

Sjibbolet: de bijbel in onze literatuur



De bijbel is, overeenkomstig zijn inhoud, alomtegenwoordig in onze letteren: citaten uit of allusies aan de Schrift komen in ontelbare gedichten, verhalen en romans voor. Maar om zijn invloed waar te nemen, is niet meteen een tijdrovende tekstanalyse nodig, menige boektitel is al een woordelijk citaat of variant daarop.

Hedda Martens (1947) debuteerde in 1982 met de bundel *Sjibbolet en andere verhalen*. Een sjibbolet of schibbolet is een kenmerk waaraan herkend kan worden of iemand tot een bepaalde groep of overtuiging behoort. Het bijbelboek Richteren 12:5-6 geeft daarvoor de oorspronkelijke verklaring.

Tijdens een oorlog tussen de Gileadieten en Efraïmieten poogden de laatsten, door zich als Gileadieten te vermommen, de Jordaan over te vluchten.

“Wanneer nu een der vluchtelingen van Efraim zeide: Laat mij oversteken, dan zeiden de mannen van Gilead tot hem: Zijt gij een Efraïmiet? En antwoordde hij: Neen, dan zeiden zij tot hem: Zeg eens sjibboleth. Zeide hij dan: sibboleth, en kon hij het dus niet op de juiste wijze uitspreken, dan grepen zij hem en sloegen hem dood.”

Maarten 't Harts roman *De Jacobs ladder* (1986) verwijst naar een droom die aartsvader Jakob had:

“Toen droomde hij, en zie, op de aarde was een ladder opgericht, waarvan de top tot aan de hemel reikte, en zie, engelen Gods klommen daarlangs op en daalden daarlangs neder.” (Genesis 28:12)

Ook Marnix Gijsen (1899-1984) putte voor een titel uit de bijbel. *De vleespotten van Egypte* (1952) is gebaseerd op de uitdrukking `hunkeren naar de vleespotten

van Egypte', die voortkomt uit het gemopper van de Israëlieten tegen Mozes en Aaron, die hen uit Egyptische slavernij bevrijd hadden en naar het beloofde land voerden. Exodus 16:3:

“Och, dat wij door de hand des Heren in het land Egypte gestorven waren, toen wij bij de vleespotten zaten en volop brood aten; want gij hebt ons in deze woestijn geleid om deze gehele gemeente van honger te doen omkomen.”

Theo Kars (1940-2015) verzamelde een aantal beschouwingen over literatuur onder de van zelfoverschatting getuigende titel *Parels voor de zwijnen* (1975). Dat baseerde hij, zij het wellicht niet uit eigen waarneming, op Mattheus 7:6, waarin Jezus oproept:

“Geeft het heilige niet aan de honden en werpt uw paarden niet voor de zwijnen, opdat zij die niet vertrappen met hun poten en, zich omkerende, u verscheuren.”

Ik kan die uitdrukking nooit lezen zonder onmiddellijk te denken aan een anekdote over de Amerikaanse schrijfster Dorothy Parker, die eens gelijktijdig met een aanzienlijk jongere collega een deur naderde waar maar één van hen tegelijk door kon. De jongste hield haar pas in, zeggend *'Age before beauty'*. Parker nam meteen de uitnodiging aan, onder de woorden *'Pearls before swine'*.



Rembrandt van Rijn - Het feestmaal van Belsazar (circa 1636-1638)

Ook Nescio's bundel *Mene Tekel* (1946) heet naar een spreuk uit het Oude Testament. Daniël 5:25-28 verhaalt hoe tijdens een feest van Belsazar, koning der Chaldeeën, lichtende letters op de muur verschijnen:

“Dit is het schrift, dat geschreven is: Mene, mene, tekel ufarsin. Dit is de uitlegging van de woorden: Mene: God heeft uw koningschap geteld en er een

einde aan gemaakt; Tekel, gij zijt in de weegschaal gewogen en te licht bevonden; Peres: uw koninkrijk is gebroken en aan de Meden en Perzen gegeven."

Uiteraard heeft dit fragment ook de uitdrukking 'gewogen maar te licht bevonden' opgeleverd, alsook 'een teken aan de wand'. Daniël 5:5 beschrijft hoe Belsazar de tekenen ziet verschijnen:

"Terzelfdertijd verschenen vingers van een mensenhand, die tegenover de luchter op de kalk van de wand van het koninklijk paleis schreven, en de koning zag de rug van de hand, die aan het schrijven was."

Mene tekel vond ook zijn weg naar Nederlandse poëzie, bijvoorbeeld naar deze regels uit het gedicht 'Glazenwasser' (1949) van Gerrit Achterberg

*Handen- en voetental
verrichten in de lucht
een klein gebarenspeel, een klucht
die hij alleen begrijpen zal;
het mene tekel en getal
van roekeloze hemelzucht.*

Marnix Gijsens *De barmhartige Samaritaan* (1952) gaat terug op het evangelie van Lucas, op de gelijkennis van de Samaritaan die zich, in tegenstelling tot een priester, het lot aantrok van een door overvallers gewonde reiziger:

"Doch een Samaritaan, die op reis was, kwam in zijn nabijheid, en toen hij hem zag, werd hij met ontferming bewogen. En hij ging naar hem toe, verbond zijn wonden, goot er olie en wijn op; en hij zette hem op zijn eigen rijdier, bracht hem naar een herberg en verzorgde hem." (Luc. 10:33-34)

Het vierde van Jef Geeraerts *Gangreen*-boeken heeft als ondertitel *Het zevende zegel* (1977). Openbaringen 5:1 is daarvoor de bron geweest:

"En ik zag in de rechterhand van Hem, die op de troon zat, een boekenrol, beschreven van binnen en van buiten, en welverzegeld met zeven zegels".

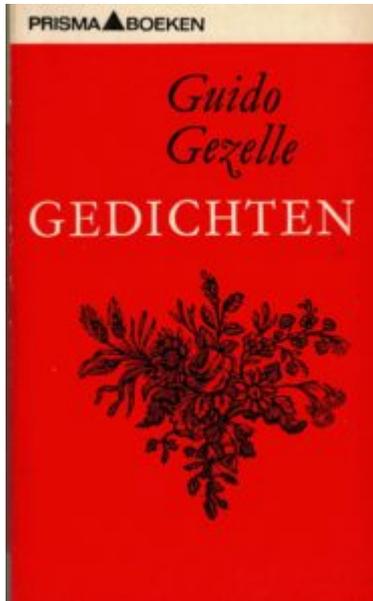
Daardoor is 'een boek met zeven zegelen' een uitdrukking geworden voor 'een zaak die (nog) volkomen geheim'. Film liefhebbers kennen 'Het zevende zegel' ook als titel van een Ingmar Bergmanfilm uit 1956.

