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A Climate for Change? Critical Reflections on the Durban United Nations Climate Change Conference

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Change Conference

Abstract

Despite more than 15 years of high level efforts led by the United Nations to broker a binding agreement on emissions reduction, negotiations at every annual meeting have failed to establish a global agreement mainly due to significant disagreements between industrialized and developing countries over differentiated responsibilities in reducing emissions. In this paper I describe my experiences as a participant-observer at the 17th United Nations Climate Change summit held in Durban, South Africa during December 2011. I provide a critical analysis of the political economy of climate change and discuss power dynamics between market, state and civil society sectors as well as the shifting geopolitics that marks the emergence of China and India as major players in the climate change arena.

A Climate for Change? Critical Reflections on the Durban United Nations Climate Change Conference

'*Saving Tomorrow Today'* – UN Durban Climate Conference mission statement

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing

Macbeth Act 5, Scene 5.

Introduction

It has been sixteen years since world leaders first gathered together in Berlin as part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to discuss global impacts of climate change, and means to combat global warming. Since then the Conference of the Parties (or as described uncharitably by some critics as the Conference of the Polluters) has met every year in an attempt to develop a binding global agreement to address climate change. The landmark Kyoto Protocol adopted in 1997 at the third Conference of the Parties (COP3) was the world's first international agreement that set binding targets for industrialized countries to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. However, since then negotiations at every annual meeting have failed to establish a global agreement, mainly due to significant disagreements between industrialized and developing countries over differentiated responsibilities in reducing emissions. The 2009 conference at Copenhagen was widely regarded as being critical to

producing a global agreement, especially given that the Kyoto protocol was due to expire in 2012. However, far from reaching a global agreement the failure of Copenhagen highlighted the depth of distrust and disagreement between and within industrialized and developing countries (Carter et al., 2011). These divisions and power blocs became even more entrenched at the Cancun conference of 2010, which also failed to deliver a global agreement.

It was in this context of uncertainty and intractable differences between industrialized and developing countries along with the United States' steadfast refusal to ratify the Kyoto protocol and their opposition, along with China and India, to agree to legally binding emissions targets that the Durban conference was held during November 28–December 9, 2011. Given the hype of Copenhagen and its spectacular failure, expectations that Durban would result in any agreement were low. Fears of another global recession, the ongoing political stalemate in the United States, concerns about the future of the Eurozone and the relentless economic growth and concomitant increases in GHG emissions of China and India loomed large over the Durban conference.

In this paper I describe my experiences at the Durban Climate Change Conference or more accurately the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 7th Session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties (CMP7) to the Kyoto Protocol, which I attended with the formal affiliation of an 'observer' belonging to a 'non-governmental organization' (NGO), the University of Western Sydney. The paper makes two contributions: first, it describes the organizational processes of international climate change negotiations and analyzes the power dynamics between market, state and civil society actors. Much of the literature on business and climate change has examined how

firms respond to climate change issues (Hoffman, 2005; Kolk, 2005). The influence of major corporations and their industry associations in climate change negotiations has not received much attention — notable exceptions being the work of Levy & Egan (2003) and Newell & Paterson (1998) — and this paper describes how institutional and discursive strategies arising from the market-state nexus shape climate policy regimes at the international level. Second, the paper analyzes the geopolitical shifts and the emergence of new coalitions in the climate change arena. The emergence of China and India as key players in the global economy has created new fault lines in the North-South divide and political alliances that have characterized climate change negotiations since their inception during the late 1980s. I show how these shifting coalitions influence the politics of climate change.

The paper is structured as follows: first, I discuss the political economy of climate change negotiations and describe the power dynamics between key actors and institutions. The organization of global negotiation processes and the inclusions and exclusions that result can influence outcomes of negotiations, creating policy regimes that can have profound consequences for society (Depledge, 2004). Second, I provide a backdrop to the Durban conference and describe my experiences as an observer of the negotiation process. Third, I analyze the power dynamics between market, state and civil society actors that constitute the political economy of climate change and describe how these dynamics influenced the outcomes of the Durban conference. Durban marked a shift in the geopolitics of climate change with the emergence of Brazil, India and China as powerful players in the global arena. I conclude by discussing future prospects for any global agreement on climate change.

The Political Economy of Climate Change

Insights from international relations, in particular regime theory, have been the conventional approach to understanding global negotiations conducted under the auspices of bodies like the United Nations or the World Trade Organization. Following from a liberal tradition, international institutions or regimes determine the nature of cooperation and conflict between nation states in the global political economy. These regimes establish particular codes of behavior to which states as rational actors are expected to conform in an attempt to seek international cooperation (Krasner, 1982). However, regime theory does not provide a sophisticated understanding of how power, particularly the institutional, material and discursive power of capital, is exercised in the political economy (Levy & Egan, 2004; Newell & Paterson, 1998). In era of neo-liberal globalization the rationality of the state is contingent on providing and maintaining the conditions necessary for capitalist accumulation.

Thus, the nexus between the state, transnational capital, corporations and their industry associations transforms the role of the state from a 'guarantor of society's progress' (Donzelot, 1988: 395) to protecting and promoting economic interests, which are generally consistent with corporate interests. Economic competitiveness obtains its social legitimacy through an ideology whereby 'progress' and 'development' can be achieved only by production and consumption of goods and services. Discursive power operates in the political economy by only allowing solutions to environmental problems like climate change that do not challenge the developmental model nor adversely affect corporate competitive strategies. Institutional logics and institutional power along with the material power of large corporations ensure that certain groups have the capacity to direct

enormous resources towards providing solutions that sustain hegemonic interests (Perrow, 1979). Consequently the market-state nexus favors big technology solutions like carbon capture and storage or geo-engineering as preferred ways to address climate change, emissions trading as the preferred mode of reducing emissions, and private banks as providers of the necessary financial infrastructure. The state becomes 'the most powerful promoter of commercial organizations as the means of fulfilling its public obligation...Public decisions rest more and more on the economic rather than in the political sphere' (Deetz, 1992: 20). A critical perspective on the political economy of climate change locates power as the central unit of analysis and will enable us to understand how particular climate change regimes are created and sustained (Payne, 2005).

Constructing the Climate Change Regime

Drawing from critical perspectives on political economy, notably the work of Cox (1981) and Payne (2005), we can describe the structure of a climate change regime as being contingent on relationships between material capabilities, ideas and institutions. Configurations of these three forces shape prospects and constraints on climate change action. Material capabilities include natural resources, technology and industrial infrastructure. Ideas refer to accepted notions about contemporary social relations as well as 'contested ideologies about alternative social orders' (Payne, 2005: 17). Particular arrangements of ideas and material capabilities are sustained by institutions that are in turn subject to the same forces of change. It is also important to understand that structural configurations of the political economy of climate change are also social constructions, 'persistent social practices, made by collective human activity and transformed by collective human activity' (Payne, 2005: 17).

In the context of climate change negotiations there is a fundamental and universally shared assumption that energy is a key driver of economic growth. The power of the fossil fuel lobby emanates from this basic assumption and explains how their lobbying efforts in climate change negotiations have been successful. The interests of states in ensuring that climate change regimes do not create any obstacles to economic growth thus coincide with the interests of the fossil fuel industry (Levy & Egan, 2004; Newell & Paterson, 1998). Discourses of climate change become inextricably linked with discourses of development where development and energy security are problems for both developing and industrialized countries. Climate change negotiations involve several actors lobbying for a variety of positions where particular configurations of interests comprising of governments, institutions, corporations and transnational managerial elites or what Gramsci (1971) calls a 'transnational historical bloc' are able to exercise their structural power to ensure that any agreement would not harm their interests.

The institutional logic of climate negotiations is dominated by an economic agenda whereby discourses of economic development take precedence over environmental sustainability. Hegemonic structures constitutive of both coercive and consensual power establish and sustain a dominant ideology whereby market mechanisms such as carbon trading become the primary mechanism to reduce emissions and emphasis tends to be on voluntary rather than legislative measures (Böhm, & Dabhi, 2009; Bumpus & Liverman, 2008). Critics argue that apart from simplification of complex ecosystem damage, practices like carbon trading serve to impose a system of property rights that 'licenses enclosures of land, air, water and labor in the global South to serve the 'carbon needs' of the North' (Lohmann, 2011: 101).

