

# COLONIALISM & THE CLIMATE CRISIS

OVER 500 YEARS OF RESISTANCE



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### **About the cover:**

The cover shows a Black female person and two children. Together they are carrying a globe on their shoulders. This is meant to be a symbol of the burden of the climate crisis and the destruction of the environment that Black people have carried for centuries, still carry and will continue to carry. For us, the illustration depicts, most importantly, resistance. In a racist world, the very existence of non-white people always signifies resistance. Beyond that, we see resistance in the care and tending of people that is carried out by care givers.

The patterns on the clothes of the people are directly connected to movements of resistance, and are chosen deliberately. For example, the use of African patterns, symbols, and fabrics like Ofi and Adinkra has long been a device of anti-racism struggles in Brasil. These connect many Black people in the diaspora to the philosophies and cultural traditions of their ancestors. There is a multitude of patterns, symbols and fabrics that represent certain regions of Africa. These can be modified through exchange as well as encounter and can evolve into new aesthetic, identity-establishing and significance that is resistant. The patterns on this cover are employed in consideration of these contexts.

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# 1. WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

You've most likely heard about man-made climate change in the media, in school, or in your free time ( → see infobox: Climate Change and Climate Crisis, pg. 7). The consequences of the climate crisis have been distinctly apparent in the last decades, particularly in the Global South and recently also in Germany ( → see infobox: Global South/Global North, pg. 30). In this booklet we would like to extend the knowledge about the climate crisis and inform about the connections between European colonialism, racism and the climate crisis.

On the first pages, we describe the most important terms and dominant positions in the current climate crisis debate. The second chapter explains the connection between colonialism, racism and the climate crisis. We look into the history of European colonialism and the emergence of racism and explain how we can understand the climate crisis in terms of race and from a decolonial<sup>1</sup> perspective. In the chapter "Colonial Continuity" we show how historical colonial power structures are still effective today by examining various examples and their impact on continuous environmental and climate destruction. This includes how racism shows itself in the climate movement. ( → see infobox: BIPOC/*white*, pg. 14). In the last chapter, "From Local Environmental Protection to Global Climate Justice the History of Resistance", we present you examples of worldwide movements of resistance against environmental and climate destruction from the Global South, some of which are hundreds of years


<sup>1</sup> By "decolonial" we refer primarily to the decolonial theory and praxis of Latin American thinkers such as María Lugones, Ochy Curiel, and many others, as well as historical and contemporary Indigenous resistance movements worldwide. Decolonial thinking argues that the existing world order and current living conditions are based on European colonialism. It aims to analyze the existing relations of power and oppression in relation to European colonialism, to expose the (in)visible processes of violence, and to articulate or practice new and existing marginalized concepts of life or praxis. According to Tuck and Yang in "Decolonization is not a metaphor" (2010), it is necessary that these decolonization processes result in the return of land and land rights to Indigenous communities.


old. These movements of resistance have been historically and are currently made invisible. The booklet contains captions in and between chapters that explain the terms more thoroughly. The content covered in the booklet can be seen as a starting point in learning about the topics discussed. Unfortunately, it is not possible to cover these subjects in an all-encompassing way. For this reason, we created a “Link Tree” (collection of links), where you can find further interesting and inspirational resources to deepen your knowledge (pg. 55).

### Disclaimer for Black People, Indigenous People and People of Color

This booklet contains sensitive issues, especially for Black People, Indigenous People and People of Color. The portrayal and description of these issues could bring up painful experiences and provoke negative feelings. If you notice that the contents of the booklet affect you in a negative way, or the like, then take a break from reading. Do something that feels good and/or speak to a person close to you about how you are feeling. Take good care of yourself.


### CLIMATE MOVEMENT, CLIMATE CRISIS AND CLIMATE NEUTRALITY


In Germany in recent years, mostly young people, have initiated a large climate movement and pushed the issue of climate well into the middle of public debate. They base their protests on research and findings of the Western scientific community (  see infobox: Global South/Global North, pg. 30). Since the 1980s, Western scientists have described climate change and its causes and warned about its consequences. They argue, that the climate crisis emerged with industrialization, between approximately 1800 and 1870 in the Global North. Since then, countries like Germany, Great Britain and the USA have emitted increasing levels of greenhouse gases, mostly CO<sub>2</sub>, into the earth’s atmosphere. These emissions aggravate the

natural greenhouse effect and thereby cause the climate crisis (  see infobox: Greenhouse Effect, pg. 8).

### **Climate Change and Climate Crisis**

For the last 30 years, the term “climate change” has found the most use. Climate change basically describes the fact that the earth’s atmosphere (= the climate of the earth) has changed. These changes relate to the temperature of the earth’s atmosphere, which has become either warmer or colder. Temperature changes have always occurred. Often these changes were very slow, so that eco-systems and organisms had enough time to adapt to the changes. The current climate, however, is changing very quickly.

This is due to the greenhouse effect (  see infobox: Greenhouse Effect, pg. 8). For decades the consequences of climate change have led to drastic changes in living conditions for humans, flora, and fauna, especially in the Global South. In the last few years, the consequences of climate change have become more and more perceptible in the Global North as well. Current climate protests and the felt threat for the Global North have led to use of the term of climate crisis instead of climate change. The term “climate crisis” is meant to emphasize the urgent need for climate measures.

Various demands, agreements and measures have been proposed based on these scientific results. One international political agreement is the 1.5° limit of the Paris Climate Agreement in the year 2015. The debates about the climate are mainly about which measures should be implemented in order to limit global warming to 1.5° Celsius. Climate movements advocate, predominantly, for the reduction of greenhouse gases as fast as possible. Therefore, the term “Climate neutrality” comes up more frequently (  see infobox: Climate neutrality, pg. 36). In principle, climate neutrality, also called “Net-zero“, aims at the reduction of greenhouse gases to zero. Therefore,

greenhousegases need to be reduced to the lowest possible level. Emissions that cannot be fully reduced are then compensated, e.g., by tree planting. But compensating measures are often criticized because they do not address the origin of greenhouse gases and the emissions are compensated, if at all, with a delay. Measures to attain climate neutrality would be, for example, the restructuring of the transport and agricultural sector, or to halt the use of fossil fuels for energy supply. Climate movements urge German climate policy makers to develop the necessary measures and transform them into reality.

### **Greenhouse Effect**

The term greenhouse effect describes a natural process that warms the earth. Without it, life as we know it would not be possible. Part of the sunlight that arrives here on earth is directly reflected off the earth's surface. Some of this reflected heat escapes the atmosphere and reaches outer space. Some of it stays inside the earth's atmosphere. This natural process, which is similar to a glass house, is aggravated by so-called greenhouse gases. The atmosphere is made up of different gases. Since the beginning of industrialization, more and more gases have been added, that cause the atmosphere to be less absorptive for the reflected heat. These are, for example, carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), and dinitrogen monoxide (N<sub>2</sub>O, also known as laughing gas). Their proportion in the atmosphere is increasing continuously, causing the earth to warm steadily. The output of these gases is known as emission. Less emission should slow global warming. According to the Paris Agreement, global warming caused by the greenhouse effect should be limited to 1,5°.

## **“WHAT DO WE WANT? CLIMATE JUSTICE!”**

Increasingly, the term climate justice is used in debates about the climate crisis. At protests or in videos, you might have heard the slogan: “What do we want? Climate justice! When do we want it?”



Now!”. You may have asked yourself, what exactly is meant by climate justice. The concept of climate justice brings the question of the responsibility for the climate crisis to the forefront. It explains that, globally, not all countries and their inhabitants are responsible, for emitting the same levels of greenhouse gases.

