



# Oil and gas corporations as anti-racist decolonial liberators? A case study of propaganda from the struggle against Shell in South Africa

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## Abstract

Oil and gas corporations and their lobbyists are increasingly appropriating the language of racial justice, anti-imperialism, and decolonization to block climate action and advance a polluting, extractive, and neocolonial agenda. This article argues that these appropriations are a form of propaganda called 'undermining demagoguery', which serves to subvert the very ideals it claims to uphold. Shell's attempt to explore for oil and gas off the Wild Coast of South Africa is used as a case study. The article shows how such propaganda efforts are becoming increasingly prevalent and recommends strategies that can be used to counteract them.

## Keywords

climate justice; oil and gas; propaganda; racial justice; decolonization; Shell; South Africa; anti-imperialism.

## 1. Introduction

Gandhi has been famously quoted as saying, "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win." A step in the progression that seems missing, though, is how your opponents will try to appropriate your language and pretend that a win for them is a win for the cause. When it comes to questions of climate justice, such appropriations are on the rise. Wins for the fossil fuel industry and connected elites are being falsely painted as wins for climate justice, anti-imperialism, and decolonization, among other goals. Such rhetoric, I argue, is a form of 'undermining demagoguery' and is used by local and global elites and lobbyists who profit and benefit from such extractive industries. In his book *How Propaganda Works*, philosopher Jason Stanley defines undermining demagoguery as "a contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of a worthy political, economic, or rational ideal, but is in the service of a goal that tends to undermine that very ideal" (Stanley, 2015, p. 65). To demonstrate how such undermining demagoguery is being deployed to serve fossil fuel corporate interests, I present a case study of Shell's attempt to explore for

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oil and gas off the Wild Coast of South Africa. I conduct a critical discourse analysis using court proceedings, interviews, discussions, media articles, government speeches and other sources.

The article begins by exploring the broader propaganda, public relations, and misinformation campaigns utilized by fossil fuel corporations and politicians both globally and in the South African context. It then explains the context of Shell's attempts to advance seismic surveys for oil and gas off South Africa's Wild Coast. It then provides a discourse analysis of Shell and its defenders, with a significant focus on one of Shell's most vociferous defenders, Gwede Mantashe, the National Chairperson of the South Africa's ruling political party, the African National Congress (ANC) and Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy. The discourse analysis shows how appeals to climate justice, decolonization and anti-imperialism are quite disingenuously being used to support Shell – a neocolonial corporation with a long history of colonial violence on the African continent. To show how such discourse is a form of undermining demagoguery, the article critically examines problematic claims made by Shell's defenders, drawing on critical activist, scholar, and community perspectives. The article then ends by discussing how such discourses are becoming increasingly prevalent, both in South Africa and the broader African context. It concludes by suggesting strategies to counteract such undermining demagoguery and its false appeals to anti-racism, decoloniality and anti-imperialism.

This article is written from the perspective of a scholar–activist. As the author, I am heavily involved in climate justice activism in South Africa. Thus, apart from engaging in discourse analysis, my research methodology is heavily based in participatory action research. Drawing on Cornish *et al.* (2023), "participatory action research (PAR) is a scholar–activist research approach that brings together community members, activists and scholars to co-create knowledge and social change in tandem." The aim of the research is to produce emancipatory scholarship, driven by the desire to tackle injustices and build futures supportive of human thriving. Reflecting this, I work alongside, am connected to, and support activists and groups at the forefront of climate and environmental justice struggles, including the one against Shell. I have also received input and feedback from frontline activists on the work that informs this article. Some of the activists I have spoken to have been reluctant to co-author written work related to this issue due to possible threats and intimidation associated with doing so, particularly given that I have been threatened with lawsuits from Gwede Mantashe, one of South Africa's most powerful politicians who is deeply committed to the fossil fuel industry and Shell. Such worries are particularly relevant in the context of rising violence, intimidation, and assassination of activists in South Africa (see for example, Kamolane & Ditshego, 2022).

