is produced than needed, you can sell the rest back and earn extra cash every month. In addition to the electricity bill, your house will pay for the water, cable and phone bills, or even a trip to Costco. To learn more about making your house a king, visit bp.com/solar.

*“The science is clear. It is understood **we** are facing an unprecedented **global** emergency. We are in a life and death situation of **our own making.**”*

-- Extinction Rebellion launch
press release

Extinction Rebellion

Three modern thrusts:

- Universalist understandings of the harms of climate change and who should speak about them
- Science as *the* truth that must be told
- A tendency to reify the state as the actor and institution through which all change must pass (perhaps because the modern state has always protected the privilege of XR's dominant voices)





"There was a palpable feeling that we did have agency to make decisions about our future and we could act to create the type of world we all want to live in."

Extinction Rebellion: radical or rational?

The UK government has declared a climate change emergency.¹ Respected fellow GPs have been arrested on actions with Extinction Rebellion. Initially I was perplexed by this and wondered how they came to take this course of action. Although I have friends who have tried to fly less and become vegan for environmental purposes, I had never really given serious thought to climate change and its consequences, let alone participate in any climate activism. I'm not really sure I have rebelled in many things in my life at all. Over the Easter holidays, though, I found myself repeatedly at Extinction Rebellion's blockades in Central London with my young son and husband (a paediatric trainee).

Now I find myself spending time helping to organise a group of doctors and healthcare professionals in support of Extinction Rebellion. In the space of a few weeks, I have gone from being a respected professional to talking on the role of what some people would describe as a radical activist.

A Master's degree in Public Health and Development at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine has stretched my horizons about the different dimensions of health. I hadn't previously considered that climate change had major ramifications for public health and was startled by the evidence presented on my course about the influence of transnational corporations fuelling doubt on this issue and permitting the inaction we see today. It is frightening to realise how bleak the future will be for my son's generation.

Like many GPs, I feel passionate about striving to improve the quality of life for my patients and the community. However, I have come to realise that the significant developments we are making in thinking around multimorbidity, and improving equity to health and prevention, are completely overshadowed by the unrecognised elephant in the room: climate and ecological breakdown.

In March, a doctor colleague posted a video on social media and invited viewers to join her, with her husband, two primary-school-age children, and grandparents, to the International Rebellion at Parliament Square in April. I saw an advert for a local talk about Extinction Rebellion and within a few days my family and I had participated in our first action — a bike ride through the

streets of Hackney dressed as bees.

We arrived nervously at Marble Arch on the first day of the Rebellion, not really knowing what to expect and how long we would stay. I was taken aback by the calm, welcoming atmosphere and the respectful behaviour towards the police and vice versa. There was a palpable feeling that we did have agency to make decisions about our future and we could act to create the type of world we all want to live in.

We kept coming back to the road blockades. We played football on the four-lane roundabout of Marble Arch and we turned Waterloo Bridge into a playground. As we cycled blissfully through the clean, quiet streets of a car-free Central London, the impossible suddenly seemed possible.

The youth climate marches led by Greta Thunberg have been an inspiration. For decades, well-intentioned, well-resourced people and organisations have worked hard to try to change our society's attitudes and actions towards the environment. This hasn't worked. Although I have no desire to be arrested, I now fully support mass participation in non-violent civil disobedience on this issue when faced with government inaction. The individual decisions that led to over 1000 arrests in April at the Extinction Rebellion blockades now seem understandable, logical, and rational.

Extinction Rebellion has three demands of our government:

- 1. Tell the Truth.** Government must continue to tell the truth after declaring a climate and ecological emergency, working with other institutions to communicate the urgency for change.
- 2. Act Now.** Government must act now to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025.
- 3. Go Beyond Politics.** Government must create and be led by the decisions of a Citizens' Assembly on climate and ecological justice.

Let us use our voices to ensure this is acted upon to protect the health of our communities.

Deepa Shah,
Locum GP, Hackney, London; Medicolegal Reports
Doctor, Freedom from Torture, London.

Email: deepashah83@hotmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp19X704357>

"It is frightening to realise how bleak the future will be for my son's generation"

-- Deepa Shah
in the British Journal of General Practice

REFERENCE

1. UK parliament declares climate change emergency. *BBC News* 2019; 1 May: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-48126677> (accessed 10 Jun 2019).

