

Mobilizing for Resiliency in the Face of Climate Change: Applying Global Strategies Locally

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Abstract

This presentation explores how emergent methods and concepts from global climate-change processes can be applied at the local level. How can communities with long-standing impasses pave new paths to collective action, and lay foundations for resiliency in view of the certainty of dramatic climate change? Feminist, political anthropology is the lens through which I share a 20-year engagement with a high-altitude North American (USA) community that is asking urgent questions about climate change, resiliency and democratic processes. Crestone Colorado and the surrounding Baca lands are anomalous for hosting 25+ international spiritual communities, whose bodies of knowledge help shape concepts of pluralistic ecologies. Our efforts include multi-day organizational retreats, and currently we are exploring how to incorporate a dialogue process already gaining attention and momentum in global climate-change policy circles: Talanoa, a Fijian process built on inclusivity, building empathy and moving to action made a mark at the 2017 Convention of Partners meeting in Bonn, Germany. This process is now being widely employed in policy talks and summits worldwide; we will report on preparation for its use through an anthropology course (“Sustainability in the Anthropocene”) to convene community members and aid in working through stumbling blocks. Additionally, we explore how “rights of nature” ordinances, also gaining increasing global visibility, can be applied to local efforts to stabilize water, food and energy security. Local case studies can be meaningfully scaled up to global dimensions in the search for what living and dying response-ably in current times might look like.

The critical distinction between conflict and violence underlies this presentation’s message. Whereas conflict suggests an opportunity to understand differing interests and positionalities, and includes chances to mitigate potential future harm, violence indicates the infliction of preventable harm itself, with requirements for future reconciliation and healing. I draw from earlier ethnographic work and training as a feminist, political anthropologist, of all-women policing of intimate partner violence in Brazil, and later research on war-based trauma brought home to domestic US communities by soldiers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, underlined the importance of community-to-global engagement with the costs of war, violence and trauma. In current work I turn to the very notion of being human in what we’re calling the Anthropocene age. Here the trauma becomes our broken bonds and covenants with nature, and the learning objectives center on fortifying rising generations against emotional despair on the one hand, and facile hope on the other. Rather, we seek to prepare rising generations to support the innumerable futures still to come, even amidst cataclysmic change. How do conceptions of culture and meaning, of in/equalities and social justice, and ecologies – of self, community, and interdependency beyond the human – inform human adaptability, sustainability and thriving in different environments?