

Ecofeminist and feminist actors at the COP:

*Eight conversations
about challenges,
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ABOUT US

Article

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ECOFEMINIST AND FEMINIST ACTORS AT THE COP:

EIGHT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND ALLIANCES

How do ecofeminist and feminist actors push for change at the COP? This question arose from my general quest for strategies for change and resilience in the world we live in, that is undoubtedly cruel and challenging for those calling for system change. Taking the recent COP29 as a point of departure, I spoke with eight activists, scholars, and advocates for feminism, ecological and economic justice about the challenges of navigating and pushing for progressive changes in a space such as the COP.

The subsequent research piece reflects on my conversations with them in order to show the diversity in strategies in navigating this space. I hope that these reflections can offer insights to others that want to learn from more experienced ecofeminists and feminists on how to push for change whilst creating empowering alliances with others. In the end, the COP is just one example of the capitalist, colonial and patriarchal spaces that we encounter every day, thus we might take these insights as an inspiration to take the question a step further by asking: How can we work towards change anywhere in an (eco)feminist manner?

The following paragraphs do not do justice to the impressive individuals that I had the chance of interviewing, but it will give a first insight into the diverse (eco)feminist agendas, strategies, solidarity and perspectives of eight people that have engaged in these interconnected struggles for the past decades.

NOTE

For the entirety of this article, it is important to note that whenever I refer to “the COP” without specifying it otherwise, I refer to the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Furthermore, this research uses the terminology and writing style of “(eco)feminisms” or “(eco)feminist” in brackets to shorten the terminology of “ecofeminisms or feminisms” and “ecofeminist or feminist.” Nevertheless, it is important to note that both are not to be equalled but have important differences amongst and between the different interpretations of the latter. The individual interpretation of ecofeminisms or feminisms and identification with such is subjective to each person interviewed and not everyone identifies with one or the other.

CONTEXT:

From the 11th to the 22nd of November 2024, the city of Baku in Azerbaijan hosted the 29th United Nations Climate Change Conference. On a yearly basis, the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) brings together almost every country in the world to debate commitments and strategies to tackle the climate crisis.

However, CSOs and many climate-vulnerable nations criticize annually that the solutions proposed by the COP do not reflect the needs of climate vulnerable countries and citizens and neither the urgency of the climate and related crises. Also last year, at COP29, the inability and unwillingness of enriched Global North countries to take sufficient action and acknowledge their responsibility was striking, and ultimately failed to respond to the [needs of the most vulnerable nations in facing the climate crisis and ignoring the gendered impact](#) of the latter. What was promised to be the “Finance COP” ([ODG COP29](#)), turned into a “[Betrayal in Baku](#)”.

Next to other issues, COP29 had as major goal to reach an agreement on climate finance, including the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG). After two weeks of debates, countries agreed on a new climate finance target of “[mobilising](#)” \$300 billion annually by 2035. However, not only the quantity is devastatingly low in comparison to the (minimum of) \$5 to \$6.9 trillion which climate vulnerable countries are estimated to need between now and 2030 ([ODG COP29](#)), also the quality of funding is vaguely expressed and mostly based on debt-issuing loans by private finance and multilateral development banks (MDBs) through which [enriched countries evaded their responsibility to pay up](#). The final decision on the NCQG does in no way reflect the needs of the climate vulnerable countries and thus is rejected by different countries (amongst which Cuba, India, Bolivia, and Nigeria) and the [Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice](#).

Apart from the disappointing outcomes with regards to climate finance, COP29 was contextualised in the geopolitical context of the ongoing genocide in Palestine, the war in Ukraine, and the recent election of Donald Trump whose potential withdrawal from the UNFCCC [pushed countries into accepting whatever deal](#) before Trump’s inauguration. Lastly, the host of the COP, Azerbaijan, made progressive climate finance decisions more difficult as its national economy depends largely on the extraction and export of hydrocarbons like oil and natural gas ([ODG COP29](#)). At least 1773 fossil fuel lobbyists have been granted access to COP29, a number that outscores “all the delegates from the 10 most climate vulnerable nations combined (1033)” ([Kick Big Polluters Out 2024](#)).