Steen des aanstoets, titel van een dichtbundel van een andere Vlaming, Willy

Spillebeen, heeft zelfs twee vindplaatsen in de bijbel: Jesaja 8:14

“Dan zal Hij tot een heiligdom zijn, en tot een steen, waaraan men zich stoot, en tot een rotsblok, waarover men struikelt”.

1 Petr. 2:7: *“De steen, die de bouwlieden afgekeurd hadden, die is geworden tot een hoeksteen en een steen des aanstoots en een rots der ergernis”.*



Ook titels van gedichten verwijzen wel eens naar een bijbelboek. *'Ego flos'*, van de Vlaamse priester-dichter Guido Gezelle (1830-1899), betekent letterlijk 'Ik ben een bloem' en begint als volgt

*Ik ben een blomme
en bloeie vóór uwe oogen,
geweldig zonnelicht,
dat, eeuwig onontaard,
mij, nietig schepselken,
in 't leven wilt gedoogen
en, na dit leven, mij
het eeuwig leven spaart.*

De opening van het gedicht - dit is het eerste van de zeven coupletten - wordt algemeen gezien als ontleend aan het *Canticum Canticorum II* ofwel het zijn de eerste regels van het tweede hoofdstuk van het Hooglied. In de Statenvertaling, uit 1637:

*Ik ben een Roos van Saron,
een Lelie der dalen.
Gelijk een lelie onder de doornen,
alzo is Mijn vriendin onder de dochteren.*

Het is een dialoog, waarvan de eerste twee regels worden gesproken door de

bruid, de tweede twee door de bruidegom. Pikant detail: de dichter J.C. Bloem publiceerde als student gedichten onder het pseudoniem Ego Flos: Ik ben Bloem.

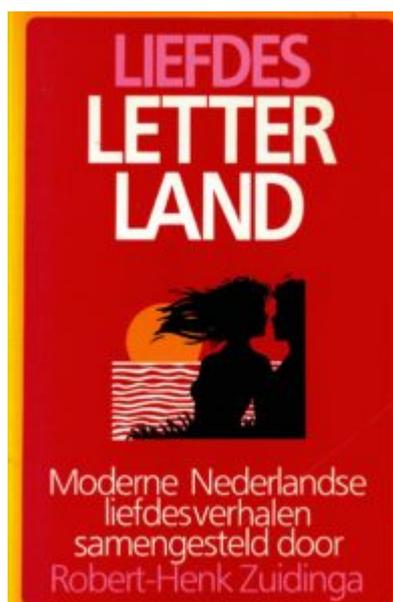
Soms valt het oog op een uitdrukking die er zeer bijbels uitziet, maar dat bij nadere beschouwing niet is. Het boek van Renate Dorrestein over haar gang langs medische en minder medische instanties, heet *Heden ik* (1993). Dat doet uiteraard meteen denken aan *Heden ik, morgen gij* (1936), een brievenroman van S. Vestdijk en H. Marsman. En in 1973 bracht Hans Vervoort een verhalenbundel uit, waarvan de titel een combinatie was van deze grafspreuk en een reclamebord aan de pui van een viswinkel: *Heden mosselen, morgen gij* (1973).

In de bijbel zult u die spreuk echter tevergeefs zoeken. Het leerzame boekje *Spreekwoorden en zegswijzen uit de bijbel* van J. van Delden verklaart echter niet alleen duizend voorbeelden uit de bijbel, maar ook uit diens periferie. 'Heden ik, morgen gij' - in het Latijn *hodie mihi, cras tibi* - wordt verklaard als een variant van een tekst uit een van de apocriefe boeken. De apocriefen zijn boeken die niet officieel door de kerk in het Oude of Nieuwe Testament, de canonieke boeken, zijn opgenomen). Ecclesiasticus (ook wel: Jezus Sirach) 38:22 luidt:

"Bedenk dat het oordeel over hem ook het uwe zal zijn: Gisteren ik en vandaag u".

Of, in de Statenvertaling:

"Gedenckt aan mijn oordeel, want alsoo sal oock het uwe zijn: my gisteren, ende u heden".



En heel soms betref het niet eens een titel maar een zin, zomaar ergens midden in het verhaal.

Peter Burger is een naar mijn mening ondergewaardeerd auteur, in wie geen uitgever tot nu brood gezien heeft. Dat is jammer, want hij schrijft prachtige

verhalen. In de bloemlezing *Liefdesletterland. Moderne Nederlandse liefdesverhalen* (1988) is zo'n verhaal opgenomen, een subtiele vertelling over het fragile contact tussen een bedlegerige bejaarde man en zijn kleine buurmeisje. Dat contact wordt verwoord in het bijbelcitaat dat hij haar voorleest:

“Koning David nu was oud, welbedaagd; en zij dekten hem met dekens, doch hij kreeg geen warmte.”

Het verhaal heet eenvoudig 'Koning David', maar dat blijkt verderop in de vertelling een verwijzing te zijn naar 1 Koningen 1:4, een van de boeken van het Oude Testament. Het cruciale citaat is in de Statenvertaling nòg mooier:

“De koning David nu was oud, wel bedaagd; en zij dekten hem met klederen, doch hij kreeg gene warmte. Toen zeiden zijn knechten tot hem: Laat ze mijn heer den koning een jonge dochter, een maagd zoeken, die voor het aangezicht des konings sta, en hem koestere; en zij slape in uw schoot, dat mijn heer de koning warm worde.

Zo zochten zij een schone jonge dochter in alle landpalen van Israël; en zij vonden Abisag, een Sunamietische, en brachten ze tot den koning. En de jonge dochter was bovenmate schoon, en koesterde den koning, en diende hem; doch den koning bekende ze niet.”

Robert-Henk Zuidinga (1949) studeerde Nederlandse en Engelse Moderne Letterkunde aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam. Hij schrijft over literatuur, taal- en bij uitzondering - over film.

De drie delen *Dit staat er* bevatten de, volgens zijn eigen omschrijving, journalistieke nalatenschap van Zuidinga. De boeken zijn in eigen beheer uitgegeven. Belangstelling? Stuur een berichtje naar: info@rozenbergquarterly.com- wij sturen uw bericht door naar de auteur.