There are also complexities and inequalities in the organization of global climate negotiations. Despite assertions by the organizers of climate negotiations that the process is inclusive and democratic, the fact remains that there are structural power inequalities among participating states that result in 'procedural inequity' or 'the unequal capacity of parties to participate effectively in negotiations' (Depledge, 2004: 10). Being allowed to participate in negotiations as a legitimate stakeholder does not mean that all participants have similar capabilities in making their voices heard. In describing climate change negotiations, Depledge (2004) points to vast disparities in the size of delegations of countries that in turn influence negotiating capacity. Negotiations typically involve several parallel sessions and smaller delegations find it impossible to participate effectively in every meeting that is held at the conference.

Global environmentalism like global economic systems is also the outcome of power relationships between the institutional power of multilateral environmental institutions, the economic power of the industrialized nations and transnational corporations, and the discursive power of the 'environmental-economic paradigm' that allows the environment to be protected only by commodifying it and controlling its means of exchange (McAfee, 1999). These power dynamics create a particular from of political rationality through a process of governmentality, where 'power is exercised in the form of economy' aimed at shaping and guiding the conduct of environmental policies (Foucault, 1979: 92). Civil society and the public spheres are also informed by this rationality where the society and state interface is managed through the market. Through the dynamics of discursive and institutional power, this market-state system positions itself 'above' society and its competing social forces while obscuring its key role in the accumulation process. In the context of climate change negotiations governmentality as a form of 'social

government' (Gordon, 1991: 42) isolates the economic in such a way that institutions and policies focus more on the anti-competitive effects of climate change regulation rather than on the negative environmental and social effects of unbridled economic growth. As we will see later, the discourse of competitiveness dominated much of the negotiations at the Durban conference.

Methods: I came, I observed, I participated and I interviewed

The Durban conference was held during November 28 – December 9, 2011. My intention in attending the conference was to document whatever I could, from the various meetings, workshops, panel discussions and daily press briefings that I attended, to the discussions and interviews I had with several delegates and my own observations about the conference and how events unfolded. I did not approach the conference with specific questions — rather my aim was to observe the interactions between different actors and organizations, the actual processes of treaty and policymaking, the different coalitions and institutional arrangements between key actors and to understand the power dynamics between market, state and civil society sectors as well as between North-South countries. I attended 3 plenary sessions, 4 working group meetings, 6 side-events, 7 workshops organized by industry groups, 4 presentations by environmental organizations, and 19 panel discussions as well as the daily press briefings. In addition, I interviewed 13 delegates from Australia, Brazil, China, Germany, India, South Africa, United Kingdom and United States representing industry groups, government agencies and environmental NGOs. I also analyzed 121 documents and reports that were made available during the conference. My description of what transpired in Durban including quotes from various participants is based on my field notes, document analysis, transcripts of interviews and panel

discussions. Some of the panel discussions and interviews were audiotaped with the permission of respondents. In all I had 43 audio files of panel discussions, workshops and one-on-one interviews totaling about 65 hours of conversation. Table 1 lists the key participants of various meetings and panel discussions I attended, which were the primary sources of my data.

Insert Table 1 around here

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eThekwini – The Place Where the Earth and Ocean Meet

The city of Durban (*eThekwini* is the Zulu name for the city) was in full conference mode with banners and signs greeting and welcoming delegates from the airport to every corner of the main city. On the way to my hotel I asked the taxi driver what he thought about climate change. He pointed to the nearby Indian Ocean and said 'we're next to the ocean so we will have problems. There are many poor people here'. I asked him what he thought about the conference. 'A lot of hot air' he said with a smile. Then as an afterthought he added 'but this [the conference] is good for business. We should have more of them'.

The conference itself was held in the imposing International Convention Center in the heart of Durban's business district, while the various exhibits, stalls, side events, and workshops took place at the adjoining Durban Exhibition Center. As expected security was tight — delegates and observers were required to be affiliated with organizations approved by the United Nations and required formal UN approval to attend the conference. Bar coded and color coded picture identity cards were issued on the basis of the affiliation and

status of participant. There were metal detectors and screenings at every entry and exit point and identity cards were carefully scanned and checked on each occasion. Hundreds of volunteers lined the streets to greet delegates and direct them to the venue, transport hub and hotels, and there was a palpable police presence in virtually every corner of the city.

At Copenhagen there was much criticism about several preemptive arrests of activists made by Danish police even before the conference began (Rovics, 2010). While no preemptive arrests were reported at Durban several local environmental activists I spoke with mentioned that the police had been in touch with them, inquiring about their plans for the conference. Environmental groups also claimed that 'strangers' attended their meetings and rallies and were seen taking notes and asking about the leaders of the group. There were several protest meetings planned and December 3 was dubbed as the 'global day of action' when nearly 10,000 protestors marched through the streets of Durban to present a list of their demands to the UN Secretariat. Hundreds of protestors also occupied the penultimate plenary session at the conference venue. Dozens of protestors, mainly environmental activists from Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth were deported during the first week of the conference.

My initial reaction on entering the Convention Center was bewilderment and confusion, first about the geography and organization of the space, second about the status and affiliation of the thousands of people that were milling around, and third about the seemingly endless acronyms that described groups, meetings, initiatives, policies and actions, which can be overwhelming even for someone who is well versed in the workings of the UNFCCC. One participant, a veteran of the last 12 COPs, asked if I was a 'COP virgin'. On my replying in the affirmative she assured me I would 'get the hang of it' in a couple of

days (I did). A remarkable feature of the spatial dynamics was the physical separation between the venues of the COP meetings and the various exhibits and stalls that marked the presence of non-governmental actors. A large outdoor sunlit space lined with food stalls and a stage where various singers, musicians and dancers performed throughout the day added a festive atmosphere to the occasion. Mainly occupied by young people belonging to a variety of environmental NGOs this space seemed to be disconnected from the more formal confines of the convention center. I overheard one excited young woman talking to her mother on her cell phone saying 'It's so much fun out here mom. Sunshine, the crowds, the atmosphere and the energy is just so great. I haven't even been to the main conference yet — I hear it's deathly boring'. Deathly boring or not, over the next 10 days the spatial dynamics of the conference became a salient feature as I navigated my way through multiple venues of the main conference, the informal consultations, the seemingly endless working groups, the 'side events, the exhibit', the media updates, the roaming interviews and the country pavilions.

Durban: The Players

The conference provided an invaluable opportunity to observe policy making in action on a global scale as well as the roles played by market, state and civil society actors in climate negotiations. The Durban conference was attended by an estimated 12,500 participants including accredited delegates from 194 countries, representatives from corporations and industry associations, as well as nearly 6000 participants from NGOs, and 1200 media members. It is important to point out that not all NGOs represent 'civil society': in recent years there has been an increase in the number of business and industry

group NGOs[1] (BINGOs) that occupy the civil society space in various trade and environmental fora including COP meetings. The major oil corporations of the world like Shell and ExxonMobil, nuclear giants like Areva as well as multinational mining corporations like Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton have all funded various non-governmental organizations that promote particular resource and energy-use agendas. Table 2 provides a summary of the key actors involved in climate change negotiations.

Insert Table 2 around here

Individual countries, groups and coalitions that were formed at various meetings leading up to Durban had different positions on climate change. These are summarized in Table 3. As we will see later these differing interests led to conflicts, accommodation, compromises, disintegration of existing coalitions and creation of new alliances.