A positive outcome next to the mentioned shortcomings was the successful 10-year prolongation of the Lima Work Programme on Gender. The implementation of next steps will be at stake at COP30, and without sufficient climate finance, effective [gender-transformative climate action](#) will remain challenging to implement.

Next to the disappointing outcomes, the possibilities for [civil society participation](#) to protest and denounce the wrong-doings of the COP were severely restricted and silenced at COP29.

Given this challenging context, how do ecofeminist and feminist actors experience the space of the COP and how do they push for the (eco)feminist agenda?

Ecofeminisms – connecting struggles that are usually separated

The term “ecofeminism” emerged in 1974, coined by the French feminist author Françoise d’Eaubonne, recognised the structural associations of women with nature and the assumed subjugation of both to men (Buckingham 2015). Furthermore, ecofeminisms have in common that they center life instead of capitalist profit maximization whilst supporting environmentally sustainable and democratically based ways of living ([ODG n/d](#)).

However, as many (if not most?) of the Western theories and terminologies, this definition does not reference or consider other older (and non-western) knowledges that recognise the shared oppression of women and nature without explicitly calling it “ecofeminism”. Nevertheless, how people interpret ecofeminism for themselves, what it means to them and how they apply the ecofeminist values and perspectives in their own lives is very diverse. Hereby, “ecofeminism” is not meant to be used as a label which individuals can or cannot hold, but this research rather intends to let people speak for themselves, sharing their personal perspective on feminisms and/or ecofeminisms.

For many of my interview partners, ecofeminisms are about connecting struggles. They are about bringing together those fights that are usually treated as separate, such as the fights for gender equality and for ecological justice. Both the feminist struggle and the ecological struggle are based on the hierarchical structures of the capitalist, patriarchal and colonial system that we live in, and which is being sustained by the subordination and exploitation of nature, of women, of dissident and racialized bodies (*Bruna, Clàudia, Sofía*). Further, ecofeminisms deal with more than simply fighting the subordination of women and nature to men, but they are a vehicle for structural change and towards a new and just system for all identities (*anonymous 1, Shereen*). This approach (in all its varieties) pushes to re-think our relationship with the earth and other people through centring the assumption that we are all “inter- and eco-dependent” (*Sofía*).

However, it is important to note that ecofeminisms are not to be equalled with feminisms and that there are important differences amongst and between the different interpretations of the latter. For instance, the label “ecofeminist” is often being interpreted solely in the context of the Northern (and predominantly white) ecofeminist wave that originated in France in 1974 and does not necessarily reflect the “deeper ecological and political fight” and the realities of racialized bodies (*anonymous 2*). In comparison, a feminism that is rooted in an intersectional, structural, anti-racist and anti-imperialist perspective questions the interconnected systems of oppression beyond the hierarchical dualisms of men/women and men/nature (*anonymous 2*). Due to the differences, whether or not to identify with ecofeminisms is highly subjective and not all my interview partners identify with both theories.

How to integrate (eco)feminisms in your work and life?

For most of my interview partners (eco)feminisms are a constant aspect of life. However, there are different degrees of embodiment and reflection of the latter in their workplace (may it be an organisation, or movement).

For some, feminism is “intrinsic” to their work (*anonymous 2*) rather than a specific goal to be reached through a policy. This means that it is an intuitive and intentional exercise to shape professional and private spaces through feminist values like solidarity and care (*anonymous 2*). Others feel more restricted in the “radicality” (*anonymous 1*) of their (eco)feminisms, depending on the workplace and position. For Anna, feminist principles are guiding values of her work at [IDDRI](#) (a French Think Tank working on sustainable development), but they are not necessarily explicit company policy. In contrast, Shereen (director of [MENAFem](#)) explained that the very mission of the movement is to transform the current economic structure to a feminist and just one, through applying feminist theories and policies at all levels (*Shereen*). Bruna and Clàudia shared that at [ODG](#) (association working on climate, financial justice and feminist topics), the ecofeminist perspective is incorporated transversally to bridge the different working areas.