Dit staat er 1. Columns over taal en literatuur. Haarlem 2016. ISBN 9789492563040

Dit staat er II, Artikelen en interviews over literatuur. Haarlem 2017. ISBN 9789492563248

Dit staat er III. Bijnamen en Nederlied. Buitenlied en film, Haarlem 2019. ISBN 9789492563637

The World Today With Tariq Ali - Jewish Arabs And Cultural Cleansing

This week Tariq speaks to New York University scholar *Ella Shohat* about the history of Jewish people in the Middle East and North Africa, using her Baghdadi heritage as a starting point. Ella tackles the dominant, Western narrative on Jewishness, asserting that Jewish history, culture and opinion aren't monolithic. Arab Jews, in particular, face the dichotomy of being considered both of the East and of the West - or, as Edward Said described it, being both Oriental and Orientalist.

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Jewish Art: Not In Heaven - Artists

As Partners In Creation

Curators Judith Cardozo and Dr. Susan Nashman Fraiman present The exhibition "*Not in Heaven*", which was part of the Jerusalem Biennale 2019. The exhibit was a response of designers and artists to a dramatic story from the Talmud.

The presentation includes individual items from the exhibition itself, as well as musings on the role of Jewish texts as sources of inspiration for artists.

More info:
<https://jewishartsalon.org/2020/04/21/not-in-heaven-artists-as-partners-in-creation/>

Dr. Susan Nashman Fraiman is a lecturer, researcher and curator of Jewish and Israeli art. She has taught at Hebrew College in Newton, Ma, the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies and currently teaches at the Rothberg School for Overseas Students. She served for five years as the collection manager at the Yad Vashem Art Museum and curated the exhibit "The Fine Line" in the 2015 Jerusalem Biennale.

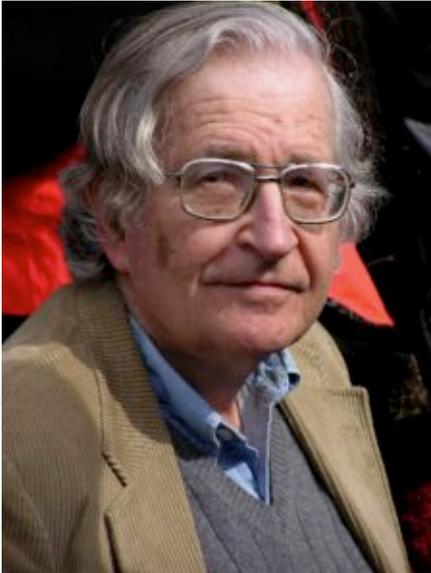
Website: www.artinisrael.net

Born in New York City, Judy Cardozo, Independent Curator and writer, educated at Pratt Institute and Barnard College, worked at the National Foundation for Jewish Culture and curated exhibitions at the Bronx Museum, Yeshiva University Museum and the Bertha Urdang Gallery. In Toronto, she was curator of the Beth Tzedec Museum and and co-produced the ASHKENAZ Festival at Harbourfront. In Israel since 2000, she worked at the Center for Jewish Art and has been involved with the Jerusalem Biennale.

Organized and hosted by the Jewish Art Salon; co-sponsored by Art Kibbutz and Jada Art.

Edited by Jonah Rubin-Flett. Assistance by Bluma Gross.

The Political Economy Of Saving The Planet. An Interview With Noam Chomsky & Robert Pollin



*Noam Chomsky ~ Photo:
en.wikipedia.org*

What needs to be done to advance a successful political mobilization on behalf of a global Green New Deal—a program that includes emissions reductions, expands renewable energy sources, addresses the needs of vulnerable workers, and promotes sustainable and egalitarian economic growth? Political scientist C. J. Polychroniou spoke with *Noam Chomsky* and economist *Robert Pollin*, who has been at the forefront of the fight for an egalitarian green economy for more than a decade, to discuss prospects for change, the connections between climate and the COVID-19 pandemic, and whether eco-socialism is a viable option for mobilizing people in the struggle to create a green future.

This conversation was adapted from Chomsky and Pollin's new book [*Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet.*](#)

C. J. Polychroniou: How does the coronavirus pandemic, and the response to it, shed light on how we should think about climate change and the prospects for a

global Green New Deal?

Noam Chomsky: At the time of writing, concern for the COVID-19 crisis is virtually all-consuming. That's understandable. It is severe and is severely disrupting lives. But it will pass, though at horrendous cost, and there will be recovery. There will not be recovery from the melting of the arctic ice sheets and the other consequences of global warming.

Not everyone is ignoring the advancing existential crisis. The sociopaths dedicated to accelerating the disaster continue to pursue their efforts, relentlessly. As before, Trump and his courtiers take pride in leading the race to destruction. As the United States was becoming the epicenter of the pandemic, thanks in no small measure to their folly, the White House cabal released its budget proposals. As expected, the proposals call for even deeper cuts in healthcare support and environmental protection, instead favoring the bloated military and the building of Trump's Great Wall. And to add an extra touch of sadism, [the budget](#) promotes a fossil fuel 'energy boom' in the United States, including an increase in the production of natural gas and crude oil."



Robert Pollin

Meanwhile, to drive another nail in the coffin that Trump and associates are preparing for the nation and the world, their corporate-run EPA weakened auto emission standards, thus enhancing environmental destruction and killing more people from pollution. As expected, fossil fuel companies are lining up in the forefront of the appeals of the corporate sector to the nanny state, pleading once again for the generous public to rescue them from the consequences of their misdeeds.

In brief, the criminal classes are relentless in their pursuit of power and profit,

whatever the human consequences. And those consequences will be disastrous if their efforts are not countered, indeed overwhelmed, by those concerned for “the survival of humanity.” It is no time to mince words out of misplaced politeness. “The survival of humanity” is at risk on our present course, to quote a leaked [internal memo](#) from JPMorgan Chase, America’s largest bank, referring specifically to the bank’s genocidal policy of funding fossil fuel production.

One heartening feature of the present crisis is the rise in community organizations starting mutual aid efforts. These could become centers for confronting the challenges that are already eroding the foundations of the social order. The courage of doctors and nurses, laboring under miserable conditions imposed by decades of socioeconomic lunacy, is a tribute to the resources of the human spirit. There are ways forward. The opportunities cannot be allowed to lapse.

