

# **Reclaiming Peoples' Power in Copenhagen 2009: A Victory for Ecosocialist Ecofeminism\***

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At this stage of my life I am celebrating a double victory for ecofeminism. It is both my own framework for practice and an alternative to capitalism that is growing into a global jubilee.

Central to ecofeminism as I understand it, is the clear imperative that we must engage with capitalism. And not capitalism in the abstract, but capitalism that is structured around the “patriarchal market economy.”

The patriarchal market economy is a system that has continued to kill life, by conquering, occupying, and commodifying any manifestation of life for profit. Women, as the custodians of life, are the first to be conquered and to be occupied. And to be exploited. And they have stayed engaged and resilient, and especially we women from Africa. And that is why I have never had any hesitation to say, “We African women have refused to die for Africa. We live for Africa.”

We African women have had to defend life, because many of our men have been very good instruments of the patriarchal market economy. They have made deals, which I would call their “male deals,” to serve the interests of finance capital at the altar of market and profit. And that has been a big burden to us women. We have had to creatively and innovatively come up with what I call ecosocialist ecofeminism. This means that in refusing to die, we seek alternatives to guarantee ourselves lifelines and livelihoods. That way, we build solidarity among women. We motivate our spirits to believe we have a capacity to manage our own lives irrespective of exclusion and the very clear strategy of capitalists to exploit every aspect of our lives, from our own blood to our labor, both in production and reproduction.

Here at the peoples' assembly in Copenhagen, I realized that ecosocialist ecofeminism has emerged victorious. There is a new consciousness afoot in the world that says we—not the exploiters—must, can, and do manage our lives. Capitalists are in crisis. Their process of absolute, unbounded global exploitation has been challenged. So, the second victory here in Copenhagen is the universal recognition that this collapsing patriarchal market economy owes humanity an economic debt, and owes us and the planet ecological debt and climate debt. And because nature cannot speak for itself, it is we, the women of the world, who must now stand up and say, it is life not profit. It is planet and people, but not planet and money.

And there is a third victory here in Copenhagen: “planet and money,” which is in serious crisis at the government climate talks at the Bella Center. The negotiations of COP 15<sup>1</sup> are a beehive

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\* This statement by Wahu Kaara was recorded by Terisa E. Turner on December 19, 2009 in Copenhagen. It was transcribed and edited by Terisa E. Turner and Leigh Brownhill.

<sup>1</sup> COP 15 is the fifteenth conference of the government parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This December 2009 conference in Copenhagen was supposed to negotiate an agreement on greenhouse gas emissions for the post-2012 period to succeed the Kyoto Protocol.

of wheeling and dealing and male arm-twisting, with no result. But here at the Peoples' assembly at the Klimaforum, it is a straightforward march for ecosocialism, for ecofeminism, for alternatives, for reclaiming peoples' power, for proclaiming the united people of the world, and for being very clear and to the point that the time for climate justice is now. Climate justice is guaranteed by ecosocialism. Copenhagen is a victory for those who are connected to life, for those whose thinking and action are guided by the principles of life, that is the women.

And that is why we are talking of "a Mother world." And mark my words, not "Another world," but "a Mother world,"<sup>2</sup> because "a Father world" has failed.<sup>3</sup> A Father world is guided by greed, hatred, wars. A Father world has put in place an intricate global web of military hardware to perpetrate violence in conquering and occupation for profit. In this web of capitalists, military hardware propels their agri-business, which connects with the insurance industry, which connects with the pharmaceuticals, and which connects with the banking system, which has already collapsed in our eyes. And to revive it, they again try to use our energies. They have taken money from the poor people to resuscitate the banks. They are trying to take more. If climate crisis was the banks, they would have a solution.

The financial magnates are bankrupt. The governments are stealing poor peoples' money and wealth and lives. In the face of this bankrupting of the poor, this death-dealing, we ecosocialist-ecofeminists are here to assert that the people of the world are not bankrupt in ideas, in political thinking, in analysis, and in commitment to very spirited action to reclaim the power to make decisions and have destiny in our hands. And that power and that destiny is in the women's hands. All that is what ecosocialism and ecofeminism is.

In Copenhagen, we of the peoples' movement took this global commitment to a new level. On the 18th of December 2009, I, Wahu Kaara, from Kenya, a small woman, was given the opportunity in the closing assembly to proclaim the end of the empire, the death of the patriarchal market economy, and the emergence of the power of the women, the power of the people of the world united on principles and ethics and morals and determination to see that there is no more plunder, no more occupation, no more irresponsibility in matters of how we relate among ourselves and also with nature. How we relate with each other and nature is guided by the principles of equity, the principles of bottom-up, participatory, horizontal democracy. These are the relations of a distributive participatory economy which is subsistence.<sup>4</sup> It is so clear: who other than the women are authorities on horizontal, participatory democracy and a distributive subsistence economy? And what else is this but ecosocialism, ecofeminism?

