

SKEENA'S COLUMN

By Skeena Rathor

In this issue of the journal I'm coming back to what is most live and relates to the origin story of Co-Liberation.

In September 2018 after spending time with Jem Bendell, I decided to commit myself to the forming and finding of Extinction Rebellion (XR) and a global movement for non-violent civil disobedience. This is after 30 years in mainstream politics and serving as an elected politician working for change inside the political system. It was a moment of reckoning with the harm and destitution of our systems. As I felt my fear and grief for the deep ecology of life, there was a slow and painful deconstructing of my identity and beliefs. I began a search for a peaceful and constructive disobedience that symbolises the story of the poly-crisis we have reached and what is needed now. What happened to us – the human family? And where do we go from here as a human family?

My opening disobedience at our opening rebellion in November 2018 was to dig up the lawn of Parliament Square at Westminster in London, and to plant three trees in the middle. A Walnut, a Plum and a Thuja. The police refused to arrest me. This action came to be from a space of visioning a flourishing world or Dunya, which in my culture of heritage means worlds within worlds – recognising a pluriversality – meaning our many ways of being and knowing, both countable and uncountable.

I've always said to people that I feel that I've been blessed to have had a tremendously joyous and beautiful role in XR as Co-Founder of the Vision Circle. My primary role (I've held many roles at once) within XR was to dream, to pray and to think from the heart-mind about our mission. But oh my goodness, how my heart has broken over and over from the confrontations with patriarchal culture and its dominatory and

separation behaviours, especially and including, for me as a Kashmiri woman with more melanin, the unconscious racism. I'm not outside those behaviours. I'm also heart broken to know that I can act and respond from that place inside me that in its scarcity pattern seeks to control and judge into separation.

But as Rumi says, 'You have to keep breaking your heart until it opens'. Well, these last three years have felt like studying with every fibre of my being for a Ph.D. in broken heartedness. The conflict between the dreams of XR, its vision, and then the real place of where the collective trauma body of the organisation is has been excruciating. And yet in this multiplicity of breakdowns and all their teachings, we found what feels like a breakthrough – a vision and practice of Co-Liberation (which I will write some more about in future issues); and on the 22nd August 2021 I climbed the balcony of the Guildhall Square, the centre of the centre of the City of London where 150 years of African slavery were planned and organised. Where we hold the world's administration keys of £20 trillion a year in corruption and money-laundering services. Where we organise the tax evasion of billions every year. From where we have institutionalised and systematised neo-colonialism and its global genocidal and ecocidal economics, to unfurl a banner reading 'Co-Liberation – Freedom Together' and to spray washable red chalk spray on to the pillars of the Guildhall to symbolise the blood of our children and the children of all species. We were saying – 'Stop the harm and heal the harm'.

I'm saying 'we' all along. I believe in the one 'we', and recognise that for every one of us we stand in different experiences of power and privilege in that 'we'. That many of us have experienced a place of powerlessness and

violence from a 'them'. That 'they' have destroyed the lands and lives of our families. So then, it doesn't feel like 'us' or our 'we'. Then the great 'WE' doesn't feel true. That's the point, just there. Humanity is not recognising or acting as if there is one 'we' when the science confirms what the spirit knows – the deep interconnection of all life. That our fate is one. Co-Liberation means the knowing, being, becoming of my safety, my freeing and my flourishing depending on yours and yours on mine, and at once with the inter-being of all life.

Below is my defence and declaration statement.

1st April 2022, City of London Magistrates Court

Since 35AD, for nearly 2,000 years the Guildhall Square, the centre of the centre of the City of London, has been a place of extreme violence and harm. It was built as a Roman colosseum, an oval amphitheatre, one of the earliest and largest where slaves and animals were bought for torture performance. The only way out was to climb or be lifted out.

So I climbed, and I got lifted out because that's what we need to do now. We need to climb to our greater heights and lift ourselves out of the hell-hole we are creating on the paradise of our beautiful earth. This was a symbolic non-violent action that caused no damage.

We buried and keep burying the reality of the violence and harm. The City of London hides itself as a killing machine. It is the world's centre of corruption and theft – organising the hiding and tax evasion of £20 trillion in offshore havens. It is the money-laundering centre of the world, to the tune of at least £100 billion. Costing every UK household £170,000 per year. The servant of global genocidal and ecocidal economics. That I am being tried for criminal damages is lunacy, and indicative of the corruption of real justice.

There's a word we are missing here for the most extensive and horrific crimes against life and humanity. We don't have the words yet for that crossover of where genocide and ecocide meet to cause the brutal loss of the deep interconnected web of life – where killing 'the other' is killing ourselves. Some people describe it as a climate and ecological crisis or emergency, some as a global catastrophe, but those words don't describe the horror or suffering that is accelerating in the name of economics, Gross Domestic Product, progress and growth only for a fingernail of humanity, and in reality not even for that fingernail, because it's suicidal growth for them and woman, and manslaughter for the rest of us. Really there is no them and us – we are one. As Martin Luther King said, we share a single garment of destiny.

The Guildhall was the meeting place for the major shareholders of the Royal African Company from the City of London for about 150 years, until 1807. This company, backed by the crown, was responsible for the shipping of more enslaved African women, men and children to the Americas than any other single institution during the transatlantic slave trade. The shareholders in the City of London have received compensation since its abolition; this only ended recently, in 2015. Their payment for harm only ended seven years ago!