**Countries of the Global North and their inhabitants are historically responsible for the largest share of greenhouse gases, and therefore, are the main polluters as well as the main profiteers of the climate crisis. At the same time, it is the countries of the Global South and their inhabitants that are most affected by the climate crisis. This means that not only the responsibility for the climate crisis, but also its consequences are unjust.**


Climate justice and its demand regarding the acceptance of responsibility does not originate in the recent German climate movements, but was founded and put forward by people from the Global South over 20 years ago ( ↪ see chapter: From Local Environmental Protection to Global Climate Justice - The History of Resistance, pg. 44). But why are particularly people from the Global South and BIPOC ( ↪ see infobox: BIPOC/white, pg. 14) the ones emphasizing and demanding climate justice?

## CLIMATE CRISIS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR BIPOC


Many Black People, Indigenous People and People of Color can no longer perceive the climate crisis as a distant problem, or a problem that is happening detached from their daily lives. They already experience the consequences of the climate crisis today: More and more people are affected by extreme weather events, natural disasters, loss of fertile soil for agriculture, as well as sea-level rise. As a result, they are losing their livelihoods, their homes, or their lives. At the same time, the affected regions experience, with increasing speed, the disappearance of ecosystems, of animal, and of

plant species. Therefore, many activists from the Global South speak of “MAPA”: Most Affected People and Areas.

The consequences of the climate crisis are complex and depend on various factors. It is important to recognize, that people and communities that are disadvantaged or excluded by society, are also structurally more affected by the climate crisis. Forms of exclusion and discrimination often overlap and therefore can be more impactful. This phenomenon is known as intersectionality

(  see infobox: Intersectionality, pg. 21). Structural discrimination leads i.e., to the denial of access to resources and the denial of participating in decision-making.

Access and participation are necessary though, in order to defend oneself against the consequences of the climate crisis. People who are affected by racism or sexism don't have the same access to, for example, housing, land, medical assistance, or evacuation options in the case of a natural disaster. They are less likely to be in positions of decision making, regarding climate protection measures, or they receive smaller wages than more privileged people for the same work.

In regions, where the climate crisis leads to lack of rainfall, BIPoC and Women, Lesbians, Interbinary Persons, Non-Binary Persons, Transgender Persons and other gender identities are more likely to possess less average funding than cis-male persons. As a result, they are seldom in the position to buy, for example, irrigation systems for farming. As a consequence, droughts and heatwaves force more and more people to give up their livelihoods and move away. Racism, sexism and other forms of social inequality play a big role in how we interact with each other, ourselves, and our environment. To understand the causes and impacts of the climate crisis, we must focus on systems of social inequality (  see pg. 24). How severely people are impacted by the climate crisis, is inextricably linked with



**Prof. Wangari Maathai** was a Kenyan professor, scholar, author, politician and co-founder of the Green Belt Movement ( → see chapter: From Local Environmental Protection to Global Climate Justice, pg. 44). For her commitment she received the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize.

From 2000-2019,  
the countries  
most affected by  
extreme weather  
events ...



their social position and associated living conditions.

You may notice: it is not possible for people who are directly affected by the climate crisis to detach the climate crisis and the destruction of the environment from social inequality and structures of power and exploitation at a global level.

The emergence of the climate crisis cannot be analyzed isolated from social inequality and traced back exclusively to the increase of greenhouse gas emissions. Many climate activists in Germany are not yet aware of how closely the climate crisis is linked to the history of European colonialism, racism and social inequality. This correlation is hardly ever observed or brought into discussions. Which structures were constructed and put into use by European colonialism? How do they relate to the climate? Who participated significantly in the process of environmental destruction and the climate crisis, and who profited from it? Who is bearing the social and ecological cost?

To answer these questions, let's take a closer look at the connections between European colonialism, racism and the climate crisis in the next chapter.

## 2. CONNECTION BETWEEN COLONIALISM, RACISM AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

### HISTORY OF EUROPEAN COLONIALISM

You have most likely heard about the so-called “discovery” of the Americas by Christopher Columbus. While in school it is spoken of him as a “discoverer”, the reality looks completely different. Christopher Columbus plays a crucial role in the violent history of European colonialism. This is the story of the brutal oppression of Non-Europeans and the occupation of their territories by European Colonial Rulers<sup>2</sup>. It is an unprecedented story of murder, enslavement and the forced displacement of millions of people, as well as the exploitation of flora, fauna and entire ecosystems. It began in the 15th century, especially when Spain commissioned Christopher Columbus to find a western seaway and commercial route to India, in order to expand the sovereignty of the Spanish-Catholic kingdom. Due to a lack of knowledge in geography, on 12th of October 1492, he arrived on Guanahani, an island in today’s Bahamas in the Caribbean and not in India. Columbus declared the land, on which he set foot that day, a property of the Spanish kingdom. He then gave the people that he encountered there, a name, chosen by him and labeled them “his subjects”. As “subjects”, he enslaved them, forced them to mine gold and silver, and forced them to convert to the Catholic faith.

Columbus proceeded using principles that are characteristic for European colonialism: European colonial powers declare themselves rulers, by occupying Non-European regions and forcibly imposing foreign domination and control.

<sup>2</sup> We would like to note that also historically, there were more than two gender identities. This fact has been made invisible by historical narrative. Also, we want to emphasize the crucial role that *white* cis-women played in the processes of European colonization which is often unnamed or down played.

## **BIPoC/*white***

BIPoC is an umbrella term that stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color. This term originated in the US-civil rights movement, is empowering and demonstrates solidarity between communities of color. In every context, Black is written with a capital B, to clarify the fact that the word is neither an adjective, nor does it denote a color. Mutually experienced racism, exclusion from the *white*-dominated mainstream society and equally ascribed “Otherness” are the things that connect BIPoC to each other. Therefore, it is not a matter of biologically shared characteristics, but primarily of social common grounds and experiences. The political term takes a position against the *white*-dominated society’s use of racial stereotypes and discriminating descriptions to cause division. Imposing the self-imposed term is a vital, empowering, and crucial action, making it an essential part of the history of resistance against colonialism and racism.

Contrary to BIPoC, *white* is not a political, empowering self-given label. Instead, it marks the dominant and privileged position of people within the racist system. This position is connected to the experience of being regarded as a social standard and norm. In turn, this fact is itself regarded as standard and norm.

The label “*white*” is understood to include this experience and perception as white privilege. Through this, racist systems of power and repression are made apparent. In order to distinctly mark the fact that *white* is not a legitimating self-designation, *white* is written in italics and without a capital letter. *white* does not denote a particular skin color, instead, it is a political term.

As you notice: these processes of colonization could only be enforced by the brutal use of violence. European colonizers destroyed whole cities, buildings, infrastructures, communication systems, artifacts, writings, among other things. They utilized and stole everything they considered “viable”. European colonizers displaced, murdered, raped, and enslaved the local inhabitants. They also killed

people through forced labor, and in some cases, through systematically implanted diseases. This terror produced the necessary conditions for oppressing and controlling the colonized people. Current estimates assume that between 80% and 90% of the Indigenous population in today's Latin America were killed between 1519 and 1568.

## ENSLAVEMENT AND EXPLOITATION FOR PROFIT

These colonization processes continued on the American, African and Asian continents for centuries, well into the 20th century. During this time the structural and ideological foundation of global capitalism was set. Within just a few decades after 1492, the demand for products from the colonies was increasing rapidly. Europeans wanted to consume sugarcane, cotton, tobacco, coffee, and many other products as cheaply as possible. In order to cultivate the necessary plant species, the European colonial powers needed land. For this purpose, they stole the land of the colonized people and cleared entire forests. At the same time, they needed increasing numbers of "manpower" to harvest and process the plants. European colonizers met the demand for labor by enslaving colonized and abducted people. European colonizers built countless plantations on the foundation of enslavement and dispossession of land. Based on enslavement and dispossession of land they formed a new colonial economic model. European colonial powers pursued the biggest profit margins, to secure their own hegemonial position, as well as to meet the European demand for colonial goods. European colonizers established a plantation economy as a key element of the economic model. On numerous large plantations they strived for maximum profit. They also experimented with methods like rotating shift work, in order to maximize the enslaved people's efficiency.