Extinction Rebellion

Despair and fear as
puritanism of the privileged,
where hopes for a '*many
worlds world*' are silenced
or submerged under

Ideas of uncertainty,
knowledge democracy,
plural ways of knowing and
epistemic justice are
entirely absent from XR
discourses



... but what about a new form of carbon colonialism and the colonisation of worlds of hope?



NESTLÉ'S NET ZERO ROADMAP

Our path to regeneration for future generations

Solving the problem means identifying the problem. We found Nestlé emitted 92 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions in 2018*. Now we know the extent, we know the road ahead.

*Total GHG emissions were 113 million tonnes (CO₂ equivalent) in 2018, 92 of which are in scope of our UN 1.5°C pledge.

Companies and their emissions

Moving faster

We're excited to hit the soil running. We're accelerating our work in manufacturing, packaging and carbon-neutral brands. We're also investing CHF 1.2 billion to help spark regenerative agriculture across our supply chain, as part of a total investment of CHF 3.2 billion by 2025.

Our milestones

- 100% deforestation free for primary supply chain by 2022
- Switch our global fleet of vehicles to lower emission options by 2022
- 100% certified sustainable palm oil by 2023
- 100% renewable electricity in all our sites by 2025
- 100% of our packaging recyclable or reusable by 2025
- 100% certified sustainable cocoa and coffee by 2025
- Source 20% of key ingredients through regenerative agricultural
- Cut virgin plastic in our packaging by a third by 2025

Scaling up

Further down the greener path, we will invest in new technologies and fundamental changes to our products and businesses around the globe.

- Use more renewable thermal energy in our manufacturing
- Source 50% of key ingredients through regenerative agricultural methods by 2030
- Plant 200 million trees by 2030

Delivering our promise

Advanced agricultural techniques will deliver a regenerative food system at scale, supported by zero emission logistics and company operations. We will balance any remaining emissions through high-quality natural climate solutions that benefit people and the planet.

"The (net-zero) 'ambition' metric is at the intersection of scientific, emotion, and moral influence"

- Bressand & Ekins (2021)

By 2050, we will reach

net zero

2018

2021

2025

2030

2050

Net-zero

- Convenient solution for avoiding real transformation and favouring the pathways that do not alter the social status quo
- “net-zero implies that if there is a certain amount of climate-changing emissions in one place, it can be ‘offset’ elsewhere”
- “a mindset that equates pollution emitted or forest cut in one place to pollution absorbed or afforestation done elsewhere, is ecologically and socially ignorant (or willfully negligent)”
 - Carbon is not the only problem, obvs
 - A numbers game with no consideration “for the complexity, quality, and multiple values of the forests that will be cleared”
- Constructing ['green' sacrifice zones?](#)

Kothari, A. (2021, July 13). *The 'net-zero' greenwash*. Wall Street International. <https://wsimag.com/economy-and-politics/66356-the-net-zero-greenwash>

The ‘net-zero’ greenwash

Climate crisis and biodiversity loss are becoming impossible to ignore

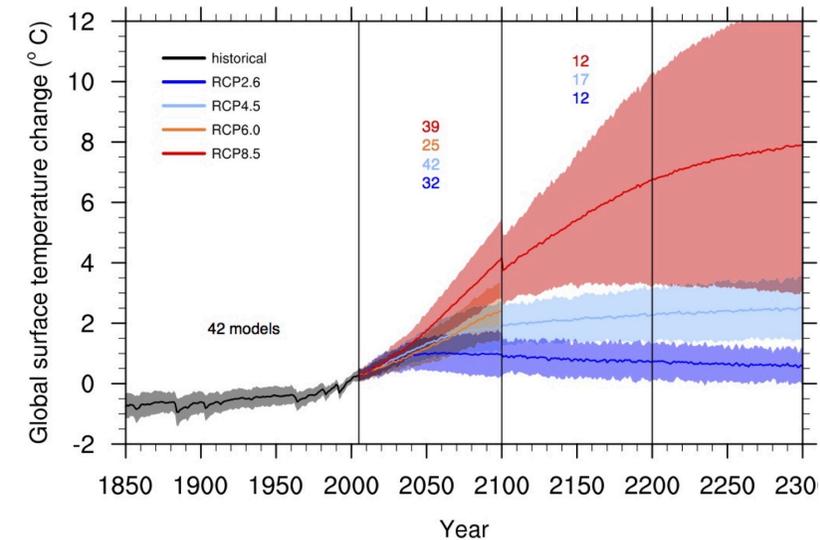
13 JULY 2021, ASHISH KOTHARI



The goal of the net-zero emissions transition is more than ever necessary today

Every once in a while, a seductive term comes along to save the fortress of rulers from being taken down by disgruntled ‘subjects’. We’ve had concepts like ‘inclusive’, ‘sustainable’, and ‘participatory’, each hiding what is otherwise business as usual. The latest in this lineage is ‘net-zero’.