Insert Table 3 around here

After thirteen days of hectic negotiations no agreement was in sight and there were signs that the talks would end in total collapse. The talks were then extended by another day and a half although several ministerial delegates had returned home, and after three consecutive all-night sessions an agreement was finally reached at 3:30 in the morning of December 11. At the final plenary session where some delegates were (quite

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[1] The proliferation of NGOs over the last two decades has led to an almost incomprehensible and sometimes comical list of acronyms. At Durban apart from BINGOs, there were TANGOs (Technical Assistance NGOs); GONGOs (Government-operated NGOs, designed to look like NGOs in order to qualify for overseas financial aid); QUANGOs (Quasi Autonomous NGOs); ENGOs (Environmental NGOs); NNGOs (Northern NOGOs); SNGOs (Southern NGOs); TNGOs (Transnational NGOS); MANGOs (Market Advocacy NGOs) and NGDOs (Non-governmental Development Organization) to name a few.

understandably) seen dozing off and others bleary eyed and barely able to speak, the

'agreement' that would govern carbon emissions starting from 2020 was announced. This

'negotiation by exhaustion' is an outcome of confrontational bargaining rather than

cooperative problem solving and has been a common feature of almost every COP

meeting, which raises questions about equity, transparency and quality of the agreements

reached. In fact, Depledge (2004: 193) argues that many of the discrepancies in the Bonn

Agreement of COP6 were largely a result of the tiredness of negotiators.

Durban: The Outcome

So what exactly was achieved at COP17? The answer depends on who one asks.

UNFCCC and the organizers, anxious to put the failure of Copenhagen and Cancun behind

them, took great pains to announce that a breakthrough deal was reached. Titled the

'Platform for Enhanced Action', the agreement called for all major emitters — including

developing countries such as China and India — to set legally binding emissions reduction

targets by 2015. EU leaders described the outcome at Durban as a 'historic achievement', a

'watershed' and 'a moment comparable to, if not surpassing, the success of COP1 from

1995' — the agreement that led to the creation of the Kyoto protocol (Keating, 2011).

Several green groups claimed that the agreement did not cover binding emissions cuts, a

major objective of COP meetings, and hence COP17 was a failure. A spokesperson for

Friends of the Earth Europe, said it was 'nothing more than smoke and mirrors — an illusion

of ambition with no real targets or timelines'. Mohamed Adow, a representative of

Christian Aid, a non-governmental organization, described the outcome at Durban as

'disastrous and profoundly distressing' and a 'compromise which saves the climate talks but

endangers people living in poverty'. Celine Charveriat, Director of Advocacy for Oxfam

declared at a press conference that the 'Durban Platform can only be described as a major disappointment. But the blame for this delay lies squarely on the shoulders of the US and other countries like Canada, Japan and Australia who dragged their feet from start to finish'.[2]

The impasse that led to an extension of the talks was over the wording of the agreement: an earlier draft contained the phrase 'legally binding', to which the Indian delegates objected. The phrase was then changed to 'legal outcome', which was opposed by the EU on the grounds that it was too weak. The Indian delegation wanted to include a reference to 'equity', which was firmly opposed by the United States who insisted that any agreement should have 'legal parity' and not be subject to North-South divisions. Finally, a compromise was reached and the wording was changed to 'a protocol, legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the convention applicable to all parties'. The agreement was to be developed by 2015 and would come into effect from 2020. Until that time the only action on climate change would arise from the 90 plus countries that had agreed to make voluntary pledges to cut emissions (Clark, 2010). While the Durban Platform reaffirmed the goal of holding global warming to no more than a 2 degrees Celsius increase, the agreement noted with 'grave concern' that the stated pledges to cut emissions would not meet that goal. It was also no coincidence that the timetable coincided with the electoral schedule in the United States given the deep political divisions in that country and the very real possibility of a change in government and corresponding shift in US policy. The promised agreement that would be developed in 2015 to become an 'outcome with legal force' by 2020 would be 'just a scrap of paper for a President Romney' (The Economist, 2011).

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[2] Quotes excerpted from the daily press briefings.

Perhaps the most significant outcome at Durban was the further marginalization of the least developed countries that are the most vulnerable to climate change. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted at the 1992 Rio summit acknowledged the differing responsibilities of developing and industrialized countries in addressing climate change. Article 3 of the convention states:

> The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects.

The principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' was further affirmed at subsequent COPs at Berlin and Bali. The Berlin Mandate of 1995 interpreted the principle as 'launching a process to commit (by 1997) the Annex I countries to quantified greenhouse gas emissions reductions within specified time periods' and that the process should 'not introduce any new commitments for Parties not included in Annex I' (Stavins, 2011). Industrialized countries like the United States, Canada and Australia have always opposed any differentiated responsibilities between developing and industrialized countries. Through a process of attrition starting at Copenhagen the distinction between Annex 1 and non-Annex 1 countries became blurred and at Durban there was a complete erasure of any distinction in the text of the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action where there is no mention of 'common but differentiated responsibilities', 'distributional equity' or 'historical responsibility' all of which had appeared in earlier drafts. While this marks a victory for the industrialized countries there may be some space to negotiate equity-based targets in a future agreement since the UNFCCC mandate does accept the 'common but differentiated

responsibilities' principle. However, the bargaining position of developing countries has weakened significantly as a result of the exclusion of any reference to equity.

Further evidence that the Durban Platform compromised the interests of developing countries can be seen in the absence of any declaration on climate change adaptation or intellectual property rights on technology transfer. The text of the Durban platform focuses almost exclusively on mitigation and ignores the demands of the least developed countries to include adaptation policies. Countries vulnerable to climate change require adaptation assistance because even if there are zero emissions starting from the present time climate change impacts will still occur. Equity was sacrificed in favor of agreeing on a legal instrument whose form remains unknown and whose enforcement is nonexistent (Jayaraman, 2011).

There was also some confusion about when emissions reductions would actually commence — while the EU insisted that actual reductions would commence in 2020 several other countries claimed that there was enough flexibility in the wording to claim that targeted emissions cuts would commence 'any time after 2020'. Europe would continue a second period of binding emissions cuts under the 1997 Kyoto protocol, which was to expire in 2012. Although the continuation of the Kyoto protocol was a desired outcome for COP17 Canada was the first signatory to formally withdraw from the protocol (Genova, 2011). Japan and Russia also refused to take on further Kyoto targets. While Kyoto may have received a second lease of life its actual impact remains in question given the withdrawal of key countries, the continued lack of participation by the United States and China (the world's two biggest emitters) and the fact that the protocol covers less than 15 per cent of global emissions. Figure 1 provides a list of the 10 biggest emitters in the world.

Insert Figure 1 around here

Perhaps the most accurate description of the outcome of Durban was 'a deal to agree a deal' (Harvey & Carrington, 2011) or a 'non-binding agreement to reach an agreement by 2015 that will bring all countries under the same legal regime by 2020' (Stavins, 2011). The last-ditch deal was basically an understanding that developing and industrialized countries would work on an agreement that 'should be legally binding' for all parties. Even the most optimistic observers agreed that resolving the many complex issues that remained would be a struggle, if not impossible.

So how are we to understand the processes that lead to a particular outcome at high-level international summits such as COP? What are the politics of domination that influence particular outcomes? How do key actors legitimize their different positions? How are conflicts played out? What are the discursive strategies that allow inaction to be legitimized? These are some of the questions I will explore in an attempt to understand the politics of climate change.

Conference of Parties – Power and Politics

The fundamental question is why, despite nearly two decades of efforts at the highest level, is there still no global binding agreement on reducing GHG emissions? If, despite the existence of some climate skeptics, there is universal agreement that climate change is a problem that needs to be urgently addressed then what is holding the world back? These questions were addressed in a variety of forums at Durban and in my discussions with participants. The most commonly cited reasons were: (1) lack of political will, (2) China and India's unwillingness to cut emissions, (3) opposition by the United

States, (4) power of the industry lobby, (5) levels of investment needed and possible negative effects on competitiveness, and (6) complexities of reaching an agreement involving 194 countries.