## **2. Fossil fueled propaganda and discourses of climate delay**

One of the biggest obstacles to action on climate change and other environmental issues is the widespread propaganda, public relations, and misinformation campaigns driven by corporations, their lobbyists, and public relations firms. To better understand the propaganda involved in the Shell case, it is important to situate it within the broader context of such propaganda efforts. A lens through which we can do so is examining what is referred to as "a discourse of climate delay" – which is a type of discourse that is intended to block action on climate change. As Lamb *et al.* (2020) highlight, discourses of delay tend to build on legitimate fears and concerns society has, but such discourses promote delay when they misrepresent those concerns, often in order to intentionally block action. On internet forums, similar behavior is known as 'concern trolling', which is when someone "posts to an internet forum or newsgroup, claiming to share its goals while deliberately working against those goals" (Castro, 2022).

This article aims to contribute and help develop the growing literature around the evolving nature of climate delay and denial (Lamb *et al.*, 2020; Maslin, 2019; Si *et al.*, 2023; Wright & Nyberg, 2021). In particular, it shows how interconnected appeals to racism, decolonization, and anti-imperialism are being used to undermine climate justice. It is important to better understand how appeals to decolonization, anti-imperialism, and racial justice are being used as discourses of climate delay, especially in contexts such as South Africa. That is because some of the most powerful and harmful public relations campaigns in South Africa have focused on exactly such areas. One of the most prominent examples is how former South African President Jacob Zuma and his supporters worked with a UK-based public relations firm, Bell Pottinger, to

deflect attention from high-level corruption (Cave, 2017). They did so by painting themselves as the agents of "radical economic transformation," working to overturn the structures of economic apartheid. Meanwhile, those who criticized them were painted as agents of "white monopoly capital" and white western powers. In November 2016, a major report by South Africa's then public protector Thuli Madonsela, detailed how Bell Pottinger had mounted a "hateful and divisive campaign to divide South Africa along the lines of race," exploiting and inflaming painful racial tensions to protect corrupt politicians, businessmen, and corporations (Public Protector of South Africa, 2016). Notably, the politicians and businessmen involved in the Bell Pottinger scandal made much of their ill-gotten gains from corrupt coal contracts and their actions undermined climate action by advancing coal interests and undermining progress on renewable energy.

South Africa is not the only country where racial tensions and injustice have been problematically exploited to undermine climate action. For example, oil and gas companies, lobbyists, and public relations firms in the United States have increasingly been falsely exploiting racial injustice as a discourse of climate delay. Some of their tactics include: creating misleading and fake grassroots (also known as AstroTurf) groups claiming to fight for racial justice against clean energy; recruiting people of color as "influencers" to advance the message of oil and gas companies; spreading false information that racial justice groups are against clean energy when they are not; and promoting the dubious message that fossil fuels are good for communities of color and Indigenous peoples (Atkin, 2020; Lakhani, 2022; Roth, 2020). They have done so despite multiple studies confirming that communities of color and Indigenous peoples are disproportionately impacted by fossil fuel pollution, extraction, and related harms and violence, both domestically in the United States and internationally (cf. [Accountable.us](http://Accountable.us), 2022; Bullard, 1993).

These examples from South Africa and the United States show that misleading and false appeals to progressive values such as racial justice, social justice, and Indigenous rights are becoming key discourses of climate delay. They can be seen as part of a growing trend of fossil fuel companies using public relations campaigns to be seen as champions of progressive causes and to deflect criticism from the exploitative, repressive, and violent activities of the industry. As Klezsca (2021) points out, the rise in this strategy of fossil fuel companies trying to appear progressive is also likely due to the increased untenability of the outright denial of climate science. As Klezsca puts it, in addition to greenwashing, they are now "wokewashing." Such public relations attempts are arguably a form of what philosopher Olufemi Taiwo (2022) refers to as the elite capture of identity politics. Elite capture involves the powerful and wealthy appropriating progressive issues and identity politics in the service of their own interests, rather than in the service of the vulnerable people they claim to represent.<sup>2</sup> With these concepts and context in mind, we can now turn to the case study of Shell's attempts to explore for oil and gas off the Wild Coast of South Africa. The article shows how the defenders of Shell deploy a form of undermining demagoguery, falsely painting fossil fuel companies as bastions of progressive values.