Net zero – technofixes to colonise hope?



- The IPCC doesn't just forecast futures, it helps make them: "Integrated Assessment Modelling pathways help to bring certain futures into being"
 - IAMs have become more reliant on negative emissions technologies, thereby performatively helping to bring these technologies and social orders into being
- Discourses around such techno-fixes emphasise consensus, closure and stabilization of facts
 - All kinds of scientific, technical and economic uncertainties left unacknowledged as climate science hits policy
- Technological promises, policies and climate change targets as co-evolving, yet the promises often remain buried inside the models used to inform policy
- If policy demands net-zero and 1.5° limits, modellers are likely to include technologies like solar radiation management in their next generation models without consideration for uncertainties, precaution, democracy
- "Seemingly radical technologies are promoted in ways that project into the future our current economic and political structures" - Smith and Fressoli 2021

Conclusions

- Hope suffers when those who help build futures can only imagine and walk through 'one world world' of modernity
 - In the name of sustainability, thus, the earth's pluriverse of thousands of still surviving biocultural ways of living/knowing on earth, and 7000+ languages, is subordinated to the net-zero or climate agendas of movements like Extinction Rebellion and institutions like IPCC
 - The same pluriverse (in its more flourishing and expansive versions) has been similarly subordinated to modern economic growth and development, over the last 500+ years
- Crucial to decolonise hope therefore, by letting it dream and build a many worlds world
 - Solidarity with 'indigenous' environmental resistance and the thriving of pluriversal ways of living therefore more important than ever before

Selected references

Arora, S., Dyck, B. V., Sharma, D., & Stirling, A. (2020). Control, care, and conviviality in the politics of technology for sustainability. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 16(1), 247–262. <https://doi.org/10/gh65np>

Beck, S., Jasanoff, S., Stirling, A., & Polzin, C. (2021). The governance of sociotechnical transformations to sustainability. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 49, 143–152. <https://doi.org/10/gkpsjp>

Beck & Mahony (2017). The IPCC and the politics of anticipation. *Nature Climate Change*, 7(5), 311–313. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate3264>

Bressand & Ekins (2021). How the decarbonisation discourse may lead to a reduced set of policy options for climate policies in Europe in the 2020s. Energy Research & Social Science, 78, 102218. <https://doi.org/10/gkmpz>

Escobar, A. (2011). Sustainability: Design for the pluriverse. *Development*, 54(2), 137–140. <https://doi.org/10/dvgvv4>

Gunderson, R. (2020). Dialectics Facing Prehistoric Catastrophe: Merely Possible Climate Change Solutions. *Critical Sociology*, 46(4–5), 605–621. <https://doi.org/10/gmp47d>

Hansson (2012). Colonizing the future: The case of CCS. In N. Markusson, S. Shackley, & B. Evar (Eds.), *The Social Dynamics of Carbon Capture and Storage*. Routledge.

James, D., & Mack, T. (2020). Toward an ethics of decolonizing allyship in climate organizing: Reflections on Extinction Rebellion Vancouver. *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment*, <https://doi.org/10/gmg7v4>

Kothari, A. (2021, July 13). *The 'net-zero' greenwash*. Wall Street International. <https://wsimag.com/economy-and-politics/66356-the-net-zero-greenwash>

McLaren & Markusson (2020). The co-evolution of technological promises, modelling, policies and climate change targets. *Nature Climate Change*, 10(5), 392–397. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-0740-1>

Shah, D. (2019). Viewpoint: Extinction Rebellion: radical or rational? *British Journal of General Practice*, 69(684), 345–345. <https://doi.org/10/gmg7vj>

Solnit, R. (2016). *Hope in the dark: Untold histories, wild possibilities*. Haymarket Books.

Smith, A., & Fressoli, M. (2021). Post-automation. *Futures*. <https://doi.org/10/gkm4d7>