Robert Pollin: In addition to the fundamental considerations that Noam has emphasized, there are several other ways in which the climate crisis and the coronavirus pandemic intersect. One underlying cause of the COVID-19 outbreak—as well as other recent epidemics such as Ebola, West Nile, and HIV—has been the destruction of animal habitats through deforestation and human encroachment, as well as the disruption of the remaining habitat through the increasing frequency and severity of heat waves, droughts, and floods. As the science journalist Sonia Shah [wrote](#) in February 2020, habitat destruction increases the likelihood that wild species “will come into repeated intimate contact with the human settlements expanding into their newly fragmented habitats. It’s this kind of repeated, intimate contact that allows the microbes that live in their bodies to cross over into ours, transforming benign animal microbes into deadly human pathogens.”

It is also likely that people who are exposed to dangerous levels of air pollution will face more severe health consequences than those breathing cleaner air. Aaron Bernstein of Harvard’s Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment [states](#) that “air pollution is strongly associated with people’s risk of getting pneumonia and other respiratory infections and with getting sicker when they do get pneumonia. A study done on SARS, a virus closely related to COVID-19, found that people who breathed dirtier air were about twice as likely to die from the infection.”

A separate point that was raised over the worst months of the COVID-19 pandemic was that the responses in the countries that immediately handled the crisis more effectively, such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, demonstrated that governments are capable of taking decisive and effective action in the face of crisis. The death tolls from COVID-19 in these countries were negligible, and normal life returned relatively soon after governments imposed initial lockdowns. Similarly decisive interventions could successfully deal with the climate crisis where the political will is strong and the public sectors are competent.

There are important elements of truth in such views, but we should also be careful to not push this point too far. Some commentators have argued that one silver lining outcome of the pandemic was that, because of the economic lockdown, fossil fuel consumption and CO2 emissions plunged alongside overall economic activity during the recession. While this is true, I do not see any positive lessons here with respect to advancing a viable emissions program that can get us to net zero emissions by 2050. Rather, the experience demonstrates why a degrowth approach to emissions reduction is unworkable. Emissions did indeed fall sharply because of the pandemic and the recession. But that is only because incomes collapsed and unemployment spiked over this same period. This only reinforces the conclusion that the only effective climate stabilization path is the Green New Deal, as it is the only one that does not require a drastic contraction (or “degrowth”) of jobs and incomes to drive down emissions.

A genuinely positive development of the pandemic and recession is that progressive activists around the world have fought to include Green New Deal investments in their countries’ economic stimulus programs. It is critical to keep pushing the development and success of these initiatives.

In support of that end, we must seriously consider how to best maximize both the short-term stimulus benefits and long-term impacts of Green New Deal programs. I know the importance of such considerations from personal experience working on the green investment components of the 2009 Obama American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, in which \$90 billion of the \$800 billion total was allocated to clean energy investments in the United States. The principles underlying these investment components were sound, but the people who worked on the program in its various stages, including myself, did not adequately calculate the time

necessary to execute many of the projects. We knew that it was critical to identify “shovel-ready” projects—ones that could be quickly implemented on a large scale and provide an immediate economic boost. But relatively few green investment projects were truly shovel-ready at that time, as the green energy industry was still a newly emerging enterprise. Therefore, the backlog of significant new projects was thin. It is only moderately less thin today.

This means that people designing Green New Deal stimulus programs must identify the subgroup of green investment projects that can realistically roll into action at scale within a matter of months. One example that should be applicable in almost every country would be energy efficiency retrofits of all public and commercial buildings. This would entail improving insulation, sealing window frames and doors, switching over all lightbulbs to LEDs, and replacing aging heating and air conditioning systems with efficient ones (preferably heat pumps). These programs could quickly generate large numbers of jobs for secretaries, truck drivers, accountants, construction workers, and climate engineers. They could also save energy and reduce emissions quickly and relatively cheaply. Building off of such truly shovel-ready projects, the rest of the clean energy investment program could then accelerate and provide a strong foundation for economies moving out of recession and onto a sustainable recovery path.

CP: Eco-socialism is becoming a major tenet of the ideological repertoire of green parties in European countries and elsewhere, which may be the reason for their increasing appeal with voters and especially the youth. Is eco-socialism a cohesive enough political project to be taken seriously as an alternative for the future?

NC: Insofar as I understand eco-socialism—not in great depth—it overlaps greatly with other left socialist currents. That being said, I don’t think we’re at a stage where adopting a specific “political project” is very helpful. There are crucial issues that have to be addressed, right now. Our efforts should be informed by the kind of future society that we want, and the kind that can be constructed within our existing society. It’s fine to stake out specific positions about the future in more or less detail, but for now these seem to me at best ways of sharpening ideas rather than platforms to latch on to.

A good argument can be made that inherent features of capitalism lead inexorably to the ruin of the environment, and that ending capitalism must be a priority of the environmental movement. But there’s one fundamental problem with this

argument: time scales. Dismantling capitalism is impossible in the time frame that we have for taking urgent action, which requires national and international mobilization if severe crisis is to be averted.

Furthermore, the whole discussion around eco-socialism is misleading. The two efforts—averting environmental disaster, and dismantling capitalism in favor of a freer and more just society—should and can proceed in parallel. One example is Tony Mazzocchi’s efforts to forge a labor coalition that would not only challenge owner-management control of the workplace, but also be at the forefront of the environmental movement while attempting to socialize major sectors of U.S. industry. There’s no time to waste. The struggle must be, and can be, undertaken on all fronts.

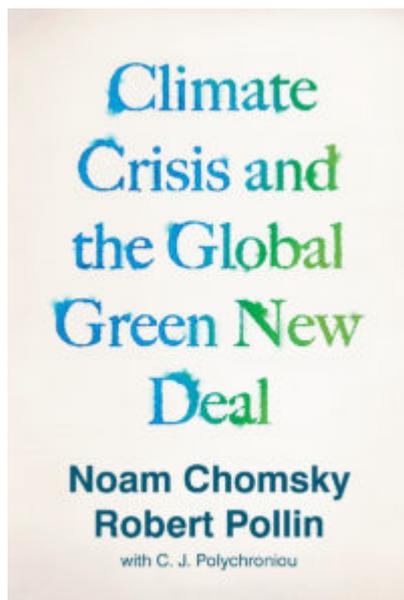
CP: Bob, in your view, can eco-socialism coexist with the Green New Deal project? And, if not, what type of a politico-ideological agenda might be needed to generate broad political participation in the struggle to create a green future?