Today, The City of London is the ninth largest emitter of CO₂ in the world. It's in constant criminal activity in the destroying of lands and water cycles. It's a servant, a butler, for the extraction and exploitation activity of the most obscenely wealthy corporations and individuals. How to communicate with it is entirely unclear. It is impenetrable. It has an unelected representative in Parliament – so it evades responsibilities as it undermines democracy every day. There is no democratic way of redress of the City of London.

On Mothers day. My Miri, my third daughter, 11 years old, wrote:

Dear Mum, Happy Mother's Day, You are my hero and I am so proud of you not only that you are the best mum ever but that you are saving the planet and with you I bet the planet will be saved.

And I felt my heart crumpling again. I felt a familiar tearing sensation in my chest.

I've held so many babies in my arms. For ten years I worked as an ante-natal and post-natal leader, breast-feeding counsellor and new-born Brazelton assessor on neo-natal wards. I have three children and six nieces and nephews. All of these children I regard as my children, our children. Every baby I have held has taken my breath away from the raw beauty and awe of their life force. It's breathtaking in the best way! I feel their infinite possibility. I feel this, too, when I hold seeds in my hands, and last summer when I sat under an oak that had just released its acorns. The call of life in your hands and arms is worth all the grief of life and love. Isn't it? And don't we have a responsibility to put our whole power, all of our love-power together to manifest a liveable future for them? Isn't that the point of life? To be part of life continuing – to experience and contribute to the beauty, joy and creation of life.

But the heart-aching and heart-breaking reality is that because of the killing of the City of London and its partners across the globe, Miri is going to lose her bet on me – on us. Our children have bet on us, and they are going to lose. The children of people in this courtroom are unlikely to experience a full adulthood. Our children will lose their lives.

The recent IPCC report says it's too late for mitigation and soon, even too late for adaptation. That we are looking at temperature rises way beyond 1.5 degrees. What that means is societal and civilisational collapse. It means the creation of death zones across the world – desertifications. It means displacements of millions, if not billions. It means Ukraine times 50. It means multiple serial bread-basket

failures – famine, violence, war and disease across the global North, just as is suffered today across parts of the global South. So what the City of London has orchestrated across parts of the global majority world today is going to come home to us, to our families and children. It's coming, and we are all due to lose everything we hold dear. I may have to watch my children starve, like the mothers in Yemen are doing today.

I have been a community organiser since the age of 9. I have worked my whole life, and since my teenage years in politics for NGOs, charities and independently in areas of change-making for health and well-being. Up until last year I was an elected politician organising for my community in Stroud, Gloucestershire. I've been an obedient citizen in service to the systems we have.

I'm also a daughter of Kashmir, a land torn apart from British colonisation. The longest-running area of conflict on the UN agenda. My homelands are tired. The struggle for freedom from oppression has now lasted for five generations. Oppression makes you small, as my friend Sarri says. Sometimes I feel very small.

I've devoted my whole life to efforts of expansion, to making us bigger, the Larger US, as Alex Evans calls it, to change and transformation, and I believe in us humans and our humanity. As my dear friend Jen says, 'Come on, you humans'. As Douglas Rushkoff says, we can be TEAM Human – divided no more, one human family. Genius collaborators in our brilliant diversity. We are 'Humankind' – the kindness of the human being knows no bounds – we are miracle workers.

Yet the City of London is devoid of this humanity. It's become a depraved killing machine. An out-of-control cancer – a parasitic growth that is destroying the organs of the earth – the primary systems of air, water and lands from the secondary systems. It's designed in the image of domination and separation. It's eating

us up alive. It's carnivorous, as my dear friend Gail says:

it takes what it wants, dumps what it doesn't want, and makes up lies to justify what it is doing. It is corrupt, brutal and wilfully blind, it smiles as it cheats, it's never satisfied and it's willing to destroy anything and everything to continue. It doesn't see itself – it's been systematised, and our personhoods have been co-opted in its service

So from the inspiration of Gandhi's Sat-ya-graha – where truth force meets love force for non-co-operation with structures, systems and policies that harm – I took this action for our many children, and the children of all species on which I and we depend. The action was to say 'NO', and to ask for our freedom so that we might heal and repair the harm in the nano-second of time we might have left. I don't know. Many scientists say it's too late.

I've been called an activist, but I realise now that I'm not an activist. I'm a motherist. My mother walked on just four weeks ago. *Tashkeel*. It means figuration. She was my pre-figurative force. Thanks to her, I know a mother's love is the most powerful force in the world. The kind of power that can lift a ton of a car off of a child. If we all acted as motherists, which I believe is the original instinct in all of us – man, woman, parent and non-parent – then it's not too late.

As a mother I can never believe it's too late – that would be too much to live with. I will never accept the actions of the City of London and its partners to kill life on earth. Never. And for the love of our children I will continue to plead, resist and recover in all the places I have to, including in this courtroom. Really, together with many motherists, I'm here to recover something and to lift something off the body of humanity and, yes, to plead for the life and love of our children and the children of all species.

About the contributor



Skeena Rathor is a Kashmiri Sufi ordinary mystic and mother of three young girls. Co-Founder of Extinction Rebellion's Vision and Guardianship Crew, Co-Founder of Compassionate Stroud and Founder of Politics Kitchen. A former Independent District Councillor, Brain Body, Heart Intelligence teacher and trainer, and Early Years and Trauma Specialist. Co-Creator and Founder of the Co-Liberation Project. She can be contacted on coliberation@protonmail.com.

SOME HUMANISTIC WISDOM

“Those who dwell among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life. Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe, the less taste we shall have for destruction.”

Rachel Carson (1907–1964)