Additionally, ODG tries to organise its work in a feminist way, not only thematically but also internally, through its non-hierarchical structure, the consideration of workers’ needs with regards to flexible schedules or other caring practices. However, this approach (as desirable as it is) seems to be only possible to be implemented in a space of privilege (potentially progressive funding entities or the flexible structure the association) which facilitates the consideration of feminist values at the workspace level. As it was pointed out during one of the interviews (*anonymous 1*), working in the NGO-sector, there was always a compromise between “radical” feminist values and the access to funding, meaning that, in their experience, there was little to no funding for projects that actually implement feminist values.

As it was pointed out during one of the interviews (*anonymous 1*), working in the NGO-sector, there was always a compromise between “radical” feminist values and the access to funding, meaning that, in their experience, there was little to no funding for projects that actually implement feminist values. Further questioning the structural (im)possibility to integrate feminisms into the sphere of paid labour, Shamim highlighted that gender-responsive projects and finance are very difficult to receive in countries of the African continent, in which the debt crisis causes governments to implement austerity measures instead of public spending.

More specifically, even within the non-governmental or civil society organisations, investors would refrain from funding projects that are led by women. Given these structural and colonial inequalities, it “becomes quite difficult to even start talking about feminism itself” (*Shamim*). The degree to which actors can implement their (eco)feminist values in the workplace thus strongly depends on the possibilities (mostly financially).

So where does this leave us? What kind of “workspace” is the COP and how do (eco)feminists navigate their demands in it?

(Eco)feminists at the COP

When preparing for the annual COP, the first difficulty reportedly arises when deciding whether to attend it. Whilst some of my interview partners reported that they had little choice as it is considered part of their job (*anonymous 1, Anna*), others shared that their organisations have annual debates whether attending is worth the human and economic resources and the CO₂ emissions (*Bruna, Clàudia*), especially when the host countries are fossil fuel states such as the United Arab Emirates or Azerbaijan and therefore the expectations for progressive climate policies are rather low (*Clàudia, Sofía*). However, in most cases, they did go – for many different reasons and intentions.

Intention of attending the COP(s):

“You can go to COP for many different reasons and that’s sometimes a problem”, argued Anna, explaining that it is difficult to go without a plan and without having a clear intention to engage in the space. The intention, however, would depend mainly on one’s role in the space and differs whether one is acting as a representative of a social movement, NGO or as policy maker (*Anna*). The motivations behind attending the COP are highly personal and have also changed over the years of attending the COP(s). In general terms, three key motivations stood out from most of the interviews: increase knowledge on the space, networking and collaboration, and impact.

Understanding the COP:

The COP processes and vocabulary are highly complex, thus the first aim for COP newcomers [1] was reportedly to improve their understanding of the space and the decisions. Especially in the first years, one has “no clear idea on how it works” (*anonymous 2*), but over the years, one gains a higher understanding of the processes and the complex language of the texts and negotiations. Understanding how “the theatre” (*Anna*) works, it is then easier to contribute to common strategies in constituencies or other groups and ultimately, to increase the potential impact.

[1] for some of my interview partners, the recent COPs were the first ones, others have been following them since COP20 in 2014

Networking and Collaboration:

For most of my interview partners, the main intention when attending the COP(s) is the possibility to network with other activists or CSOs, to strengthen alliances and to work on a common strategy together. Especially for the newcomers, meeting experienced international activists is a great way to learn and have an in-person follow up on the networks built during the preparation of the COP (*anonymous 1*).

To navigate the space in alliance with others, rather than by oneself, enables to strengthen “collective and cross-movement work towards systemic transformation” (*anonymous 2*). Instead of the individual action or agenda, it is the collective power that will strengthen the movement and contribute to change (*anonymous 2*), both externally and internally. Even within the CSO groups at COP, “different colonial, imperialist, and capitalist threats” would still need to be understood and challenged (*anonymous 2*). Gaining this understanding would have to be an “intentional exercise” of everyone going to COP so that individuals do not simply follow their own agenda but actually “serve the collective work” (*anonymous 2*).

Apart from collaborating with other activists or CSOs, other relevant networks are those with the media. Especially smaller groups or organisation such as the ODG, said Bruna and Clàudia, can use their presence at COP to make strategic connections with media outlets to which they usually would not have the access to. Having the possibility to speak up in broader and international media channels, their perspectives on the decisions and processes of the COP would reach an audience beyond their usual, which would increase the diversity of voices speaking about COP, especially those who report in a critical or politicized way (*Clàudia, Bruna, Sofía*).