During this time, European colonial powers implemented a global system of kidnapping, enslavement, and exploitation of Africans.

European dealers and colonizers abducted African people and deported them to Latin America. In 1502, the first ship with kidnapped and enslaved Africans arrived in Latin America. The rational mode of thinking that arose in Europe during that time is reflected in the building of “merchant vessels”. This was underlined by purposeful calculation. The goal was to kidnap as many people as possible to sell them with maximum profit. Memories of many riots of this time have been handed down throughout the centuries. It is estimated that over 1.2 – 2.2 million people alone did not survive deportation. This historical process is also called Maafa. Maafa describes the systemic mass deportation and enslavement of at least 12.5 million people by European colonizers. The term also describes the emotional, physical, and psychological oppression and the transnational trauma caused by it. The term Maafa not only refers to exploitation, loss, and trauma, but especially to the African resistance against colonial rule.

## HISTORY OF GERMAN COLONIALISM

When talking about European colonialism, Spanish, Portuguese, French and British colonial powers and the atrocities they committed usually stand at the forefront. The role of the German Reich in the history of colonialism is often depicted as insignificant. However, Germans like Ulrich Schmidl or Hans von Staden, were members of the crew on the very first Spanish and Portuguese colonial ships. The focus of their efforts was the establishment of German colonies and trade with enslaved people. Officially, the German Reich began participating in the exploitation and oppression of colonized regions and people in 1884. One central event was the so-called “Berlin Africa Conference” that took place in Berlin from the 15th of November 1884 to the 26th of February 1885. Otto von Bismarck and the French government conjointly invited representatives of ten further European countries, the Ottoman Empire, and the USA to Berlin, to






***Yaa Asantewaa*** was Queen Mother of a federate state of the Ashanti-Empire, (today's Ghana), who led the anti-colonial war of resistance against the British colonial power around 1900.

negotiate the “Division and Allocation of the African Continent”. After four months, the conference produced a final document, that played a central role in the history of colonialism. Among other things, the entire African continent was divided between representatives of the colonial powers. Have you ever had a closer look at the map of the African continent? Perhaps you have noticed that the borders between countries are very straight. This is not coincidental. At the “Berlin Africa Conference”, these borders were drawn with pen and ruler, without any consideration of local circumstances or conflicts. The political borders that we know today are based on this event. The Congolese priest Michel Kayoya expressed his resentment and contempt towards the unbelievable arrogance and unjustified utilization of African territory and its people by European, *white* colonial rulers in a poem called “The Self-Assurance of the Colonist”. The German Reich colonized African, Pacific and Chinese territories, that they “lost” at the end of the war in 1918. “German-Southwest-Africa” (today’s Namibia), “German-West-Africa” (today’s Cameroon, Togo), “German- Samoa”, “German-Neuguinea”, “German-East-Africa” (today’s Burundi, Ruanda, a small part of Mozambique and Tansania (without Sansibar), as well as “Kiautschou-Tsingtao” (Shangdong-Peninsula in today’s China) belonged to German colonized territories. During the 19th and 20th century most of the colonies freed themselves officially from European colonial rule, like the former Portuguese colony of Macau in 1999. To this day, complete groups of islands, such as the Turks and Caico Islands or the Guadeloupe Islands remain as “overseas territories” under the control of European countries.

## ANTI-COLONIAL RESISTANCE

Common knowledge about colonial history in Germany represents the perspective of the *white* colonial powers. Thereby, it excludes the

excessive and brutal use of violence during colonial times, as well as the anti-colonial war of resistance and crucial anti-colonial leaders. However, anti-colonial resistance was present in all eras and in all locations in the most diverse ways (  see chapter: From Local Environmental Protection to Global Climate Justice, pg. 44).

**Colonized people have always resisted, were never passive or impotent victims. They organized active resistance movements and fights, formed coalitions and alliances - across generations and extensive areas.**

One example of an anti-colonial leader is Yaa Asantewaa. Yaa Asantewaa was born between 1840 and 1860 in the Ashanti Kingdom (in today's Ghana) and later was named Queen Mother. As Queen Mother, she filled the most influential position in the Ashanti Kingdom after the King, and was the keeper of the Golden Stool. The Golden Stool is the most important symbol of the Ashanti Kingdom - nobody is allowed to be seated on it. At this time, parts of the Ashanti Kingdom were occupied by British colonizers, whose goal it was to build, with violence, their colonial territory. The Ashanti defended their land with significant resistance. The British colonial power tried to break this resistance permanently. In order to demonstrate their strength and superiority, the British governor Sir Frederik Hodgson demanded of the Ashanti their surrender and the delivery of the Golden Stool. In the wake of this insult, Yaa Asantewaa was named commander in chief of the Ashanti. She led her Kingdom in a war of resistance against the British colonial power. Despite the brutality of the British colonizers and their greater numbers, the Ashanti under Yaa Asantewaa staved them off time and time again. The colonizers finally captured Yaa Asantewaa in 1900 and banished her to the Seychelle Islands, where she died in 1921. Until today she is still a well-known person of anti-colonial resistance.

## COLONIALISM, RACISM AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

One central objective of European colonialism was the control of the colonized population and land and the permanent maintenance of their power. For this purpose, it was important to impose the colonial worldview and societal organization on the colonized. The most important step to that was the destruction and oppression of the different understanding of the world and knowledge systems of Indigenous people. The colonizers, for example, burned the so-called “códices”, the inscriptions of the Maya, a people that live in Central America for many thousands of years. The Maya held many records of their understanding of the world, traditional beliefs, as well as their knowledges of mathematics, astronomy, or agriculture in the códices. The colonizers forbid the colonized people to speak their languages, in order to force upon them the colonizer’s languages, such as Spanish, Portuguese or English. This often led to the loss of knowledge, that was traditionally passed on orally. As a consequence, many of Indigenous worldviews that were and are practiced in areas of Africa, the Americas and Asia are lost. **Up to the present day, BIPOC world-wide successfully resist against systemic oppression and devaluation of their knowledge and beliefs.**

As decolonial researcher Syl Ko<sup>3</sup> says, the effect of European colonialism can be understood as a social “Big Bang” : the arrival of Columbus introduced a complete new social universe. The changes that were brought about by European colonialism are far-reaching and lasting. They not only embodied a turning point for the populations of the colonized territories, but also for oppressed populations in Europe, like Muslims, Jews and Sinti\*zze and Rom\*nja. The present world order is based on these changes, as well as many concepts and values that are considered self-evident and “normal”. Of course, these changes didn’t happen overnight, instead, during the

<sup>3</sup>Syl Ko (2019): Black Veganism Memoirs - Preview Episode.

course of several generations. In order to understand how European colonialism, racism and the climate crisis correlate with each other, we have to examine more closely the colonial society and the colonial way of thinking.

### **Intersectionality**

The English word intersection is embedded in the word intersectionality. This term can be traced to the scientist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. The term underlines that people are not affected by either one or the other form of discrimination, instead, different forms can and do have impact simultaneously.

People can be plurally discriminated against, based on their age, their skin-color, and their sexual orientation, among others. Different forms of social inequality and power structures play roles in discrimination. Classism is also a form of discrimination that functions intersectionally with financially or economically disadvantaged persons.

## **COLONIAL THINKING AND RACISM**

In the course of colonialism, the European colonial powers established a new social organizing principle and societal system. This served not only to strive for maximum profits, but also to justify the violent crimes carried-out against the colonized and enslaved people. The colonial powers presented themselves as “superior”, hereby dehumanizing colonized populations and devaluing their ways of life. This new societal system is the globally effective system of racism that is built upon the colonial way of thinking. The European colonizers invented so-called “human races” within the species homo sapiens. The different invented “human races” were then organized hierarchically, whereby *white* people always stood at the top. Specific human characteristics were attributed to the various “human races” in this new order. *White* people ascribed themselves with positive

characteristics, while colonized and enslaved people were assigned negative characteristics. This process is called racialization. As a result, *white* people caused the dehumanization, devaluation, and categorization of colonized and enslaved people. The racist societal system and the idea, that there are allegedly superior and inferior people, emerged out of this process.