RP: In my view, details of rhetoric and emphasis aside, eco-socialism and the Green New Deal are fundamentally the same project. The Green New Deal, as we have discussed the term, offers the only path to climate stabilization that can also expand good job opportunities and raise living standards in all regions of the world. It defines an explicit and viable alternative to austerity economics on a global scale. My coworkers and I have worked on this issue—advancing the Green New Deal as an alternative to austerity economics—in different country settings over the past few years, including in Spain, Puerto Rico, and Greece. In my view, the Green New Deal is the only approach to climate stabilization also capable of reversing rising inequality and defeating global neoliberalism and ascendant neofascism.

Beyond the Green New Deal, I don’t know what exactly “eco-socialism” could mean. Does it mean the overthrow of all private ownership of productive assets for public ownership? As Noam suggested, do people seriously think that this could happen within the time frame we have to stabilize the climate, that is, within less than thirty years? And are we certain that eliminating all private ownership would be workable or desirable from a social justice standpoint—i.e. from the standpoint of advancing well-being for the global working class and poor? How do we deal with the fact that most of the world’s energy assets are already publicly owned? How, more specifically, can we be certain that a

transition to complete public ownership would itself deliver zero net emissions by 2050? To me, the overarching challenge is trying to understand alternative pathways to most effectively building truly egalitarian, democratic, and ecologically sustainable societies—putting all labels aside and being willing, as Marx himself insisted, to employ “ruthless criticism” toward all that exists, including all past experiences with Communism and Socialism. And, for that matter, being open to criticizing all authors, including Marx himself. Indeed, my favorite quote from Marx is “I am not a Marxist.”

We have only briefly touched on “planetary boundaries” besides the climate crisis, including air and water pollution, as well as biodiversity losses. I understand that the eco-socialist movement gives substantial attention to these critical environmental issues. I share their concerns and welcome the focus they bring to these issues. We have concentrated here on the climate crisis for the simple reason that it is the matter of greatest urgency.



CP: Europe’s civil disobedience movement, led by Extinction Rebellion protesters as a strategy to tackle the climate crisis and create a just and sustainable world, is growing by leaps and bounds, especially among young people, but it also seems to annoy many citizens and may even be alienating the general public. Noam, can you share with us your thoughts on the strategy of massive civil disobedience as a way to tackle the climate emergency?

NC: I was involved in civil disobedience for many years, sometimes intensely, and think it’s a reasonable tactic—sometimes. It should not be adopted merely because one feels strongly about the issue and wants to display that to the world. That tactic can be proper, but it’s not enough. It’s necessary to consider the consequences. Is the action designed in a way that will encourage others to think, to understand, to join? Or is it more likely to antagonize, to irritate, and to cause people to support the very thing being protested? Tactical considerations are often denigrated— “that’s for small minds, not for a serious, principled guy like me.” Quite the contrary. Tactical judgments have direct human consequences.

They are a deeply principled concern. It's not enough to think, "I'm right, and if others can't see it, too bad for them." Such attitudes often cause serious harm.

But I don't think there is a general answer to your question. It depends on the circumstances, the nature of the planned action, and the likely consequences as best we can ascertain them.

CP: Bob, where do you stand on this question?

RP: I would just add that any and all tactics that might move us closer to solving the climate crisis should be considered seriously. This includes civil disobedience. But we also have to consider the negative effects of civil disobedience's success. For example, if roads or public transportation systems are shut down on weekdays, then people can't get to work, parents can't pick up their kids at daycare, and sick people can't make it to the doctor's office. Such consequences will only reinforce the view that already exists—whether fair or unfair—that climate activists don't care about the lives of ordinary people. Actions that strengthen this view in the general public are politically disastrous.

As it is, this view is already nurtured when climate activists don't show genuine commitment to transition programs for the workers and communities that will be hurt by the shutdown of the fossil fuel industry. This view is further strengthened when climate activists favor carbon taxes without 100 percent rebates for most of the population, starting with lower-income people. These rebates compensate people for the cost-of-living increases they will face simply by driving their cars or using electricity in their homes. The Yellow Vest movement that emerged in France in 2018 to oppose the diesel tax proposals of the thoroughly tone-deaf President Emmanuel Macron is one obvious example here.

Civil disobedience should certainly be included as a tactic if it becomes clear that it will be truly effective. By "effective" I mean helpful to advancing a Green New Deal project capable of delivering a zero emissions global economy by 2050.

CP: As we have discussed, neoliberalism is still dominant, and even more dangerous neofascist social movements are on the rise. In this context, the prospects of energizing voters in order to demand fundamental levels of political mobilization to confront the climate crisis do not appear particularly promising. In fact, it seems that it is mainly the youth who are insisting that we address climate change with the level of urgency it demands. In that context, what do you think it

would take to turn things around and elevate climate change to the very top of the public agenda worldwide? Noam, let's start with you.

NC: It has become almost de rigueur these days to cite Gramsci's observation, from Mussolini's prison, that "the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."

Neoliberalism may remain the dominant elite mantra, but it is visibly tottering. It has delivered a harsh impact to the general population almost everywhere. In the United States, nearly half the population has negative net worth, while 0.1 percent hold more than 20 percent of wealth—as much as the lowest 90 percent. Moreover, obscene wealth concentration is increasing along with its direct impact on the decline of functioning democracy and social welfare. In Europe the impact is in some ways worse, even if somewhat cushioned by the residue of social democracy. And morbid symptoms are everywhere: anger; resentment; increasing racism, xenophobia, and hatred of scapegoats (immigrants, minorities, Muslims, etc); the rise of demagogues who stoke these fears and exploit the social pathologies that surface in times of confusion and despair; and, in the international arena, the emergence of a reactionary international headed by the White House and incorporating figures such as Jair Bolsonaro, Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Benjamin Netanyahu, Narendra Modi, Viktor Orbán, and the rest. But such morbid symptoms are countered by rising activism. The new has not yet been born, but it is emerging in many intricate ways and it is far from clear what form it will take.

Much is unpredictable, but there are a few things that we can say with confidence: unless the new that is taking shape confronts the twin imminent threats to survival—nuclear war and environmental catastrophe—and does so quickly and forcefully, it won't matter what else happens.

CP: Bob, what are your thoughts on the matter?

RP: I will start with another apt aphorism from Antonio Gramsci: "Pessimism of the mind; optimism of the will." That is, if we take climate science seriously and then examine where the world is today, the odds of us moving the world onto a viable climate stabilization path—specifically, of hitting the IPCC's stated target of net zero CO2 emissions by 2050—are shaky at best. On the other hand, to invoke Margaret Thatcher's famous dictum, "there is no alternative" to doing

everything possible to accomplish these goals.

