

THE FUTURE



Transnational Institute

WE



WHAT



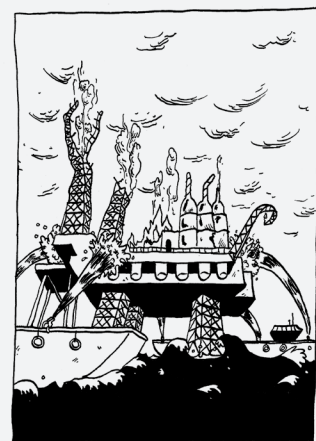
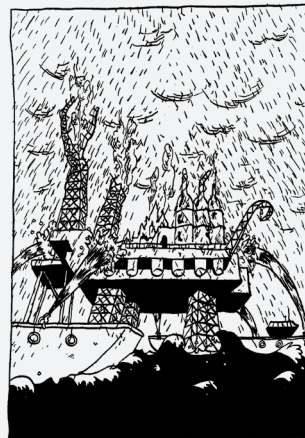
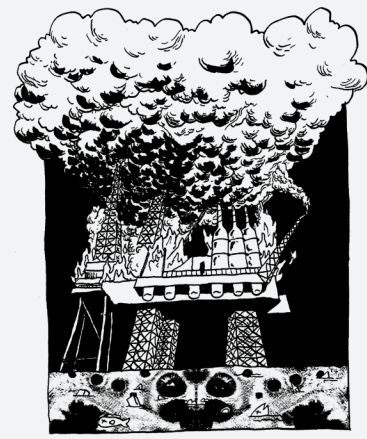
Authors:

Hamza Hamouchene
Niels Jongerius
Inés McKechnie Charle
Shaun Matsheza
Katie Sandwell
Lavinia Steinfors
Josephine Valeske



 .ORG

THE FUTURE WE WANT



March 2021



.ORG

Coordinating author

Katie Sandwell

Authors

Hamza Hamouchene

Niels Jongerius

Inés McKechnie Charle

Shaun Matsheza

Lavinia Steinfort

Josephine Valeske

Illustrations

Gus Moystad

Design

Kees de Klein



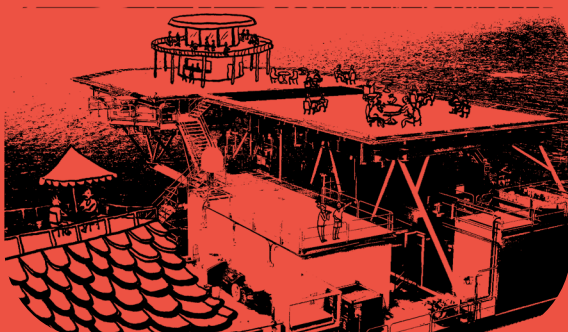
De Wittenstraat 25
1052 AK Amsterdam
The Netherlands
tel: + 31 20 662 66 08
tni@tni.org
www.tni.org

The Transnational Institute (TNI) is an international research and advocacy institute committed to building a just, democratic and sustainable planet. For more than 40 years, TNI has served as a unique nexus between social movements, engaged scholars and policy makers.

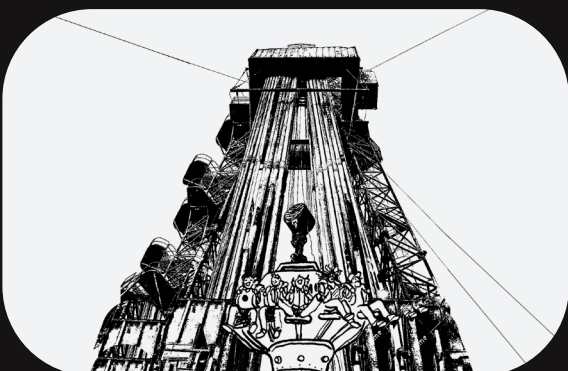
This document represents a collective work by the authors, drawing on other work published by TNI and co-published with allies. Different sections reflected the diverse viewpoints and perspectives of the authors involved.



Introduction	5
Why Shell must fall	7
What is Shell?	8
Why do we need a future beyond Shell?	8
Why now?	9
A future beyond Shell	11
A future rooted in justice: 6 principles of just transition	12
History of just transition	13
Just transition depends on context	13
From headquarters in The Hague to gas extraction in Groningen	14
Energy poverty	14
Just transition is an anti-racist framework	14
Just transition is a class issue	16
Trade unions for energy democracy	17
Just transition is a gender justice issue: the future is feminist	17
Just transition is about more than just the climate	18
Sacrifice zones	19
Just transition is about democracy	19
From protecting investment to protecting resistance	20
Energy Democracy	20
The false promises of "green" energy	21
Universal access and social justice	21
Renewable, sustainable and local energy	21
Public and social ownership	21
Solutions at the scale of the problem	22
Fair pay and creation of green jobs	22
Democratic control and participation	22
The inspiring present	23
Production	24
Distribution	24
Integrated companies	24
Conclusion	26
Epilogue: A requiem for the future	28



INTRO DUCTION



From grassroots environmental movements to climate scientists, there is a growing consensus that the time has come for an urgent transformation in how we relate to natural systems and territories.¹ The planet is at a tipping point and dramatic changes at many levels of society are needed to avoid catastrophic global heating. In 2019, a youth uprising led the fight for our common future. In the Netherlands, activists from Code-Rood, Gastivists and CLuB launched their *Shell Must Fall!* Campaign, aiming to take down Shell, challenging the multinational at its 'homeland' headquarters.² Momentum is building to re-think our societies, our economies, and our energy systems – making the future of fossil-fuel mega-companies a key battleground.

The Covid-19 pandemic which swept around the world in 2020 – and is far from being under control – has revealed in stark terms the crisis in our social systems and our relation to the planet, from the habitat damage and agro-industrial food systems that have driven pandemics,³ to the deep inequalities that left millions of people acutely vulnerable,⁴ to the 'crisis of care' and the vast 'unpaid debt' of neoliberalism⁵ revealed in many countries and communities. The pandemic has placed massive new burdens on people already struggling with climate change, poverty, and exploitation. Death and long-term impairment from Covid-19 has been starkly disproportionate, with poor and racialised people and communities heavily affected.⁶

Many governments around the world have responded in authoritarian ways, seizing the opportunity to push through unpopular laws while resistance was criminalised in the name of public health,⁷ and implementing intrusive measures that have stripped civil liberties, often without clear public health benefits. At the same time, suspicion of scientific experts and public health bodies, and chronic underfunding of public health services, has resulted in delayed responses and endangered peoples' lives. Finally, social support mechanisms, if they exist at all, have often been weak, faltering, privatised, corrupt, or inaccessible to those who need them most. As a model for planetary change, the response to the pandemic has not been inspiring.

At the same time, Covid-19 and the global response to it has unquestionably demonstrated the ability to make deep changes to economies, laws, public infrastructure, and our private lives that would have seemed impossible in 2019. Grassroots and local responses have revealed the strength, vision, and resilience of ordinary people even in times of great hardship. These responses highlight people's creativity, passion and commitment in communities around the world, which can help us to envisage – and build – better futures.

Realising this vision means confronting and radically transforming the profit-driven fossil-fuel-dependent economies that shape contemporary society. To do this we must take on the mega-corporations that defend – and profit from – the extractivist, imperialist, capitalist model. The Future Beyond Shell project is exploring some of the core ways and reasons to do this. The Future We Want puts forward alternatives, laying out a practical vision of systems that could meet everyone's needs without trashing the planet. Other sections will examine the obstacles in the path of achieving these alternatives, and the strategies activists are using to overcome them.

1 Limits to Growth: Club of Rome Brundtland Commission: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Brundtland-Report>

2 The Shell Must Fall! campaign was launched at the Annual General Assembly of the company. In an address to its shareholders and board, they stated: "we are here to announce that our coalition is determined to make you, Royal Dutch Shell, fall, by any legal, political or economic means necessary." <https://youtu.be/T2S7F6Ln0vg>

3 <https://thenewpress.com/books/monster-our-door/>; <https://nyupress.org/9781583675892/big-farms-make-big-flu/>; <https://mronline.org/2020/04/20/114206/>; <https://www.tni.org/en/article/video-recording-recipe-for-disaster-webinar-on-food-systems-inequality-and-covid-19>

4 <https://longreads.tni.org/covid-capitalism-report>

5 https://www.transform-network.net/cs/webinars/detail/?tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=9071 ; <https://focusweb.org/covid-19-exposes-twin-crises-of-neoliberalism-and-authoritarianism-in-philippines/>

6 <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/08/03/covid-19-crisis-erodes-womens-rights-in-indonesia-activists.html> ; <https://www.statnews.com/2020/06/09/systemic-racism-black-health-disparities/>

7 e.g. <https://mronline.org/2020/10/22/indonesias-return-to-an-authoritarian-developmental-state/> ; <https://focusweb.org/covid-19-exposes-twin-crises-of-neoliberalism-and-authoritarianism-in-philippines/>

WHY SHELL MUST FALL



What is Shell?

The British–Dutch company Royal Dutch Shell is ‘a global group of energy and petrochemical companies’ with more than 80,000 employees in over 70 countries,⁸ headquartered in The Hague. It is one of the illustrious ‘Seven Sisters’ and in 2020 was the world’s fifth largest company, and the largest based in Europe.⁹ It was formed in 1907 through the amalgamation of the Royal Dutch Petroleum Company and the Shell Transport and Trading Company Ltd.

Shell has contributed massively to the current environmental crisis: it is responsible for 2% of the total global CO₂ and methane emissions for the entire period between 1854 and 2018.¹⁰ It remains solidly in today’s top ten polluters from the fossil-fuel industry,¹¹ spending millions on lobbying to block climate policies that might affect its profits (see below).¹²

Shell is a major producer of oil and gas, producing more 1,001 million ‘barrels of oil equivalent’ in 2019.¹³ But, as a ‘modern, diversified company’ it is also active in multiple related industries. It seeks to integrate its supply chains both ‘vertically’ and ‘horizontally’ in order to better control prices and extract profits. For instance, Shell Chemicals owns dozens of factories around the world, including Europe, that refine petroleum products and by-products into motor oils, industrial lubricants and plastics.¹⁴ Chemical refineries boost oil companies’ profitability, even if oil prices are low or falling, or as consumers shift to less polluting forms of transport or consumption.

For decades, fossil-fuel companies publicly denied or downplayed climate and environmental risks linked to their products, while internally they planned to protect their profits in the face of climate change.¹⁵ Today, as the realities of the climate catastrophe are undeniable, Shell now paints itself as a key actor in a sustainable future. In its ‘powering progress’ strategy, announced in 2021, it declares its intention to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, while remaining a major player in global energy.¹⁶ Relying on a mix of geo-engineering (carbon capture),¹⁷ ‘nature based solutions,’ (green grabbing)¹⁸ and new fuels (e.g. large-scale solar),¹⁹ Shell aims to protect (and expand) its profits while apparently responding to some of the critiques raised by activists around the world, and rehabilitating its image after a growing number of recent legal proceedings demand that it take responsibility for damage caused to communities and their environment.²⁰ The “solutions” it proposes are deeply problematic.²¹

Why do we need a future beyond Shell?