An important process that makes this hierarchical order possible is called “Othering”. In the process of “Othering”, one group of people construct an imaginary boundary between their own “Self” and another group of people, the supposed “Others”. This imaginary boundary originates in the invention of differences. Thereby, the “Self” always receives positive characteristics, while the “Others” are assigned negative ones. Moreover, these characteristics are described as “natural” and fixed. It is necessary to instrumentalize the “Others”



as negative, in order to mount the “Self” as superior.

In the context of racism, this means specifically, that *white* Europeans justified their supremacy and the committed violence against colonized people by dehumanizing colonized people and distancing themselves from them. They created a racialized “Otherness”, that is depicted as “irrational, primitive, passive, traditional, undisciplined” etc. In contrast, colonizers described themselves as “rational, complex, active, modern and disciplined” etc. This violent process of upgrading and degrading the people founded the racist power relationship. *white* Europeans presented themselves as superior, in order to justify the domination of the “inferior” colonized population and to exploit them for their own profit. The invention of “human races” was debated and “proven” by various scientists over the centuries. These included, for example, anthropologists, biologists and philosophers. They turned the enslaved and colonized into objects of research. On the basis of this racist foundation, European colonialism became a project that “missionized, civilized and developed” in the “name of modernism and enlightenment”.

As you may notice: the colonial societal system is deeply hierarchical and unequal. A crucial characteristic of colonial thinking is, among other things, the division of the world into contrasting pairs. Next to the classification Black and *white* people, there is also the classification man and woman, heterosexual and homosexual, non-handicapped and handicapped and so on. The result is the colonial “ideal concept of man”, that is *white*, (cis) male, Christian, heterosexual and non-handicapped. European colonizers introduced their worldview and societal system at a global scale. In this embedded is the categorization of people exclusively into two genders “man” and “woman” and the alleged superiority of “man” to “woman”. As a consequence, the European standard led to the erasure and oppression of all other existing gender identities. The structural

indifferences that patriarchy continues to uphold also can be seen in the effects of the climate crisis ( ↷ see pg. 12). The deeply hierarchical and unjust colonial societal system arose through the division of people into binary gender order and in other suspected contrastive pairs.

Finally, European colonialism needed racism in order to justify domination over the colonized people as well as the committed violence and terror used against them. **European colonialism and the corresponding exploitation, oppression and degradation of the colonized population wouldn't have existed without the racist power relationship.** Until today, racism functions by branding people as "Others" and "strangers" by denying them their self-determination as well as their human status.

## COLONIAL THINKING AND NATURE

As you've learned until now, *white* people presented themselves as superior to the colonized people. This process is inseparable from the fact that *white* people also considered themselves superior to nature. This led to a colonial concept of nature, with which the European colonizers justified the domination and exploitation of "nature". This understanding of nature emerged from the European colonizer's separation from all non-human forms of life, meaning from everything that is known today as "nature". In order to establish this separation, they dismissed the diverse relationships between humans, plants, animals, earth, minerals, water, etc. and did not consider them as an interconnected system. This is how the separation between *white* people and "nature" came into being. This separation is based on the colonial logic: The *white* person categorizes himself as contrary and superior to "nature" and therefore, devalues nature. The *white* person presents himself as active, sensible, orderly, civilized, modern and dynamic. "Nature", on the other hand, is either pure, primitive ,



paradisaic and exotic, or wild, dangerous, mysterious, and chaotic. The important fact is that the *white* person decides, to its own advantage, how and what “nature” is.

**European colonizers invented a “nature”, that, because of its alleged inferiority, needed to be dominated and controlled. Based on this, European colonial powers exploited “nature” ruthlessly in the colonized territories. They pursued their goal of massive profits, as well as securing and consolidating their global power.**


European sciences, such as biology, geography and anthropology (= the scientific study of humanity) played a central role in the invention of the colonial understanding of nature. This was especially true for the natural sciences of the 18th and 19th century that superseded the Christian-religious ideas of the world. European natural scientists actively created the conditions under which they could undertake colonial “discovery and research” trips to the “New World” (=colonized territories). Thus, they “discovered” animal and plant species, that were long known by the colonized local people. They appropriated the colonized people’s knowledge of plants and their medical effects. Both researchers and European colonial powers made significant profits from this appropriated knowledge. *White* researchers benefitted from social fame and fortune, without disclaiming from whom this knowledge originated. This colonial practice resulted in the fact that many findings of Western sciences are based on appropriated and stolen knowledge from Asia, Africa, and the Americas. German scientists, like Alexander von Humboldt, took part in these colonial expeditions. Today they are still celebrated as “discoverers” in the Global North.

European scientists conducted a kind of research that reduced animal and plant species, and entire ecological systems, to a “research object”. They applied their research methods and confirmed their understanding of “nature” as an inanimate, passive object. They



**Sarai or Sakhua** is the name of a tree in Northeast India, that plays an important role for many Indigenous communities, like Oraon or Bhumij. The tree is used for medicinal and religious purposes, and also in the preparation of food.

observed, described and measured, categorized and classified them using rigid schemata and models. They gave already known species of flora and fauna names in Latin or Greek, thereby oppressing and marginalizing current knowledge and language systems. In the course of colonization, European sciences claimed universality, accompanied by the denial and devaluation of non-European knowledge. This oppression continues until today: Indigenous names and descriptions for plant and animal species are rarely acknowledged and rendered invisible.

It becomes evident: the alleged superiority of *white* Europeans is the result of the racialization of the colonized peoples, as well as the separation and devaluation of “nature”. A capitalistic assessment of “nature” was based on this colonial understanding of nature. This is why “nature” today is often called a “natural resource”. The European colonial powers considered the so-called “New World” (=colonized territories) as supposedly inexhaustible source. They considered these resources as raw materials that were always available to them, in order to make technological industrial progress for making their economic growth and life-style possible. In this newly established relationship between *white* people and “nature”, “nature” became a symbol of endless consumption and availability. As the colonial legacy is still being inherited, the colonial concept of nature forms the foundation for overexploitation, extractivism (  see infobox: Overexploitation and Extractivism, pg. 34) and the destruction of the environment.

## A CRITICAL RACE AND DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS

After treating European history of colonialism, it becomes clear that European colonialism cannot be separated from the emergence of racism. European colonialism established a worldwide system

of power and oppression by using violence. This system was based on the racist idea of “superior” and “inferior” people, as well as on the separation between *white* people and “nature”. Racism is an ideology that justifies, now as ever, *white* people’s destruction of the environment and the livelihood of BIPOC. The objective is to facilitate the life-style, profit and security of *white* people, in the name of “civilization”, “development” and “modernism”. Consequently, *white* people changed global climatic conditions to such an extent, that the biosphere, ironically, became an existential threat.

**Only when the colonial and racist dimensions of the climate crisis are examined, it becomes clear that human-made climate change has not been caused by all people equally. Instead, the causes are rooted in the colonial way of thinking, that *white* people introduced at a global level and still practice today. Colonialism, racism, and the climate crisis are linked to one another. The current climate crisis, at the expense of BIPOC globally, is the result of over 500 years of colonial practice.**

Only the destruction of the environment in Non-European countries and the systemic enslavement of colonized people, made the historical enrichment, the industrialization and technologization of countries in the Global North possible. This means, that European colonial powers built their economic, political and ideological supremacy at the expense of the colonized people for more than five centuries. These power structures at a global level are still effective today and for this reason are also called colonial continuities. We will look into these in greater detail in the next chapter.



***Ta'Kaiya Skoden Stoodis Blaney*** is a young actor-singer-songwriter, land defender and climate activist from the Tla'amin First Nation in Northern Vancouver, today Canada.