With respect to “optimism of the will,” we can point to the rapidly growing tide of climate activism that has delivered major breakthroughs. Most emphatically, this includes the September 2019 global Climate Strike, led by the remarkable Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg. Estimates place between 6 and 7.5 million people participating in 4,500 locations in 150 countries.

The Climate Strike reflects equally significant, if less visible, developments around the world. One example is the successful movement in the western Mediterranean countries, including Spain, France, and Italy, to outlaw new oil and gas exploration and drilling, as well as to phase out existing projects. These very recent political breakthroughs started around 2016. In Spain, from 2010 to 2014—with the country then suffering from the aftershocks of the global financial crisis and Great Recession—government officials signed more than one hundred permits with oil companies to start new exploration and drilling projects throughout the country. But environmental activists joined forces with business owners in the tourism industry to mount a successful resistance against fossil fuel development as an economic recovery plan. The government’s efforts to counter the economic crisis by opening the country to oil exploration and drilling were “a bad dream,” in the [words](#) of one municipal official from the Spanish island of Ibiza. “We luckily woke up,” he said.

This type of grassroots climate activism throughout Western Europe has also led the European Commission to officially establish its European Green Deal project. The overarching aim is for the entire continent to achieve the IPCC’s goal of net zero emissions. As of early 2020, both legislative bodies of the EU, the European Council and European Parliament, had voted to endorse the project. Of course, legislative bodies passing resolutions is the easy job. Whether European residents have the will to follow through on these commitments remains an open question.

Similar movements are gaining momentum in the United States, despite the buffoonish climate denialism of President Donald Trump. In June 2019, New York state passed the most ambitious set of climate targets in the country, including carbon-free electricity by 2040 and a net zero emissions economy by 2050. The [New York initiative](#) follows similar measures, if somewhat less ambitious measures to date, in California, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, New Mexico, and Maine. One major factor in these U.S. state-level developments is the increasing

participation of the mainstream labor movement. Union members have assumed major leadership roles in some cases. These state-level measures now need to incorporate substantial and just transition programs for workers and communities whose livelihoods currently depend on the fossil fuel industry. These people and communities are facing major hits to their living standards in the absence of generous transition programs. By bringing just transition considerations to the forefront of the climate movement, the unions are building on the legacy of the visionary labor leader Tony Mazzocchi that Noam discussed earlier.

Climate movements remain at modest levels throughout most low- and middle-income countries, but there is a reasonable chance that will change quickly. Activism is growing, alongside coalitions among environmentalists, labor groups, and business sectors. One reason for mobilization is that air pollution is rendering virtually all the major cities in low- and middle-income countries unlivable, including Delhi, Mumbai, Shanghai, Beijing, Lagos, Cairo, and Mexico City. Aman Sharma, a young Climate Strike activist in Delhi, [told the Guardian](#) in September 2019, “We are out here to reclaim our right to live, our right to breathe and our right to exist, which is all being denied to us by an inefficient policy system that gives more deference to industrial and financial objectives rather than environmental standards.”

A critical factor in advancing this movement, in developing countries and elsewhere, is demonstrating how climate stabilization coincides with the expansion of decent work opportunities, raising mass living standards, and fighting poverty in all regions of the world. This must be recognized as the core proposition undergirding the global Green New Deal. Advancing a viable global Green New Deal should therefore be understood as the means by which “optimism of the will” comes alive in defining the political economy of saving the planet.

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Climate Change Intensifies Inequality: An Interview With Gregor Semieniuk



Gregor Semieniuk

This is part of [PERI's economist interview series](#), hosted by C.J. Polychroniou.

[Read Gregor's bio here.](#)

C.J. Polychroniou: You studied International Relations in Germany, at the Technische Universität Dresden, but ended up pursuing graduate studies in economics in the USA. What drew you into the “dismal science?”

Gregor Semieniuk: In Dresden, the program's content spanned economics, public law and political science. What intrigued me about economics was that on the one hand it seemed necessary to grapple with the most intractable global issues of the time: for instance, why it was so difficult to increase most countries' material affluence, how renewable energy could quickly replace the existing energy supply, and of course how the 2007-08 financial crisis and ensuing economic turmoil could be explained. On the other, my economics classes tended to provide straightforward answers to questions that were obviously more multi-faceted, like that a minimum wage was (categorically) to be discouraged because it diminished welfare. From my political science classes I knew that it was good practice to seek out contending theories to analyze the same problem through different lenses so as to gain a deeper understanding. I wanted to learn about contending

theories also in economics, but there seemed to be only one theory, so-called neoclassical economics, and its strengths and weaknesses weren't explicitly discussed. My search for a program that satisfied my curiosity led me to look to the USA, and ultimately to the New School for Social Research, with its famous teaching of a plurality of theoretical approaches. So I went there for my graduate studies. Of course, one thing I learned soon enough was that neoclassical economics and its offshoots can be more nuanced in their assumptions and conclusions. Yet, this does not replace the more variegated approaches and points of analytical departure that the full gamut of ideas in economics (in history and present) has to offer.

CJP: Your primary research areas are in environmental and ecological economics and in economic growth. Can you briefly spell out the connection between climate change and the economy? And, more specifically, in what ways does climate change threaten economic stability and growth?

GS: Climate change is driven by greenhouse gas emissions, that are mainly caused by combusting fossil fuels and from changes in land use (think intensive agriculture or deforestation). Fossil fuels in particular have been historically tightly interlinked with economic growth. Their qualities and quantities are arguably a key factor behind the industrial revolutions in today's rich countries. Luckily, however, while energy is a fundamental input into any economic activity, there are increasingly good alternatives to fossil fuels to supply that energy without or with much lower emissions, such as modern solar and wind energy, and a growing variety of devices compatible with the electricity they supply, such as electric vehicles and heat pumps.

At an abstract level, the interaction of economic growth and greenhouse gas emissions can be thought of as economic growth causing greenhouse gas emissions to rise. The resulting climate change "dampens" or eventually reverses economic growth through negative impacts on productivity, profitability, capital stock and human lives. More concretely, climate change poses difficult problems and threatens human wellbeing and livelihood in many ways. There are direct impacts, such as lower agricultural productivity or sea level rises. More indirect impacts intensify social problems and conflicts. To give you one example, up to two thirds of Bangladesh's population are at risk of being impacted by sea level rise by the mid-21st century. This does not mean permanent inundation but increased exposure to flooding and salinity that make it harder to earn a living on

agriculture, or risks destroying coastal non-agricultural production sites and homes. The resulting increased migration from coastal to inland communities can exacerbate social conflicts and urban poverty there, ultimately threatening social and economic stability. In the USA, up to 40 million people could be exposed to such hazards by 2100.[1] Of course, here there are much more resources available that could be used to protect communities from these impacts, so the context in which climate change impacts occur matters.