I was able to identify several discourses based on my observation and analysis of what transpired in Durban and a review of research on earlier COP conferences. I call them the competitive discourse, the development discourse, the poverty discourse and the innocent victim discourse. These interlocking discourses arose from the politics of domination and politics of legitimation that characterize the political economy of climate change (Carter et al., 2011). These discourses are also marked by shifting coalitions of interests and groups as well as a range of discursive and institutional practices that promote particular interests to constrain any meaningful action on climate change.

For developed countries the discourse was about competitiveness and market mechanisms that would enable emissions reductions at the lowest possible cost. For the large developing countries like Brazil, China and India the discourse was about development; for the least developed countries the poverty discourse was paramount; and the innocent victim discourse reflected the position of low lying island states that had negligible GHG emissions but whose very existence was threatened by climate change. What these interlocking discourses produced at Durban was basically more inaction or delayed action through strategies of co-optation, direct threats, payoffs, and isolation.

Climate Impasse: The Competitive Discourse

Competitive vulnerability was the main argument used by developed countries against binding emissions targets, particularly the United States, Canada and Australia. Canada's withdrawal from Kyoto after the Durban conference is an example of the effects of the competitive discourse. Announcing the decision at Durban, Canada's Environment Minister Peter Kent stated that if Canada stayed in the Kyoto Protocol it would need to purchase $14 billion worth of emissions trading permits for not achieving its Kyoto targets, which would place the country at a competitive disadvantage. Corporations and industry lobbies also played a key role in influencing their respective country's position on binding emission reduction targets. For instance, at Durban two influential industry associations, the International Council on Mining and Metals and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development organized several side events with expert panels comprising of senior managers from leading mining and utilities corporations. The impact of climate change agreements on the competitive position of their organizations was a key focal point in these discussions. A senior manager from a leading metals manufacturer commented:

> What we're talking about here is the different carbon pricing policies may affect the relative competitiveness of facilities in different countries. That could lead to increased imports, loss of company share and then in the longer term perhaps a more serious issue, at least in the UK, to promote relocation of facilities and where new facilities will be built (Transcript #3, Panel Discussion).

A senior manager of one of the largest electricity producers in the United States stated:

> Today we face what we call the train wreck of EPA regulations coming at us all at one time. We face something that I think is the biggest hurdle we've ever faced in the — we estimate potentially 80 gigawatts of energy being shut down if all these regulations hit

at one time … And we're making some headway to get people to understand that we're not trying to blow up the Clean Air Act, we're trying to just not shut down plants while we build the controls in place. So with that environment, the Republicans are saying no regulations, Democrats are saying we want to regulate to the impossible level, and we're kind of stuck in the middle so therefore we have trouble getting anything done … Inconsistent, multiple or overlapping government policies — I enjoyed writing that — which increase the price of electricity are likely to result in a distance from customers and can slow economic recovery' (Transcript #7, Panel Discussion).

The basic argument from industry sectors that were the largest emitters was the same: emissions reductions would be too costly and would erode the profitability of firms, lead to increased prices for consumers, slow economic recovery, give polluting competitors in developing countries an unfair advantage resulting in the closing down or relocation of plants. Industry efforts to engage with policy makers at the national and international levels have been successful in the sense that both in the EU and at COP negotiations several regulatory proposals were either abandoned or watered down. In a recent study of EU steel corporations Okereke and McDaniels (2012) found that the companies 'strategically exaggerated' their competitive vulnerability to carbon pricing in order to obtain preferential treatment under the European Emissions Trading Scheme. At COP meetings aggressive lobbying by carbon intensive industries and the fossil fuel lobby influenced their respective country's approach to negotiation as well as the actual content of agreements. The basic aim was to promote 'flexibility' in climate change policies where flexibility invariably meant the use of market mechanisms and voluntary, non-enforceable 'pledge and review' approaches to climate change (Newell & Patterson, 1998).

The institutional logics of competitiveness influence the climate agenda in ways that seem paradoxical to the goals of mitigation. For instance, in 2011 the United States sued the Chinese government for providing 'unfair subsidies' to its green industries, which they claim is a violation of 'free trade' (China Times, 2011). China has invested more than $30 billion in developing its solar industry and is a world leader in solar technology. US solar companies facing bankruptcy urged their lawmakers to sue China for unfair trade practices. At the corporate level BP recently announced the closure of its solar power business claiming that 'the continuing global economic challenges have significantly impacted the solar industry, making it difficult to sustain long-term returns for the company' (Macalister, 2011). The company's mission to move 'beyond petroleum' has now truly been reversed back to petroleum given its annual expenditure of $20 billion on oil and gas development.

Climate Impasse: Inactions as Actions

There are a range of discursive strategies that allow corporations, institutions and governments to show action on climate change. These are strategies that create legitimacy but do little to address the realities of climate change. First, the focus is on setting goals, targets, carbon accounting and monitoring procedures all on a voluntary basis to obviate the need for legally binding targets. Goals and targets are also framed in ways that are economically efficient rather than environmentally sustainable — for instance, a commonly used target is reducing emissions intensity per unit of output or GDP (as opposed to reducing overall emissions). Even if emissions intensity targets are reached, growth in production and sales means that overall emissions will keep increasing. Second, a range of experimental projects and demonstration plants such as renewable energy or

carbon capture and storage are launched, often through public-private partnerships that demonstrate 'stakeholder engagement'. While these investments provide tax benefits to private corporations and are often funded by government grants they tend to remain at the experimental stage and are very rarely scaled subsequently on a commercial scale. Third, where it is possible to demonstrate carbon neutrality through offsets, the strategy is to set goals to achieve carbon neutrality. Thus, low emitting industries like financial services and banks tout their climate change credentials by claiming carbon neutrality. Or, at the next level small countries that are low emitters develop mission statements for becoming carbon neutral to show it can be done. However, the problem of scaling up remains unresolved. Fourth, market, state and civil society actors engage in coalition building to demonstrate a commonality of purpose and action on climate change.

Climate Impasse: Corporate Political Strategies

Industry strategies to address climate change also involve launching legal challenges to climate change legislation. In 2009 the Air Transport Association, the lead industry association for US airlines, along with American Airlines, United Airlines and Continental Airlines sued the EU for new regulations capping jetliner emissions and requiring airlines to pay for exceeding emission limits (Reuters, 2009). In December 2011 Europe's highest court ruled in favor of EU regulations declaring that 'application of the emissions trading scheme to aviation infringes neither the principles of customary international law at issue nor the open-skies agreement' (The Guardian, 2011).

However, industry attempts to influence climate negotiations have not gone unchallenged. Many environmental organizations at COP17 targeted carbon intensive industries and their lobbyists. For example, Greenpeace International organized an

elaborate display at their stall titled 'Who's holding us back? How carbon intensive industry is preventing effective climate legislation'. The exhibit described the power and influence of bodies like the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), that according to Greenpeace actively 'campaigns for more access for companies to influence the architecture of an international climate agreement'. The exhibit described lobbying activities of 7 multinational companies and members of WBCSD: Shell, BASF, Arcelor Mittal, Tata, Koch Industries, Eskom and BHP Billiton, who along with industry associations such as the Petroleum Association of Japan, Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, European Chemical Industry Council, Business Europe, European Steel Association, American Petroleum Institute, US Chamber of Commerce and South African Energy Intensive User Group lobbied the governments of Japan, Canada, Australia, South Africa, the United States and the European Union to 'effectively undermine climate legislation'.

