

# In the Frontlines of Climate Justice

Speakers:

- LaDonna Bravebull Allard (Lakota, USA)
- Nicole Oliveira (350.org Europe)
- Nnimmo Bassey (Nigeria)

Moderator: Catarina Gomes (Linha Vermelha, Portugal)

Reporter: Ana Rita Antunes

More information about the panel:

<https://climaximo.wordpress.com/2018/12/09/nas-linhas-de-frente-da-justica-climatica/>

This session brought together dozens of people to hear the stories of three speakers who participated in battles for climate justice, and what this meant for their personal lives.

Moderator Catarina asked them to begin by introducing some of the principle battles in their countries of origin.

Nicole brought the expansion of the fossil fuel industry in the Amazon, in countries such as Equador and Bolivia. The anti-fracking campaign in Brazil and Argentina in 2013, in which legal actions were brought, along with a public consultation, together with an aggregation of the public and security training, made this an extensive campaign. Due to this, many states in Brazil have officially banned fracking.

La Donna started by affirming very viscerally and intensely, that at the beginning of her fight in the battle for Standing Rock, the first approach taken was to speak with the children and then with the elders, arguing vigorously that everyone should be involved, that nobody should be excluded and that everybody has their role in this. Contexts such as the USA and Brazil, in which governments are not amenable, are not excuses for citizens not to act. And this idea is reinforced by the existence of 200 camps in gas and petroleum extraction zones, as well as by the deinvestment of 64,000,000,000 dollars: banks, insurance (companies which had money involved in the Dakota Access Pipeline, or in other projects). Although those who control the media control the world, we have to take this control, because they implement a divide and conquer policy, which is a military strategy. La Donna notes that the extraction industries are now adopting military type strategies to deal with resistance.

Nnimmo told us that he is from Nigeria, a caricature of the cleanest country in the world, where the rivers are covered in oil, thanks to exploration by Shell and other companies, in which gas wells flare to make production flow. Direct foreign investment is scattered throughout Africa, with a great deal of growth, with politicians even advertising their countries to attract investment. He adds that each gas well is a crime scene.

Following this introduction, the moderator asks the speakers to share key lessons from their campaigns and mobilisations, successful or not.

**Nicole** stated that one of the lessons she learned was that in her experience, **it was left-wing governments that opened the**

**door to the fossil industry**, in this case, in Latin America, where poverty increased due to territorial conflicts and expropriation, from which this industry enjoyed 200,000,000,000 dollars in financial benefits in Brazil. She gave the example of president Mujica in Uruguay, who pretended to be poor, although he was a multimillionaire who made fracking legal in the country. Examples which immediately demonstrate that just because a government is on the left, that doesn't necessarily mean that they will adopt different measures. These parties are not benefitting the climate paradigm, creating a space in which more radical parties, with fascist ideals and politics, becomes more relevant in the political panorama.

**La Donna**, before answering this question, asked the audience how to measure success, and what it means. And answered that success is self-empowerment: “now they see me”. She commented that in this aspect of success, governments cannot be trusted, giving the example of President Obama, who opposed the Standing Rock movement and supported lawless corporations, despite all his campaign promises. One of the local impacts of the favoured industry was the explosive growth in drug trafficking, the price of food and of housing. She identifies our fault as being that we allow this to happen, that each person at this moment has blood on their hands.

**Nnimmo** contests that success is not always tangible. The simple fact of saying “no!” is already a huge success, because if a million people say it, possibilities already come into existence. He also defines success as suffering and imprisonment for civil disobedience, but recovering afterwards.

Saying “no” is an alternative, a capacity to fight against the industrial and political narratives. And above all, when contesting the narrative of the paradigm of industry and the political elite, saying what you feel is the best way, because nobody can contradict it. Other successes which he recalls were in 1996, when Oil Watch International began a campaign delaying extraction for 10 years. Currently, the World Bank has begun to talk about carbon budgeting and about the *Keep it in the Ground* movement. Nnimmo also counts as a success, mutual international solidarity and support between various campaigns, and legal prosecutions, especially in the countries where big petrol has its headquarters (UK, Italy, Holland).

Siezing this context, the moderator asked the speakers about their visions on international and regional cooperation in the fight against the gas, petrol, and coal industries. **La Donna** described the Standing Rock movement as a series of seeds sown across social networks, a lesson coming from the youngest. Cooperation is fundamental and natural, because we are all indigenous to the Earth.

**Nicole** observed that **in the Southern Hemisphere, populations are reaching the limits of resistance, affirming that it's fundamental and urgent that we Europeans become involved and take advantage of our individual civil liberties to demonstrate.** She gave a highly paradigmatic example of the importance of cooperation: 350.org has a role playing activity, called *The Village*, in which each group imagines the village of their dreams, with all the things they would like to see happen. After this first stage, one of the facilitators asks to see each group's result and tears the project

apart in front of the participants. The facilitator starts to warp and negatively explore the project. Following the betrayed confidence of the first group, the second group is already reluctant to accept the facilitator and following groups refuse. The moral of the story can be found in something which the speaker has already experienced, in which people only allow change (in this case, destruction) because they don't know what it will be. She notes that in this exercise the groups find it hard to accept the destruction of their fantasy village, asking them to imagine how populations suffer when they lose their way of life in the real world.

The session ended with some commentary on the part of the listeners, who were sympathetic to the speakers' battles. **Nicole** added that she is profoundly unhappy because of her experiences, that she is followed daily, she has seen her colleagues murdered, and is not sorry to make us feel uncomfortable, because her objective is to make everybody feel uncomfortable enough to act.

**La Donna**, despite her years of suffering in the Standing Rock movement, emphasised the importance of community, explaining that where she is from, funerals are not family, but community affairs, where everybody gets a chance to say goodbye. She ended with: “**individualism is the downfall of humanity**”.