The fossil-fuel and extractive industries are major drivers of climate change. Companies like Shell, which reap massive profits from this destructive industry, have never left its continuation and growth to chance. Rather, they have actively campaigned at every level, seeking to shape government regulation, scientific research, and political ‘common sense’ to support the continued growth of fossil-fuel extraction, regardless of its consequences. After decades of campaigning, they have shifted from outright denial of the climate impacts of their work to portraying themselves as holding solutions to the disasters they have created. Even if the ‘solutions’ they offer were sound and convincing, however, Shell’s negative impacts go way beyond carbon emissions. As we detail below, just and regenerative economies and energy systems are about far more than investing in technical fixes to reduce emissions. This report explores the rich ecosystems of alternatives that show the way towards transformative change, and new relationships with each other and the Earth.

⁸ <https://www.shell.com/about-us.html>

⁹ <https://fortune.com/global500/>

¹⁰ [https://milieudefensie.nl/klimaatzaakshell/veelgestelde-vragen#12-draagt-shell-echt-zoveel-bij-aan-klimaatverandering-;](https://milieudefensie.nl/klimaatzaakshell/veelgestelde-vragen#12-draagt-shell-echt-zoveel-bij-aan-klimaatverandering-) <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/09/revealed-20-firms-third-carbon-emissions>

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/09/revealed-20-firms-third-carbon-emissions>

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/mar/22/top-oil-firms-spending-millions-lobbying-to-block-climate-change-policies-says-report>; <https://corporateeurope.org/en/future-according-shell>; https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/bp-shell-climate_n_5f6e3120c5b64deddeed6762; https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/one_treaty_to_ruled_them_all.pdf

¹³ <https://reports.shell.com/annual-report/2019/strategic-report/segments/upstream.php>

¹⁴ <https://www.shell.com/business-customers/chemicals/manufacturing-locations.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-consensus-97-per-cent/2018/sep/19/shell-and-exxons-secret-1980s-climate-change-warnings>; <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/05042018/shell-knew-scientists-climate-change-risks-fossil-fuels-global-warming-company-documents-netherlands-lawsuits>; <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-secure-and-the-dispossessed>

¹⁶ <https://www.shell.com/media/news-and-media-releases/2021/shell-accelerates-drive-for-net-zero-emissions-with-customer-first-strategy.html>

¹⁷ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/anti.12532>; <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27738161/>

¹⁸ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03066150.2012.671770>; <https://www.foel.org/resources/publications/nature-for-sale>; <https://www.tni.org/en/protecting-justice>

To explore a Future Beyond Shell, we need first to understand the problems with the current systems, and Shell's role in defending and maintaining them. The fossil-fuel industry is a key and strategic piece of a destructive global system which must be overcome and dismantled.

Shell in brief, the fossil-fuel industry:

- **is driven by profit maximisation**
- **thrives on inequality and the violent exploitation of human and other living beings and systems**
- **undermines democratic decision-making, and**
- **misleads the way to a just transition**

These four characteristics make the fossil-fuel industry in general, and Shell in particular, a major obstacle to a just transition. These obstacles are explored in much greater depth. Shell has prioritised profits above fair wages and decent livelihoods, liveable ecosystems, social justice, human rights, and the broader public good. Shell's origins lie squarely in colonialist and imperialist violence, and its activities today continue to be characterised by conflict and dispossession. Shell invests heavily in corporate lobbying, fosters close ties to governments, pushes for – and exploits to the maximum – a trade and investment regime that puts profits before people, and uses any other means at its disposal to protect its profits. Finally, as it tries to paint itself as a green saviour of the twenty-first century, Shell advances false solutions that delay and undermine the socio-ecological transformations needed to address the climate crisis. For more information on the project visit the Future Beyond Shell website at futurebeyondshell.org

Since Shell is both a symbol and a champion of the system that has so enriched it, taking it on will help inspire action on how to approach and dismantle these obstacles, in order to move towards the urgently needed social, political, and economic transformation.

Why now?

The current anti-Shell campaigns are part of a long history of popular resistance.²² From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, for instance, there was widespread opposition to Shell's activities in South Africa and its role in supporting the apartheid regime. One of the campaign slogans was 'even the hardest Shell can be broken'. Although this opposition was broad and strong, there was no serious plan to dismantle the company from the ground up, or to build just and sustainable alternatives to meet peoples' energy (and other) needs.

As resistance to the climate crisis has deepened, and the Covid-19 pandemic has further exposed both the need for and the possibility of rapid change, we believe the time has come for a serious and strategic analysis and debate on how to build a future beyond Shell. Activists, academics, scientists, and governments increasingly recognise the need to move beyond our dependence on fossil fuels.

The start of 2020 saw an unprecedented plunge in the price of oil, caused by an 'oil war' unleashed by Russia and Saudi Arabia to drive US shale-oil producers out of business, as the Covid-19 pandemic intersected with and accelerated the profound shock to the fossil-fuel industry. Oil prices hit historically low, and even negative, values as some US oil producers paid buyers to take the oil off their hands because they lacked enough storage capacity. The impact for oil companies was brutal, especially in the high-cost US shale-oil

19
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/another-case-of-energy-colonialism-tunisia-s-tunur-solar-pro/> ; <https://www.cadtm.org/We-can-t-tackle-environmental-and-https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33115>

20
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55853024> ; <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-50265157> ; <https://www.dw.com/en/shell-climate-lawsuit-dutch-activists-push-courts-for-steeper-emissions-cuts/a-55979290> ; <https://www.dw.com/en/uk-court-nigerian-farmers-can-sue-shell-over-pollution/a-56551330>

21
<https://www.foei.org/resources/publications/chasing-carbon-unicorns-carbon-markets-net-zero-report> ; https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345992520_Carbon_unicorns_and_fossil_futures_Whose_emission_reduction_pathways_is_the_IPCC_performing

22
<http://chihiro.nl/?p=1171>

23
<https://theconversation.com/the-oil-shock-of-2020-appears-to-be-here-and-the-pain-could-be-wide-and-deep-133293> ; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/20/oil-prices-sink-to-20-year-low-as-un-sounds-alarm-on-to-covid-19-relief-fund> ; <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/4/21/reliant-on-oil-exports-algeria-watches-price-crash-with-concern>

24
For more on how fossil fuel companies are preparing to profit from climate change see, The Secure and The Dispossessed <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-secure-and-the-dispossessed>

25
<https://www.shell.com/media/news-and-media-releases/2021/shell-accelerates-drive-for-net-zero-emissions-with-customer-first-strategy.html>

26
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jul/06/naomi-klein-how-power-profits-from-disaster> ; <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/07/covid-19-crisis-boosts-the-fortunes-of-worlds-billionaires>

sector. For the smaller oil-producing countries such as Algeria, Ecuador, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria and Venezuela, the situation exacerbated existing economic difficulties, with mounting budget deficits and haemorrhaging financial reserves.

This dramatic drop in oil prices served as an additional wake-up call, exposing the perilous position of economies reliant on petrochemicals.²³ For activists it showed that, while oil companies and states that depend on them can and do act together to protect the system upon which they rely, there are also deep tensions between them. As the limits of the planet's ability to absorb emissions while remaining liveable for human beings become clearer, oil companies and powerful countries are quietly crafting their own responses and exit strategies.²⁴

Shell itself has announced that its total emissions probably peaked in 2018, and its oil extraction in 2019.²⁵ But, will the future beyond fossil fuels be one of corporate half-solutions, with food, energy, and economic systems that continue to destroy sensitive ecosystems, concentrate wealth and power, undermine democracy and put corporate profits ahead of human needs and natural systems? Or will it instead be a genuinely just future built around democratic, regenerative, gender-just and anti-racist economies, decent livelihoods, and restorative relationships with ecosystems, territories, and all life forms?

Moments of crisis and transformation can be opportunities for the powerful to consolidate power,²⁶ but also for real systemic change. The transition away from fossil fuels is a unique opportunity to push for more genuine and systemic transformation. The shifts in the global energy and economic system will create gaps, weaknesses, and opportunities. Corporations are moving fast to close these gaps and ensure that 'business as usual' can continue, fuelled by 'green' gas, biofuels, hydrogen, large-scale solar projects, or any other form of energy over which they can seize control. Climate and environmental justice movements must therefore move faster. We must take advantage of this moment of transition to push for genuine changes and a redistribution not only of energy, but also of power. Decades of activism have given us the tools to imagine a better future, and to begin building it.

A significant goal of this project is to foster analysis and discussion among academics, activists, journalists and policy-makers. This was kick-started at the alternative 'Future Beyond Shell presents Future Beyond Crisis' meeting held on 16 May 2020, just ahead of the Shell 2020 AGM.²⁷ The conversations will be ongoing and, we hope, enriched by new ideas and perspectives.

27
Future Beyond Shell presents Future Beyond Crisis, Meena Chani from Ecolise, 1h15min. <https://vimeo.com/419510100>



A FUTURE BEYOND SHELL



What does it mean to talk about genuine, transformative, systemic, or redistributive change? We understand the environmental crisis as a symptom of a broader crisis of racist sexist colonial capitalism; a crisis of a global system that extracts profits at the expense of human beings and all other forms of life on the planet. The campaign seeks to go beyond simply removing Shell from the system of extractive capitalism to fundamentally change that system. We seek to build the popular power that can create just and healthy societies in regenerative relationships with ecosystems and territories.

This calls for thinking about and practising environmental and social justice together. Advocates of or apologists for fossil-fuel economies try to divide the issues of decent work and environmental justice by arguing that an energy transition will lead to a loss of jobs,²⁸ but environmental and social justice are two sides of the same coin. A just future must ensure that retraining and social support is available for everyone currently working in the fossil-fuel industry and living in frontline communities to move away from the reliance on fossil fuels to decent and sustainable livelihoods. Furthermore, these affected communities, including workers, must be in the driving seat of transition: their goals, ambitions, political visions, and aspirations must be at the heart of the process. We know from history that when environmental policies are separated from social justice, communities, regions and future generations pay a bitter price.

One powerful concept which has arisen to understand the connections between economic and environmental justice is that of 'Just Transition'. This concept is broad and inclusive, and still evolving. Labour, feminist, environmental, anti-racist and other social movements around the world are developing and elaborating this vision. At the same time, actors like Shell are pushing their own narrower visions of transition and, in some cases, even co-opting the language of 'just transition' to describe a change in energy sources that leaves the structures of profit and power unchanged.²⁹

Just Transition is only one of the many lenses through which to look at a future beyond Shell, and how to get there. We will explore and elaborate on some central principles of the Just Transition, not to suggest that this framework should encompass or dominate other critical ideas like energy democracy, environmental justice, de-growth, regenerative economies, or just recovery/transformation. Rather, we share the concept so that activists can draw on the analysis and information that helps them to better understand their opponents, build new alliances, and realise their visions of a world transformed.

A future rooted in justice: 6 principles of just transition

For half a century, the concept of a just transition or transformation has been growing.³⁰ A just transition is one that ensures that the costs of moving away from ecologically destructive technologies are not borne by workers or marginalised people, or by territories, landscapes, and ecosystems. This means we must change how societies – and production – are organised rather than simply replacing one source of energy with another. Increasingly, climate and labour movements are coming together around the idea that it is impossible to break the dependency on fossil fuels without tackling the deep structures of institutionalised inequality and racist, sexist, capitalist exploitation that have driven us to the brink of ecological disaster.

28

For instance, Exxonmobil and its campaigns for jobs in the fracking industry. <https://inthesetimes.com/article/exxon-facebook-instagram-advertising-fracking-climate-fossil-fuels>

29

<https://www.shell.com/energy-and-innovation/the-energy-future/a-fair-and-just-transition.html>

30

In the context of Covid 'just recovery' has also become an important frame.

