

The Arc of the Global Justice Movement

Gopal Dayaneni

[youtube.com/watch?v=VIwbHAYKx0k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIwbHAYKx0k):
Catalyst Project's Global Resistance
Panel



Transcript of a talk by Gopal Dayaneni on March 27, 2011, at the Catalyst Project's Anne Braden Anti-Racist Organizing Training Program open panel on Imperialism and Global People's Resistance.

Hi my name is Gopal; I apologize to people who have to listen to me talk more than is reasonable, Hilary being one of them, which is only because we work together. Uh let's see, I'm a parent, I have two kids, my daughter is six and a half and my son is four and I live in Oakland with nine adults and eight kids. So just a little bit about, like, my world.

I'm going to talk a little bit about the arc of the global justice movement over the last couple of decades; I'm going to start with a big picture thing. I'm going to talk here about the relationship between economy, ecology, and empire ...

"Eco" means home, right, so economy is the management of home, and an ecosystem is all of the relationships in your home, and ecology is the knowledge of your home. An ecosystem can be as small as a ripple in a pond and it can be as big as the planet. When you *globalize the economy*, you *globalize the ecosystem*. Humans have done things like gone to war with each other in their homes for time immemorial, and human communities have chopped down trees for time immemorial.

When ... your economy is small, you can mismanage your home and there will be consequences that you experience. And you will change the way you think about how to live in a place and you'll do something different.

When you globalize the economy the consequences of your mismanagement of home are systemic, you cannot exist alone in a planet by carving up the Amazon rainforest or the Boreal forest, right? You can't kill the circulatory system of the planet by taking all the life out of the oceans, right? When you globalize the economy, you globalize the consequences of mismanagement of home.

And in an economy there's a whole bunch of different elements and one of them, a key one of them is governance. And one of the primary mechanisms of governance, of this profoundly mismanaged ecosystem, is empire. And I believe we are at the end of the empire, I believe we are actually at ... the death throes of the empire. And everybody has an instinctive reaction of whistling. [audience laughs] Good thinking.

However, empires don't evaporate [and leave] democracy in their wake. They crumble. They crumble and they leave feudalism in their wake, they leave totalitarianism in their wake, they leave all kinds of other really crappy things in their wake. So as we implode the empire we have to also imagine composting the system. We have to imagine taking it apart brick by brick and building something new. So that's the big picture for me of where I want to start with, and then I'm going to show some pictures and talk about the Global Justice Movement.

[1st slide] The Anti-Globalization Movement started in Seattle! [audience laughter] Wrong! [louder laughter] Wrong! Raise your hand if you were there! [It was] a really powerful moment for us as a movement, but of course it was not the beginning of the movement; it was an important opportunity in the United States to begin that process of imploding the empire.

[Next slide] Actually, as many people know, there are no starts of anything. It's a big long process, but we can think of the Zapatista uprising at the beginning of NAFTA in 2004 as one of the key moments that galvanized the Global Justice Movement and the Anti-Globalization Movement. And I want to say something really important about what the Zapatistas brought to our movement, and what a new way of thinking it represented. There are some key ideas, and all of the slides I'm going to show are going to unpack some of these ideas. One is, they embraced the politicization of the sacredness of place. [This is] a lesson of indigenous struggle from the *beginning*; that we must have a politicized relationship to place, that place must be sacred to us, and that we have to defend it, and it is about knowing where you are, where you are from.

And for those of us who are dislocated by colonialism, by the psychic dislocation that makes you see a forest as a bunch of trees waiting to be cut down as opposed to a place that you are from, that you are a part of, it is important that we begin the thousand year journey of sacredness of place *right now*. So that's one of the key things.

[next slide] The second key thing that came from the Zapatistas was this idea of a world where many worlds fit, and one of the terms that we're using to talk about this now is translocalism: the idea that we have autonomous struggle, that we have common strategies, and that we have shared frames.

[next slide] So we're building a movement of movements that are connected to each other, but are all locally rooted ... This [slide] is an antiglobalization demonstrations in Thailand.

[next slide] So the global justice movement started with this Anti-Globalization period, and then it transitioned into what we started to call the Global Justice period.

[next slide] And it took on both [aspects], for a couple of reasons. One is, it was not just about being antagonistic towards dominant institutions, but about building new institutions.

[next slide] So this is just all examples coming out of People's Global Action and other forms of globalized resistance taking on opportunities of big international moments but really trying to push local agendas and new things.

[forward two slides] And then the last one was Ya Basta, this one— can we back up for a second?

[back a slide] Are people familiar with these images? Everyone know what that is? Ok so, these are folks ... I think this is G8, G8 in Italy. They're marching; these people are in the front line; they have tires and they're disarming cops and they're passing them back, they're passing batons back, and it keeps going for a whole lot of people, and what they're basically doing is creating a buffer, so at the end of this march is families, right, this is a big demonstration of direct confrontation of the state. One of the key things that came out of the Global Justice Movement is a new orientation towards being anti-corporate and anti-global-government, but not necessarily striving for state power. That's a really unique kind of moment that we developed into.