Details of corporate political strategies in dealing with climate change are extensively documented in a 2011 report titled 'Corporate, Climate and the United Nations' prepared by the Polaris Institute (Fernandes & Girard, 2011). Even the United Nations' own reports document the rising influence of corporations in various UN bodies like UNICEF, UNDP, UNEP and WHO through public-private partnerships, consultancies, voluntary standards initiatives, advocacy and project financing (Utting & Zammit, 2006). The main channels of corporate influence include direct lobbying of governments and international organizations, lobbying through industry associations and events, UN-business partnerships, corporate funding and investments. Industry lobbyists are both part of official country delegations at the various COPs as well as Business and Industry NGOs (BINGOs), who as observers have access to some official meetings, side events, workshops and can make submissions to the UNFCCC. The number of BINGOs participating in COP

talks has been steadily increasing over the years with more than 2000 participating

organizations at Copenhagen in 2009. According to Fernandes & Girard, (2011) there were

a total of 4201 lobbyists at all the COPs since 1995 from four major BINGOs — the World

Business Council for Sustainable Development, International Chamber of Commerce,

International Emissions Trading Associations and the now defunct Global Climate Coalition

(an association of mainly US businesses opposed to emission reduction targets and largely

responsible for the US refusing to ratify the Kyoto protocol). The main focus of lobbying

efforts by carbon intensive industries was to slow down the negotiating process, block any

outcome, oppose binding targets and taxes and promote market-based mechanisms as

solutions for climate change that would allow firms to continue operating without

significantly curbing emissions (Depledge, 2004; Fernandes & Girard, 2011).

Climate Impasse: Inclusions and Exclusions

While the UNFCCC, ministerial delegates and trade representatives take great pains

to highlight the inclusive and democratic nature of climate change negotiations, pointing

to the presence and participation of NGOS and environmental groups, the reality is that

inclusions and exclusions are carefully orchestrated — from the granting of approvals to

attend the conference, to the classification of participants as delegates or observers with

the accompanying access privileges to the many 'closed sessions'. The North-South divide

in climate negotiations is also evident in NGO presence in climate negotiations. In the last

few COPs between 75– 90 per cent of NGOS were from developed countries. (Depledge,

2004). Business and industry NGOs are almost exclusively based in OECD countries. While

there is limited funding from the UN to assist delegates from developing countries to

participate in climate change negotiations no such funding is available for NGOs from

developing countries. Negotiations at COP17, as in prior climate conferences, are both formal and informal. While the formal sessions are usually open to accredited observers the informal sessions can be either open or closed. There are also unofficial, behind the scenes meetings where the real deals are hammered out, usually in very small groups. Most of the actual negotiation sessions involving representatives of states were 'closed sessions' as were some of the 'informal consultations' among industry groups, NGOs, multi-country networks, inter-governmental organizations and working groups. Access to closed sessions was carefully monitored by security staff (I tried to enter one such session and was politely but firmly turned away). As negotiating groups in informal sessions become progressively smaller they tend to be dominated by the more powerful delegations. Depledge (2004: 120) quoted a participant involved in the negotiations that led to the Kyoto Protocol:

> As the issues developed, there were smaller negotiating groups...and as the groups got
> smaller....then we started to lose out on participation and ....it just made it easier for
> countries who wanted to minimize the outcomes ....I guess the US is the classic
> example.....they were involved right to the end in the smaller and smaller groups.

    Thus, participation of NGOs and observers is severely constrained in sessions where most transparency is needed. At Durban, there were criticisms from some of the least developed countries and civil society organizations at these closed room meetings — as a representative from a youth NGO said in her speech to the delegates 'you give us a voice but no seat at the table'. Stakeholder engagement strategies at the policy level seem to mirror corporate strategies and have more to do with managing stakeholders than serving their interests (Banerjee & Bonnefous, 2011).

        Perhaps the most significant reason for inaction is that climate change, while being

an environmental problem, is being engaged with as primarily a political and economic

issue. At the very first meeting of the parties to address climate change there was general

agreement that a cooperative, collaborative and multilateral effort was required. However,

when negotiations commenced, the problem statement shifted from the ecology of

climate change to the economics of climate change and it soon became evident that any

agreement on climate change would essentially revolve around the economic impacts of

climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. Thus, while the aim of reaching an

agreement on climate change was through cooperation and collaboration the negotiating

process was competitive where the basic negotiating principle was 'give as little as you can

and extract as much as you can' (Saran, 2010). Any outcome from such a position would

tend to favor the lowest common denominator, which is what all the climate change

summits have produced so far. The lowest common denominator in the climate change

debate is energy security, which being the engine of economic growth means that climate

change negotiations are primarily conducted on the basis of economic competitiveness.

Thus, the institutional logics of competitiveness and markets through a combination of

material, institutional and discursive power produce a politics of domination that

overcomes a politics of legitimacy. This process is enabled by creating shifting coalitions

that transcend conventional North-South boundaries as we shall see in the next section.

Shifting Geopolitics: From Climate Change to Climate Justice

Climate change has disproportionate impacts across the globe. Poor populations

across the world face the gravest threat from climate change and have the least resources

to adapt to or mitigate against climate change. Developing countries argue quite justifiably

that the use of the atmosphere has taken place in vastly unequal conditions over the last

300 years and that it would be unfair and unjust to expect countries that are trying to emerge from poverty to be treated the same as industrialized countries that are mainly responsible for GHG emissions. There continues to be deep divisions between developed and emerging economies on each other's role in reducing emissions. Both China and India along with Brazil have been opposed to mandated emissions cuts for all countries because they argue with some justification that historically it is the industrialized countries of the world that have contributed most to GHG emissions and therefore should be held responsible for reducing emissions while developing countries should focus their efforts on alleviating poverty.

As in previous COP meetings the EU continued to play the world leader in pushing for a global climate change agreement. EU negotiators went to great lengths to emphasize the legitimacy of their proposal for a legally binding agreement on emissions reductions. Their insistence on strong wording in the draft document was opposed by the United States on the grounds that any agreement had to have legal parity between all countries, which was opposed by developing countries since such an agreement would be counter to the 'common but differentiated responsibilities' principle. China's position was that it was 'not averse to a legally binding agreement' (a significant shift from its earlier position that it would not accept any binding agreement) provided it was not bound to the same emission standards as the rich countries because more than 100 million of China's citizens still lived in 'persistent poverty' (Reuters 2011). In explaining India's opposition to legally binding targets the Indian negotiator stated that she could not 'sign away the rights of 1.2 billion people and many other people in the developing world' by agreeing to an outcome that could constrain these countries' economic development (Sheppard, 2011). The small island nations and least developed countries called for stronger measures and binding targets

arguing that even the internationally accepted 2 degree rise meant death for their populations and was a form of 'climate fascism' imposed by the rich countries and powerful emerging economies like China and India.

The final plenary session saw several clashes erupt between the EU, USA and Canada on one side and China and India on the other. The EU Commissioner for Climate Action, Connie Hedegaard, offered a commitment to continue the Kyoto protocol that would bind the rich countries to cut GHG emissions in exchange for a legally binding agreement involving all countries. To cheers from the audience she declared: 'We need clarity. We need to commit. The EU has shown patience for many years. We are almost ready to be alone in a second commitment period. We don't ask too much of the rest of the world'. The 'rest of the world' reference was to India's refusal (greeted by boos from sections of the audience) to commit to any legally binding agreement. The Indian minister for the environment replying to Hedegaard's demand for all countries to agree to legally binding emissions cuts said: 'The equity of burden-sharing cannot be shifted. Am I to write a blank check and sign away the livelihoods and sustainability of 1.2 billion Indians, without even knowing what the EU "roadmap" contains? I wonder if this is an agenda to shift the blame on to countries who are not responsible for climate change'. China backed India's position with their minister, Xie Zhenhua, accusing developed countries of not doing enough: 'What qualifies you to tell us what to do? We are taking action. We are doing whatever we should do. We are doing things you are not doing. We want to see your action' (Vidal & Harvey, 2011). Given these intractable positions any compromise seemed impossible, thus any agreement that was ultimately reached needs to be unpacked carefully.