31

These six principles are based on those identified in a discussion among activists working on Just Transition in Europe, Africa, and Latin America which took place in Amsterdam in 2019. You can find the full workshop report here: <https://www.tni.org/en/justtransition>

32

One the defining documents on Just Transition in the US context lays out a rich and transformative vision, build with communities and social movements: https://movementgeneration.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/JT_booklet_Eng_printspreads.pdf

33

<https://www.shell.com.ph/media/media-releases/2019-media-releases/proudly-philippine-made.html> ; https://www.world-psi.org/sites/default/files/rapport_eng_56pages_a4_lr.pdf

34

<https://www.shell.com/sustainability/our-approach/working-in-partnership.html>

35

<https://www.shell.com/sustainability/our-approach/working-in-partnership.html>

36

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/mar/22/top-oil-firms-spending-millions-lobbying-to-block-climate-change-policies-says-report>

37

https://www.shell.co.id/en_id/about-us/who-we-are/history-of-shell-in-indonesia.html

We will explore here six principles of a just transition. While not exhaustive or conclusive, they provide an overview of some of the central ways in which a genuinely just transition diverges from and goes far beyond Shell's vision of a 'transition to sustainability'.³¹

- Just transition looks different in different places
- Just transition is anti-racist
- Just transition is a class issue
- Just transition is a gender issue (and the future is feminist)
- Just transition is about more than climate
- Just transition is about democracy

History of Just Transition

The concept of just transition emerged in the United States in the 1970s, in the context of negotiations among unions, communities, and environmental organisations on the closure of a nuclear power plant. This led to a growing movement in the US, which has increasingly incorporated other dimensions into the discussion,³² both at the national level and in exchanges with other global movements. Through the 1980s and 1990s the concept began to gain popularity worldwide as a powerful framework that could express workers' demands in relation to environmental conflicts, and unite different forms of re-

sistance to the political-economic model that has been trashing the planet, concentrating wealth, and exploiting workers worldwide – the impacts of which have fallen disproportionately on marginalised communities. The discussion on a just transition originated in the energy and extractive sectors, but energy use also lies at the basis of food systems, public services, transport, and production and distribution systems. Transforming how we use and think about energy requires deep transformations in every sector. At the same time as Just Transition has gained ground as a unifying framework to

help diverse movements work together, there have been increasing efforts by corporations, multi-stakeholder bodies, and other groups to co-opt and develop their own definitions of the term. Their understandings tend to refer to changes in energy sources, which leave the distribution of power and privilege unchanged or even deepened across the world. The concept of Just Transition has itself become a terrain for struggle, with movements fighting to ensure that the radical substance of the idea is not diluted or lost.

Just transition depends on context

Shell is active in more than 70 countries. The costs (and benefits) of its activities are distributed unequally between and within countries, societies and communities. Strategies to build a Future Beyond Shell will vary according to their context. The challenges, responsibilities, and opportunities of actors in different historical and geographical locations will differ. But, when pockets of action leading to a just transition link up, we can build international solidarity, learn from our differences and strengthen each other's local struggles. The company is interconnected across vast distances, and the movement against it must be similarly networked and interconnected.

The global span of transnational corporations (TNCs) requires us to look differently at the diverse places of operation, both in particular locations and along the supply chain. Understanding what a just transition would look like means taking a closer look at what happens on the ground, and what needs to be done to bring about the future we want. This includes taking seriously the experiences and needs of workers who currently depend on fossil economies for their livelihoods; of people whose livelihoods are being destroyed by environmental catastrophes and climate change linked to fossil fuel extraction; and of people in both rich and poor countries who lack access to the energy and other resources that they need to ensure decent livelihoods.

There is no single, simple answer to overturning and replacing Shell, but it is critical to understand the diverse ways in which different communities confront it. It is also useful and important to better understand Shell itself, and how it acts across different geographical and political spaces. Shell embraces a range of tactics to guarantee its position in global

38 <https://content.csbs.utah.edu/~mli/Economies%205430-6430/Gordon-How%20Big%20Was%20Indonesia%27s%20Real%20Colonial%20Surplus.pdf>

39 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/24/business/energy-environment/netherlands-gas-earthquakes.html> ; <https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2019/05/groningen-hit-by-strong-earthquake-as-gas-extraction-impact-continues/>;

40 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/24/business/energy-environment/netherlands-gas-earthquakes.html>

41 <https://www.tni.org/en/article/water-protectors-urge-dutch-activists-to-join-global-struggle-against-fossil-companies>

42 https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/energy_democracy_workshop_report_for_web-2.pdf

43 <https://www.fuelpovertyaction.org.uk/about-us/>

44 <https://womin.africa/community-activists-resources/women-activists-confront-energy-inequality/>

45 <https://energy-democracy.net/energy-poverty-and-access/>

46 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/18/environmental-justice-means-racial-justice-say-activists>

47 For example - <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/02/the-trump-administration-finds-that-environmental-racism-is-real/554315/> ; <https://www.amherst.edu/system/files/media/1304/>

48 http://www.e-reading-lib.com/bookreader.php/149187/Open_Veins_of_Latin_America.pdf

49 https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/hamza-hamouchene/lumumba-lesson-for-us-all_b_3987607.html ;

energy markets: from investing in renewables, to greenwashing existing operations, to diversifying its operations in chemical and plastics production – which have received less widespread public opposition than oil and gas extraction. It works with governments to develop public–private partnerships (PPPs),³³ collaborates with organisations like The Nature Conservancy and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN),³⁴ participates in multi-stakeholder spaces like the Roundtable for Responsible Palm Oil (RRSPO),³⁵ and of course devotes millions to lobbying for policies that will support its long-term profits.³⁶

In order to oppose Shell, we must learn from this diversity of tactics, and confront these in many geographic, economic, and political spaces. To envisage a Just Transition and a future beyond Shell, we must engage with the manifold and varied needs and realities of people around the world who may be exploited, dispossessed and impoverished by fossil-fuel economies, depend on them for their livelihoods, or both.

From headquarters in The Hague to gas extraction in Groningen

The Netherlands, where Shell is headquartered, illustrates the complex nature of context. Before Indonesia gained independence from the Dutch colonial power, it was one of Shell's first and most important sites for oil drilling: Royal-Dutch Petroleum (which merged with Shell Transport in 1907) was formed to exploit oil in Sumatra and established Indonesia's first oil shipping port.³⁷ Most of the profits were amassed in the Netherlands, entrenching an inequality in wealth and environmental impacts between the two countries which remains today.³⁸ Today, however, Europe's biggest gas field lies in Groningen, one of the poorest regions of the Netherlands. Shell (in a joint venture with Ex-

on-Mobil) has been extracting gas from this field since 1959, although it has announced that this will end in 2022. For decades, the region of Groningen has experienced earthquakes caused by gas extraction – over 1,000 since 1986.³⁹ Jobs and profits, of course, flow mostly to Shell's headquarters in The Hague and its research facilities in Amsterdam and even these are threatened as Shell reorganises to protect its profits in the face of low oil prices. Many local residents feel that their distance from these metropolitan centres made it possible for decision-makers to ignore or downplay their struggles for years.⁴⁰ Shell's identity as a 'Dutch' company obscures these important inequalities even

within the Netherlands. Recognising these inequalities provides the opportunity for important expressions of solidarity, as in 2017 when water defenders from the Standing Rock camp resisting the US Dakota Access Pipeline travelled to Groningen to meet with local activists and share their struggles and experiences in resisting destructive fossil-fuel economies.⁴¹ The struggles of communities in Groningen are obviously not identical to those in Nigeria, in Indonesia, or in the US – but a just transition must be built upon a solid and nuanced understanding of the different impacts of fossil-fuel economies in diverse contexts, and a commitment to solidarity across these interconnected struggles.

Energy poverty

Struggles to achieve a Just Transition must tackle the excessive use of energy, which is destroying the planet, and the plundering resources to create cheap consumer goods. Equally, they must address the urgent needs of those who lack access to the energy (and other resources) they need to live decent and dignified lives. In the words of Dinga Sikwebu of the National Union of Metalworkers of

South Africa: 'Energy also shapes the lives of ordinary people in a big way. Without energy, there can be no production, and without energy people can't live dignified and meaningful lives. So, energy is a key input in shaping what people can do and how they live, and the lack of energy is a form of inequality and the absence of democracy'.⁴² A future beyond Shell must be one in which energy production prioritises

the needs of people and communities. From elderly people freezing in the United Kingdom because they cannot afford to heat (or insulate) their homes adequately,⁴³ to women in South Africa affected by dirty energy in their homes and their communities,⁴⁴ Just Transition must have the voices, needs, and proposals of the most marginalised people at its centre.⁴⁵

Just transition is an anti-racist framework

As environmental justice movements have underlined,⁴⁶ the costs of environmental destruction are disproportionately borne by racialised communities.⁴⁷ At the international level, countries that were the victims of colonialism are more vulnerable to the climate catastrophe and to other environmental damage linked to fossil-fuel extraction. Some middle-income countries, including Brazil, Russia, India China and South Africa, the so-called BRICS, play key roles in extractive economies, and in many countries the wealthy elite are enriched by these exploitative and environmentally damaging industries. Nonetheless, the distribution of benefits and costs is still deeply shaped by the power structures established

50 <https://www.versobooks.com/books/2002-fossil-capital>

51 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/03/shell-accused-of-fuelling-nigeria-conflict>

52 For example, <https://www.tni.org/en/deep-and-comprehensive-dependency>

53 <https://energy-charter-dirty-secrets.org/> ; https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/busting_the_myths_around_the_energy_charter_treaty-web.pdf ; <https://10isdstories.org/cases/case9/> ; <https://www.tni.org/en/ECTpetition>

54 <https://multinationales.org/Shale-gas-how-Algerians-rallied-against-the-Regime-and-Foreign-Oil-Companies>

55 <https://www.foei.org/resources/publications/chasing-carbon-unicorns-carbon-markets-net-zero-report>

56 https://demandclimatejustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/NOT_ZERO_How_net_zero_targets_disguise_climate_inaction_FINAL.pdf

57 <https://www.routledge.com/Green-Grabbing-A-New-Appropriation-of-Nature/Fairhead-Leach-Scoones/p/book/9781138850521> ; <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03056244.2019.1688941>

58 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2008/feb/13/conervation>

59 <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33115/The-Ouarzazate-Solar-Plant-in-Morocco-Triumphal-%60Green%60-Capitalism-and-the-Privatization-of-Nature> ; <https://merip.org/2020/10/global-aspirations-and-local-realities-of-solar-energy-in-morocco/>

60 <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/bioenergy-in-the-eu>;

through European colonialism and imperialism, as well as by systemic racism apparent in many countries, itself often linked to colonial legacies. Around the world, indigenous and racialised communities are far more likely than others to live among the slag-heaps and sacrifice zones of extractive industries.

A Just Transition must address questions of redress, redistribution and reparations, starting with those most affected by Shell and other fossil-fuel giants. A just and regenerative economy cannot tolerate any form of racial supremacy, and an anti-racist transition would treat energy as a human right to which everyone has adequate access. This means explicitly tackling the historical injustices within and between countries; recognising the linkages between fossil-fuel economies and migration, and affirming all migrants' human rights; and advancing an expressly anti-racist vision.