Similarly, COPs would offer a unique chance for activists, CSO or NGO representatives to get direct access to (inter)national politicians, whilst this would be much more difficult in the context of day-to-day national politics (*Sofía, Shamim*).

Impact:

The individual intention or motivation to attend COP is also shaped by the impact that one aims to achieve. The latter include cross-cutting goals like “reclaiming space and leverage power” through movements led by the Global South (*anonymous 2*), “denounce wrong-doings” (*Sofía*), reporting critically about the processes to audiences outside of the COP (*Bruna, Sofía*) or “influence negotiations” (*Anna*).

Other impacts were more specific such as diversifying gender representation and intersectionality, by getting involved in a queer working group (*anonymous 1*). The latter aimed not only to be an outward- but also inward-directed process to improve representation and inclusivity of queer, non-binary and trans identities within and outside the CSO spaces (*anonymous 1*). Further, as Shereen argued, especially COP28 in 2023 was impacted heavily by the ongoing genocide in Palestine and thus a major desired impact of her work at COP was to bring attention to the topic, in all the possible spheres of negotiations, plenaries or protests, and ultimately, to “turn the COP into a Palestine COP” (*Shereen*).

Although the impact is often limited and aims might not be able to be reached, the presence and work of social movements, CSOs or individual activists does have an impact ultimately. “Without their presence, the outcomes would be worse” argued *Sofía*, highlighting the importance of the collective work.

As it was pointed out during one of the interviews (*anonymous 1*), working in the NGO-sector, there was always a compromise between “radical” feminist values and the access to funding, meaning that, in their experience, there was little to no funding for projects that actually implement feminist values. Further questioning the structural (im)possibility to integrate feminisms into the sphere of paid labour, *Shamim* highlighted that gender-responsive projects and finance are very difficult to receive in countries of the African continent, in which the debt crisis causes governments to implement austerity measures instead of public spending.

Administrative and financial barriers:

The external barriers to access are rather straight-forward. Without being an UN-accredited organisation or movement, they will not be given a badge to enter, however it is very difficult and time-consuming to receive such accreditation. Depending on the country of residency and income, travelling to COP is very expensive and emits lots of CO2. Additionally, the prices in the hosting city are rising incredibly in the lead-up to the COP, including those for necessary expenditures such as hotels, food and transport (*anonymous 1, Brunna*). Thus, for small-scale organisations or movements without affiliation to bigger organisations or sponsors, it is rather challenging to gain access to the space.

Internal challenges:

Once inside the COP, my interview participants reported a variety of additional challenges. Firstly, the persistent gender inequality: “gender is always treated as a topic” rather than a cross-cutting theme and internal requirement (*Clàudia*). [A study on gender representation at the COP29](#) by Ecologistas en Acción has shown that, although some groups like the NGO sector almost achieve gender parity, the summit is clearly dominated by men, with women representing just over one third of the largest group of people, the country delegations.

COPs are still “white men’s spaces” with a majority of male heads of states and negotiators (*Clàudia*). Especially for young or racialized women, it would be difficult to claim spaces to speak up, argued *Sofía*, whilst male speakers do not hesitate to occupy speaking spaces, “just like in any space in the world” (*Sofía, Anna*).

Secondly, there is a strong language barrier. Although the COP is an international space, the language spoken in many spaces is English only, which already impedes the active participation of many non-English speakers (*anonymous 1*). The domination of English as main language is particularly problematic given the complexity of the UN documents and their difficult terminology.

Furthermore, working at COP is extremely “draining”, “tiring”, and “psychologically and physically tough” and there is a lack of privacy, (self-)care, or fresh air, whilst the working hours are really intense (*anonymous 1, Bruna, Shamim, Anna*). *Anna* mentioned that she fainted at her first COP and *Shamim* told me how she fell sick with “eco-anxiety” for six months after attending her first COP due to the “inability” (or should we say unwillingness?) of those in power to propose effective solutions to the climate and related crises. Additionally, costs for food inside the COP mirror the increased prices of the host cities, further hindering people without access to sufficient funding to be present at COPs (*Bruna, Shamim*).