[next slide] This is La Via Campesina in India, which is an international alliance of small farmers and peasant movements,

[next slide] And they're a core part of the National Alliance of People's Movements in India, which is a super interesting formation. We don't have that in the United States; we don't have a national alliance of people's movements. The closest thing we have is the U.S. Social Forum, which there are some images of later. This is the Narmada Bachao Andolan [Friends of the Narmada River]. I think there's something really important here. The Narmada Bachao Andolan is a movement of indigenous Adivasi people in India, who were displaced by mega dams on the Narmada river, which is a mighty river. One of the things that they do is they refuse to leave during the monsoons so their homes get flooded out, and then the state comes and forces them out. And this is actually one of the really important transitions in the Global Justice Movement: that folks who have struggle on the ground in their communities are connecting it directly to scales of governance that are both at the country level and at the international level, and are building these movements of movements at all of these different levels. So you will find the Narmada Bachao Andolan doing direct action in their community, *and* showing up at international arenas, in the same way that you see the Korean farmers doing the same thing; they are engaged in their struggles on the ground and then they come and join these broader alliances that are taking on institutions of governance at the international scale.

[next slide] This is another one from India, one of my favorites, it's called "weeding." It's "Cremate Monsanto"; these are farmers who are pulling out genetically engineered crops, particularly cotton, and burning them in public, basically saying we don't want it. So we call it weeding.

[next slide] These are all examples of communities around the world who are connecting their struggle with a larger internationalist frame, and with a particular eye towards self governance. This is in Nigeria, where folks having been fighting.

[next slide] ... This is an image of the water wars in Bolivia! *Huge* indigenous organizing, local organizing; this was one of the really inspiring moments because they managed to kick Bechtel out of Bolivia and they [now] have a communal water system.

[next slide] This is the MST [*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*]; this is the Landless [Workers] Movement in Brazil. They have a multi pronged struggle – I just recently wrote a piece for Ruckus called "Pick a Fight, Break the Rules, Build Anew, Change the Game" and this is exactly what they do. They pick a fight; they take underutilized, vacant land so they directly confront landowners. They break the rules; they just take it over. They build something new; they build new institutions, new lifeboats for their community, and by doing that they can actually change the rules of the game. They are actually making a new set of policies.

[next slide] [next slide] The antiglobalization movement ... transitioned into I think the anti-war movement, because I think of 9/11 and because of the whole connection there. All of it is about looking for the systemic frame that holds it. I love this picture because this is in Pakistan, but the sign is in English; they're very clear who their audience is. [Audience laughs]

[next slide] Ok, so now we're getting to the Climate Justice Movement, which is where we are right now, and the Climate Justice Movement is an interesting thing because climate's not an issue right? It's the systemic consequence of screwing up your ecosystem, right? You globalize the ecosystem: this is the biggest picture consequence, that we've screwed up the relationship between the atmosphere and the oceans. And the Climate Justice Movement has really taken on leadership of indigenous peoples and traditional knowledge because, not simply because those folks are on the front lines of the root causes, false solutions, and impacts, but because the knowledge that we need to survive is rooted in evolved knowledge of place, and *this* is a really central premise of the Climate Justice Movement. ...

[next slide] [next slide] This is all the climate justice up there in Tambotu (sp?) and the Indigenous Environmental Network.

[next slide] This is indigenous people who were shut out of the UN framework convention on climate change, doing an action [next slide] directly connecting global poverty— the same thing that makes people poor, housing insecure, and hungry, is the same thing that's screwing up the atmosphere. That's the analysis, right?

[next slide] False solutions.

[next slide] OK! Now we get to Cochabamba and Bolivia ... There was an international summit of peoples' movements in Bolivia that actually really advanced a really important new frame, which is the rights of Mother Earth, and this idea that there are inherent rights to nature, and that we're all a part of that, that there's new framing, this new sacredness of place. One of the really interesting things about the People's Summit in Bolivia is that there [were] seventeen official organizing spaces and there was an eighteenth space, an eighteenth table that was organized by social movements in Bolivia who had issue with the Bolivian state, which gets to a question of scales of governance which we'll talk about on another occasion.

[next slide] And then the U.S. Social Forum in Detroit, this is where we are actually trying to build our national alliance of peoples' movements. In fits and starts; it's very hard to build a people's movement inside the empire. But again, local actions connecting to global organizing, global struggle.

[next slide] I'm not going to say anything about this because we just talked about the Mideast, but these are images from Egypt and particularly the role of the social movements there. But the one thing I want to say is that the thing that people don't talk about nearly enough is the way in which self organizing took root on the ground very quickly, in the moment, the "laboratory of resistance" as David Solnit calls it, of trying to building the new in the moment.

[next slide] And then the last one is, it is not true that we ... are not going through an attempt to overthrow our government. We are, obviously, every day. So that's the last one!

(Transcribed for Catalyst Project by Alex Pollak)