### 3. COLONIAL CONTINUITIES


The current existence of colonial power structures is also referred to as colonial continuity. The power relations mentioned before have been steadily reproducing themselves since the so-called end of the colonial era, providing various forms and interrelations of oppression. The Global North fills the role of the oppressor in the past and present. The Global South, in turn, is oppressed. To better understand this relationship and the related consequences for the climate, we have collected a few examples for you.

#### **Global South/Global North**

The terms “Global South” and “Global North” describe the historically evolved and current power and oppression structures on a global level. The term Global South describes countries and places in the world (for example, countries in Africa, Southeast Asia, or South and Central America) that find themselves, from a global perspective, in a politically and economically disadvantaged position. The root of this condition is to be found in the European colonial era and every kind of associated exploitation, which in turn originates from the Global North (for example, Europe and the United States). Countries of the Global North are in a privileged position of power and are also often referred to as the “Western World” or the “West”. The division into South and North is understood independently of the geographical location because Australia, for example, also belongs to the countries of the Global North. The term Global South is intended to replace judgmental and foreign terms for the countries in question.

### EMISSIONS AND THE HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY

As we have learned in the previous chapters, the climate crisis and the emerged consequences for the environment and people go mainly back to countries of the Global North. Since industrialization, these

countries are responsible for huge amounts of emissions (  see infobox: Greenhouse Effect, pg. 8) released into the atmosphere. Countries such as Germany and the USA reported their highest CO<sub>2</sub> emissions during the 19th century. Since then, their emissions have been falling, but they have been contributing to global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for a longer period of time than countries in the Global South. While the EU is responsible for 27% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions released since 1850, all countries of the Global South together are responsible for 41% of historical emissions. The imbalance between the emissions of the countries of the Global North and those of the Global South becomes even more evident with the following comparison: In 2013 alone, Germany as a single country produced as much CO<sub>2</sub> as much as 49 African countries in the South of the Sahara combined.

In summary, countries in the Global North have been causing climate change for decades. They historically bear a greater responsibility than countries in Africa, Latin America or Asia. While the Global North continuously exploits these countries, the Global South faces increasing disadvantages from the situation.

Brazil, for example, is now one of the countries that releases the most greenhouse gas emissions into the earth's atmosphere each year. The reason for this is the widespread clearing of the Amazon rainforest and the related cattle farming. Deforestation releases huge amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> that are bound and stored in trees. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions resulting from deforestation in countries of the Global South are responsible for approximately 25% of global warming. The cleared or deforested areas are then often used as pastured land for cattle farming. The cattle, in turn, releases methane during their digestion, which also stimulates and contributes to the greenhouse effect.

Methane emissions from cattle farming account for an additional 15% of the man-made greenhouse effect. Often, the beef is then eventually exported to Europe and to other countries where the consumption of beef is rising because of adaptation to a Western lifestyle.

Soy is also grown on the cleared land and used in the EU as animal feed in the meat industry. On average, the EU imports nearly 34 million tons of soy a year, for the most part, from South America. This requires an area of cultivated land as large as Belgium, the Netherlands and Austria combined. Brazil's greenhouse gas emissions are therefore strongly linked to consumption in Europe together with the *white* upper class in the Global South and therefore cannot be considered individually. This means that the Global North is very often also behind the emissions that come from countries in the Global South, directly or indirectly. To better understand the extent to which colonial structures continue to play a role in countries of the Global South today we will take a closer look at the way in which raw materials such as soy are procured in the first place in the next chapter.




The **19%** of the world's population that resides in the **Global North** are responsible for **92%** of the **world's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions** ...


...the **rest of the world's population** for the **last 8%**.



## EXPLOITATION AND OVEREXPLOITATION

As you have learned, the “natural resources” of the countries of the Global South were in great demand by people of the Global North already over 500 years ago. Raw materials such as sugar cane, coffee, tea and cotton were first exported during the colonial era. Today, it is primarily mineral resources such as metals and oil. This type of resource exploitation continues to take place today. The capitalist system in which we find ourselves allows and promotes this exploitation. The vicious cycle is: if someone wants to make more profit, something has to be exploited for it; be it animals, plants or people. One benefits, while the other is disadvantaged.

This dynamic is also reflected in overexploitation (  see infobox: Overexploitation and Extractivism, pg. 34). Here, “natural resources” are extracted or removed from the environment without respect for biodiversity and conservation of the resource.

Predominantly the environment and people of the Global South suffer from this. The Global North benefits from overexploitation by importing cheap raw materials. These are cheap because people from the Global South are exploited and often have no choice but to work at extremely low wages. These exploitative structures were already developed in colonial times and continue to this day. In the past, the labor of BIPOC in the Global South was systematically exploited, from which *white* people made high profits (  see chapter: Enslavement and Exploitation for Profit, pg. 15). Today it is no different. It is companies, political actors and last but not least, the entire population of the Global North that profits massively from environmental destruction and exploitation.

There are numerous examples of overexploitation in the extraction of natural resources such as oil or metals, as well as in industrial agriculture. Well-known examples are the palm oil industry in Indonesia and soybean cultivation in the Amazon rainforest. In

### **Overexploitation and Extractivism**


Overexploitation refers to the mining or extraction of natural resources for the purpose of making as much profit as possible, while ignoring the ecological consequences. Since colonial times, people of the Global North have overexploited the environment, putting ecosystems at risk and driving species to the brink of extinction.

Extractivism is linked to the exploitation of Indigenous people's natural resources. For decades, many different Indigenous groups have been extracting from the environment only as much as they need at any given time, in order to ensure the preservation of the ecosystem. In the meantime, however, the term has taken on a new meaning and often appears as "neo-extractivism." Here, it refers to overexploitation and its social and political aspects. Governments in countries of the Global South, mostly in Latin America, regulate the processes of natural resource exploitation. Nevertheless, destructive (colonial) structures persist: Ecosystems and BIPOC continue to suffer from the consequences of overexploitation.

both cases, large corporations often appropriate fertile land under questionable circumstances in order to subsequently operate large-scale monocultures there. This process is also known as "land grabbing" and was already practiced during colonial times. This appropriation is accompanied by the fact that BIPOC and marginalized communities of the Global South are losing their homes and being displaced.

Land grabbing and overexploitation is occurring in the Brazilian rain forest on a large scale. As described in the previous chapter, soy is cultivated there in large-scale monocultures, where previously species-rich intact ecosystems prevailed. Huge areas of rainforest, and also dry forest elsewhere, are cut down or cleared for the monocultures, which leave infertile soils behind. In addition, soybean cultivation requires huge amounts of water and pesticides are used that are not legal in Europe. Large corporations act ruthlessly towards

ecosystems and rob the environment of every nutrient until the soil is unusable. Then they move on. Behind them they leave lifeless and bare strips of land.

Often the soy is grown where Indigenous people, rural communities and farmers have lived for decades or often centuries. They are displaced and lose their livelihoods due to the high demand for meat in Europe. After such a cultivation, or also mining of natural raw materials such as oil or metals, the affected regions often become unusable and uninhabitable. An overuse of the environment takes place. This massive environmental destruction through overexploitation for raw material extraction, deforestation for large-scale land and soil use for monocultures or pastureland, and industrial facilities for energy supply is currently taking place and has historically taken place mainly in the Global South. In summary, this means: **the costs of white people's lifestyles, profits, and security are primarily carried by BIPOC and marginalized people in both the Global South and the Global North. BIPOC and marginalized people have been actively resisting these conditions for centuries and continue to fight against environmental degradation and for their land and human rights today.** (  see chapter: From Local Environmental Protection to Global Climate Justice, pg. 44).

