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Paris Talks: Securing the Future

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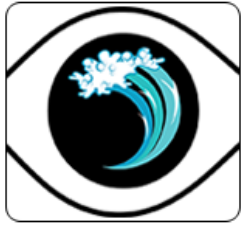


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Eyes on the Rise

Paris Talks: Securing the Future

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This special series of posts is produced by [Juliet Pinto](#) (Florida International University) and [Phaedra Pezzullo](#) (University of Colorado-Boulder)

In collaboration with [International Environmental Communication Association](#), FIU's [Sea Level Solutions Center](#), and [eyesontherise.org](#). Both Pinto and Pezzullo are attending [COP21](#) in Paris.

By Phaedra Pezzullo, from Paris

Today, I attended a security briefing and helped set up the IECA booth with Prof. Juliet Pinto & Suzanna Norbeck, JD, from [Mediators Beyond Borders](#) (with whom we're sharing the booth). Despite the state of emergency, the security was nothing compared to the airport in Indianapolis.

Honestly. (For an excellent book on U.S. security performances from an intersectional cultural studies perspective, see Rachel Hall's [The Transparent Traveler](#).)

Nevertheless, today was a striking juxtaposition between those inside COP21 and those outside. Outside, as I have tweeted and posted on Facebook (for those that want pictures), there were three main events worth noting: a sunrise ceremony by Indigenous environmental activists, a display of thousands of shoes instead of people in lieu of current law, and a human sidewalk barricade that stood peacefully on the sidewalk where the marching was to occur.

Inside COP21, there were two main events today: a security briefing and an opening welcome. The security briefing was led by the executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) of the past five years and Costa Rican diplomat, Christina Figueres.

Figueres affirmed the actions outside the convention space and expressed a hope that images would be shared on the screens inside the convention, but also announced the slogan for the convention would be "No Surprises." This slogan was to clarify that any civic act (the example given was someone bursting through a door) must be registered with the UN/Paris security for approval ahead of time or else security will respond quickly to shut any disruption down. We also were assured with 150 heads of states arriving tomorrow that the COP21 center was the safest place on Earth right now.

The second main event at COP21 today was a welcome gathering of delegates from all countries with civic attendance as space allowed. For me, the most interesting moment was when, after claiming to uphold transparency, a delegate from Tuvalu asked why some negotiations had begun among certain delegates already eager to begin negotiations.

Co-President De L'ADP Ahmed Djoghlaif (Algérie) assured the audience that

everyone's voice mattered and recalled that this has been a five-year process that needs to wrap up by mid-week next week so all may have approval of a binding legal document by December 11th. He shared that many documents of informal conversations were on the website and concluded by affirming: "We are very glad you are with us. If we save Tuvalu, we save the world."

Hoping for safety in a time of emergencies is an important goal right now.

- Will Tuvalu, an island most could not point out on a map, become "safe" as a nation as a result of the negotiations in the next week?
- Why does acute violence from guns and bombs garner more attention than areas suffering from ongoing war or climate disasters, both of which represent so many more lives than were tragically lost in Paris a bit over a week ago?
- And how do diplomats communicate safety and respect while believing policing bodies is necessary to bringing about the structural change we so desperately need to avert a global emergency of climate disruption?

Exigence—a situation marked by a sense of urgency—is a foundational term in rhetorical theory. As a Master's student and eventually in my first publication, I (2001) wrote about the concept "latent exigence," in which the state acknowledged there was a crisis that needed to be addressed in the distant future as opposed to the present.

Addressing climate crisis often is framed similarly: making Earth uninhabitable for humans surely counts as an urgent situation, but—for many—it doesn't appear to be immediate, visible, or worth addressing in the short term. As such, the crisis constantly is deferred—something we should address, but maybe not today.

It already sounds as if the agreement being negotiated the next two weeks will reflect this latent exigence: once again warning of catastrophic climate

change, but not yet committing to the actions needed to limiting warming to 1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius overall (nor will it likely commit sufficient funds for adaptation necessary for Third World countries). Further, a great deal of U.S. President Obama's administration's efforts these next two weeks will be dedicated to finding a way to make a commitment that does not require him to go back to Congress for approval, since it would be blocked there and any meaningful treaty needs the U.S. (as the second largest emitter).

Nevertheless, there is reason for hope: environmental and environmental justice communities and organizations have built momentum in the U.S. and internationally. As opposed to Copenhagen and other previous agreements, almost every country in the world is participating in the negotiations these next two weeks—most (almost 180 countries, representing almost 95% global greenhouse gas emissions) have submitted a plan ahead of Paris.

We will not meet our carbon reduction goals solely through individual consumer choices; we need structural change. A high level of participation, therefore, is a good sign. Plus, the less than 60 page working document going into Paris is much shorter and to the point than documents of past COPs at this point. So, the focus seems clear: we need to transform the global energy sector. Not tomorrow, but today.

If you are frustrated that global negotiations are not moving fast enough, please, use your civic freedom (liberté) to spend one hour this week doing something to transform our energy system. Write a Letter to the Editor. Email a representative. Create a pamphlet your city can distribute online on how to reduce carbon structurally. Time yourself. 60 minutes. If you've done it before, as I know many of you have, please, do it again. Now.

For those looking for inspiration, there is an indigenous 15 year old from Boulder, Colorado, where I live now, named Xiuhtezcatl Tonatiuh. He performed in Paris this past week at the preconference Youth gathering. This is his third time addressing the UN. Watch his video and consider how he

constitutes exigency in relation to climate justice, as well as what you can do to amplify his voice: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=236OWXEGopk>.

Thanks for sharing these reflections of this journey and for all the affirmations you have posted. The connections between us matter.

Phaedra C Pezzullo is an Associate Professor of the Department of Communication at the University of Colorado Boulder. She is a climate justice advocate, teacher, and author. In addition to her award-winning book, Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Travel, Pollution, and Environmental Justice (University of Alabama Press, 2007), she coedited Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement (MIT Press, 2007), edited Cultural Studies and the Environment, Revisited (Routledge, 2010), coedited Readings on Rhetoric and Performance (Strata, 2010), and coauthored Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere, 4th Ed. (Sage, 2015).



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