### **3. Royal Dutch Shell: Anti-colonial liberator?**

In 2021, a major public outcry occurred in response to Shell's attempt to develop oil and gas in South Africa. Shell and partners planned to perform seismic surveys for oil and gas in the oceans off what is referred to as the Wild Coast in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, a relatively pristine and rural coastline made up predominately of local amaXhosa communities. Shell's plans were met with widespread resistance from people across South Africa and local communities, who took Shell to court to oppose their plans. In stark contrast to the resistance of communities, key South African politicians and government departments actively worked to

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<sup>2</sup> Elite capture is different from coopting movements. Coopting movements is the "the elite strategy of using apparently cooperative practices to absorb those who seek change – to make them work with elites without giving them any new advantages" (Holdo, 2019, p. 1). Elite capture, on the other hand, is where elites use and appropriate the language of movements to try and claim they are working to uphold their ideals, when in fact they are serving their own elite interests, often in opposition to the ideals they falsely claim to uphold.

promote Shell's interests. Most prominently among them was Gwede Mantashe, the National Chairperson of South Africa's ruling political party, the ANC, who also serves as Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy.

As Minister, Mantashe has become renowned for pushing forward the interests of fossil fuel corporations over communities. Surveys of mining-affected communities reveal widespread beliefs that his department works on behalf of corporations, not people (Amnesty International *et al.*, 2022). In his quest to promote Shell's oil and gas exploration, Mantashe invoked the language and histories of colonial resistance to try and justify greenlighting Shell's oil and gas agenda. Mantashe has even gone so far as to claim that those resisting Shell's oil and gas exploration are guilty of "colonialism and apartheid of a special type" (Sgqolana, 2021). Doing so seems to be an attempt to try paint the resistance to the project as being driven by both foreign, neocolonial, Western interests and white, middle-class South African environmentalists, who are trying to deprive black communities of the benefits of oil and gas. Such rhetoric is particularly effective in the South African context, which is replete with examples of racist fortress conservation and where white conservationists have a history of displacing black communities from land to create conservation areas used predominately or exclusively to the benefit of white communities and tourists (Counsell, 2022).<sup>3</sup> Thus, Mantashe's narrative taps into legitimate historical grievances around problematic white environmentalism, and falsely weaponizes those histories in support of Shell.

Mantashe has even gone so far as to claim that the Shell struggle parallels previous anti-colonial struggles. More specifically, he claimed that the Eastern Cape faces their second Nongqawuse moment (DeKlerk, 2021). For context, Nongqawuse was a Xhosa prophetess in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the anti-colonial war against the British, Nongqawuse had a vision that her people should kill their cattle and destroy their crops. By doing so, the ancestors would ensure they won the war and prospered. However, after hundreds of thousands of cattle were slaughtered, the result was not prosperity but rather a deep and devastating famine that severely weakened the amaXhosa—playing a major role in their later defeat to the British. According to Mantashe, we now face a second Nongqawuse moment, where it is those who resist oil and gas that are asking us to kill our proverbial cattle and crops. It is worth examining the players and interests involved in the Shell case to see why Mantashe's narrative is such a blatant and gross inversion of reality and a prime example of undermining demagoguery.

First, there is Shell, a multinational oil and gas corporation with a long history of violent and harmful colonial and neocolonial dispossession on the African continent and beyond. Shell (formerly known as Royal Dutch Shell) recently moved from its traditional headquarters in the Netherlands to the United Kingdom, largely because post-Brexit UK has a weaker regulatory environment (Davies & Makortoff, 2021). Shell also partnered with a local investor, Impact Oil & Gas, whose chairman is a white South African business tycoon, John Copelyn. He is an ex-member of parliament under the ANC (Carnie, 2021). Impact Oil and Gas, which is registered in the United Kingdom, has been granted the rights to vast tracts of ocean to explore for oil and gas off South Africa's coast. As pictured below (Figure 1), it is a completely male, almost entirely white-led organization. Meanwhile, those taking Shell and company to court are predominately Indigenous and black local communities, including Indigenous Xhosa communities and local fisherfolk, who are worried about the potentially devastating impacts of oil and gas and how it might lead to them losing their traditional and subsistence livelihoods.