Extractivism, neo-colonial hierarchies and just transition

If we are serious about moving beyond the dependence on oil, it is crucial to examine the linkages between fossil fuels and the wider economy and address the power relations and hierarchies of the international energy system. These are rooted in colonial and neo-colonial legacies, as well as practices of dispossession, plunder of resources and land grabs. For those who see history as a form of competition, backwardness and poverty are evidence of a country's or people's failures; some lost, others won. But, to quote the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano,⁴⁸ 'the winners happen to have won thanks to our losing.' The history of Africa's (Latin America and Asia's too) underdevelopment 'is an integral part of the history of world capitalism's development'.⁴⁹

In the popular imagination, energy tends to refer to coal, oil and gas. Extractivism refers to getting hold of, controlling and appropriating these resources and 'fossil capitalism'⁵⁰ is one of its manifestations. But, the concept of extractivism is broader than this, capturing economic activity which removes resources from one place or community to enrich another, with little consideration for the environmental, social, and labour costs of this activity. Thus, activities from agribusiness to green energy production can fit within the extractivist model.

Modern European imperialism began with the conquest of the Americas and was structured through barbaric colonialism, dehumanising slavery, exploitation and outright robbery. It continues in the current divisions of the global system and with the creation of 'sacrifice zones' and 'sacrificial people' in order to maintain the creation of profits. Social and environmental costs are largely borne by 'marginal', 'peripheral,' and 'surplus' people. This marginalisation happens along multiple and intersecting lines of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and geography, among others.

Importantly, this dynamic of exploitation, where some countries (and some communities within countries) bear the costs of the use and extraction of fossil fuels, while others reap the profits, is maintained by various interlocking systems. Economic and governance systems, diplomacy and armed conflict have all been used to reinforce and defend these exploitative relationships and practices. Iraq and Libya were among the most recent victims of fighter jets and bombings, as western powers sought to control their abundant natural resources. Countries like Nigeria⁵¹ have been ravaged by wars fought over their resources.

Institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as the international Free Trade and Investment (FTI) regimes more generally, have often served to reinforce the unjust division

61 <https://www.brookings.edu/research/intra-african-trade-a-path-to-economic-diversification-and-inclusion/> ; <http://abahlali.org/files/3295358-walter-rodney.pdf>

62 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-shell-nigeria-court-idUSKBN29Y1D2>

63 For more information: <http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/>

64 http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/resistreclaimrestructure_2013_english.pdf

65 <http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/resources/tued-publications/tued-working-paper-9-energy-transition-are-we-winning/>

66 <http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/TUED-Working-Paper-10.pdf>

67 <http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/TUED-Working-Paper-11.pdf>

68 <http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TUED-WP13-Transition-in-Trouble.pdf>

69 The term 'womxn' and 'womyn' are used, particularly in intersectional feminism, to avoid the suggestion of sexism perceived in the sequences m-a-n and m-e-n. Womxn explicitly includes trans and non-binary people who identify as female, and the term is used to foreground this inclusion against potentially more exclusionary uses of the term 'women'.

70 <https://www.whatworks.co.za/news/news/item/661-climate-change-is-a-feminist-issue>

71 The term 'natural disaster' is contested: the impacts of any extreme weather event, earthquake, etc are mediated by social, economic and political factors, which also determine who is likely to be worst affected. For an exploration of this in the context of famines see <https://www.versobooks.com/books/2311-late-victorian-holocausts>

of power and resources established by colonialism and imperialism. Companies present the extraction of wealth as 'investment,' necessary for countries' development. Instruments like Trade Agreements often lock countries into these relationships, limiting their decision-making power and consolidating unequal terms.⁵² The Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) is a telling example: oil companies are pushing this investment agreement, which gives them powers to halt energy transitions by suing states for implementing policies that might damage their profits.⁵³

These neo-colonial dynamics can disguise politics which are more 'not in my backyard' than transformative: governments may ban environmentally destructive practices in their own countries, but pursue policies that displace extractive industries to other countries rather than seeking transformative solutions. France, for instance, has banned fracking domestically while offering diplomatic support to French-based TNCs to exploit shale resources in its former colony of Algeria.⁵⁴ Likewise, there are growing concerns that countries aiming to achieve 'net zero' emissions⁵⁵ will do so through market-based mechanisms, which create 'carbon colonialism',⁵⁶ forcing less economically powerful countries and regions to accept 'green grabbing'.⁵⁷ This can take the form of conservation arrangements that exclude traditional (and sustainable) users of land,⁵⁸ of 'green energy' projects that displace and dispossess local people;⁵⁹ or of monocultural plantations that claim to capture carbon or produce 'carbon neutral' fuels but also wreak havoc on water resources, food sovereignty, traditional livelihoods, ecosystems, and biodiversity.⁶⁰

At the same time, the extraction of fossil fuels continues apace in many countries. The costs and benefits of extractive economies, however, are by no means evenly distributed internally. In Tunisia, Shell is the largest gas producer (after it acquired British Gas in 2016). It supplies approximately 60% of Tunisia's domestic gas production through the Miskar and Hasdrubal operations, holds a 100% interest in the Miskar gas field, the most productive in the country, and sells the gas to the State Electricity and Gas Company at international market values and in hard currency. Enormously profitable for Shell, this arrangement does little to meet the needs of ordinary Tunisians, either in terms of providing decent and sustainable livelihoods, or meeting their need for affordable clean energy.

Nonetheless, decades or even centuries of policies to keep these countries in the position of providing raw materials to wealthier economies mean that there are few alternative sources of livelihoods. Neoliberal reforms have gutted the public sector, and plunged people into deeper poverty, while the international trade and investment regime has ensured dependency – in 2017, for example, just 17% of all trade in Africa was with other African nations, while the remaining 83% of goods left the continent.⁶¹

As energy security in the rich countries (and for the wealthy elite in poorer countries) trumps the human rights and sovereignty of peoples across most of the world, and as resources are controlled by the richest and most powerful (states and TNCs), it is crucial to scrutinise the political economy of energy transitions and undertake a power and class analysis of the actors involved.

Just transition is a class issue

A just transition towards a future beyond Shell implies a redistribution of economic and political power. Those who now sell their labour to Shell and the fossil-fuel industry more broadly, as well as those whom it has exploited and dispossessed, must have the right to control and manage resources currently in corporate hands. The concept of Just Transition emerged from

72 <https://www.unisdr.org/files/48152-disasterandgenderstatistics.pdf>

73 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-dgreports/-dcomm/-publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf

74 Drawing heavily from: <https://www.tni.org/en/article/ecofeminism-fueling-the-journey-to-energy-democracy>

75 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/anti.12532>; <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/354/6309/182>

76 https://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Friends-of-the-Earth_Nature-for-Sale-report_EN.pdf; <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03066150.2012.671770>

77 <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/blue-carbon-ocean-grabbing-in-disguise>;

78 <https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/blog/2018/oct/22/global-sacrifice-zones-and-why-we-are-not-together>

79 <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/12/on-fire-naomi-klein-review>

80 <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/on-shrinking-space>

81 <https://reports.shell.com/annual-report/2019/consolidated-financial-statements/balance-sheet.php>

82 <https://reports.shell.com/annual-report/2019/strategic-report/segments/oil-and-gas-information/delivery-and-exploration.php>

83 <https://reports.shell.com/annual-report/2019/strategic-report/performance-indicators.php?tabc=1e2>

84 <http://priceofoil.org/content/uploads/2020/09/OCI-Big-Oil-Reality-Check-vF.pdf>

labour unions, recognising both the needs and the transformative visions of working people.

Around the world, Shell affects workers in different ways: from those who sell their labour to Shell or its subsidiaries and have been able to earn enough to maintain their family, to those whom the fossil-fuel giants exploit as temporary or precarious workers, or in hazardous conditions, to those whose land and resources have been appropriated or destroyed by fossil-fuel economies.⁶²

A vision of just transition needs to be alive to the different and legitimate needs, expectations, demands, and visions of these communities. At the same time, it must acknowledge that the inequalities and divisions among those who engage with Shell, whether as workers or as consumers (or both), pale in comparison to the differences between these diverse groups and Shell's corporate interests. Despite their differences, workers and communities around the world share the same interest in an economy that prioritises their needs and interests – for decent work, thriving communities, and a liveable environment – over corporate profits.

Realising a vision where the needs of people, territories, ecosystems, and communities are put first depends on rectifying historical imbalances in political power and global decision-making. New or better democratic structures and practices, from the local to global scale, must give more power to the voices of the many – the 99% – than to the interests of the few. Repairing historical injustices will call for intellectual imagination as well as political power and class-based organising.

Trade unions for energy democracy

Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) is a global, multi-sector initiative to advance the democratic direction and control of energy in a way that promotes solutions to the climate crisis, energy poverty, the degradation of land and people, and responds to the attacks on workers' rights and protections.⁶³ In late 2020, TUED's membership included 66 trade unions and related organisations across 20 countries. TUED's 2013 publication *Resist, Reclaim and Restructure* set out the basis for building a radical energy

democracy movement, demonstrating 'the need to resist the dominant agenda of the large energy corporations and their allies; the need to reclaim to the public sphere parts of the energy economy that have been privatized or marketized; and the need to restructure the global energy system in order to massively scale up renewable and low-carbon energy, aggressively implement energy conservation, ensure job-creation and local wealth creation, and assert community and democratic control over the

energy sector'.⁶⁴ Its research papers have addressed how policies focused on the market and the private sector have prevented the energy transition from taking off;⁶⁵ the need to invest public funds directly in a pro-public and system-wide energy transition;⁶⁶ how trade unions and civil society can reclaim the just transition discourse;⁶⁷ and how public planning and ownership is necessary for 'community energy' to contribute meaningfully to a just transition.⁶⁸

Just transition is a gender justice issue: the future is feminist

Womxn⁶⁹ bear a disproportionately heavy burden of the climate crisis, constituting 80% of the 60 million people displaced by the climate crisis.⁷⁰ Womxn and children are 14 times more likely than men to die as a result of catastrophic 'natural'⁷¹ disasters,⁷² which have intensified and become more frequent due to global heating. A transition will be just only if it is led by womxn, who currently do most of the social reproductive work on which every society relies, and thus should play a key role in developing alternative visions and practices.

There are at least two ways in which feminism is a pathway to a future beyond Shell. First because, as mentioned, womxn are disproportionately affected by the ecological crisis to which Shell's activities continue to contribute. Due to patriarchal patterns in the sexual division of labour, more womxn than men experience energy poverty and most of the world's farmers are womxn, whose livelihoods are threatened by climate change. Globally, womxn do at least 76% of all unpaid care work, more than three times as much as men.⁷³ This includes gathering fuel, fetching water and obtaining food, along with caring for children, and those who are sick, have a disability or are elderly. Those who are the most exploited and marginalised are hit hardest by disasters: from womxn in low-income

85 <https://www.fool.com/investing/2020/08/28/exxon-removed-from-the-dow-after-nearly-100-years/>; <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bp-writeoffs-idUSKBN23M0QA>

86 wetsvoorstel van GL over standerd assets uit balans halen.