CJP: It's been argued that climate change has worsened global economic inequality. Does climate change reinforce inequalities? How does it do that?

GS: There are good reasons to believe that climate change increases existing inequalities. Here it is useful to distinguish between inter-country inequality and interpersonal and group inequalities, whether within a country or globally. Just like in the current COVID-19 crisis, rich countries can mount more sophisticated responses, and rich or otherwise privileged people everywhere can protect themselves better and face lower rates mortality than their poorer counterparts, so climate change tends to hit people already in lower-income countries and on the lower rungs of the wealth and privilege distribution harder. For instance, as mentioned in my previous answer, U.S. responses to flooding are likely to rely much more on protection, while in Bangladesh more people could lose their livelihoods and be left with no choice but to retreat. And richer people can pay higher prices for food and other amenities or invest in adaptive measures (like insulation and air conditioning) while poorer people may not be able to do so.

Interestingly, climate change mitigation is also sometimes criticized for exacerbating inequality. Between countries, the worry is that if developing countries curtail their expansion of fossil fuel powered electricity in order to install (more costly or less effective) renewables supply instead, that harms their economic growth and hampers the important task of improving the material conditions of the vast majority of the global population living in these countries. Encouragingly, renewable power from new powerplants, like a wind farm, is now increasingly cheaper than continuing to operate existing coal power plants so that trade-off looks less painful by the day. <https://www.irena.org/publications/2020/Jun/Renewable-Power-Costs-in-2019>

Of course, these renewables have to be integrated into an electricity grid and

appropriate and affordable end-use devices, like electric cars, also have to be available, but overall the falling costs make this a more and more feasible proposition.

Between people, the biggest worry is that policies penalizing emission intensive activities disproportionately hurt the poor. The 'yellow vest' movement in France is pointed to as an example that interpersonal inequality even in rich countries would be exacerbated and made unbearable by carbon taxes. For instance, if you can't afford to rent in a city and you move to the lower-rent countryside, you are more reliant on a greenhouse gas emitting car, and so would be harder hit by a tax. That was the case in France for many people. However, it is entirely feasible to design policies that make them less unequal or even progressive. For instance, if affordable electric transport was provided alongside taxes that increase fossil fuel prices, then it would be easier to switch by swapping your old car for a new electric one at a subsidized price + availability of charging infrastructure. And my colleague Jim Boyce has shown that when combined with progressive (i.e. income inequality reducing) rebates financed by at least part of the money accruing to the government, carbon taxes or auctioned-off emissions permits can contribute to progressive redistribution. Key is that richer people will pay much more for consuming carbon in absolute terms, which is money that can be redistributed, it just amounts to a lower share of their income. Examples, such as the carbon tax in British Columbia, show that it can be done and that people come to accept the carbon tax.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0301421515300550>

On the whole, it seems to me that it's much more straightforward to deal with inequality resulting from climate change mitigation, than with inequality that results from climate change itself.

I want to point out one more, perhaps less obvious dimension of inequality between countries. Someone needs to produce all of these new technologies, and there is good evidence that the green technology leaders are concentrated in high income countries and - for some activities - in China. The economic development discourse emphasizes the need for industrial upgrading and acquiring capabilities. So far, the low-carbon transition does not look to be a leveler of the inequalities, but rather to reinforce them. For instance, among the top wind and solar panel manufacturers, only a few countries are represented. And more advanced technologies such as low-carbon steel making tend to be developed in

rich countries. Unless a green transition can be shown to offer good economic opportunities for all world regions, coherent, effective climate change mitigation policy could be complicated also by inequality in this dimension, and risk increasing exposure of people to climate change in the unequal ways discussed above.

CJP: Some versions of a Green New Deal have been advocated by many economists as a means of halting global climate change. In your view, what should be the key components of a “Green New Deal”? How should we finance these initiatives?

GS: A Green New Deal should ensure a transition to a low-carbon economy that is timely, just and stabilizes the economy. Timely means the transition occurs so as to reduce emissions and stabilize atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases at levels compatible with low average global warming, such as by 1.5°C. Just means that the transition does not impose undue burdens on communities that are most vulnerable to this change, such as workers in fossil-fuel intensive industries. Of course, the transition would also be a welcome moment to reduce inequalities that are high already before the transition. Finally, rapid structural change risks destabilization. In her interview with you in this series, my colleague Isabella Weber points out how rapid price changes destabilized the formerly socialist countries. Poorly coordinated structural change could lead to similar destabilization. Currently, the policy focus is on “transition risks” to high-carbon industries that could destabilize the financial system through sudden declines in assets prices and debt defaults. But of course underlying such risks is the destabilization of the input-output structure of the real economy itself. So the structural change must be coordinated not only in the low-carbon “sunrise” but also high-carbon “sunset” industries.

In rich countries, financing the necessary investments in sunrise industries is in my view a question of political will more than anything else. While many commentators on this topic like to stress that the public sector cannot take on the investments needed by itself, and that greater private investment flows must first be mobilized, the current COVID-19 related stimulus packages show that what the public sector can and cannot do is relative. If governments decided to throw their weight behind the necessary low-carbon investments – not just renewable energy supply with storage but also transport, building retrofits and green hydrogen to power industrial processes – and commit to keep it there permanently, they could

certainly do so. Moreover, the resulting fast learning, cost declines and policy certainty would see private investors line up to participate anyway. I think a stronger public leadership role is needed in the transition financing now that can well be carried out by strengthened versions of existing development banks and investment agencies and funds with their capacity to identify good projects and structure deals. To the extent that the private sector can initially add to these funds and investment facilitation expertise, that is great. In the medium term, as we already see in the power supply sector, private actors will be keen to take on the lion's share of arranging and supplying investment, lured by healthy returns. I believe such an approach requires careful planning and audacious political decisions, but is eminently feasible.

In less affluent countries, there can be binding constraints on the public sector's ability to stem the financing. Here, priorities for what is done could be aligned with industrial policy to partake in the green manufacturing boom that is caused by the rise in investments. In a happy scenario, rich countries and international organizations would also recognize that they'd be better off supplying sufficient stable finance and stimulating green manufacturing activity abroad for a Global Green New Deal.