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<sup>3</sup> The rhetoric is also effective given histories of movements being influenced by international non-government organizations who, as some theorists have warned, often work to purvey Western norms and ideologies (King, 2004). However, it perverts legitimate worries about this in service of rapacious Western oil and gas corporations.



Figure 1: Impact Oil & Gas's Board – picture created from a composition of images available on the Impact Oil & Gas [website](https://impactoilandgas.com/about/board-of-directors/)<sup>4</sup> on October 16, 2022

For the context of South African history, the Dutch and British were the two main colonizers of South Africa. As such, it could not be more of an echo of Apartheid and colonialism for local black communities to have their land and oceans threatened by resource extraction driven by Shell, a historically Dutch oil and gas corporation, and Impact Oil and Gas, a UK-based company headed by a white South African. Thus, Mantashe's claims that local communities resisting Shell are guilty of "colonialism and apartheid of a special type" is a staggering perversion of reality. It is perhaps harder to find a clearer example of undermining demagoguery, where a contribution to public discourse "is presented as an embodiment of a worthy political, economic, or rational ideal, but is in the service of a goal that tends to undermine that very ideal" (Stanley, 2015, p. 65). Mantashe's hypocrisy is particularly egregious because many resisting Shell are doing so as part of a generations-long Indigenous struggle to resist colonial extraction and violence. We could turn, for example, to the words of Sinegugu Zukulu from *Sustaining the Wild Coast*, the lead applicant in the case against Shell, who was born and raised in the Baleni Village on the Wild Coast. As Zukulu pointed out:

What Mantashe does not understand is what they stand for is the continuation of colonization. As what colonization stood for is how African resources are being extracted to benefit European superpowers. What they are doing now is absolutely nothing different. It is worse, because we are allowing it to happen again and degrading the very basis of livelihoods for our people.<sup>5</sup>

There is something tragically poetic about Mantashe invoking the history of Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing. According to University of Fort Hare historian Professor Jeff Peires' (1989) book on the subject, the great cattle killing was secretly engineered by the British, who influenced Nongqawuse as a way to weaken the then powerful amaXhosa people. It was part of a devious plan by Sir George Grey, who had previously devastated the Australian Indigenous population and was brought to South Africa to do the same. Now, in a seeming repeat of history, like Nongqawuse before him, Mantashe is selling an arguably false prophecy of oil and gas prosperity, claiming that he is fighting against "colonialism of a special kind." Meanwhile, he is working on behalf of neocolonial forces like Shell and Impact Oil and Gas. As I have argued

<sup>4</sup> <https://impactoilandgas.com/about/board-of-directors/>

<sup>5</sup> This quote is from a conversation that the author had with the applicant.

in response before, if this is the second coming of Nongqawuse, then it is Mantashe who is the modern-day Nongqawuse and who is guilty of "colonialism and apartheid of a special type" (Lenferna, 2022a). He is the one collaborating with neocolonial forces, asking communities to sacrifice their land and oceans under the false promise that they will see prosperity as a result.

#### 4. Selling snake oil to traditional leaders

In December 2021, Shell's permission to perform seismic surveying was temporarily revoked by a successful urgent interdict in the courts. The interdict was only temporary though, as the matter needed to be heard more fully in court. In preparation, Minister Mantashe's Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) went on a tour of the Eastern Cape, successfully securing support for seismic surveys from several traditional leaders, partly by selling them misinformation about the potential impacts of the seismic survey (Ellis & Hoseya, 2022).<sup>6</sup> The narrative that Shell's project is an example of neocolonialism might seem complicated by the fact that the local supporters of such extractive violence are traditional leaders and the once proud liberation movement the African National Congress. However, having a local black face to sell a western agenda is nothing new for South Africa. Indeed, a foundational element of colonialism was to empower pliant, corrupted, and unaccountable tribal leaders. In the words of 20<sup>th</sup> century southern African author Bessie Head, such tribal authority systems have "been highly praised by the colonialists as the only system that would keep the fearful, unwieldy, incomprehensible population of 'natives' in its place" (1968, p. 45).

