

Shape the camp

#Antiracism & Decolonialism

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Introduction

Purpose of the meeting

Climate Justice Camp Belgium is a group of people/activists who have come together to learn, among other things, how to change the narrative of climate justice, which today revolves a lot around the idea of the red line, that we should not exceed the 2°C target. Several meetings with and on other struggles (feminism, LGBTQI+) have already been organized and others are planned (social justice and precariousness, ageism, validityism, final plenary). These meetings are not always organized in the same way (some have been organized partially in a non-mixed form while others in total non-mixity). This meeting is organized as a non-mixed meeting, as some BPOC (Black & People of Colour) did not feel comfortable coming, due in part to the fact that climate activists often (if ever) do not make the links between climate issues and decolonial issues. The idea of this meeting is to have a discussion based on the experiences and knowledge of those present, it is not a conference. All those present have an interest in climate issues (and want to know more) but are not directly involved in the climate movement.

Climate Justice Camp

The climate justice camp will take place from 4 to 8 September in Belgium. The camp will be a space for exchange, education and training. As the idea is to change the narrative of climate justice, there won't be any mass action, as is often the case in climate camps elsewhere in Europe. Even if the programme is not yet fixed, the idea is to give space to other struggles so that they can present their agenda, or organize conferences or workshops (if they want to).

Presentation of Le Space

It is [Le Space](#) that welcomes us again. Space is a place that has existed for a few years in an organic and *bottom-up* way. The place has been taken over by people undergoing multiple and varied oppression to reflect together on strategies for struggles and ways to connect with other struggles elsewhere (especially at the global level). They try, through a physical place, to create an intersectional space but in an organic, non-academic way. They also disseminate the knowledge transmitted through these meetings. A recent study showed that Space was the only organic intersectional place in Brussels. Le Space organizes 3 or 4 events per week, focusing on artistic and cultural formats (concerts, exhibitions, discussion-debates).

Problems related to climate change and its current narrative

A absence of decolonial, anti-imperialist and anti-racist issues in the fight against climate change

- There is an absence of decolonial and anti-racist issues in the fight against climate change, even among activists (see occupy for climate). The climate movement's approach to the problem often forgets that the capitalist system is based on a colonial and patriarchal past and present.
- This absence of decolonial, anti-imperialist and anti-racist issues puts BPOC in a dilemma: how to be part of this movement while being critical of it? In other words, how can we be part of a movement (because we think it is important to fight for the climate) while being critical of the way the struggle is being fought? For BPOC, the challenge is to try to make things change in the climate movement: this puts them in a "lobbyist" position that is very tiring, especially when people in the climate movement are not always open to criticism (whether anti-racist, feminist or queer). Some people think that they have a responsibility to do something for the climate, and that it is stronger than criticism... The consequence is that it takes away some people's desire to join a movement that does not take anti-racist issues seriously by integrating them into its narrative.
- The problem is not only in the narrative, it is also in the respect for other struggles. A major climate action (Occupy for Climate) was thus organized on the same day as the anti-racist demonstration, which is an annual event (and takes place every year more or less on the same date). The organizers of Occupy for Climate were aware of the anti-racist demonstration (as they had been contacted) but decided to organize this action anyway. Other options were possible: connect to the event (and mobilize in their networks for the event) and/or do an action on another day. The consequence is that the anti-racist demonstration did not have any media space, and this probably played a role in the mobilization.

A movement that does not recognize that the red line has already been crossed

- The narrative around the 2°C red line does not work because the red line has already been exceeded: many countries/populations have already suffered and are currently suffering the consequences of extreme events (see the impact of the increasingly frequent cyclones in Mozambique). We are not talking about the consequences of rising water levels in Mozambique, Puerto Rico... Nor is there any mention of the consequences of climate change on indigenous populations in Brazil.
- The issue of the first impacts of climate change (whether in the South or here in Belgium - the least well-off populations are the first to be impacted by environmental degradation) is not present.

- We cannot talk about climate as if it does not already have impacts, especially on oppressed people. Similarly, we cannot talk about environmental degradation without addressing the impact of pollution on people who are already suffering from racism.
- Questioning that in climate movements is complicated. Nothing is being put in place, particularly at the level of claims. For example, what is the point of a climate law that will not address the issue of expropriations related to resource extraction?

An egocentric and privileged climate struggle that advocates the convergence of struggles without doing its own education

- There is also a certain "egocentrism" in the fight against climate change, i.e. we only mobilize because we think it will affect us. See for example the example of [Sign for my future](#)'s greenwashing campaign, which uses visuals of little girls who are threatened by hurricanes: not only is it self-centered, but this message is once again being carried by privileged wealthy populations. The climate movement is mainly made up of white people who have difficulty thinking outside their living space.
- Today, the climate movement does not integrate decolonial, anti-racist, imperialist issues. It is not just a question of calling for the "convergence of struggles" but first of all of reflecting on the legitimacy of the word: who has the right to say that we will converge? This word too often comes from privileged circles, which rarely question their place in the world and their legitimacy to speak out. Moreover, the convergence of struggles is a relationship and there must be two people to make the relationship. To interact with activists who know nothing about the decolonial issue, everyone must do their own education.
- Another way is to see convergence as an objective that has its stages. A first step is to have spaces where BPOC can formulate their demands, also set the conditions for the necessary alliance... and think about who is asking them?