CJP: With decarbonization becoming the ultimate goal in the transition to a green economy, shouldn't this mean that economic growth as an objective would have to take a back seat, at least temporarily? If so, is this an argument in support of degrowth?

GS: This is partly a question of priorities, partly of how much the two goals, decarbonization and economic growth, are compatible. On the first, as long as we are living in a capitalist economy with rivaling political systems (rather than with a fabled enlightened world government that could solve all the international coordination problems in an intelligent and just way) I think the ultimate goal remains accumulation of capital, which tends to produce some sort of economic growth, in the sense of increasing profits and having to maintain certain socially negotiated living standards for at least some people. If the green transition can be made compatible with this goal, it has a good chance of success within the current system.

But the more interesting practical question I think is about compatibility. A well-executed Green New Deal would increase aggregate demand without

destabilizing the economy while increasing international cooperation, and so in all likelihood usher in a Golden Age of “green” capitalism, just like the period in the mid 20th century for the then capitalist economies. Due to the high unemployment rates now caused by COVID-19 and the continuous supply of workers displaced from high-carbon industries but retrained under just transition initiatives such as those proposed by PERI itself, this demand expansion should be falling on an unconstrained supply side and not lead to ‘overheating’. From that perspective, I would argue the opposite: the conventional approach to a decarbonization through investment is an argument in support of high growth.

The degrowth perspective comes into play when asking whether this high-growth scenario, that may effectively mitigate climate change, is not unsustainable in other dimensions. The now famous ‘planetary boundaries’ concept reminds that greenhouse gases are only one environmental problem at the global scale that requires attention. Others may be exacerbated by the mitigation response. Surely, the debate about the feasibility of economic growth will stay with us throughout the green transition and beyond, but my personal view is that unless degrowth was a very radical global phenomenon, it would not be an effective way to mitigate climate change. It’s relatively straightforward to reduce emissions by a few or perhaps 10 percent through degrowth as COVID-19 shows (it also shows that this imposes significant hardships on large swathes of the global population). But to go beyond that while keeping people provisioned and alive, is – in my view – an even more ambitious and unresolved policy challenge than a Green New Deal, as my colleague Bob Pollin discusses in a recent article in *The New Left Review* <https://newleftreview.org/issues/II112/articles/robert-pollin-de-growth-vs-a-green-new-deal>

CJP: Are you optimistic about the prospects of a Green revolution before we see temperatures rising beyond 1.5°C?

GS: The prospects depend on a lot of factors. My worry is a lack of audacity in tackling the transition in the face of detracting other and more immediate problems, a fracturing international scene and lack of empathy within countries for those that are not the elites, all of which is further exacerbated by an intellectual climate fueled also by the discourse in economics that has at least since the 1980s discouraged ambitious direction-setting programs by what must ultimately be national governments. In that sense, I am not optimistic. But I think there are good reasons for Green New Deal-type programs that should be made in

an attempt to win the argument and attract support.

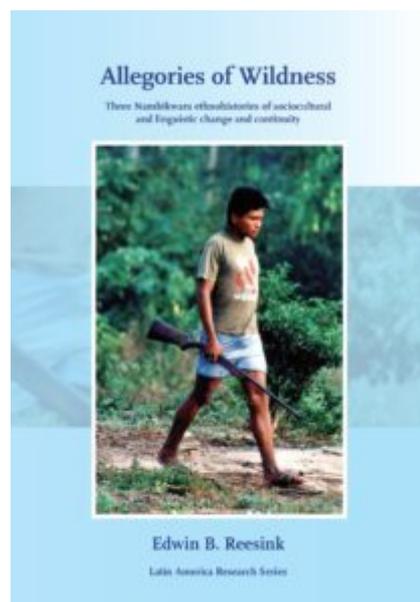
While the US Green New Deal proposal introduced in Congress has been criticized as being too far-reaching or not well thought through, I think that misses its most powerful and inspiring message. By tackling climate change head on, other seemingly more pressing issues could be addressed as well and from the present onwards. This includes economic inequality but also the environmental injustice that is now causing members of ethnic minorities to die from COVID-19 in disproportionate numbers. The hope is that a political window of opportunity arises that allows making progress, which then becomes self-sustaining thanks to a broad coalition of public support fueled by the demonstration that such a Deal both addresses current injustices and generates employment and profits for many. Here, the fast pace at which low-carbon technologies become competitive with incumbents is very encouraging. This cost-reducing trend would only be reinforced from the economies of scale, learning and other network externalities as well as the reduced uncertainty that a sustained Green New Deal-type initiative would entail.

Note:

[1] To read more about flooding in Bangladesh, the US and atoll island nations, see: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43017-019-0002-9>

**Edwin Reesink - Allegories of
Wildness ~ The Name, Fame And
Fate Of The Nambikwara ~ Three
Nambikwara Ethnohistories Of
Sociocultural And Linguistic**

Change And Continuity



Now

online:

<https://rozenbergquarterly.com/allegories-of-wildness>

A 'primitive wild people' that only Rondon could 'pacify', that was the reputation of wildness of these 'savages' around 1910. Not only that, Rondon also renamed them as the "Nambiquara" and hence, a few years later, this people acquired its first fame in Brazil with a new name. Actually, colonial expansion and war had been part of their history since the seventeenth century. The crossing of the enormous Nambikwara territories by the telegraph line constructed by Rondon's Mission produced, as far as known, the first real pacific contact. For those local groups most affected it proved as disastrous as all 'first contacts' without any preparation and substantial medical assistance. When Lévi-Strauss travelled through the region the so-called civilization had receded again. His research was very severely hampered by the historical consequences and by the fact the Indians still retained their political autonomy. Yet he has remarked they were the most interesting people he met and regarded this journey as his initiation in anthropological fieldwork. *Tristes Tropiques* made this people famous to a very large public and fixed another particular image of the Nambikwara. And then, in the seventies and eighties of the last century, the final assault took place by their being "before the bulldozer" (as written by the best known Nambikwara expert David Price). Only after a demographic catastrophe, permanent encirclement and great losses of territory, several Nambikwara local groups coalesced and emerged as peoples while many other local groups perished in this genocide. In effect, the so-called Nambikwara never were 'one people'. This study explores the ethnohistory of the name, fame and fate of three of these peoples — the Latundê,

Sabanê and Sararé — and dedicates some special attention to language loss and maintenance.

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