

Notes from Paris by Jay Smith, Athabasca University, Alberta, Canada, [jayathabasca@hotmail.com](mailto:jayathabasca@hotmail.com)

Much is being made in the mass media that a COP 21 agreement is within reach. Yet, probing deeper there is growing recognition that any agreement is going to be a weak agreement, an agreement for agreement's sake to avoid the stigma that came from the utter failure of Copenhagen in 2009. Civil society organizations are particularly skeptical. At the General Assembly of social movements and civil society organizations that concluded today, December 9, in Paris there was a general consensus that this is not a good deal for the environment and Mother Earth. If there are going to be any winners it will for the apostles of neoliberalism, the corporations and states that believe that if there is a problem the market has a solution.

Indeed, it is this division between those who adhere to the ideology of the market and those believe in the Rights of Nature and Mother Earth that is becoming starkly clear at COP 21. It is the former that are dominant among those negotiating at COP. What is becoming clear is that adherents to the market and those who adhere to the Rights of Nature and Mother Earth have two starkly different points of view on our relationship to nature. Advocates of the market see nature as inert, as a resource provider, as a source of wealth and accumulation, something to profit from. The opposing view sees Mother Earth as a living entity which humans are a part of in a vast interconnected web of life such that in harming the environment we harm Mother Earth and ourselves. To harm Mother Earth is to harm ourselves, except for the fact that Mother Earth can live without us but we cannot live without Mother Earth.

Having attended many civil society sessions in Paris outside the official space of negotiations I would like to provide some quotes that highlight these differences better than I can describe them. Here they are in no certain order.

Jutta Kill, biologist, Germany: "The economy views nature as a service provider to provide ecosystem services."

Osprey Orielle Lake, Women's Earth and Climate Action Network – USA: "Nature is assumed to a commodity in the capitalist system."

Nnimmo Bassey, Health of Mother Earth Foundation/ Oilwatch Nigeria: "We are all children of Mother Earth and can see her pains, tears, and struggle."

Tom Goldtooth, Indigenous Environmental Network, on the financialization of nature, a system advocated by the rich countries and in the latest COP draft which uses market mechanisms to put a price on every aspect of life and nature. These mechanisms under the notion of "net zero" would permit rich nations such as the US to keep on polluting if they can find another country, usually in the global south, to offset US pollution by, for example, planting more trees to absorb excess US carbon, all for a price of course. "The financialization of nature is a violation of the sacred."

Ruth Nyambura, African Biodiversity Network – Kenya, on the convergence of our struggles: "There is no such thing as a single issue struggle as we don't live single lives."

Attosa Soltani, Amazon Watch Founder, "The cause of the Rights of Nature is a true cultural revolution. The greatest one that can be achieved in this century."

Shannon Biggs, Movement Rights, USA, "Fracking is rape of the Earth, an 'environmental ebola'."

Gert-Peter Bruch, Planete Amazone, France, "Fracking is not a solution, it is a problem."

Eriel Deranger, Athabaskan Chippewyan, Oil Sands Canada, "If there was a global prize for unsustainable development, the tar sands would be the winner."

Pablo Fajardo, Lawyer for those affected by Texaco, "Indigenous cosmovisions belong to the entire planet." "When you cut down trees you cut down brothers and sisters."

Linda Sheehan, Earth Law Center, USA. "We cannot have unlimited growth on an unlimited planet."

Ramiro Avila, University Simon Bolivar, Ecuador, "We have treated Mother Earth as a thing, a slave, an object in which everything is measured by money."

Judith Lief, US Buddhist, "We are all related, all beings should be treated like our mother."

Tiokasin Ghosthorse, Lakota Nation, US, "If everything is related there can be no domination."