87 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/oil-and-gas-companies-risking-2-2trn-in-stranded-assets-during-low-carbon-transition-report-warns/>; <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/apr/19/carbon-bubble-financial-crash-crisis>; <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2012/jan/19/fossil-fuels-sub-prime-mervyn-king>; <https://carbontracker.org/reports/carbon-bubble/>

88 While widespread outcry about ISDS mechanisms have led to minor adjustments to (and new names for) these tools, rumours of ISDS' demise are, so far, much exaggerated. <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-zombie-isds>

89 For a few examples see: <https://10isdstories.org/>; https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/isds_africa_web.pdf; https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/mongolia_paper.pdf;

90 <https://www.tni.org/en/energy-charter-dirty-secrets>

91 <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/50-jaar-isds>;

92 For instance SA Global Campaign Right to Say No: <http://aidc.org.za/sa-campaign-dismantle-corporate-power-right-say-no/> <http://aidc.org.za/want-right-say-no/>

93 https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/reclaiming_public_services.pdf

94 <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/scottish-government-must-stop-outsourcing-22750864>

households, womxn of colour and womxn with disabilities, to transwomxn and undocumented womxn.⁷⁴ A future beyond Shell needs to address these gendered dimensions of the ecological and climate crisis – by limiting global heating to the absolute minimum, and by adopting systems that value, invest in and safeguard reproductive work and the care economy by guaranteeing access to water, food, and energy. A future beyond Shell must reflect how caregivers use energy in their daily lives. In order for ordinary womxn to have a voice in the future we want, we need a truly participatory democratic approach that places womxn – particularly the most marginalised – at the centre of decision-making processes.

Second, ecofeminism is a fundamental alternative to the current system of extractive capitalism. An ecofeminist society aims to sustain rather than destroy lives and life forms, based not on private profit but on sharing resources. Alternatives like agroecology, often led by women, show the rich possibilities of this approach. Ecofeminism is an approach that values all life and strives to nurture social and ecological reproduction and regeneration. It recognises the interdependence of all life forms and that their survival depends on sustaining the ecosystem, which it regards as something valuable in itself rather than a source of profit and reckless growth.

A feminist future is one in which the systems that support life – from care work to public services to ecosystems – not only underpin our economic models but are driven by a politics of care. It is also a system in which all people have the opportunity to live emancipated lives of full human flourishing, irrespective of their assigned gender or gender identity. Ecofeminist perspectives offer an opportunity to re-value economic and social activities which are life sustaining and restorative over those which produce profit, concentrate wealth, and destroy the planet.

Just transition is about more than just the climate

As we have seen in the previous sections, the current environmental crisis and the damage wrought by fossil-fuel economies goes far beyond climate change caused by emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs). Although these pose a critical threat, they are only one manifestation of a broader ecological crisis that is leading to mass extinctions, habitat loss, desertification, forest fires, and the collapse of ecosystems all over the world. Correcting the runaway increase in atmospheric CO₂ will not save these ecosystems. We need to fundamentally rethink our relationship with the territories, ecosystems, and natural processes, with each other, and with all life forms, based on visions and practices that understand all these as interdependent.

This complexity is visible in struggles against Shell. The impacts of fossil-fuel extraction on local ecosystems and communities – from the earthquakes in Groningen, to the polluted wells of Nigeria, to the destroyed and toxic rain forests of Ecuador – can be catastrophic. Environmental Human Rights Defenders have used the Environmental Justice framework to identify the injustices being perpetrated by companies, and to push for an economic system that actively protects sacred lands and territories, ecosystems, and people who depend on them for their material, spiritual, and cultural survival.

This is a stark contrast to the vision of ‘transition’ advanced by fossil-fuel giants like Shell and endorsed by many national governments and multi-stakeholder bodies. These have proposed a range of land- and technology-intensive solutions, from Direct Carbon Capture⁷⁵ to the use of vast tracts of land (much of it in poorer countries) to grow monocultural tree plantations to capture carbon in soil,⁷⁶ to investment in exclusionary ocean-based carbon-capture initiatives.⁷⁷ In general, these solutions rely on a simplistic vision of global eco-

95 <https://www.gmbScotland.org.uk/newsroom/renewables-job-losses-scandal-must-stop>

96 <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/communal-members-of-ixtepec-contending-to-develop-a-wind-farm-cooperative>

97 <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33115/The-Ouarzazate-Solar-Plant-in-Morocco-Triumphal-%60Green%60-Capitalism-and-the-Privatization-of-Nature> ; <https://merip.org/2020/10/global-aspirations-and-local-realities-of-solar-energy-in-morocco/>

98 https://www.tni.org/en/search/field_publication_series/think-piece-series-on-flex-crops-commodities-35 ; <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/bioenergy-in-the-eu> ;

99 <https://energy-democracy.net/principals/>

100 This means decisions being taken at the lowest feasible level, rather than at a higher level than necessary.

101 <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/towards-energy-democracy>

102 <http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/resources/tued-publications/tued-working-paper-11-trade-unions-and-just-transition/> ; https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/191120_-_just_transition_case_studies.pdf

systems, where a tree in Tunisia can be easily replaced with a tree in Poland (and vice versa); where the carbon cycle operates in isolation from other natural systems and processes; where the ecological destruction attacking the heart of our society is treated as a given which can, at best, be compensated for by preserving areas of ‘wild nature’; where the vast diversity of human relationships with nature are treated as equally destructive; and where the livelihoods, cultures, and traditions of communities that rely on natural territories are regarded as fundamentally expendable for the goal of continuing to increase profits.

Recognising that Shell’s damage to the ecosystem does not begin or end with CO₂ emissions helps us to see through these ‘false solutions,’ and illuminates the rich tapestry of alternative relationships with nature that go beyond ‘business as usual’. A future beyond Shell means re-thinking how we relate to energy, ecosystems, and the planet as a whole, rather than just getting better at cleaning up Shell’s mess.

Sacrifice zones

The concept of sacrifice zones developed in the context of the Cold War and the threat of nuclear war. It articulated the possibility of huge swathes of land, or almost the entire surface of the Earth, potentially becoming uninhabitable for generations. Today the concept is used to refer to ‘entire geographic areas which have been relegated to environmental damage and/or economic disinvestment’.⁷⁸ Sacrifice zones are usually manifestations of the power imbalances that mean that some communities are

denied the political power to protect their landscapes and territories. Overwhelmingly these are the places where poor, racialised, and otherwise marginalised people live. Increasingly, many sacrifice zones are understood as a product of fossil capitalism, inextricably linked to the wealth accumulated by those who profit from fossil-fuel economies. In the words of Naomi Klein ‘our fossil fuel-powered economy requires sacrifice zones’.⁷⁹ Visions of Just Transition must be mindful of the possibilities of creating

new sacrifice zones with alternative technologies – from ocean ecosystems gutted by extraction of rare-earth minerals to traditional pastoralists’ land seized for large-scale solar installations. It must also confront the twin challenges of reparation and restoration: how to ‘roll back’ the grabbing of lands and resources that has characterised development so far, how to redress the wrongs done to communities and ecosystems, and how to regenerate natural and social systems.

Just transition is about democracy

Democracy is critical to achieving a just transition: environmental human rights defenders, environmental justice activists, and mobilised citizens are all at risk from authoritarianism and repression.⁸⁰ Democratic space must be protected to enable progress towards a just transition – and criticism of the current destructive and unjust system.

At the same time, transparency, accountability and participation are fundamental values in a just transition. Democratic management of energy, and of the territories and natural systems on which we depend, is essential. We need to build a system that is not only accountable to the 99% but is also shaped and managed by the many. A democratic transition means that communities and workers can influence climate and energy policies so that future renewable energy systems are owned and organised in a democratic fashion, including equitable mechanisms to ensure that those most affected have greater decision-making powers. A just transition must take power out of the hands of corporations and put it in the hands of people.

One way of thinking more deeply about what a democratic energy system might look like is to apply the lens of ‘energy democracy,’ a framework a growing number of movements and initiatives around the world are using to articulate their vision for an alternative to Shell and companies like it.

From protecting investment to protecting resistance

For 2019 Shell reported total assets of \$404.3 billion.⁸¹ Exploration rights for new oil and gas fields are a significant piece of this picture,⁸² with Shell declaring 11,096 million 'barrel of oil equivalents' in proven oil and gas reserves in 2019 and saying 'Reserves are crucial to an oil and gas company, as they constitute the source of future production'.⁸³ Not only environmental activists,⁸⁴ but also investors⁸⁵ and policy-makers⁸⁶ challenge the validity of such valuations. Nations and policy-makers increasingly agree that if fossil-fuel companies actually extracted and burned all the reserves that they count as 'assets' it would mean the end of life as we know it.⁸⁷ Some believe that these reserves will therefore become 'stranded assets' –

on-paper values that can never be realised in practice due to regulatory, market, or biophysical constraints. If it becomes impossible to extract, sell, and ultimately burn these fossil fuels, how should they be accounted for in Shell's balance books? Certain mechanisms already exist to ensure that fuel companies can realise projected future profits despite their planetary costs. Controversial Investor-to-State-Dispute-Settlement (ISDS)⁸⁸ mechanisms, for instance, protect investors' claims against regulatory interventions. Such mechanisms, embedded in many trade and investment agreements, allow corporations to use international arbitration bodies to seek colossal amounts of compensation from governments when they believe that

national-level regulatory changes have damaged their profits.⁸⁹ This system is cemented in many existing investment treaties and in the multilateral Energy Charter Treaty ECT⁹⁰ that Shell was instrumental in creating in 1968.⁹¹ A future beyond Shell needs to reverse both special business protections and also the underlying principles that prioritise private profit over public health and wealth, and global ecosystems. Policies that govern all levels of the economy must recognise the universality of human rights, provide legal recourse for affected communities everywhere, and recognise communities' and nations' right to reject harmful investments.⁹²

Energy democracy

In the face of Fridays For Future, Extinction Rebellion, and climate justice movements that can no longer be ignored, Shell and other fossil-fuel TNCs are increasingly portraying themselves as the future of 'green energy'. Even if these rhetorical changes were to reflect or lead to some real improvements in their practices (which is far from certain), a 'green' Shell cannot be the answer to the climate crisis. Corporate monopolies, driven by the thirst for profit and built on extractivism, dispossession, and exploitation, cannot produce the solutions we need, whether they are selling fossil fuels or 'renewables'. Nor will toppling these companies, in itself, be enough to tackle the climate crisis. Rather, societies need to fundamentally change the ownership and organisation of their energy systems.

Energy Democracy provides a vision of what an energy system might look like if it were governed 'by and for the people'. There is no single, overarching definition of energy democracy. It is concerned with shifting power over all aspects of the energy sector to its users and workers – from production to distribution and supply, and from finance to technology and knowledge. This can be done by putting privatised utilities back into public hands (through re-nationalisation or re-municipalisation), and developing new community-owned and -controlled solutions such as local energy cooperatives, among others. In recent years, at least 374 energy grids and services around the world have been reclaimed or newly created by local authorities.⁹³ Both grassroots communities and the state have a democratic role to play. National, regional, municipal and cooperative enterprises can jointly deliver clean and affordable energy if they are under public control and horizontally integrated, meaning that they work to meet the energy needs of all people across the entire territory where they operate.