So in terms of the "Mother world" or ecofeminist framework, we already have it. In terms of the mechanism of how to coordinate and make it happen, we have proclaimed it here at the Peoples'

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<sup>2</sup> Adapting the World Social Forum slogan, "Another World is Possible," scholars of the Gift Economy and those working within the arena of Matriarchal Studies convened a joint conference in 2009 entitled, "A Mother World is Possible." Wahu Kaara was the keynote speaker at this conference, held at York University in Toronto, Canada, October 23-25, 2009. See: <http://www.motherworldconference.org/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Mies, "'War is the Father of All Things' (Heraclitus) 'But Nature is the Mother of Life' (Claudia von Werlhof)," *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, Vol. 17, No. 1, March 2006, pp.18-31. Mies' paper is adapted from her keynote address to the conference, "Ecology, Imperialism and the Contradictions of Capitalism." This *Capitalism Nature Socialism* Anniversary Conference was held at York University in Toronto, July 22-24, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Kaara is subscribing to the "subsistence" or life-centered political economy that stands against the commodified relations of capital. See Maria Mies and Veronica Bennholt-Thompson's *The Subsistence Perspective* (London: Zed, 1999).

assembly. Klimaforum has been two weeks of very intense linkages of movements to movements—peoples' movements that together are the agency of social transformation, agency of economic reconstruction, agency of political analysis, agency of practical realization. Out of this intense linkage building, in contrast to the governments that have nothing, we do have a consensus declaration: System change not climate change!

We have agreed that system change is necessary to stop climate change. Because it is the patriarchal market system that is defective, that is dead, that is not acceptable. It itself is a mechanism of genocide. Against it we have ecosocialist ecofeminism located and grounded in peoples' energy in the motion of this global peoples' movement of reconstruction.

The stark contrast between dead capitalism and jubilant ecofeminism was everywhere apparent in Copenhagen. The Peoples' assembly was nothing other than dynamic, vibrant motion of human connection in ideas, in spirit, in love, and in testimony in proclaiming this new dispensation for system change. I tell you. We are witness to a paradigm shift here in Copenhagen. That is why I am saying it is a victory for me. That is why I am going home a very fulfilled person. Because I have been in a peoples' forum that has one voice and one manifesto: to reclaim power strategically both outside where the movements are and inside where decisions are made.

The 16<sup>th</sup> of December 2009 was a historical, remarkable day here in Copenhagen. We the people had our action outside the official talks. In a symbolic action we were reclaiming power as the Peoples' assembly in the face of government paralysis and intransigence. Demonstrators outside called on official delegates to walk out and stand with the peoples' delegates and ratify a popular climate change solution premised on system change. Many of us were inside the Bella Center, refusing to be co-opted and integrated, refusing to be tokens, refusing to sanction the wheeling and dealing. We did march out of the Bella Center. We met and joined the Peoples' assembly. We proclaimed the reclaiming of peoples' power. We did this in spite of the police surveillance and brutality. I had never imagined that police brutality could happen like this in Western capitals.

Before Copenhagen I thought issues of democracy and human rights were only in question in the part of the world I come from. Then I saw the police in Copenhagen brutalizing the people of the world. I wondered whether I was back in the Kenya I knew during President Moi's dictatorship.<sup>5</sup> And I wondered about the contradiction gripping the Danish government. Why, in the 1990s, had the Danish government claimed to us Kenyans that Denmark could support us to stand up for our rights and to fight for democracy? The Danish people through their Royal Danish Embassy in Nairobi, through the Danish aid agency, Danida, that I have worked with, have supported us as we marched forward to reclaim our democratic space in Kenya. Then it was so ironical to come to Copenhagen, the Danish capital, and see the same police brutality we faced in Kenya. That is why I am saying that this experience is a victory for me. Because I have witnessed the double standards. This confirmed my conviction that it is the system that is defective. The system is what is death. The system is what kills. The system is what is structurally compounded with inherent genocidal mechanisms. And the system has to go.

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel arap Moi was president of Kenya from 1978 to 2002. He presided over a brutal dictatorship. He outlawed opposition parties by changing the constitution and called Kenya a single party democracy. A vigorous democracy movement succeeded in legitimizing opposition parties in 1992, but it took a decade and three general elections before Moi was voted out.

The violent extremes of the Danish police testified to the fact that system change is what we must go for, and not climate change. And not token “solutions” or “science to the rescue” with “technical fixes.” And not reforms. And not “conditional” debt cancellation. And not tree planting for carbon trading. And not cutting down emissions through slick fixes. And not all these false solutions that marketeers are trying to impose to silence us. And not science that has been paid for and supervised by the interests of the market. What does this false “science” do? It constructs so-called “scientific” research. It tries to convince the people of the world through “scientific” jargon and mathematics that if we do this and that, we will have solved the climate problem. But the terrible deception is that inherent in those mathematical calculations is the pseudo-science and hard sell to win over the whole world to accept that profiteers can solve the climate problem by commodifying air. And then sell it to us. Because carbon trade is nothing else than commodifying the air for sale.

The vibrant and creative peoples’ forum assured me of one truth. That we have won. And we must take confidence from having that framework, ecosocialism-ecofeminism as our way forward. And we call upon our best thinkers to articulate in more detail what ecosocialism and ecofeminism are. We all should come together in action to make real ecosocialism and ecofeminism. And we all must reclaim and build relations in which the center of decision-making is grounded at the level of ecosocialism and ecofeminism. This is where the women are on the ground at the community level, at the level where determinants of life matter, where all of us participate and contribute. Because ecosocialist-ecofeminism guarantees every human being an opportunity to be dignified, in participation, in making a contribution to human well-being. And that is the difference that we are looking for. That is what we have as women. That is what is plentiful in the so-called Third World. And that is the way forward. The 21<sup>st</sup> century belongs to ecosocialist ecofeminism. I have no doubt in my mind. It is here in Copenhagen. It has always been there in our groundings. And here we have proclaimed it, and we have raised the flag, and the sky is the limit in the reconstruction and rebuilding of the world.