

## **After Cologne – frustrations, potential and our common responsibility**

*This text is an offering to help inform further strategy discussions. Its goal is not to make people feel bad – it is to support a better analysis of what we do, what we can do and what we want to do as parts of the climate justice movement. Finally, it is quite focused on dynamics that were at play in Cologne in the references it is making, which might make it harder to understand for people who did not attend the meeting in Cologne. We however hope that its analysis is at times broad enough to provide some relevant food for thought to anyone stumbling upon these lines.*

### **Are we a movement?**

Diversity is key. But when in a meeting everyone pushes their own agenda and campaign without listening to one another, this is not diversity, it's insularity. In Cologne, we did not have discussions as a movement - we didn't discuss proposals (or only in small groups) - we didn't engage in debates and decision-making - we didn't try to answer the questions asked to us in the run-up and during the conference. We came together, networked and educated each other. We advertised what we were doing. That is it. We did not engage with any analysis or decision-making exercise.

### **Are we serious?**

Accountability, as was rightly pointed out, is not something every one of us has learnt while growing up. It is something we need to learn collectively and take on individually. Engaging on the terrain of political work and striving for real change entails analyzing, debating, choosing, and evaluating what we do.

From the conference in Cologne, we could look at accountability from two different angles:

- impact and anti-oppression

Both are necessary; one without the other is a joke. But *both* are necessary. Keeping each other accountable for our practices is crucial. But getting comfortable in trying to make ourselves and our bubble perfect, and therefore dis-engaging from the terrain of political work at a society level means not living up to our responsibilities.

We cannot hide behind improving internal practices and forgo achieving change on the political level; same as we cannot hide behind the necessity for society-wide change to not keep checking and improving our own practices. This is a non-binary balancing act and practice.

Regarding anti-oppression, here are some guiding questions to look at your own process: are you listening to feedback - are you acting on it - while acting, are you still being effective in enacting change.

Regarding impact, here are some guiding questions: when you act, do you have an idea of how this will push for real change in society - do you understand yourself and your group as part of a bigger civil society push for change - do you therefore know, hold, and take responsibility for that place through your actions.

If we ignore these considerations we risk staying stuck in performative work that include rituals (actions, food, conferences, camps etc), fake allyship (not planning for change at a meaningful level is not solidary), no space for criticism and debate on strategic questions or practices, no political power analysis (but still expecting to see the world change one day! Because... we are right! That should be enough, right?), and a few others, but we said this document would not be too long.

## **Are we talking about the same things?**

At the end of this conference, as so many time before, we left with the question of whether we are actually talking and referring to the same things, even when we use similar language and codes.

*(Note: here, we are referring back to a temperature check that happened during the last plenary)*  
If we claim to be a movement for justice, why are we still naming and singling out MAPA and its centering in a tokenization-sounding exercise? Why isn't it ingrained in our identity and strategy, rather than a recurring question that we throw around and then are proud to have remembered? Of course, how centering MAPA (or disability justice, or gender justice, or class justice etc) translates in practice, is a question. But in the context of a strategy conference it is a strategic question that should inform the movement decisions that are made as such.

Questions around solidarity and justice could be: What does it mean for climate justice actors, to fight for justice? Does it mean demanding reparations? Does it mean spreading education? Does it mean planning to take down capitalism? Does it mean working hard in coalition with other movements to ensure that social change is just? Does it mean analyzing which power "we" hold, and what is achievable with it? Which targets and moves are strategic based on the people involved, the context and the goals? With whom and when are we making these decisions?

Instead of general statements of "wanting to learn more from MAPA" let's claim and name spaces for learning and teaching each other about justice. And let's not mix spaces and discussions to only make ourselves feel better without holding ourselves accountable for change, be it change in our practices or in our impact.

## **An invitation to Hannover**

Around moments of "coming together", especially a strategy conference, we would like to invite everyone to take responsibility for the space. More often than not, groups do not prepare for such a conference and shy away from even naming a delegate (Goddess forbid a delegate with a representative or decision-making power!). The fear around representativity and power is legitimate - but it is as legitimate as the stalemate it is putting us in as a movement.

In addition we often fail to create capacities in our groups to follow up on a strategy process that could de-multiply our individual groups' impacts. Contributing to and attending this type of discussions and spaces too often comes at the very bottom of the list of everything else we do. But do we give ourselves a chance at change, then? Or do we use words like "conference", "strategy", "tactics" etc. just to feel better? How do we expect societal change if we don't even carry our learnings, debates, plans and disagreements back to our groups and into our communities, after having had them in agreed spaces?

Of course, let's be realistic (and humble): people making the climate justice movement will not bring about whatever system change means on their own. But they are part of a much, much bigger social desire for change that includes other movements. So what about stepping up to a common responsibility, and asking ourselves what are our strengths and what can the climate justice movement bring to a broader ecology of social and political change? How can we push from an angle that other movements can't reach, and therefore reinforce each other's pushes for change?

And when we meet again, please, let's stop advertising who had the best idea - let's talk, debate and plan as a movement. Let's get over a very white supremacist fear of failure and of criticism, ingrained in us by our educational system. If we are not willing to stick our necks out during a discussion, take the brain power and energy to engage and maybe make mistakes, how can we discover how to change the status quo? Let's learn to have opinions and, equally important, to listen

to each other<sup>1</sup>, plan together, be gentle to each other, practice accountability, debate, disagree and not lose sight of the bigger picture.

### **Let's love and own this**

Doing more is not (necessarily) the way forward, but doing better is. And we are, in theory, committed, smart and passionate enough to give this a try.

That was a lot of challenging thoughts. But the silver lining is: our movement is growing. We are this movement. The combined urgencies of climate breakdown and neocolonial capitalism are still here for us to fight. And last we heard, we want to do this together. So let's put our priorities and brains where they are of use! See you in Hannover!

Zaheen and Alma

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<sup>1</sup> Don't quote this text to justify being an ass. Having a thought-through opinion/suggestion, or a genuine question, is not the same as taking all the space and thinking you know better than everyone, and pretending to be doing the work. Love!