The false promises of "green" energy

There are abundant examples of unjust transition projects, characterised by undemocratic and exclusionary processes. One current example is in Scotland, where contracts for the construction of offshore windfarms have been overwhelmingly awarded to global companies, with construction taking place in China and the United Arab Emirates.⁹⁴ Trade unions and political parties have called for jobs in construction of these windfarms to be locally contracted.⁹⁵ Another example of an unjust transition in the wind energy sector comes from the State of Oaxaca in southern Mexico, where international 'green' energy compa-

nies were granted land to build windfarms on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Local communities were left out of the process, and conflicts arose both over the rights to the land, the fact that the energy was meant for the national market and industrial production over the local needs, and the profits flowed abroad. Local communities have developed a cooperative alternative centred on energy sovereignty.⁹⁶

By focusing on only one aspect of the necessary transition such projects risk creating resistance from and resentment among local populations. Such undemocratic visions of renewables are not

confined to wind energy: whether massive solar farms which are draining the water resources of Morocco to produce 'clean' energy,⁹⁷ or 'agrofuel' plantations in Brazil that displace small-scale farmers or force them into new relationships of dependency and also damage sensitive ecosystems.⁹⁸ Where the skills, needs, visions, and abilities of local communities are not incorporated into project planning and development, avoidable divisions can be created and the old dynamics of 'peripheral' and marginalised communities being exploited to provide goods and services for privileged communities elsewhere are once again reproduced.

Movements motivated by the concept of energy democracy also demand a socially just energy system – universal access, fair prices and secure, unionised and decently remunerated jobs. They want an energy system that works in the public interest, with the profit motive giving way to social and environmental goals. They seek a transition from high- to low-carbon energy sources, and ultimately a world powered entirely by renewable and sustainable energy.

Often, the concept of energy democracy is also strongly associated with the expansion of local initiatives, such as small-scale cooperatives, that generate and distribute electricity based on renewable sources. Demanding energy democracy for the future beyond Shell means an energy system based on the following principles:⁹⁹

Universal access and social justice

Everybody should be guaranteed access to sufficient and affordable energy. Almost 1 billion people today lack reliable access to electricity, and a growing number cannot pay their energy bills. Energy poverty and the location of fossil-fuel mining and production sites disproportionately affect marginalised communities, including racialised and indigenous people. Reducing energy consumption and ending (energy) poverty must go hand in hand. We cannot speak about transforming our energy system without asking ourselves: "Energy for what, and energy for whom?" The energy system should prioritise the needs of womxn, racialised people, indigenous communities, low-income families and other marginalised groups including refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants and migrant workers, people with disabilities, LGBTQ people, religious, ethnic, and linguistic minorities, and others.

Renewable, sustainable and local energy

Fossil-fuel resources must be left in the ground. We ultimately want to make the energy mix 100% renewable in order to limit the impacts of global heating for current and future generations. Local and national authorities must divest public funds from fossil fuels and invest in new renewable capacity. a local renewable energy system is one way to facilitate energy conversion and create healthy and thriving communities.

Public and social ownership

Major TNCs like Shell regard energy as a valuable commodity for maximising profits. Meeting the needs of people while staying within planetary limits requires a completely different logic than that of the so-called free market. New forms of public ownership – by

municipalities, citizens' collectives and workers, often in the form of cooperatives – are emerging to serve the public interest. State ownership can likewise play a key role. The means of production and reproduction need to be socialised and democratised so that people everywhere can enjoy the fruits of a new, renewable energy system.

Solutions at the scale of the problem

Energy democracy means state as well as other forms of collective ownership of the energy system. This must be guided by accountability, community control, popular participation, and system-wide collaboration (rather than competition) in order to protect energy as a human right and public service. This requires decentralisation and subsidiarity¹⁰⁰, so that those affected by and dependent on the energy system can exert effective local control. It also requires system-wide coordination, for example to ensure that energy providers are cooperating and working alongside

each other in order to achieve universal coverage. Coordination is also needed to ensure investments for upgrading energy infrastructure to respond to variability in renewable generation and safeguard grid stability and solidarity, preventing the emergence of 'two-tiered' systems that provide better, greener energy and services to privileged consumers. There is no universal solution for how to create just and sustainable energy systems. Autonomous citizens' associations, worker-owned cooperatives, (re) municipalisation and nationalisation, as

well as nationwide public planning of the energy transition can all play a role, and any of these may be part of the most effective solution in a given context.¹⁰¹ The term 'commoning' practices is sometimes used to describe these diverse methods by which communities are taking power to govern their own services. However, transformations will be needed not only at the local level, but also at larger regional and national scales. Democratic governments will be critical in enabling redistributive and power-sharing policies.

Fair pay and creation of green jobs

Many energy workers and unions have united to resist the corporate agenda of fossil fuels and, together with environmental and social organisations, to lead a just transition that creates fairly paid and unionised jobs in the renewable energy sector.¹⁰² In transforming our energy system, and the systems of production and reproduction that depend on energy, the needs, goals, aspirations, and proposals of workers, for decent work, dignified livelihoods, and thriving communities should be at the centre.

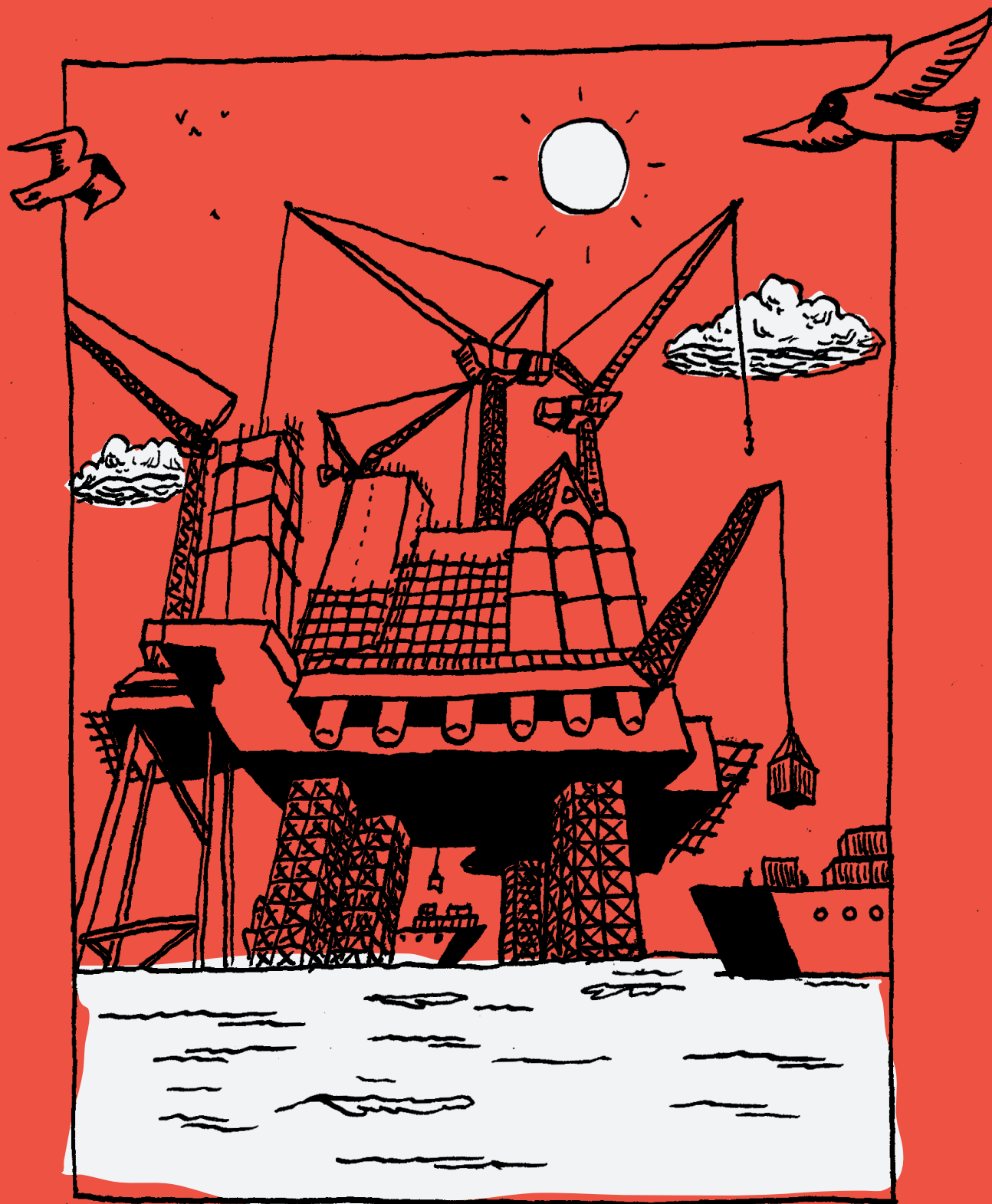
Democratic control and participation

In order to put the needs of communities first, citizens and workers need to have greater power in decision-making regarding energy policy. Publicly and socially owned energy systems have great potential to introduce democratic mechanisms: for example, the board of directors of a municipal energy company can involve users, communities and employees in making key decisions. Democratic mechanisms can be diverse: from open assemblies and spaces for citizens' participation, such as the Spanish 'mesas' or roundtables, to forms of direct democracy. Absolute transparency and accountability in all operations, and rich and informed public debate, is a precondition of democratic control.



THE INSPIRING PRESENT

The future we want



Examples of Energy Democracy and Just Transition in action already exist. Activists, movements, neighbourhoods and communities around the world are not waiting for the future but are building realistic and scalable alternatives that light the way to possible changes at the global scale. Here we share a few key examples.

Production

Public ownership can take the form of worker-owned cooperatives, as shown in the German town of Wolfhagen, where in 2005 residents set up a cooperative to raise capital for wind turbines that have since supplied them with green energy.¹⁰³ The cooperative owns 25% of the local electricity company, with two seats on the board. Thanks to this set-up, in combination with the re-municipalisation of the electricity grid, profits that were previously for private gain now enable lower energy tariffs, have supported a near doubling of the number of staff, and have been used to cross-subsidise the local kindergarten.¹⁰⁴

In Palestine, PENGON (Friends of the Earth Palestine) assisted womxn to set up solar panels that supply them with electricity whenever central supplies are switched off under the Occupation. These womxn gained the skills required to install and maintain solar panels, generating energy for 900 households across Palestine. Their cooperation with the Ministry of Women's Affairs even led to the creation of a gender unit in the Palestinian Energy Authority in order to influence the national planning process regarding the energy sector.¹⁰⁵

Distribution

In Barcelona, the governing citizen platform Barcelona en Comu created the energy retail company Barcelona Energía to buy energy directly from renewable sources. In 2019, thanks to input from civil society organisations (CSOs), such as the Energy Sovereignty network, the municipality created a participatory council that is open to users' and citizens' groups, and is authorised to give input on issues such as tariffs and investments, and help shape education policies. The new public company has a no cut-off policy and facilitates electricity connections to those who temporarily occupy abandoned buildings because of the lack of affordable housing.¹⁰⁶

The Bulgarian cities of Dobrich and Burgas have become role models for other European cities that fight against energy poverty. Dobrich has built up refurbishment expertise (expertise in renovating and insulating buildings to make them more efficient), which has led energy bills that are 30–60% lower for thousands of families. Burgas even managed to refurbish half of its residential buildings. A combination of European Union (EU), national and municipal finance ensured that many of its poorer residents could participate in the project, enjoying maximum benefits. To apply for refurbishment, households living in flats or apartment blocks had to create an owners' association and a representative from each association acted as a point person with the municipality. This enabled a meaningful dialogue between the municipality and residents so that people's preferences and concerns were followed up.¹⁰⁷

