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Paris Talks: Trials of Climate Advocacy

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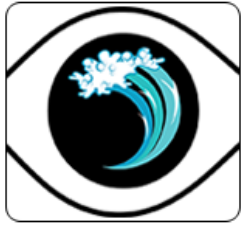


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Eyes on the Rise

Paris Talks: Trials of Climate Advocacy

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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

(An automated email alert sent by my university to my inbox this morning)

Members should avoid all demonstrations by environmental activists due to take place in the coming days in several European

capital and main cities as a basic security precaution. ... Avoid all protests related to the COP21 Conference due to the risk of localised violence between participants and the police. Any unrest is likely to be swiftly contained by the police, though may temporarily pose incidental risks to bystanders." (International SOS Security Advisories, 11/27/15)

(Conversation in my living room this morning)

"Ma, why do you have to leave today?"

"Well, honey, I think climate change is the most important issue today, and

I have an opportunity to help bring attention to it. (Pause) To help your

future be safer."

As my almost 6 year old looked at me with skepticism, I wondered if my child sensed my doubt. Would going make a difference? Who am I to think I matter?

Today, I'm getting on a plane to Paris, France, for the first week of COP21; organized by Gregg Walker, I am one of four delegates for the International Environmental Communication Association Climate Working Group.

Our goal is to try to blog/tweet daily during COP21 to try to raise awareness about climate communication. In Paris over the next two weeks—during which climate activists already are being put under house arrest and

criminalized for reasons completely unrelated to the impetus of the state of emergency—this simple act of encouraging public attention and debate matters.

I confess: I am a reluctant climate activist-scholar.

This may come as a surprise to those of you who know my whole career (and beyond) has been dedicated to environmental matters. Yet, my professional expertise has focused on toxic pollution (literal and metaphorical), bodies, and environmental justice movements. I've been focused on my own research and busy life without wanting to or feeling capable of changing course.

The climate crisis poses a dilemma for many of us invested in environmental communication as scholars and practitioners: do we stay focused on our areas of expertise (natural resource disputes, animal studies, environmental justice, et cetera) or do we become drawn into spending our limited time and resources on climate change (which impacts natural resources and animals and social justice burdens)?

As those of you know who have read the 4th edition of my coauthored textbook with two time Sierra Club President and IECA member Robbie Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, at COP19 two years ago, then Filipino Climate Change Commissioner Naderev Yeb Saño gave a speech I think is worth hearing in the wake of Hurricane Haiyan.

If you have not listened to his speech, I implore you to do so (<https://vimeo.com/79117298>). It's an honest reflection on living—and daring to try to make a difference—in an age of climate crisis. The “cruel irony” of climate change, as we note, is that the people most directly impacted the worst by this gradually worsening climate disaster are those who have benefitted the least from the carbon economy.

Yeb's speech helped moved me to realize that somehow—in between raising

my child, doing my job, and much more, I needed to make more time for climate justice. The usual suspects haven't made enough progress for us to leave the fate of our world up to them.

As a result, this week I'll be doing fieldwork and blogging in one of the most loved cities of the world at a gathering of some of the biggest luminaries in government, NGOs, and activism during a state of emergency.

This is not my comfort zone.

But, I think the crisis we face is so exigent that comfort is no longer an ethical option or the most viable value for our future.

When I interviewed Yeb last spring about his speech and ongoing advocacy with the People's Pilgrimage, he said the international attention to his speech "was for me a signal that I am being thrust into a position of responsibility that I cannot abdicate and that's why until today I do my best to speak in the name of the movement, this growing global movement, in the name of solidarity." During these two weeks, I think we're all thrust into a position of responsibility we should not abdicate.

We need everyone to (re)tweet, blog, "like" stories on Facebook, write letters to government representatives, make proposals within the institutions where we work, march, sing, build puppets, and/or communicate in any way you feel capable. To amplify our voices, please, tag [@IECA](#) or [#COP21_IECA](#).

For a brief background on what COP21 is and why it is significant historically, see: <http://www.forbes.com/forbes/welcome/>

For more details on the day-to-day plans of COP21, see:

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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