Climate Power Blocs

At COP negotiations power is exercised by industrialized countries in a variety of ways: through a strategy of divide and conquer, threats to withdraw aid funding, coercion, promises of additional funding, and isolating countries that object to the terms of any agreement. Recently released WikiLeaks cables reveal how US diplomatic offices gathered information about other countries' positions and then used financial aid and project financing to garner political support for the US position (Carrington, 2010). Millions of dollars of US aid funding to Bolivia and Ecuador were withdrawn in 2010 due to their opposition to the Copenhagen Accord, while governments of smaller countries were rewarded with funding to support the US position at Copenhagen (Bond, 2011). In an effort to gather support the EU Climate Action Commissioner, Connie Hedegaard, wrote to the US State Department stating that the Alliance of Small Island States 'could be our best allies, given their need for financing' (The Guardian, 2010a). The Maldives, possibly the first nation state that will cease to exist due to rising sea levels, mounted a global campaign to raise awareness about climate change and called for strict legally binding emissions controls. Their initial opposition to the Copenhagen Accord was reversed because of a $50 million aid package from the United States. According to a leaked cable the US deputy climate change envoy informed the Maldives' US ambassador that if 'tangible assistance' were given to his country, then other countries would realize 'the advantages to be gained by compliance' with Washington's climate agenda (The Guardian, 2010b).

A leaked cable reporting a meeting between the US Undersecretary of State and the Ethiopian Prime Minister in 2009, then head of the African Union's climate change negotiations, contained a direct threat to Ethiopia to support the Copenhagen accord, failing which any promised financial aid would be suspended (The Guardian, 2010c).

Another leaked cable from the US Deputy National Security Adviser warned his EU

counterpart about the increasing influence of developing countries, particularly the so

called BASIC group of countries consisting of Brazil, South Africa, India and China:

> It is remarkable how closely coordinated the BASIC group has become in international
>
> fora, taking turns to impede US/EU initiatives and playing the US and EU off against
>
> each other. BASIC countries have widely differing interests, but have subordinated
>
> these to their common short-term goals. The US and EU need to learn from this co-
>
> ordination and work much more closely and effectively together ourselves, to better
>
> handle third country obstructionism and avoid future train wrecks on climate, Doha or
>
> financial regulatory reform.

The BASIC group was formed in 2009 and played a key role in Copenhagen, including

staging a walkout to protest that their concerns were not being heard by the developed

countries. The US and EU seemed to have learned their lessons well because post-

Copenhagen they were able to garner the support of most countries in the African Union

and other developing countries, and were successful in removing any reference to equity

from the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action.

   As in Copenhagen, North-South climate politics dominated the Durban COP. Power

politics were also played out in the various regional coalitions that emerged in Durban. The

leader of the Chinese delegation stated at a joint news briefing with his South African,

Indian and Brazilian counterpoints:

> BASIC countries are united and demand that the second commitment of the Kyoto
>
> protocol is a must. Developed countries should carry out their commitment they have
>
> made in cutting emission and giving financial assistance to help developing countries
>
> deal with climate change. We are ready to do our due contributions on climate change

to make the Durban conference a success. We will speak with the same voice (Xinhua News Agency, 2011).

However, the South certainly did not speak with one voice — on several occasions the least developed countries voiced their concerns about the role of China and India in determining the interests of all developing countries and called for a legally binding agreement that included both those countries. Karl Hood, Grenada's negotiator and representative for the Alliance of Small Island States made an impassioned speech at a plenary session where he described the increased vulnerability of island states and the immediate perils they faced: 'This little island is where I get my dignity from. I shouldn't be transported somewhere else by the whims and fancy of others who want to develop. While they develop, we die. Why should we accept this?' (Sheppard, 2011). Venezuela's ambassador, Claudia Salerno accused the UN chair of the session of ignoring the views of some developing countries. Referring to the Green Climate Fund, an initiative whereby the rich countries would help developing countries to adapt to climate change, she said: 'This agreement will kill off everyone. It is a farce. It is immoral to ask developing countries to sell ourselves for $100 billion' (Vidal & Harvey, 2011).

Durban marked a significant shift in the coalitions among developing countries. Cracks appeared in traditional alliances such as the BASIC group, despite their public affirmations of unity. China's willingness to consider a legally binding treaty for all countries subject to equity principles, marked a significant departure from the group's earlier position that any legally binding agreement would apply only to industrialized countries. Brazil and South Africa also softened their initial stance on a legally binding treaty leaving India isolated. The Alliance of Small Island States, fearing that Durban would go the way of Copenhagen and Cancun in its failure to reach any agreement or worse still,

terminate the Kyoto Protocol, was instrumental in forming a new alliance with the Least Developed Countries and the European Union in an effort to ensure there would be a second commitment period to the Kyoto Protocol. The final confrontation at Durban was between the EU and India; two years earlier at Copenhagen it was disagreement between the EU and China that prevented any meaningful outcome.

Much of the impetus of climate negotiations has come from the EU, which is also the only party to offer to undertake unconditional emissions reductions. The other key player in global negotiations, the United States, has always resisted committing to emissions reductions since the start of the climate change negotiations, despite virtually dictating the design of the Kyoto Protocol. The US position on climate change has essentially remained the same — to promote 'flexibility' in all arrangements instead of enforcing stringent targets on developed countries. It was at the insistence of the United States that emissions trading became the cornerstone of climate policy at the international level despite strenuous objections from developing countries and even the EU, which was apprehensive that emissions trading could undermine mandatory reduction targets and enable the US to avoid taking significant domestic action on emissions reductions (Grubb, 2004).

The US approach to climate change reflects their politico-economic ideology, as well as the power of their industry groups. These groups spent more than $100 million in lobbying their government not to accept emission reduction commitments unless developing countries accepted similar commitments, while also lobbying developing countries to oppose any binding commitments because they would threaten the latter's economic growth. Grubb (2004: 27) describes the US strategy during early climate change negotiations as 'one of the most cynical, and successful, international lobbying campaigns

in history'. During the negotiations leading up to the Kyoto Protocol the North-South

divide almost led to the breakdown of talks — the reason they did not was because the

objections of major developing countries like China and India were simply overridden and

the US position was adopted (Grubb et al., 1999). At Copenhagen and Durban the shifts in

power were apparent — it was China and India that dominated the talks and influenced the

outcomes. At Durban, China was more strategic in developing alliances to support their

position as opposed to India, leaving the latter isolated from its own group of BASIC

countries and from other developing countries. Ministers and senior officials from the

island states and from the least developed countries participated at almost all the side

events and workshops organized by the Chinese delegates. Mirroring strategies adopted

by the US and EU, China announced several trade and technology assistance programs

with the least developed countries in a successful effort to garner their support.

Conclusions

What conclusions can we draw from the Durban Summit? What are the significant

changes, if any, in the political economy of climate change from the first Conference of

Parties held in Berlin in 1995 to the Durban COP in 2011? A cynical response would be to

say that the only outcome that 17 climate change summits have produced (barring the

landmark Kyoto Protocol) is a general agreement to continue to negotiate. However, even

that outcome can be considered remarkable given the enormous complexities of

negotiating any agreement involving more than 200 countries. If Berlin was a watershed

because it was the first time all countries came to the negotiating table, then Durban

marked a major shift in the traditional alliances that have characterized all the climate

change summits thus far. Political alliances at climate change negotiations, once

considered 'remarkably resilient' since the late 1980s (Grubb et al., 1999: 29) shifted

significantly at Durban. While the EU continues to be at the forefront of climate change

negotiations the shift in the economic center of gravity to Asia has undoubtedly influenced

how these negotiations take place.

But the shifts in power to large developing countries like China and India by no

means marks a victory for the poorer countries of the world. In fact, the opposite is true.

Putting China and India in the same category with the broad range of developing countries

as somehow representing the 'global South' replicates the hegemonic structures that

created and sustained the North-South divide. Post-Durban, the climate change hegemon

now obtains its power from inequalities in South-South relations. The development

argument that is so persuasively used by China and India obscures inequities in resource

access within their respective countries and the sharply rising inequalities between the rich

and the poor. While there is no doubt that poverty rates in both countries have declined

over the last 25 years, income disparities have increased sharply (World Bank, 2009). Both

the distribution of energy consumption and the benefits of economic growth are extremely

unevenly distributed in China and India. For instance, the richest 10 per cent of urban

energy consumers in India emit 12 times the amount of carbon as the poorer 50 per cent of

rural consumers (Parikh & Parikh, 2002). A burgeoning middle class of urban consumers

drives most of the energy requirements of both China and India while the energy needs of

the rural poor tend to be ignored.