Lastly, depending on the host countries, the COPs have very restrictive rules for internal actions. In COP28 and 29 for instance, it was prohibited to show any flags, to speak openly about Palestine, or to do any blockages or other incommoding protests. If you were to disobey the rules, *anonymous 1* said, “you risk your badge being taken away which has consequences also for the organisation that you are representing, and you might never be able to enter again.”

Strategies

As expected, there is not a simple answer regarding which strategies work best to advance in the (eco)feminist agenda at COP. Talking to my interview partners, the following aspects stood out from the conversations as crucial to navigate the space in a sustaining manner, both for one’s own health as well as to contribute to the collective agenda: preparation, unified messages, conversations with stakeholders, side events, protests, and media engagement.

Preparation:

As Shamim pointed out, preparation is key, both at the individual and the organisational level. At the organisational/collective level, the preparation for COP is a continuous process including advocacy work, uniting different groups and organisations, strengthening the movement, conduct research to inform future strategies, and continuously work on creating a collective imaginary and collective demands for the movements and their allies (*Shamim, anonymous 2, Shereen*).

At the individual level, Shamim explained that after her first and very overwhelming experience at COP27, she sat down months before COP28 to prepare herself and to she selected a few topics to follow in depth at COP28 and COP29. This did not only allow her to keep her agenda controllable during the COP itself and limit the risk of burning out, but also improved the preparation of the specific topics, and thus the contributions that she could make to her movement's work (*Shamim*). Sofía and Clàudia mentioned to have followed a similar strategy.

Unified messages:

Most of my interview partners highlighted the importance of cross-movement, collective work at the COP. Thus, messages and demands should be unified and proposed by an alliance of movements or CSOs rather than by individual actors (*anonymous 1, Clàudia*). For instance, *anonymous 1* reported that at COP28, a big alliance of CSOs protested collectively for the inclusion of the phrase “phase-out of fossil fuels” in the final decisions. For them, this protest felt particularly powerful, because it was one direct demand that was supported collectively (although eventually only a weaker version of the terminology “transition away” was included in the final draft) (*anonymous 1*).

Side events:

Another strategy is to organise or participate in the side events. Since CSOs and movements have less opportunities to speak up in the official negotiations (*anonymous 1*), the side events offer spaces for the civil society to voice their opinions and strengthen alliances with other like-minded groups.

However, the downside to these events is precisely that they are mostly attended by like-minded groups, meaning that policy makers are unlikely to attend them, unless they get a speaking slot to “brag about their pink- or greenwashing” (*anonymous 1*). Their direct impact on the negotiations thus might be rather limited, however, they function as vital spaces to share knowledge with other groups, and work on the above-mentioned collective demands and strategies (*Anna, Sofía*).

Protests:

Although protests have been increasingly restricted over the past years, protest mobilizations are nevertheless viewed as an effective strategy at the COP. All of my interview partners reported to engage in the latter, either as organisers or participants, especially in organised actions related to debt cancellation, end austerity or just transitions (*Shamim, Shereen, Clàudia*). Although those **actions faced restrictions** and censorship also at COP29 and activists experience growing frustration, protest actions proceed to be a powerful act of empowerment for the movement and CSOs in general.

(Social)Media:

As mentioned before, networking and maintaining contact with the traditional media is a crucial element of the work of many activists or CSO representatives at the COPs. Reporting critically on the processes and decisions of the COP, both via traditional and social media, is needed to inform audiences outside of the COP, to offer more critical perspectives than the mainstream media and to use the media presence to build up additional pressure on negotiators (*anonymous 1, Clàudia, Sofia*).

Conversations with stakeholders and influencing negotiations:

Depending on their role, some of my interview partners also engaged in high-level conversations with stakeholders such as government representatives or negotiators. Part of MENAFem's advocacy strategy, explained Shereen, is framing the narratives of negotiations to include their demands (for instance, feminist perspectives). Similarly, Anna described that a part of her job of representing IDDRI at COP is to try to influence the negotiations by writing stakeholder briefings or organise information meetings. Regarding government representatives, Clàudia and Sofia reported that at COP28, when Spain was holding the EU presidency, the Spanish NGOs had a unique change to voice their opinions towards the EU position at COP because they managed to get into direct contact and meetings with the Spanish delegation (*Clàudia, Sofia*).