Towards a new narrative that integrates the anti-imperialist and anti-racist dimensions of the fight against climate change?

One or more narratives?

- When you try to deal with different topics at the same time, such as climate change, racism and sexism for example, the danger is that you end up with a narrative so broad that it no longer means anything to anyone. Another option may be to develop several narratives, so that each person can start from his or her own perspective and thus take ownership of the fight for climate justice, based on personal experiences and wills.

Avenues for a new narrative

- Climate struggles are interesting because they can easily be linked to anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles. In other words, we have to question climate change from the perspective of anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism. To do this, we must educate ourselves, in order to be able to analyze and criticize the system in all its dimensions.
- The links between climate change and racism are also interesting to explore.
- The correlation between climate change, white supremacy and colonialism is also interesting. Some issues could be included such as the negative impacts of deforestation (e.g. forced displacement due to fossil fuel production) or the fact that some parts of the world (e.g. Senegal) are used as a garbage can.

Make the link between colonization, resource extraction and its negative impacts (violence, insecurity, forced migration, environmental degradation, etc.). One example is the Belgian colonization in Congo, during which large mining companies drilled into forests to harvest gold, coltan and so on. These resources are the object of war (armed violence, gender-based violence) and force local populations to migrate, often cutting off family ties (with significant negative psychological repercussions). Their extraction is also a source of numerous pollution and environmental degradation.

- Integrate a reflection on the [anthropocene](#), which is a new geological era proposed by P. Crutzen?

Integrate the voice of the first concerned

- Integrate the voice of the first concerned? Who are the first people concerned, impacted? It is often said that climate change is a complex problem, but it is not complicated to say that someone who has their house flooded is a victim of climate change. We need people who are experiencing climate change, who are not white middle-class people in Belgium...
- The idea is also to find a direct link between climate and BPOC people. We must be able to reconnect the climate with ourselves. We need to see more clearly the links between climate change and colonial memory.
- At the moment, it is not clear how BPOC in Europe are more impacted by climate change. In other words, it would be interesting to be able to answer this question: as a non-white person, am I more affected by climate change here in Belgium? On the global scale, it is quite clear (with the rise of waters that make islands disappear for example), but here it is less clear.
- One way to develop a narrative around this idea is to start from immigration and the fact that it will become increasingly important in Europe because of climate change.
- Another avenue is air pollution. There are pollution peaks in Brussels (in terms of fine particles) and it has been shown in studies that municipalities with green spaces can more easily absorb these particles > there are no green spaces in deprived areas of Brussels. The chances of your health being affected by air pollution are greater in areas without green space, which are often also the poorest areas, and where people of immigrant background often live, who may not have the resources to defend themselves. If you come from Uccle, and they want to install a waste incinerator in your neighborhood, you have the political resources to defend yourself and refuse.

How can we make the camp more welcoming for racialized people?

Integrate BPOC into the organization

- Integrate BPOC into organizational structures, including the organization of conferences/workshops (choice of topics, speakers) and on site (moderation or presence in panels)
- Make sure that it is not only white people who bring their knowledge...

Set up totally non-mixtures spaces

- Non-mixing allows people to feel more comfortable and to talk more easily about their own experiences. Having total non-mixing makes it possible to dig deeper, to have deeper discussions, to *empower*.
- Partial non-mixing (in fish bowl) is generally not desired (but not excluded either). As a reminder, the principle of the non-mixed fishbowl consists in asking the people concerned to get in the middle to discuss and leave the unconcerned people around so that they can educate themselves (but without interacting, just taking notes). People present are not enthusiastic about this format for several reasons: it can be unpleasant to be observed (and affect the quality of the conversation because of a certain self-censorship, and the difficulty of talking about very personal stories), to be instrumentalized by privileged people (who in this case use the people concerned for their own personal development). It can also be unpleasant to witness the reaction of privileged people (because people around do not always understand that they should not say anything at all, even without using words, i.e. not agreeing or worse disagreeing) or because they often feel obliged to express their guilt at having privileges.

Program Ideas

- Choose two/three angles of attack on the anti-racist perspective in the fight against climate change upstream of the camp: for example pollution and social/popular class, access to healthy food, issues of foreign multinationals in the countries of the South, question of the people most affected.
- Workshop on the impact of climate change on BPOC in Europe (not mixed). The basic idea is that BPOC are more empathetic towards people who are already impacted by climate change (and are therefore better allies). The psychological effects (e.g. depression) related to the inability to return to see one's family, for example, could be addressed.
- Climate colonization must be an important topic.

Next meeting

The people present will review during a second event which will focus on 2/3 of the topics discussed during this first meeting (e.g. air pollution & precariousness) in order to deepen them. The idea of inviting an expert to provide content on the subject(s) was also raised.