Integrated companies

In many places, governments are struggling to handle the energy transition. For example, ESKOM, one of the world's biggest state-owned electricity companies, headquartered in South Africa, is not only troubled by severe mismanagement. The company is increasingly

103 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/28/small-town-wolfhagen-community-revolution-german-europe-energy-contract>

104 https://www.tni.org/files/futureispublic_chapter_15.pdf

105 <https://energy-democracy.net/pengon-friends-of-the-earth-palestine/>

106 https://www.tni.org/files/futureispublic_chapter_15.pdf

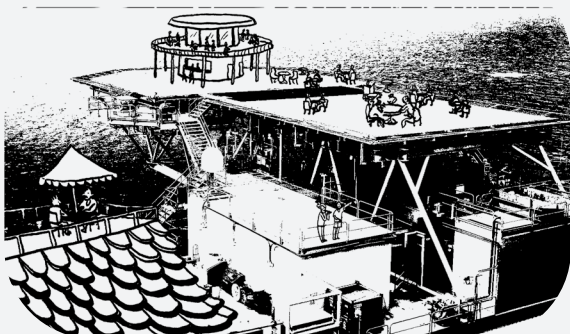
107 <https://municipalpower.org/articles/the-smart-transformation-of-a-black-sea-metropolis/>

108 <https://www.new-eskom.org/>

109 <https://energy-democracy.net/coopelesca-costa-rica/>

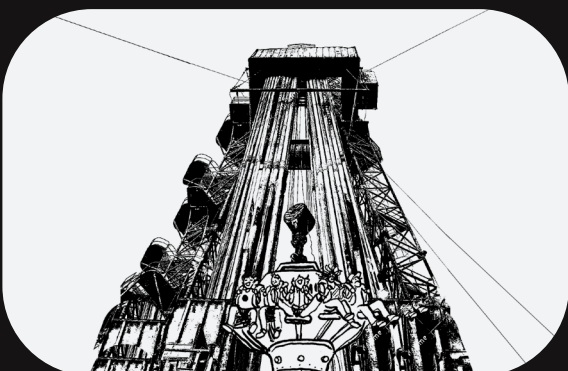
indebted, in part because the energy transition has been left to private for-profit companies while the costs have been socialised. In response, an international alliance between trade unions and CSOs has been fighting privatisation by advocating for a ‘New Eskom’ that is fully public and fulfils its promise of socially owned renewable energy.¹⁰⁸

Conversely, Costa Rica shows that it is possible to have an effective and equitable electricity system based on public ownership. Over 70 years ago, it created the Costa Rican Electricity Institute (ICE), moving from 14% to 99% coverage today. In 2017, hydropower, geothermal, wind, solar and biomass energy sources made up 99.7% of the country’s power mix, the vast majority of which was generated by state-owned and socially owned power producers. ICE produced 66%, and sub-national public utilities and four rural energy cooperatives together generated another 7%. These cooperatives have over 1,900 employees, and supply electricity to over 390,000 users. COOPELESCA is one of these, whose mission includes the preservation of the country’s natural environment. In 2015, it had offset its entire carbon footprint through diverse environmental actions, mainly the purchase of land at risk of environmental degradation. The cooperative also involves residents via the participatory design of local development plans, which encourage and support community initiatives.¹⁰⁹



CONCLUSIONS

The future we want



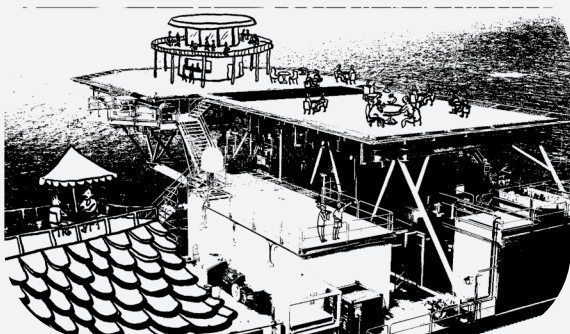
All of these examples show that there are feasible, scalable alternatives for a future beyond Shell in which we abandon the idea of vertically integrated mega-corporations and embrace collective, publicly owned, democratic and decentralised systems of energy generation, distribution and supply. This vision of Energy Democracy is integral to a broader Just Transition, which needs to re-imagine and re-build our systems of production and consumption, our societies and communities, and our relationships with natural processes and territories.

We must enshrine access to safe, clean, affordable energy as a basic human right. We must ensure that social and ecological justice reinforce each other rather than appearing to be in conflict. We must ensure that 'no-one is left behind' in Just Transition. And we must recognise that Just Transition goes far beyond replacing one fuel source with another, 'greening' Shell or chasing technical fixes that promise that more money, more technology, and more centralised power can somehow undo the damage caused by this system so far.

The need for an energy transition can no longer be denied, and TNCs are preparing to capture this transition and profit from it. Portraying themselves as green saviours, they are advancing new 'solutions' daily that will consolidate their power, allowing them to continue dispossessing and exploiting communities and destroy ecosystems around the world in order to enrich their shareholders. This cycle can be broken only if human rights, decent livelihoods, healthy communities and flourishing ecosystems are prioritised over profits, allowing people to recover ownership and control of their land, territories, and resources, and to build regenerative relationships with ecosystems and each other.

In order to realise this vision, we will need to embrace the strength of our many diverse movements across hugely different contexts, but which are nonetheless united both by common enemies and the by bonds of solidarity. A wide range of tactics and tools will be needed to overcome the dominance of Shell and other fossil-fuel mega-corporations; to loosen their grip on national and transnational decision-making; to expose their false solutions; to strengthen and grow peoples' solutions for Just Transition; and to build a truly just and sustainable future beyond Shell.

Together, we can build a future beyond Shell.



EPILOGUE: A REQUIEM FOR THE FUTURE



EPILOGUE: A REQUIEM FOR THE FUTURE

The future we want

Sunday, 14 March 2032
The Hague

Almost two years ago, Appeals Court judges in the Hague ordered the final dissolution of Shell's once-vast portfolio. Their decision set into motion the long process of closing all Shell's books, winding down its operations, and dealing with the legal implications of its closure. The ruling included a provision for setting up a body to address the claims of some of Shell's victims, who have been clamouring for justice. Two years after the giant multinational collapsed, they will at last get a chance to state their case and to seek reparations from Shell at the Shell Truth and Justice Commission (STJC) in the Hague.

It is a sweet irony that the hearings are being held at the company's former headquarters in the Netherlands. The red and yellow company flag no longer flutters in front of the iconic building, but it is still a venue for protesters. Chaotic scenes were all over the media again this week, and the world watched the massive crowds that filled the Carel van Bylandtlaan when the STJC officially began its proceedings. Many came to celebrate, although others had come to mourn what for them was one of the last vestiges of Dutch global dominance.

Shell's demise has so far been a messy affair, and it is clear that the resolution of its legacy will be no different. The last two years have seen a flurry of activity, with legal claims and counterclaims. The Appeals Court ruling not only sounded the death knell for the once thriving multinational, and brought an end to the dizzying story of an antiques trading company that had developed into a vast monster; it also marked the end of an era in human history. As the only remaining fossil fuel multinational, Shell was the last of a dying breed, a relic from a different time. Just like many of the multinational giants that had fallen before it, Shell collapsed as much from external pressure as from inherent tensions. Decades of activism, lobbying, lawsuits, marches and street demonstrations, rigorous scientific argument, and appeals to basic human decency and kindness finally bore fruit.

Shell's demise is the victory of a vision that is diametrically opposed to the world that the multinational and its sister companies epitomised. It is also the birth (or revival) of another vision of the world, whose values have nothing in common with the logic that made Shell grow into the monster that it became. Indeed, the dramatic cultural shift and the broader turn away from fossil fuels following the Global Green Deal also played a role – the new global economy simply has no place for a company like Shell.

As the STJC gears up, the world is slowly but surely coming to terms with what Shell was and came to represent.

A shameful legacy

The Commission's first week has already given some insight into how complicated it will be to deal with Shell's legacy. For some observers in the Netherlands, Shell represented the best of Dutch ingenuity and business acumen. It will be difficult for them to accept the demise of such an iconic feature of the Dutch economic landscape. The legend goes back to the turn of the twentieth century, with the birth of the motor vehicle. The Royal Dutch Petroleum Company (in Dutch: Koninklijke Nederlandse Petroleum Maatschappij) later merged with the United Kingdom's Shell Transport and Trading Company Limited (later British Petroleum or BP), largely to be able to compete globally with American Standard Oil company. This merger was the genesis of a vast multinational that would eventually

1
<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/episode/2013/4/26/the-secret-of-the-seven-sisters/>

2
<https://www.wealthandpower.org/part-2/11-competitive-colonialism-defending-colonies>

3
<http://abahlali.org/files/3295358-walter-rodney.pdf>

4
<https://www.tni.org/en/ExtractivismNorthAfrica>

5
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Chaco-War>

6
<https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/who-we-are/our-history/early-history.html>

7
<https://www.herald.co.zw/bombing-their-way-to-freedom/>

8
<https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/media/1997/9711/s971107d.htm>

9
<http://www.climatefiles.com/shell/1988-shell-report-greenhouse/>

10
<https://www.who.int/tobacco/publications/industry/interference/en/>

11
<https://www.foei.org/news/oil-spills-ogoniland-nigeria-shell>

12
<https://www.dw.com/en/why-nigerian-activist-ken-saro-wiwa-was-executed/a-18837442>

13
<https://www.greenpeace.org/international/press-release/20061/investigation-shell-total-oil-illegal-toxic-waste/>

generate spectacular wealth for its founders. However, it would also have a massive impact on the planet, being responsible for 2% of historical global greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). Thanks to this merger, a small company that had been trading oil in Indonesia grew to become one of the Seven Sisters¹ that dominated the global petroleum industry from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s. The company was for a long time the world's largest and most diversified oil company. It came to represent the Netherlands, and nationalism was probably behind the decision to maintain a distinct identity from its British wing following their historic merger. Even the name, Royal Dutch Shell, linked it to the monarchy, a source of pride for many Dutch citizens.

Any pride in the achievements of Dutch colonialism and imperialism must, however, be tempered by the true price that was paid for them, and by whom. Those who mourn Shell's demise must come to terms with the corporation's chequered legacy – and chequered it is. The Shell Truth and Justice Commission, set up to ensure justice for those affected by the multinational's long trail of destruction, will have to give a comprehensive account of Shell's current victims, as well as affording a glimpse into the historical harm caused by Shell's unbridled greed.

Just this once, let us speak ill of the dead.

Colonialism, wars and apartheid

In a laborious process expected to last at least 18 months, the Shell Truth and Justice Commission sitting in the Hague will hear cases from multiple aggrieved parties. The list of victims, past and present, direct and indirect, covers the globe. The Netherlands was one of the most voracious of the colonial powers, coming after Britain, France, Portugal and Spain in the number of territories occupied. It might be tempting to separate Shell from the colonial and imperial history of its two home countries. Wasn't the massively successful corporation, after all, the fruit of that legendary European entrepreneurial spirit? The result of ingenuity, courage and hard work? Perhaps. But Shell was also involved in extremely questionable practices, both historically and also judged by contemporary standards.