Alliances and solidarity

Creating alliances and standing in solidarity with others could be considered a strategy by itself, however, the importance that most of my interview partners gave to this aspect justifies it being a separate paragraph. When I asked about alliances that they support and feel supported by, two networks were mentioned the most: the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC) and the Climate Action Network (CAN).

Anonymous1 reported that they felt supported by the WGC because they would not only work on connecting gender as a transversal topic with climate or financial justice, but they would also try to implement this view internally. Having a space like WGC, in the physical (at COP28 they had a separate room for the constituency, at COP29 they were not allowed the space) and mental sense, allowed for the networks to come together, care for each other, distribute workload and organise together (*Anna, anonymous 1*). Similarly, many interviewees highlighted how CAN offered a crucial space to connect and built common strategies together, to bring especially COP-newcomers on board and make them feel included and accompanied (*Bruna, Sofía*).

Of course, also those spaces have their shortcomings. For instance, despite efforts to increase diversity, gender often remains referred to in binary terms and lacks representation of queer, non-binary or trans identities (*anonymous 1*). Furthermore, Shamim described that she sometimes felt a “drift between movements, where activism has turned into a competition”. Instead of working on a common agenda, sometimes groups would prioritise their own demands.

However, instead of competing, it is crucial to bridge all the interconnected topics and work together at a global scale (*Shamim*). As positive examples of connecting the struggles and collaborating in a unified manner, she highlighted the work of indigenous communities and the work of Debt for Climate, who actively tries to forge these cross-movement and intersectional alliances through including labour unions or working-class movements as well as local governments (*Shamim*).

Solidarity within the described alliances and beyond is something that has to be acted upon, instead of simply said or written, meaning to integrate and prioritize others’ demands above the own if needed, to collectivise struggles and step up for the rights of others and of nature beyond borders (*anonymous 2*).

Could you imagine a feminist version of the COP?

When I asked this question, most of my interview partners laughed due to the perceived difficulty of that imagination. Thinking about it for a bit, they did come up with different imaginaries to either transform the existing space in a better version of itself, or (thinking more ahead) to change the system that requires the existence of COP as it is and would thus allow for a completely different “COP”.

Transforming COP...

Visions for a better, more (eco)feminist version of the COP include an online version (less emissions, fewer costs and stress due to travelling, more accessibility) (*anonymous 1*) and mandatory quotas for non-male and youth negotiators and speakers (*Anna, Shamim, Sofía, Clàudia*). The COP would need a more democratic system where civil society can vote in negotiations, just like countries (*anonymous 1*), and more effort would be needed to actually include the feminist perspective into all documents and policies whilst recognising the gendered consequences of climate change (*Clàudia*).

At an (eco)feminist COP, there would be more honesty, fewer deals behind closed doors (*Anna*) and there would be accountability for commitments that have not been met (*Shamim*). Without accountability, decisions under the UN convention do not count much, as they cannot be enforced (*anonymous 1*). “Moving away from voluntarism to accountability”, Shamim argued, an (eco)feminist COP would be a “COP of action” instead of empty words.

...or transforming the system?

Whilst the above-mentioned actions might improve the COP, a transformation of the context, the underlying global system would be needed to allow for an actually (eco)feminist space. The COP is “basically born out of (neo)colonialism and greenwashing” (*anonymous 1*), and thus the global political, economic, colonial and capitalist architecture would have to be transformed in the first place (*Bruna, Shereen*). Negotiating entities would not necessarily be national governments (*anonymous 1, Clàudia*) but instead decisions should be based on the needs of local communities and feminist values (*anonymous 1, Anna*).

An actually (eco)feminist COP would eventually not need to be the same space with the same purpose. In a more ecofeminist world, big conferences and negotiation spaces like the COP would potentially not be needed as much (*Bruna*). If people would recognise being part of earth and interdependent on others and on nature, Bruna argued, “then we wouldn't have these problems, we wouldn't have to negotiate that much because we would be exchanging more.”

What about boycotting the COP?