## SO MUCH FOR “GREEN TECHNOLOGIES”

Numerous approaches to slowing the advancing climate crisis from the Global North carry colonial ways of thinking. They are often technology-driven and frequently referred to as “green technologies.” “Green” because they are supposed to be “sustainable” and “environmentally friendly”. The Federal Environment Agency writes that such future-oriented solutions depend on the efficient use of raw materials. A rather problematic statement, because many so-called green solutions require limited rare earths, which, in most


## **Climate neutrality**

There is no official definition of the term “climate neutrality”. In principle, climate neutrality means that the emission of greenhouse gases, such as CO<sub>2</sub>, methane or nitrous oxide, should be reduced to zero. To achieve this, on the one hand, significantly fewer greenhouse gases are to be emitted. On the other hand, the greenhouse gases that are nevertheless released are to be offset by countermeasures. What remains after offsetting and the savings of greenhouse gases elsewhere is called the “net”. There are different approaches and ideas to achieve climate neutrality. Technologies and measures are only climate neutral if they have no impact on global warming. In reality, however, the primary approach is not to develop the necessary measures to reduce greenhouse gases. These measures would be, for example, an agricultural turnaround, elimination of the use of fossil fuels for energy supply, or a change of mobility, that is not based on cars. In fact, greenhouse gases continue to be emitted and the compensatory measure chosen is, for example, the planting of young trees (especially in the Global South). Of course, this does not have the same effectiveness as forests that have already existed for centuries as CO<sub>2</sub> reservoirs and is primarily at the expense of BIPOC in the Global South.

cases, are located in countries of the Global South and are acquired through overexploitation.

Let's look at electric cars as one example. Since sustainable mobility is a major goal (of countries in the Global North) in the context of climate neutrality, car companies argue that we need as much electric mobility as possible to fight the climate crisis. In use, such a car may well emit fewer emissions than a conventional car with an internal combustion engine. What receives little attention, however, is the manufacturing process, which needs to be viewed extremely critically. This is because it consumes more energy than usual. In addition, the acquisition of components needed for the rechargeable battery of electric cars is anything but sustainable.

## LITHIUM AND ELECTRIC CARS

Lithium is one of the most important metals used in the production of rechargeable batteries found in electric cars, smartphones, and laptops. The largest lithium-deposit in the world is found in Bolivia. The problem with it is that it is a rare earth. Lithium deposits won't last forever, and the idea of the electric car as a future-oriented sustainable mode of transportation fails already here. While landscapes such as the Salar de Uyuni salt desert in Bolivia are being destroyed by lithium mining, children in the Democratic Republic of Congo are mining cobalt, which is also important for electric cars. And they do so without suitable protective clothing and for very low wages. This example shows once again how present colonial structures are, and how people of the Global North enrich themselves from the resources of others. We see how the colonial way of thinking continues to shape our conditions to this day (  see chapter: Colonial Thinking and Racism, pg. 21).

So-called green solutions support not only inhumane and life-threatening working conditions in the Global South. The overexploitation of such raw materials requires huge amounts of water. At the same time, wastewater contaminated with chemicals is not properly disposed of, resulting in widespread poisoning of the surrounding soil. As a result, BIPOC and socially excluded people who have lived there for decades have to leave their homes. They are being deprived of their livelihoods, as the fields on which they depend for agriculture are now infertile.

An actual solution which would not be at cost of the Global South would be, for example, the expansion of bicycle lanes and public transport. In contrast, these transportation concepts that are not based on cars are not even considered. This is because there is not as much profit to be made with them.



***Fatima Jibrell*** is a Somali environmentalist and founder of the organization Horn Relief, now Adeso. she has been fighting against the deforestation of trees to produce charcoal for over 30 years.

**It is BIPOC in the Global South that bear the social and environmental costs of supposedly sustainable technical climate solutions.**

## THE PROCESS OF OUTSOURCING

You may remember when plastic disposal was a big topic in the media in 2018. The reason was a new regulation that was introduced by China. Because until then, China was one of the main collection points for plastic waste in the world. European countries exported their plastic waste to China, where it was further processed. However, this system became increasingly difficult as more and more contaminated plastics arrived in China. The reason for this was countries like Germany, which recycled the easily recyclable plastics themselves. So, the plastic that arrived in China was the kind that was difficult to recycle. Therefore, the imported plastic waste ended up in Chinese landfills or incinerators. This incineration releases many toxic substances. Due to this high ecological impact, China introduced stricter regulations, so that less contaminated plastic could be imported. As a result, countries in the Global North found new buyers in Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. But even these importers were soon overwhelmed by the flood of plastic from countries such as the USA, Germany, and the UK. After a few months and several tons of illegally imported plastic waste, these countries also had to respond with stricter regulations. Nevertheless, Germany exported the majority of its plastic waste in fact, 151,000 tons to Malaysia in 2020.

**Countries in the Global North outsource plastic recycling processes because they apparently do not want to deal with the consequences of cheap plastic consumption for populations and ecosystems. Instead, they burden BIPOC and socially excluded people in the Global South with their waste.**

## COLONIAL STRUCTURES IN CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS

Just as colonial structures have their impact on climate and the environment, they also shape climate movements, such as Fridays for Future. Especially through Greta Thunberg, the leading figure of the mainly *white* climate movement the topic of climate crisis and its consequences appeared more and more often, almost daily, in the German media. It is portrayed as if Greta Thunberg would be the world's first young climate activist. Yet, for decades, young BIPoC activists from around the world have been fighting against the consequences of climate change. These activists are rarely heard or read about. Can you think of any?

Two contemporary examples are Adwoa Addae and Tonny Nowshin. Adwoa Addae is a queer climate activist from Jamaica. Adwoa fights for more visibility for queer and trans BIPoC, who are particularly hard hit by the effects of climate change. Nowshin fights in Germany for the preservation of mangrove forests in Bangladesh, which are supposed to give way for a coal-fired power plant. Among many other actions, in 2020 Nowshin participated in a protest action together with *white* climate activists against a coal-fired power plant in Germany. In retrospect, Nowshin was not included in a single official press photo. The same experience had to be made by her. Fellow activist Vanessa Nakate from Uganda, who was cropped by a news agency from a press photo showing her next to *white* activists in early 2020. A clearly racist act. Not only do both activists of color get no recognition for their work. Their presence is simply made invisible.

Thus, only the image of *white* climate activists is reproduced again and again. They are given a stage in the Global North. They are listened to, while those who have been affected by the consequences of climate change for decades are not.

Pictures always tell a story. Due to the fact that BIPoC perspectives





**Adwoa Addae** is a queer climate activist from Jamaica. Adwoa fights for more visibility for queer and trans BIPOC, who are particularly hard hit by the effects of climate change.

get almost no space in German media, the representation of their experienced realities is missing. Through this lack of representation, BIPOC are marginalized. They are given the feeling and message that climate activism is only for *white* people. This also happens when BIPOC in Germany are categorically accused of a lack of interest in environmental protection. However, reality shows that this is not the case at all. Did you know that in Summer 2021 the first BIPOC Climate Conference in person and in Fall 2020 the first BIPOC Climate Conference online was organized by BIPOC climate activists in Germany? A safe framework was created in which BIPOC climate activists could exchange ideas.

### WHITE SAVIOR COMPLEX

Climate activism in the Global North is fundamentally based on the mindset of “*white* conservation”, whose origins can be found in colonialism. As we saw in the chapter on the “colonial understanding of nature,” *white* people have assumed that they are superior to “nature.” And even though *white* people (historically) have carried the greatest responsibility for the climate crisis, they now see themselves in the position of saviors: “We have to save the climate.” This dynamic is reminiscent of the phenomenon of *white* saviorism, in which *white* people often feel the need to save BIPOC in the Global South, or to “free them from their misery”. The conflict here is that they are exactly the ones who are responsible for the precarious situation of countries in the Global South in the first place. But instead of taking on the responsibility, coming to terms with their own history, overcoming hierarchies, and relinquishing power and privileges, they present themselves as the “rescuers” and thus reinforce the image of the “more progressive, superior” society.

**This upgrade of their own self-image succeeds, among other things, by devaluing and ignoring centuries of resistance struggles**

and essential (survival) strategies in dealing with BIPOC's climate crisis. Thus, *white* climate activists can present themselves as the only "environmental saviors" worldwide.