There are some concerns that with all the attention on GHG emissions and energy

efficiency the broader debate about sustainability, in particular the equity dimension of

sustainability, seems to have been pushed into the background (Banerjee, 2003). With the

apparent abandonment of the equity principle, least developed countries find themselves

more vulnerable not only to the physical impacts of climate change but also to the policy measures to address climate change. Adaptation and technology transfer were two key policy issues that were central to climate change negotiations but are not mentioned at all in the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action. Vulnerability and adaptation to climate change are crucial problems for many least developed countries (Beg et al., 2002) that require both financial and technological resources but which have not been addressed in the Durban Platform. The proposed Green Climate Fund of $100 billion per year to be paid to developing countries is basically an admission of the North's 'climate debt' to the South (Bond, 2010: 21).

In a damning indictment of the climate change negotiation process and of the global elites from developing countries that are supposed to represent the interests of their impoverished citizens, Sunita Narain, Director General of the Center for Science and Environment, an Indian public interest research and advocacy organization, had this to say:

> Our government's negotiators are the same people who would stymie any real action on environmental improvement in the country. They will oppose fuel efficiency standards, tax on big cars, or tough penalties for polluters. But they will still talk glibly about low carbon economies ... The US has provided a perfect formula - it promises us the right to pollute, because it wants to legitimize its own pollution. Secondly, it promises that we can get a place on the high table of polluters. And as powerful conspirators, this will mean that we need to do little ourselves, but instead push the price of change on the less favored - the poor of India or the poor anywhere else in the world. It's an open offer to protect, not our right to development as we have been demanding. But a simpler proposition: we give you the right to pollute (at least for now). The other proposition is equally seductive. To the countries, which are not yet polluters (from Ethiopia to Maldives), the Copenhagen Accord says we will give money

to keep you pliant and agreeable. This is why the Accord promises some fictional

money to poor vulnerable countries. It's a perfect formula, designed to please all. There

is only one hitch: we will all have to forget the climate change crisis and its hazards and

impacts (cited in Bond, 2010: 16).

In a critical political economy of climate change the 'exercise of power in the form of

economy' (Foucualt, 1979: 92) is not the sole provenance of governments but emanates

from a loosely woven web of interconnected actors and institutions whose interests sustain

existing material inequalities and forms of political power. Thus, the key question for a

more progressive and equitable climate regime is how can groups that are excluded from

participation at the global level resist policies that undermine their sustainability? As we

have seen the institutional processes of climate change negotiations cannot provide

avenues where agency can be exercised because the organization of these processes

benefit groups who are able to speak with one voice, which in most cases tends to be

powerful industry groups (Newell & Paterson, 1999). And the large, primarily northern

NGOS that are allowed to participate at climate change negotiations cannot possibly

represent the sheer diversity of social movements across the world. For example, several

local groups in Europe and the United States have resorted to direct action to stop the

expansion of polluting industries. Justifying their actions because of what they feel is

'legislative gridlock' around climate change these groups have been successful in stopping

new coal fired plants from being built in the UK using a variety of grassroots based direct

action (Adam & Tran, 2009). Rural communities in many parts of Africa, Asia and Latin

America are also engaged in struggles with states and multinational over resource access

(Banerjee, 2011b). Perhaps these grassroots based direct actions and localized political

interventions represent a strategic form of power that can enable local actors to exert some

influence over the global climate agenda (Levy & Egan, 2003). These local struggles and resistance movements are ultimately about seeking new ways of participatory decision-making on the global governance of climate change. From a critical perspective governing the political economy of climate change has less to do with how markets can penetrate climate change regimes but more to do with how marginalized and impoverished communities who are non-corporate, non-state and often non-market actors can ensure that climate change regimes do not threaten their survival (Banerjee, 2010; 2011a).

In their analysis of the Copenhagen climate change summit Carter et al. (2011) concluded that ultimately the politics of domination prevailed over the politics of legitimacy. Perhaps the same could be said of Durban, with one crucial difference: the elites from a few South countries have become key players in the politics of domination both in their interactions with the North, with other South countries, as well as with civil society actors in their own regions. If effective global regulation is the only way to address climate change, it is difficult to see how such regulation can emerge out of COP meetings post-Durban given the politics of domination described earlier. At best governments will address climate change at the national level on a voluntary basis, which then underscores the importance of direct action at the local level to prevent the expansion of polluting industries. Thus, reclaiming space for public discussion and even intervention at different sites of decision-making becomes an important task for implementing democratically derived principles of climate justice (Banerjee, 2011b).

Research and policy addressing concerns about sustainability and climate change have coalesced around one central question: how do we make economic growth environmentally and socially sustainable? Answers that emerge from framing environmental and social problems as risks to growth can only serve to sustain regimes of

accumulation. Perhaps it is time we start addressing another question, one that requires a profound shift in our collective imagination that can enable a radical re-visioning from regimes of accumulation to regimes of distribution: how do we make a low environmental impact lifestyle, with reduced consumption and standard of living among wealthier populations economically sustainable?

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Event Summary	Key Participants
Plenary sessions	Conference of parties
The Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP)	Negotiating group of 37 industrialized countries
The Ad Hoc Working Group on Long Term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA)	Negotiating group of 195 countries
Making the transition to low carbon societies in a changing world	Panelists from the EU (scientists and government officials)
Country-level climate change and impacts	EU panelists
Climate change: Perspectives from India and Bangladesh	Panelists from government, industry associations and NGOs
Carbon capture and storage	Panelists from research organizations, industry associations and EU governments
Climate justice	Panelists from NGOs and governments
Financing climate change	EU panelists from government and banking sectors
Civil society in developing countries	Panelists from India, Bangladesh and South Africa. Organized by EU
Green climate fund	Panelists from the banking sector
Private sector solutions	Panelists from industry associations
Low carbon Asia	Panelists from government, NGOs and industry associations
Carbon pricing	World Business Council for Sustainable Development panelists from transnational corporations
Integrating energy efficiency across the power sector value chain	World Business Council for Sustainable Development panelists from corporations in the power sector
Sustainable forests	World Business Council for Sustainable Development panelists from transnational corporations and governments.
Innovation and intellectual property rights	Panelists from government agencies and industry groups in China
Low emissions development	EU panelists
Climate change strategy and trends	Government and industry officials from China
The green economy	EU panelists
Emissions trading	Panelists from the International Emissions Trading Association
South-south cooperation	Government officials from China, Grenada and Bangladesh
Country impacts	EU panelists (scientists)
Climate change and the power sector	CEOs and Directors from power companies in the EU and USA

Low carbon future	EU panelists
Event Summary	**Key Participants**
Learning platform	NGOs from EU
Carbon markets	EU panelists from government and industry
Forum on energy efficiency	Panelists from China
Business risk and public policy	Panelists from transnational corporations and industry associations
Germany's low carbon and energy strategy	Panelists from government and industry
Climate diplomacy	EU panelists
Green growth	Panelists from the EU, India and South Africa
Low carbon enterprises	Government and industry panelists from China
Competitiveness implications for mining and metals	Panelists from the International Council on Mining and Metals
Principles for climate change policy design	Panelists from the International Council on Mining and Metals
The role of mining and metals in land use and adaptation	Panelists from the International Council on Mining and Metals
Who's holding us back? How carbon intensive industry is preventing effective climate legislation	Workshop organized by Greenpeace
Climate villain awards	Performance organized by Friends of the Earth
Daily press briefings	Media, COP delegates and press secretaries