To try and circumvent the will of communities, the ANC has reverted to strengthening rather than weakening one of the structures of apartheid. The ANC has been championing bills that strengthen such tribal authorities and weaken the need to consult with and get the consent of communities (Claassens, 2019). Activists and local communities have fought these bills, referring to them as the Bantustan Bills, in reference to how they would in effect work to bring back the Apartheid Bantustans for people living in rural South Africa. When confronted with resistance to Shell's plans, it was these tribal authorities that Minister Mantashe and the DMRE turned to in order to try and override the will of local communities. Fittingly, one of the lead applicants against Shell, the Amadiba Crisis Committee, has also been at the forefront of challenging such efforts to weaken community rights (UNEP, 2018). They have been challenging them in court and pushing instead for stronger community rights, embodied in the principle of Free Prior and Informed Consent. With this background, we can better understand the words of the Amadiba Crisis Committee (2021), who wrote the following in relation to a victory they had in their Shell case:

Mantashe's department is the doormat that the multinational corporations use when they clean off their boots before entering the country to continue their colonial looting. This is why Mantashe's losses in court are celebrated as victories for the people and for democracy.

It may seem perplexing that the ANC would make such a strong push to support multinationals like Shell. However, that can arguably be explained largely through a clear conflict of interest. Namely, that the ANC has significant investments in Shell through their investment arm the Batho Batho Trust, which is the single largest source of funds for the ANC. Rather than seeing this as a conflict of interest, Mantashe claims that the investment in Shell showcased the ANC's "foresight" (Evans, 2022). Such a conflict of interest is not new either, as Shell has a long history of working to curry favor with the ANC. For example, Shell donated their offices to the ANC in 1994, so these former ANC head offices were once called Shell House (the ANC is currently located elsewhere in Luthuli House). For many local activists, Shell is just one example of the ANC's "sell-out" from its history of being a socialist, anti-colonial movement to becoming a political party that is embedded with and in bed with rapacious neocolonial, capitalist forces (Bond, 2014).

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<sup>6</sup> One example from their discussions is that the Department's deputy director general told traditional leaders that there is [no blasting involved in seismic surveys](#). Seismic surveys, however, are precisely loud underwater blasts used to produce soundwaves to survey the ocean floor. That's why [scientists have been warning](#) against the harmful effects that surveys have on marine life.

It is perhaps fitting that Mantashe has led the charge to defend Shell, as he is in many ways the embodiment of this "selling out." He became part of post-Apartheid history by becoming the first trade unionist to be appointed to the board of Directors of a Johannesburg Stock Exchange-listed mining corporation, Samancor, in 1995 at the turn of Apartheid (Poplak & Neille, 2023). Mantashe, who has held several prominent leadership roles in both the ANC and the South African Communist Party, somehow managed to reconcile his communist political ideology with profiting from and leading a major capitalist corporation. Hypocritically, to deflect critical attention from the ANC "selling out" to a host of multinational corporations, Mantashe accused South Africa's civil society, media, and research institutions of being "foreign-funded forces" for critiquing him and the ANC or for providing evidence that doesn't suit their narrative (Lenferna, 2022b). Such hypocritical discourse is an exemplar of Mantashe's undermining demagoguery, claiming to uphold a communist ideal of fighting undue foreign influence, neocolonialism, and corporate capture, all the while advancing the agenda of foreign, neocolonial, and rapacious capitalist interests against the will of local communities.

In September 2022 though, Mantashe and the ANC's neocolonial attempt to bypass the will of communities by drawing on traditional leaders hit a major obstacle. Shell and company had their exploration rights off the Wild Coast revoked by South Africa's courts (Bega, 2022). Their loss was owing to several reasons: the exploration right was granted unlawfully since there was no meaningful consultation with affected communities; the DMRE failed to consider the potential harm to the fishers' livelihoods and the impact on their cultural and spiritual rights; the companies' consultation with kings, monarchs, and other traditional leaders was not enough and "finds no space in a constitutional democracy"; and the contribution of oil and gas exploration to climate change was not considered. Furthermore, the court case found that Mantashe's DMRE was so blatantly biased in favor of Shell that communities were not even expected to try and pursue normal procedures of appealing to them. As such, Mantashe and the ANC's heavily pro-oil and gas rhetoric came back to undermine their own agenda.