Europe's development trajectory, and its current standard of living, came at a price² too terrible for most Europeans to contemplate. The doctrine of white supremacy was invoked to rationalise the brutal plunder that condemned vast numbers of people across the globe to impoverishment, environmental depredation, and no means to earn a decent living. Even as it enabled western Europe to acquire the standard of living it is now used to, the extraction of resources, their processing and their transport to Europe's commercial centres left bodies in its wake, most of them the black and brown bodies of colonial subjects. Born in the great imperialist scramble of the twentieth century, Shell rose to prominence during an era that will surely come to be known as the real dark age in human history. An era where European colonial powers' belief in their entitlement to the world's resources³ led them to place little value on human life elsewhere. They didn't care either about working-class people whose labour consolidated their wealth, whether miners, factory workers (including child labour), or women in domestic service. Their rapacious pillage ultimately led humankind to the brink of a terrifying precipice.

Imperialism placed the demands of the metropole ahead of any interests of the people and countries in the periphery, a hierarchy of lives according to a racial yardstick, with the white Europeans at the top, and those with darker skin colour at the bottom. Colonialism facilitated the needs of capital through the appropriation of natural resources,

of mineral deposits, of culture, and of labour. That predatory logic and unbridled pillage was the wind fanning the colonial project, and part of the price paid to create western Europe as we know it today. It is a history that the Netherlands is still only beginning to come to terms with, if at all. Europe's prosperity is, more than anything else, the result of the colonial project and its ever-present legacy. Corporations were a central pillar in that edifice.

Shell is one of the many commercial companies that facilitated and benefited from Dutch and broader European colonialism, serving as agents for the brutal enterprise. Right from the beginning, the company was focused on extracting wealth for the enrichment of its shareholders in Amsterdam and London. Beginning in Indonesia, the company eventually had a presence in all the Dutch colonial territories and then beyond. With the typical colonial disregard for ancestral indigenous systems, disdain for local cultures and contempt for local knowledge, Shell used fair means and foul to obtain concessions and drilling rights, and in the process wreaked colossal social and environmental havoc. The wellbeing of the people in the zones of extraction⁴ was hardly ever a concern.

It is no surprise, then, that in her opening statement at the STJC, Muntu Wezweni, a human rights lawyer and representative of the Shell Victims Union, gave some historical examples of Shell's cynicism and lack of regard for human life. She recounted how, from early on in its history, in a bid to dominate the oil industry, Shell promoted the very antithesis of life and peace, being involved in multiple wars and conflicts, with the most egregious being the Chaco war⁵ (1932–35), between Bolivia and Paraguay. She spoke of how the territorial dispute over oil deposits discovered in the eastern Andes became a proxy war for the major oil companies. Shell competed for exploration and drilling rights against Standard Oil, which chose to back Bolivia while Shell supported Paraguay. The casualties were huge: Bolivia lost around 2% of its population, or between 56,000 and 65,000 people, and Paraguay about 36,000, or 3% of its population. Most of the dead were indigenous people drawn into a war the oil companies may not have instigated directly, but had definitely fanned. The legacy of that war has reverberated through both nations' histories, the echoes of which can still be heard.

The eloquent lawyer showed how this mercenary mindset was not just an isolated aberration. In the First World War⁶, Shell was the main supplier of fuel to the British Expeditionary Force, 80% of the British Army's TNT, and the sole supplier of its aviation fuel. The corporation even volunteered all of its shipping to the British Admiralty. Later on, Shell became involved in wars and conflicts around the globe, from the war to secure oil in Iraq, where Shell and BP gained oilfields, to fuelling, if not instigating the war in Algeria and elsewhere.

Wezweni showed how Shell's disdain for human decency and the quality of life of those living where it operated were also displayed when the corporation became involved in sanctions-busting for the illegal white settler regime in Rhodesia⁷ (now Zimbabwe), and later BP-Shell, along with other major oil companies, played an active role in undermining the international sanctions on the former apartheid regime in South Africa. She showed how, in its final report to South African President Nelson Mandela in October 1998, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) condemned the mining and oil industries for their role in supporting the apartheid regime and its discriminatory policies. The report singled out in particular Shell, BP, Mobil, Caltex⁸, and Total as "the most notable" of the oil corporations that did not respond to the TRC's invitation to make a submission on their activities during the apartheid era.

With such a damning historical record, it is hardly surprising that so many people are applying and lining up to testify before the STJC. The jurors will have to hear cases from far and wide, both geographically and historically.

Environmental devastation

While we have only heard the opening statements so far, there is no doubt that most of the claims against Shell will concern its impact on the environment, which was unparalleled, if not unprecedented. First of all, from being a key player in the growth of the fossil fuel industry, Shell advocated and fuelled a development paradigm that drove the planet to a precipice from which it will take centuries to step back. Not only this, but Shell also deliberately concealed relevant information that could have bought a little more time to pull back. A public information film, ‘Climate of Concern’, which resurfaced in 2017, revealed that Shell clearly understood about global heating, even as far back as 1988⁹ – a quarter of a century ago – but carried on with ‘business as usual’. In short, even before the fight against climate change became the rallying cry that finally led to the Global Green Deal, Shell knew. This parallels exactly the tobacco industry, which knew in the 1950s that smoking was associated with lung and throat cancer. They not only concealed this, but sponsored ‘research’ and funded articles proving the opposite; and undermined all WHO efforts¹⁰ to publish the truth. They even fought against smoking bans.

Beyond its broader impact on the development paradigm as an advocate and supplier of fossil fuels, Shell’s specific activities have caused some of the worst environmental crimes. The litany of offences is by now well documented in the testimonies narrated by communities who have litigated for decades. Perhaps most emblematic were the major civil court cases brought by the Ogoni people, whose community was affected by oil spills that devastated entire ecosystems. Who has not heard of the contamination of the Niger Delta, and the destruction of the Ogoni land?¹¹ The name of Ken Saro Wiwa¹² is one of the best-known martyrs in the cause against the oil company’s presence in Nigeria. In the years before its demise, the corporation was involved in multiple legal suits, ranging from lawsuits brought by Milieudefensie for Shell’s climate policies, to claims of murder and other harm brought against Shell in the United States, to legal challenges against fracking. In the now famous case brought by four Ogoni fishermen against Shell, a Dutch appeals court ruled in 2021 that Shell Nigeria, a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell PLC, be held liable for oil leaks which ruined farmland, and that it had to pay compensation to the four. While it triggered the beginning of the avalanche of legal losses that led is most directly credited with bringing Shell to its knees, that judgement did not find the Dutch parent company liable. So it is hoped that the STJC will do so and achieve compensation for all the people whose livelihoods were brutally destroyed by Shell’s activities.

The price in blood

Given all these transgressions, it is understandable that some will choose to speak ill of the dead. And that so many people have showed up to bid Shell farewell – or good riddance. Among the demonstrators at the Carel van Bylandtlaan are many activists who have dedicated years, and used vast amounts of their financial and other resources, to free their communities from Shell’s toxic grip. For even as Shell went about its nefarious business, this was never simply accepted by those affected. Every violation, every outrageous act, met with resistance from grassroots movements and local activists.

The list of litigators at the STJC is made up of members of frontline communities who can no longer fish the same waters as their ancestors used to because of an oil spill, communities whose farmland is now wasteland covered in never-ending fires. Some of the witnesses are young children born with various defects due to toxic waste dumped on the land their mothers walked. Because of the crimes committed against them, they continue to march for justice. In the crowds outside the courthouse are anti-colonialists who have long sought justice for the victims of Shell's activities – for the legacy of colonialism. Some of the demonstrators are trade unionists and workers whose rights were trampled upon at every turn; artists and scholars who have expended barrels of ink on why companies such as Shell should no longer exist. Despite Shell's dissolution, and their fatigue at having fought for so long, they still march. Holding placards and singing victory songs, community leaders from indigenous groups such as the Mapuche¹³ in Argentina, who have engaged in a decades-long fight for their rights, and to stop Shell fracking on their land, still seek justice. And indeed, the Groningers who march for the exact same thing, holding their heads up high as proud Dutch people.

Shell may have been dissolved, but the search for justice is far from over.

The future beyond shell

Far from the madding crowd, in Ogoniland, there are many for whom the news of Shell's death is still meaningless. The ruling has not brought the fish back into their waters, it hasn't removed the black oil slick from the trees, it hasn't cleared the air of the choking fumes. For them, the pumps might as well be still pounding away, and in some places they still are, run by opportunists who are ready to sell the oil on the black market. Much like a rickety engine, Shell's is a slow, sputtering stop.

Ground-breaking as it is, the dissolution of the monstrous multinational and the institution of the STJC is just the first step on the path towards real justice. It is not enough to celebrate Shell's demise and leave it at that. In fact, the major task is just starting. One of main questions is how to put right what has been wrong for decades. How can balance be restored? Can it be restored?

The first step in any healing process is to acknowledge the damage that has been done, to describe it and call it by its rightful name. It is to recognise Shell's activities as crimes against humanity, and crimes against the planet, atrocities that went on for far too long. It is to highlight the lines that connect the present to the colonial project that gave birth to Shell and its ilk, and to accept the complicated nature of their legacy. It is to realise that Shell had many diverse impacts wherever it had a footprint, and that while some of those may seem positive, they inevitably came at a cost that is way too high, and that past, present and future generations have to bear. The future that we build has to be based on an unwavering commitment to speak the truth, no matter how ugly it may be.

Acknowledgement of the wrongs done must lead us to the question: What does justice look like? Justice for the Mapuche people in Argentina will not be exactly the same as that for the Ogoni in Nigeria. Justice for Code Rood activists in Groningen will necessarily be different from that for the oil workers in Algeria, or the people who are still suffering the aftermath of apartheid in South Africa, or victims in the Philippines, in Tunisia, in Indonesia, in countries across Latin America. In fact, the faces of justice for all of these diverse victims may actually be opposed to each other. There are no easy answers. There must be reparations for affected communities, and these should be collectively and demo-

cratically determined and administered. Where there are conflicts of interest, there needs to be the space to find mutually acceptable compromises, through processes that recognise and remedy the continuing power imbalances that are the legacy of Shell and the system that gave birth to it. Shell may finally be dead as a corporation, but the stench of its legacy will linger for a long time, and it is prudent to prepare for what that means.

We do not yet know if the STJC will indeed expose the truth and secure justice to all those who demand it. We can only hope that this will be the case. What can be agreed, however, is that the death of Shell, as the last of the fossil fuel giants, offers an opportunity to do things differently. The world has seen a great cultural shift away from fossil fuels, and the Global Green Deal has already led to vast economic changes. The greatest changes will, however, need to be in our culture and in our worldview. A Future Beyond Shell needs to acknowledge the limitations of the paradigm that led people and the planet to the precipice in the first place. It requires re-examining the relationship with nature, acknowledging that human beings are part of nature, not removed from it. This means an end to attempts to dominate nature, but rather to seek balance within it. We must purge the mindset that led to the crimes of colonialism, and opt for sustaining life, and not destroying it for short-term gains. We must adopt a feminist stance, because the patriarchal alternative has led us down a path of destruction. We must revive and respect the teachings of indigenous communities who have lived on and have such an intimate understanding of their ancestral lands that the most advanced western science cannot hope to attain.

We are at no loss for great ideas for the future. What we need is the commitment to carry them out. A commitment to carrying out a Just Transition, looking to feminist ways of managing society, to building a global society that caters to the needs of all, not just today's wealthiest people and regions. A world built for everyone, by everyone.

We may speak ill of the dead as long as others can draw lessons from their mistakes.

Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (Zulu saying)
'A person is a person, because of people.'



**THE
FUTURE
WE
WANT**