Especially in recent years, there have been an increase in activists calling for a boycott of the COP (for example, the [Boycott COP28 campaign](#)). Whilst all of my interview partners have voiced their respect and support for those decisions, they have decided to go to the COP – despite its contradictions.

For many of my interview partners, the decision to go to COP is an annual debate, both with their organizations and with themselves. Attending COP could be considered a way of “legitimizing the space” (*Clàudia*) and its flaws, including its lack of diversity and lack of ambitious and just climate responses. A boycott of the COP, however, would have to be “visible”, and bring attention to the “questioning of the actual COP” and the reasons behind it (*Clàudia*).

Another discussed option is to attend counter-summits instead of COPs. On the one hand, counter-summits are powerful spaces of public mobilization, especially in contrast to the restricted actions that are possible within the COP. On the other hand, counter-summits happen mostly in the same host country of the COP, thus attending those would still cost plenty of CO2 emissions, time and money for international activists to come together (*Clàudia*).

Eventually, all of my interview partners highlighted the importance of going to COP for many different reasons. Firstly, there is a major element of accountability. If CSOs were to abstain from COPs, it would be way more difficult to follow the internal processes and decisions from outside. There would be less people “watching, protesting and holding governments accountable” (*Bruna*) and even more badges would go to lobbyists who would “gladly take advantage of those empty seats” (*anonymous 1*).

Secondly, the COP does offer a unique space for international activists to meet and strengthen their cross-movement work. It is important to “empower those movements and represent young people”, and to be an example for others to engage as well (*Shamim*).

Thirdly, it is crucial to reclaim a space like the COP and work towards making it better. In the end, the COP is a unique space that brings almost every country in the world together (*Bruna, anonymous 2, Anna*), thus (at least in theory) it holds a unique potential to push for global transformations. Whilst outside mobilization is necessary as well and would ideally go hand in hand with those in the inside (*Shereen*), reclaiming the space and working towards uplifting the power of the Global South (*anonymous 2*), of non-male, racialized or oppressed identities within COP is crucial.

And looking back, it also must be appreciated that change is happening, although very slowly. For instance, decisions include terminologies (like “gender-responsive finance” or “transition away from fossil fuels”) that were “unimaginable years ago” (*Bruna*). Together, the critical voices inside and outside COP thus had, have, and will have a crucial impact in eventually transforming the space.

Looking ahead: COP30 and beyond

Following [COP28](#) and [COP29](#), which have shown particularly disappointing outcomes with regards to climate ambition and finance, as well as were especially restrictive towards protests and interventions, the expectations for this year’s COP30 in Brazil are high. Firstly, because this year marks an historic moment of the jubilee year and the global call on debt cancellation, the mid-way towards the agenda 2030 and the submission of the new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) (*anonymous 1, Shamim, Sofía, Anna*). Secondly, Brazil as a host country increases the expectations on more progressive outcomes with regards to fossil fuels and climate finance (*Shereen*).

Lastly, the return of COP to Latin America (the last time in 2014 in Peru) and the regional presence of very strong mobilization and energy towards COP support the empowerment of Latin American movements and their efforts to push their visions forward – at COP30 and beyond (*anonymous 2*). 2025 will be about systemic transformation, in which the “COP is just another space to advocate and just one of the fronts on which we are fighting” (*anonymous 2*).

Whilst each of my interview partners have specific topics of expertise or topics they pick to follow with most detail, their work is ultimately an inter-connected, collective effort that pushes for way more than an improvement of the COP as it is. In all the diversity of their approaches and strategies, they collectively demand and work towards a just world for all.

FURTHER READING

Ecofeminisms and theories of change

Note: The following list is not exhaustive and simply serves as an invitation and entry point to delve deeper into the topics.

On Ecofeminisms

Karen J. Warren 2000: *Ecofeminist philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*. Rowman and Littlefield publishers.

Silvia Federici 2004: *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia.

Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva 2014. "Ecofeminism." Bloomsbury Academic & Professional.

María Lugones 2010: "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia* 25 (4): 742-759.

On theories of change

- Decolonial theories on epistemic disobedience:

Walter D. Mignolo 2009: "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom." *Theory, Culture & Society* 2009, Vol. 26(7-8): 159-181.

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