## 5. Resisting a neocolonial oil and gas onslaught

Fortunately, in the case of Shell, the courts could see through the undermining demagoguery of Mantashe, Shell, and the ANC (although the case was being appealed in the courts by Shell and partners at the time of writing). However, there are many more cases at play where this rhetoric continues. Indeed, the duplicitous invocation of anti-imperialism, decolonization, and racial justice as a narrative to justify pushing forward and protecting fossil fuel interests is becoming quite pervasive in South Africa, where there is an onslaught of new projects being proposed (Overy, 2022). To justify these oil and gas projects, leaders in the ANC also claim that vast amounts of gas is needed to support the renewable energy transition locally. However, a range of expert studies in South Africa show that developing significant new additional gas power is not needed for a stable electricity supply and would make electricity more expensive relative to a renewable energy dominated system—including a study by a business association lobby group that includes Shell (Carnie, 2022; Comrie, 2022).

The claim that oil and gas exploration is needed for domestic energy supplies and sovereignty is also challenged by the fact that much oil and gas exploration across Africa is not for domestic use. Rather it is destined for overseas markets like Europe, particularly in the wake of the gas supply crisis caused by the Ukraine-Russia war, which has seen a "dash for gas" across the continent (Daley, 2022). Additionally, most of the corporations driving such projects are not local companies aimed at economic development but rather multinational oil and gas corporations who typically offshore their products and their profits, while enriching a small handful of local elites. In the words of Zimbabwean energy and environmental justice activist Lorraine Chiponda, "If the dash for gas across Africa goes ahead, the continent will once again be subject to the unequal and unjust trade relations of the past, pulling wealth out of Africa and poisoning our land, water, and air" (Lidigu, 2022).

Increasingly, we see the argument being made that oil and gas is part of a just energy transition for countries in Africa and the Global South more broadly. Valid arguments that the Global South must be given the space to develop and that a climate debt is owed to them are being twisted so multinational oil and gas corporations can profiteer from extracting more resources and wealth. Echoing colonizers before them, the

neocolonial push for oil and gas extraction comes masked as being for the good of the people who are trying to resist it. To justify obscene profits—often for Western and foreign multinational corporations—the good of Africa and her people's "development" is the new justifying mission (Nemakonde, 2023). Yet, if you speak to many of those resisting such projects, they do so precisely to pursue a more just, equitable, and sustainable form of development and to protect their lives, livelihoods, and communities from being poisoned, polluted, and destroyed.<sup>7</sup> They also point to a growing body of evidence showing that a renewable energy future would better tackle poverty and development and provide energy access while not destroying their livelihoods (e.g. Curtin, 2021).

Indeed, the reality on the ground for those who have seen oil and gas extraction is often not one of meaningful development but instead is a legacy of pollution, poverty, violence, and inequality. To help understand the legacies of oil and gas exploration across the African continent, we can turn to renowned poet and activist Nnimmo Bassey from the oil-soaked Niger Delta in Nigeria. Decades of Shell's oil and gas exploitation have made the Niger Delta home to a devastating combination of poverty, violence, and inequality, layered upon deadly, toxic and polluted air, soil and water (Laville, 2023; Tran, 2022). We could also speak to award-winning activist Anabela Lemos from Mozambique, where French oil and gas multinational Total is pursuing oil and gas extraction. There, promises of oil and gas prosperity have fallen woefully short, with gas exploration entrenching poverty and inequality (Kirshner *et al.*, 2021). Total's oil and gas push has also helped sparked intense conflict, which has plunged the region into "total chaos" – to quote a security operative working in the area (Beaumont, 2021). Far from being isolated incidents, oil and gas companies have left behind similar legacies across the continent. In the words of Bassey and Lemos (2022), writing together in *Foreign Affairs*:

Far from generating prosperity and stability in sub-Saharan Africa, investments in fossil fuels cause real harm. Decades of fossil fuel development have failed to deliver energy to much of the continent and have built economic models dependent on extraction that have deepened inequality, caused environmental damage, stoked corruption, and encouraged political repression. Pouring more money into fossil fuels will not only perpetuate this dynamic but also delay the necessary shift to renewables.