## THE PROBLEM WITH *WHITE* CLIMATE ACTIVISM

In Germany, the majority of the activists in climate movements are *white* middle-class people. Viewpoints are often held that are critical of the capitalist consumerism of Western societies and see it as the root of evil in the current situation. At this point, however, we should ask ourselves who can even afford the biologically sustainable lifestyle that most *white* climate activists strive for. After all, sustainability often means spending more money on, say, that sweater made of sustainable cotton or food at the organic store. Only those who live in abundance can have the goal or desire to consume less. All those who have less available, financially, already contribute much less to the climate crisis than a middle-class person (from the Global North). The condemnation of unsustainable lifestyles is therefore also classist ( ↪ see infobox: Intersectionality, pg. 21).

*White* climate and environmental activists often ignore the fact that racist structures play a major role in the climate crisis. As a result, they forget about their fellow activists who are spread all over the



The **richest 1%** of the world's population emitted **twice as much** CO<sub>2</sub> between 1990 and 2015...

...as the **poorer 50%** of the world's population **combined!**

world. This way of thinking leads to demands that only refer to the Global North, and at the same time forget the people in the Global South. Germany is not regularly affected by environmental and climate catastrophes. Compared to the Global South, people here do not have to give up their homes because of floods or droughts. The flood catastrophe in Ahrtal Germany from 2021 was the first to be publicly discussed because of the climate crisis. The fight against the climate crisis in countries of the Global North can hardly be compared to the dangers environmental activists in the Global South have to face when they resist. In 2019 alone, 212 environmental activists were murdered while fighting the climate crisis. More than half of the murders occurred in Colombia and the Philippines.

#### **4. FROM LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION TO GLOBAL CLIMATE JUSTICE – THE HISTORY OF RESISTANCE**

Climate movements have a long history. Contrary to the widespread assumption in Germany that they originated in *white* environmental groups, the reality is quite different. During the 1960s, environmental movements emerged in the United States, the majority of which were *white* and middle class. They protested against industrial pollution with the approach: “Not in my backyard.” In fact, they succeeded in driving many industries out of their neighborhoods. However, this only shifted the problems, it didn’t lead to the elimination of the polluting industries altogether. Thus, most industries moved to places populated predominantly by BIPoC, thus lodging the pollution problem in these communities. This transfer of environmental damage to communities of color is called “environmental racism.”


This is because, more than anything else, racialization was - and remains to this day - the biggest indicator of peoples’ risk to live close to harmful industries (more so than social class, gender, etc., whereas this can be, in turn, intersectional). A 1994 study shows that


BIPoC in the US are 47% more likely to live next to a toxic landfill than *white* people.



This was also the case in small and rural Warren County in the early 1980s, where predominantly Black people lived. The North Carolina government had decided to dump 6,000 truckloads of toxic waste in Warren County. The people began to organize against it. Even as the first trucks entered the town, residents blocked the access road to the landfill. Their protest marches, as well as their civil disobedience, lasted 6 weeks and more than 500 people were arrested. The protests in Warren County are often referred to as the cradle of the environmental justice movement. This is because the majority Black activists did not view environmental problems in isolation, but also understood them as a social problem that had its origins in social hierarchies and systems of exploitation. The idea of environmental justice spread quickly and environmental justice movements formed

around the world, mostly at the initiative of BIPOC communities.

We can perceive a similar dynamic with regard to the climate crisis and climate justice movements. In the 1980s, the first major confrontations with the climate crisis began. In the Global North, these were understood as an isolated climate problem. Supposed solutions aimed to reduce greenhouse gases which were being held responsible for global warming. In the process, the climate crisis and the supposed solutions were viewed only from a technical perspective. These technical solutions caused new injustice, without addressing the root of the problem (  see chapter: Colonial Continuities, pg. 30).

However, as in the motto “We’re all in the same boat”, both the early climate movements and the politicians of the Global North considered the climate crisis and its solution as a problem whose responsibility and consequences would affect everyone equally. This assumption pays no attention to the fundamental imbalance in the cause and effect of the climate crisis (  see chapter: “What do we want? Climate Justice!”, pg. 8). This makes it possible for the Global North to push itself to the forefront in climate debates, as well as rendering BIPOC perspectives and experiences on climate issues invisible. Both their strategies for dealing with the climate crisis and their resistance and successes are rendered invisible, going unnamed in many debates and negotiations on climate issues.

In response to this inept view of the climate crisis, organizations and grassroots movements demanding climate justice formed, particularly in the Global South. Many of these groups and organizations came together in 2002 and formulated the “Bali Principles of Climate Justice”, which created an important foundation for the meaning and basic principles of climate justice.

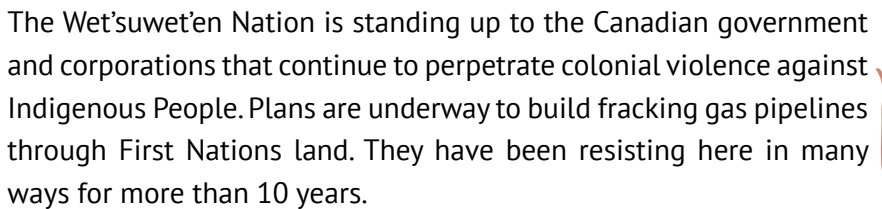
With them, a foundation was laid for a new movement. Since then, people around the world have taken to the streets, occupied mines,

blocked cruise ships, developed ways of living in solidarity, and collectively demanded a climate-just world.

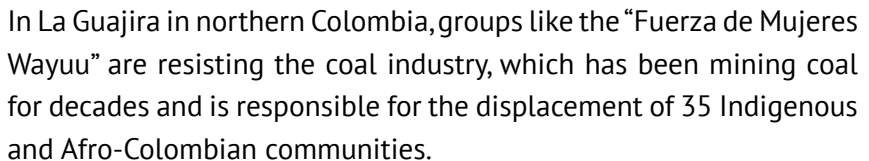
The struggles for climate justice, however, did not begin here, but had started long before - even if they were often not formulated as such. Thus, it is particularly the anti-colonial struggles of the Global South, which have existed for over 500 years, that have fought the system that has produced the climate crisis.

Thus, if we understand that colonial thinking is the root of the climate catastrophe, it means that liberating and fighting colonial thinking is also a struggle for the climate.

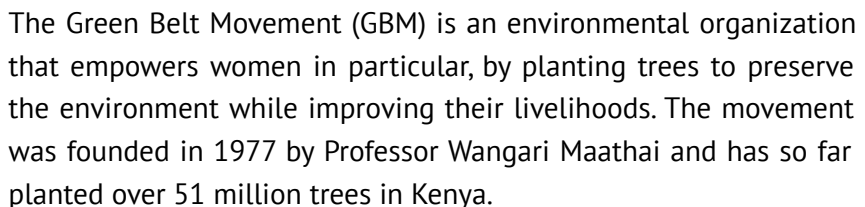
In the following we would like to focus on anti-colonial resistance and make them visible. It is important for us that we do not romanticize or fetishize resistance and not force upon Western fantasies of revolution. Movements of resistance are not totally free from global power structures. They sometimes contain indifferent, complex and contradictory dynamics. That is why it is important to look at the significance of movements within the framework of a bigger picture.



The Wet'suwet'en Nation is standing up to the Canadian government and corporations that continue to perpetrate colonial violence against Indigenous People. Plans are underway to build fracking gas pipelines through First Nations land. They have been resisting here in many ways for more than 10 years.




In La Guajira in northern Colombia, groups like the “Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu” are resisting the coal industry, which has been mining coal for decades and is responsible for the displacement of 35 Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.




The Green Belt Movement (GBM) is an environmental organization that empowers women in particular, by planting trees to preserve the environment while improving their livelihoods. The movement was founded in 1977 by Professor Wangari Maathai and has so far planted over 51 million trees in Kenya.








In Chiapas in southern Mexico, the Zapatistas are fighting against oppressive conditions. They are organized in councils and form broad networks of solidarity. In recent years, the fight against femicide and sexism has come to the foreground.