Table 1
Data Source Events

Key Actors	Description
Conference of the Parties (COP)	Decision making group. Consists of 194 countries plus the European Union
Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP)	Decision making group. The Protocol's top body consisting of 193 parties. Meets annually at the same time as the COP
The Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP)	Negotiating group. Consists of 37 industrialized Annex I countries
The Ad Hoc Working Group on Long Term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA)	Negotiating group. Consists of 195 countries
Subsidiary Body Implementation (SBI)	Expert group that provides advice to the negotiating groups
Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA)	Expert group that provides advice to the negotiating groups
Annex I countries	Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the United States and the European Union representing 27 countries. Includes countries with economies in transition (the EIT Parties) such as the Russian Federation, the Baltic States, and several Central and Eastern European States
Annex II countries	Consist of the OECD members of Annex I, but not the Economies in Transition (EIT) Parties. Annex II countries are required to provide financial resources to enable developing countries to undertake emissions reduction activities under the Convention and to help them adapt to adverse effects of climate change
Non Annex I parties: The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) The African Group Least Developed Countries Group G77 and China	Developing countries Consists of 42 island states and low lying countries 53 member states 48 member states 132 member states with rotating chairmanship between Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean
Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)	Environmental NGOs, business and industry NGOs, local government and municipal authorities, Indigenous peoples' organizations, research-oriented and independent NGOs

Table 2

Negotiating Group	Position on Climate Change
G77 and China	• Preserve and strengthen Kyoto Protocol
Africa Group	• Preserve and strengthen Kyoto Protocol • Protect principles of 'common but differentiated responsibility' and equity • Mandatory global regime with strong compliance provisions and enforcement penalties • Financial and technological support to be provided to developing countries to implement adaptation plans • Removal of all barriers that prevent technology transfer including removal of patents on climate related technologies
Least Developed Countries	• Legally binding instrument that accepts principle of 'common but differentiated responsibility' • Second commitment period for Kyoto Protocol • Compliance regime and international verification to monitor emissions from developed countries
Alliance of Small Island States	• Second commitment period for Kyoto Protocol
India	• Opposed to any new legally binding treaty • No legally binding emission targets for developing countries • Any future agreement to be bases on principles of 'common but differentiated responsibility' and equity
BASIC group (Brazil, South Africa, India, China)	• Preserve principle of 'common but differentiated responsibility' • Strengthen the unity of G77 and China to represent a unified voice of developing countries in climate change negotiations
United States	• 'Pledge and review' scheme instead of agreed and enforceable mitigation commitments • Any agreement must have legal parity – rejects principle of 'common but differentiated responsibility'
European Union	• Single legally binding treaty for developed and developing countries • Second commitment period for Kyoto Protocol
China	• Second commitment period for Kyoto Protocol • Not averse to legally binding emissions reduction obligations post-2020 provided they are based on principle of 'common but differentiated responsibility'

Table 3
Key negotiating groups and their positions at Durban*

* Adapted from United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change COP17/CMP7: Guide to Negotiations. Institut de l'energie et de l'environnement de la Francophonie (IEPF, 2011). www.iepf.org.
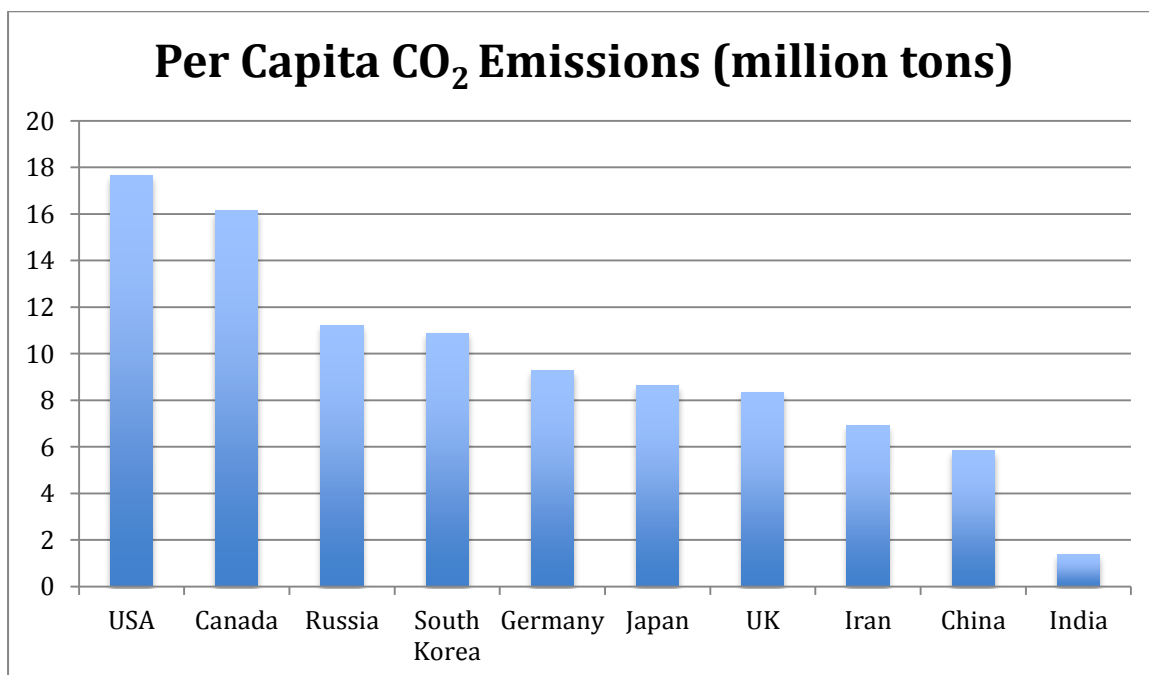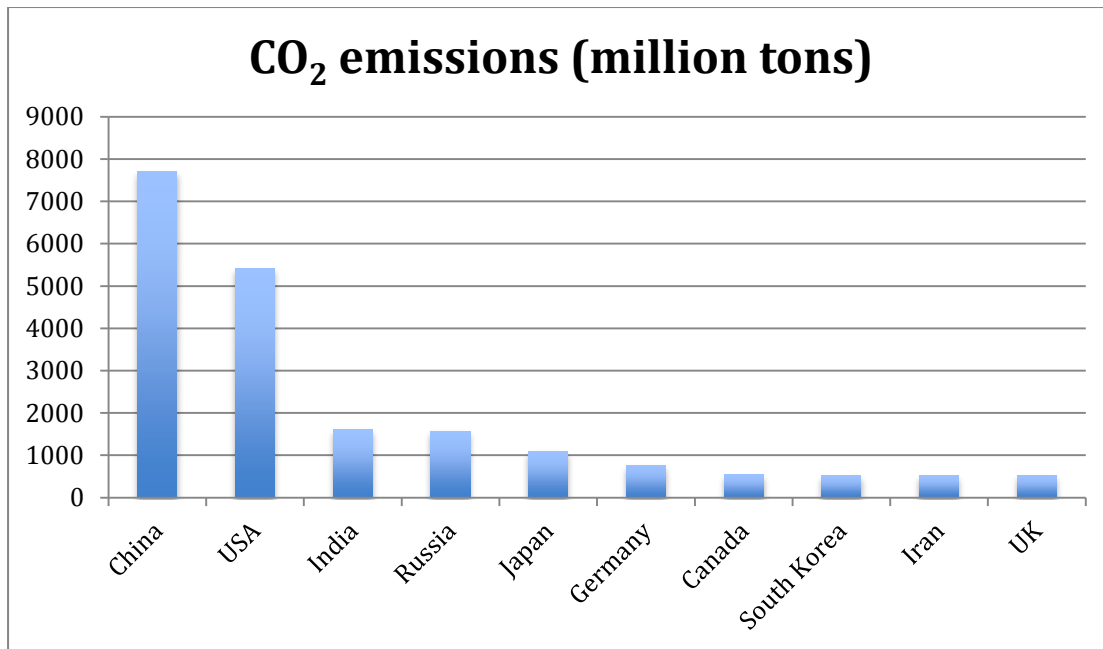
CO_2 emissions (million tons)

Per Capita CO_2 Emissions (million tons)

Figure 1

Total and per capita CO_2 emissions of the ten biggest emitters*

*Source: Energy Information Administration (2011).
http://www.eia.gov/cfapps/ipdbproject/IEDIndex3.cfm?tid=90&pid=44&aid=8.