## 6. Conclusion: Strategies to counter oil and gas propaganda

As oil and gas corporations attempt to ramp up their extractive activities, it is vital that activists, scholars, and communities are equipped to grapple with the new forms of propaganda that are being deployed to justify such activities. Using the case study of Shell in South Africa, this article has elucidated an emerging discourse of climate delay, namely, false appeals to anti-racism, decolonization, and anti-imperialism. These false appeals often amount to a form of undermining demagoguery, which is "a contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of a worthy political, economic, or rational ideal, but is in the service of a goal that tends to undermine that very ideal" (Stanley, 2015, p. 65). In order to counteract such propaganda, multiple strategies will need to be used, and here I recommend a few.

One strategy is to pre-emptively warn the public about misinformation, which recent literature shows can help build resistance and "inoculate" against forms of propaganda such as climate denial (Lamb *et al.*, 2020). A second strategy is for climate justice movements and researchers to more genuinely center anti-racism, decolonialization, and anti-imperialism in their work, messaging, and solutions, so as to more easily defuse such propaganda. On the movement front, initiatives like the Red Deal in the United States are a powerful example of such an approach (The Red Nation, 2021). On the research front, an example comes from the Transgressive Learning School, which "works on reframing dominant narratives in education and learning

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<sup>7</sup> This comes from interviews and discussions that the researcher has had with several of the activists and community members involved in the struggle against Shell.



spaces [and embracing] a commitment to the commons and the common good, to decolonisation, the good life, ecological economics, real sustainability and [environmental and social justice]" (Temper *et al.*, 2019).<sup>8</sup>

A third strategy revolves around the fact that the Global North's failure both to act sufficiently on climate change domestically and deliver on climate finance and reparations internationally justifiably feeds into a sense that it is unfair to expect the Global South to act on climate change. So, action by the Global North to truly deliver on climate justice would greatly assist with counteracting the effectiveness of such propaganda. A useful recognition in this regard, however, is that many of the elites and corporations holding back climate action in the Global North also benefit from, are the same as, and/or work together with those trying to push a neocolonial extractive project in the Global South. As such, a fourth strategy is toward increased internationalism and solidarity in climate justice efforts. Such international solidarity can strengthen resistance to multinational corporations, as was well demonstrated in the case of global resistance to the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (Engelfried, 2022).

Another strategy, from my own activism experience in a role as general secretary of the South African Climate Justice Coalition, is to use satire. Satire has proven to be a powerful and effective tool in exposing the hypocrisy and falsity of undermining demagoguery. Satirical videos and articles that the coalition have worked for critiquing the undermining demagoguery explored in this article, have won a South African Film and Television Award, invoked threats of lawsuits from Mantashe and his office, and have been discussed by the Office of the Presidency of South Africa (Lenferna, 2023; Politically Aweh, 2021). This demonstrates the power of satire to subvert, ridicule, and expose undermining demagoguery and the potential to proactively use the oil and gas industry's own PR against it. In the words of political commentator Molly Ivins, "*Satire is traditionally the weapon of the powerless against the powerful.*"

Oil and gas corporations, however, are some of the world's most powerful and wealthy corporations, with vast resources to propagate polluting propaganda. As such, activists, communities, and scholars will need to be versatile, alert, and strategic in their efforts to resist the onslaught of neocolonial oil and gas extractivism and disingenuous discourses of climate delay. It is my hope that this article has contributed to those efforts, but the task ahead is no easy one and forms part of a difficult multi-generational struggle with many activists facing threats, intimidation, and violence for their efforts. Recognizing this, it seems appropriate to end with the words of the assassinated anti-colonial revolutionary, Amílcar Cabral: "Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories..."

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<sup>8</sup> A reviewer of this article recommended the Transgressive Learning School quite strongly. More information about them is available on their website: <https://transgressivelearning.org/>

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