In the south of Bangladesh are the Sundarbans, the biggest mangrove forests in the world. It is also the intended place for a new coal-fired power station for which the mangrove forests would be destroyed – The German Fichtner Group is also involved. The local population have organized themselves against this plan for many years. Thus, tens of thousands of people have joined a 500km long protest march.



In Nigeria, protests against the SARS police unit have been forming since early 2017. In October 2020, these found a new peak and especially the young generation protests loudly against the ongoing police violence. Queer individuals in particular led the protest.



After the murder of 22-year-old Shannon Waterfalls in Namibia, large protests formed. Since the 10/7/2020, people here have taken to the streets under the slogan #ShutItAllDownNamibia to protest sexual and gender-based violence as well as colonial legacies.

The Samin live on the island of Java (Indonesia). They have already resisted the colonization of the Netherlands. Today they are resisting the expulsion by the German concrete manufacturer HeidelbergCement, which wants to open new mines in the Kendeng Mountains. On 9/20/2020, they filed a complaint against HeidelbergCement with the German government.

The Haus of Khameleon is an organization that fights discrimination and violence against Trans People. Through education and advocacy, it is a strong voice for equal rights for Trans People in Fiji and throughout the Pacific. They also fight against the climate crisis and sea level rise.

In Kosbass, Siberia, resistance to the fossil coal industry has been building since 2013. In particular, the Indigenous population group of the Shor stands in the way of the mining projects with the help of vigils, small group actions or even legal complaints.

## 5. “FOR PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE”

- *Rebecca Abena Kennedy-Asante, Black Earth Kollektiv*

In this booklet we have shed light on the connection between climate crisis, colonialism and racism. We have taken a closer look at the history of European colonialism, highlighted colonial continuities and made anti-colonial resistance and opposition to environmental and climate destruction visible.

An examination of European colonialism and racism can be very tough and unpleasant, we know that. But it is necessary in order to understand the roots of the climate crisis and to develop solutions from them. If reading all the colonial continuities has made you feel powerless, we hereby encourage you to break free from that powerlessness. Because as complex and multi-layered as the connections between climate crisis, colonialism and racism are, your resistance can be as diverse and as powerful.

Regardless of whether you join Friends of Earth Germany, Ende Gelände, Fridays for Future, the Seebrücke or your local queerfeminist strike alliance! Whether you are part of a group that explicitly supports climate-related issues or not, remember: power-critical struggles are always struggles for climate justice! Therefore, an important step is to reflect on your own positioning in society. Which privileges do I enjoy? When do I reproduce racism, sexism or other forms of systematic oppression?

It is indispensable to deal with these questions and one's own position in society. This is the only way that we can break down the existing power structures. Therefore: inform and reflect upon yourself! But reflection must not stop with us. We must recognize - inside and outside our movements - the colonial continuities and fight against them, because they support the system that destroys the climate, the people and our environment. So, let's go! See you at


the next climate protest, demo or climate camp!

To all our BIPOC brothers and sisters: We see you! We see your injuries, your courage and your power! It is exactly our (survival) life that is an act of resistance. Thank you that you have trusted us and read the brochure up to this point. As you have seen, we can look back on a long history of resistance, also when it comes to climate. Because climate activism is not *white*. It was and is always part of our history/histories.

If after reading the brochure you feel motivated to continue to become active and to reflect the climate crisis from a decolonial and non-*white* perspective, here are some starting points for you: the Black Earth Collective, the BIPOC Climate Justice Network, KlimaDeSol, the Bloque Latinoamericano and many others.

**We fight on! For Past, Present and Future!**

## GLOSSARY

**BIPOC** stands for Black, Indigenous, People of Color. (  see infobox: pg. 14).

**cis** is the opposite of “trans.” “cis” is used to express that a person identifies with the gender to which they were assigned at birth based on genitalia.


**Emission** means discharge. This refers to the release of particles or substances into the environment that contaminate it.

**Global South/North** (  see infobox: pg. 30).

**(Social) Hierarchy** means a ranking. In it, people, animals, objects, etc. are assigned a place in society through superiority and subordination. Hierarchy is therefore always based on domination and subordination.

**Intersectionality** (  see infobox: pg. 21).

**Capitalism** refers to a particular economic and social order based on the separation of capital and labor. People with capital can afford machines and labor, while people without capital have to sell their labor cheaply. The main goal of capitalism is growth and profit maximization.

**Classism** (  see infobox: pg. 21).

**Maafa** is Swahili and means “catastrophe.” On the one hand, the term describes the mass deportation and enslavement of African people in the course of colonialism. On the other hand, it describes the

transgenerational trauma caused by this. At the same time, it refers to the millennia-old resistance of African people against colonial exploitation and oppression.

**Marginalized people** means people who are excluded from society. Often because of supposed differences from the majority of society. For example, because of gender, sexual orientation, origin, etc.


**Monoculture** refers to an area used for agriculture or forestry on which only one type of plant is grown over a long period of time. Next to economic benefits, monocultures have severe negative impacts on ecosystems.


**Sexism** describes the structural discrimination against people based on their gender, in Western societies women, lesbians, inter, non-binary, trans, and agender persons.

**trans** is an umbrella term for all people who do not identify with the gender to which they were assigned at birth. It is the counterpart to “cis”.

**Greenhouse gas(es)** (  see infobox: pg. 8).

**Greenhouse effect** (  see infobox: pg. 8).

**Western** (  see infobox: pg. 30).

**white** marks the dominant and privileged position of people within the racist system (  see infobox: pg. 14).

## FURTHER READING

Here we have collected our sources, as well as further literature (in German): <https://linktr.ee/Klima.Kolonialismus>



If you go to [www.bundjugend.de/kolonialismusundklimakrise](http://www.bundjugend.de/kolonialismusundklimakrise) you will also find our sources, continuing literature (in German) and you can download the booklet, or order further copies.



## AUTHORS



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You can reach the authors for workshops, readings and advice, lectures or a shared discussion, etc. under: [klimaantikolonial@protonmail.com](mailto:klimaantikolonial@protonmail.com)

## WHO IS BEHIND THE BROCHURE

This brochure was produced as part of the “Locals United” project at the BUNDjugend. The project is funded by Aktion Mensch. Locals United illuminates connections between the climate crisis and social struggles. Because people who are exposed to (multiple) discrimination are more affected by the consequences of climate change. For this reason, our motto is: “Climate Justice = Social Justice”. Our commitment to a world without coal, oil, gas, environmental destruction and exploitation of resources, is for us inseparable from the creation of a society of solidarity and equality. With Locals United we want to give important food for thought, for example with workshops and discussions on “colonialism and climate crisis”, “queer feminism and climate justice” or “intersectionality” and offer a platform to the most diverse perspectives within the climate movement.

Portraits Locals United: Antonia Koschny



## What does the BUNDjugend do?

BUNDjugend is committed to environmental protection and global justice. We want a world in which everyone - including future generations - can live a good life without thriving at the expense of others or the environment.

We demand a political rethinking, but also, we start with ourselves. If you also want to change something and are younger than 27 years old, then the BUNDjugend is the right place for you. With us you can have your say, get involved and become active! As an independent youth organization of BUND (Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland e.V.) we are active nationwide. We are part of the Young Friends of the Earth network and thus connected with young people from all over the world.

Locally, you can join local groups, participate in seminars and camps, or get involved in nationwide actions and campaigns. On [bundjugend.de](http://bundjugend.de) you will find current offers and dates in which you can participate, materials and contact points.

[www.bundjugend.de](http://www.bundjugend.de)

Gefördert durch die  
**Aktion**  
**MENSCH**



**BUNDjugend**  
YOUNG FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

**“WE MUST FREE OUR CONSCIOUSNESS FROM PREDATORY  
CAPITALISM, RACISM, AND PATRIARCHY, BECAUSE THESE LEAD  
TO OUR SELF-DESTRUCTION.”  
- BERTA CÁCERES**

