

Emira Woods: So I just say, Yes! Yes! Amen! to everything [Michael Klare] says right, but I guess my lens fits in really well, because you know I am from Liberia, so I tend to focus a lot on U. S.-Africa policy, and for me that is often the part that's sort of pushed to the margins, left out, not underscored enough. So my job is to do that underscoring with us here today. And I guess I want to start back where Joe's frame starts, with World War I, because I think it is critical for us to understand that, you know, Michael called it material asset. Many of us just call it greed, economic power, greed. But it is that greed, that economic power, that actually pushed, and pushes still today, military power.

And so when you think about the expression, one of the most dramatic expressions in history of economic power -- we can talk about slavery (we could totally talk about that) -- but from a global perspective many of us think about the Berlin Conference, when Europe literally carved up Africa and had this massive scramble for Africa's resources. It happened in 1888, prior to the First World War, but it brought was dramatic economic wealth to the European Powers which created the means through which an industrial base actually produced the weapons of the war. So the resources coming from Africa actually increased. The statistic is dramatic when you actually look at it. Between 1880 and 1913, military spending in Europe increased by fifty percent. So the resources coming from Africa created the weapons from the industrial base, and also created the economic base to fuel the war. And I think often that is ignored when we think about World War I. We think about nine million people killed, and we should think about nine million people killed, and what implications that had for the rest of the world, but we far too often ignore the critical role that Africa played then, and plays now.

And so that is why I am here. That is why I took the train from D. C. Because I think that for all of us, as activists, demanding a better world, we got to stop pushing a critical part of our human family to the margins. And I feel like that's our critique for us as a movement and us as a people.

So you know the time moves quickly, so I wanted to talk about, you could talk about between the wars and all that, but the current imperial project, and its consequences and implications. The current imperial project, I still see as the U.S. wanting to maintain empire at all cost. And clearly I agree wholeheartedly with Michael: it's all about the geopolitical struggle, but at the heart remains today control and access to natural resources. And I think Michael is spot on to say it's oil. It is also gas, particularly liquified natural gas. It is increasingly mining. Whether it is uranium, which is key for Europe. You know France with seventy-five percent of its energy coming from the nuclear industry, uranium the core source of that. All of these resources are increasingly be found where?

Audience: In Africa.

Emira: In Africa. Right. In Africa. It is important for us to underscore this point, and the other resource -- Michael also touched on that, and I just want to spotlight it more -- is land.

I think it is important for us to underscore: it is oil, liquified natural gas, it is mining, particularly uranium, but is is also platinum, gold, diamonds, coal tag (without which we cannot make our iPhone, iPads and all those) that are increasingly being sourced from Africa. As of 2008, about twenty-five percent of the oil coming to the U.S. came from Africa. Twenty-five percent right. And what we see is that there is increased, heightened interest in

Africa's geo-political, geo-strategic significance, not just for the U.S. and China, but for many countries around the world, because of these vital resources without which the global economy could not function.

So, I think it is important for us as we think about particularly U.S. policy -- I know a lot of people in this room are thinking a lot about U.S. policy. The current imperial project is pushing forward even greater attention on Africa. I think it is also important for us to recognize that the remaining arable land on this planet -- sixty percent is the number that the World Bank tosses out -- sixty percent of the remaining arable land on this planet is in Africa. So there is a scramble, not just for oil gas and mining resources, but now increasingly for land, and people are being steadily tossed of their ancestral lands, and are becoming really economic migrants in places around the world. We can talk about that as well, but the core issue here is U.S. policy is creating an environment where this resource extraction happens unimpeded – with U.S. companies, using U.S. taxpayer dollars, increasingly expanding their wealth, expanding their greed.

So the Occupy Movement had this wonderful phrase, "We are the 99%! We are the 99%!" That 1% are increasing their wealth, increasing their power, particularly over core foreign policy decision making, and we the 99% have to begin to recognize our power, to seize our power. So that, essentially, is why I'm here to encourage us to seize our power and to link up with movements that are demanding a different way.

I think it is important to bring this home, because right now we have Senator Kerry in Africa. We have a big push -- have you all heard about this (I know Mark Harrison has) -- Power Africa, Electrify Africa. So essentially, what the Administration, as well as Congress, are focused on is: in order to engage with Africa, to help Africa – the language is still sort of benevolent, just as it was during the slave trade, very benevolent – it is to help Africa. To bring lights. Who doesn't want to bring lights? You know, for schools. It sounds wonderful, but the reality is, when you take off the mask, it is advancing the current imperial project of access control over particularly these resources.

And so Power Africa, Electrify Africa is actually a guise through which big oil companies are accessing oil and liquefied natural gas from Africa. So the places where the interest is heightened is places like Nigeria, where oil has been flowing since 1956, like Angola where oil has been flowing for the last decade. But it is increasingly places like Liberia where I am from, where Chevron just moved in just about a year ago, ExxonMobil just in the last couple of months. These places where there is new exploration, because -- as Michael's book so beautifully explains -- there is new technology in the oil sector through they've been able to access oil from even deeper below the sea.

So in the case of Ghana, where oil discoveries have happened in the last six years, the oil was discovered five thousand feet below the sea in these Jubilee Fields. Five-thousand. So, do you remember the BP disaster here in the U.S., it happened at three-thousand feet below sea, but increasingly, on the Africa side, it is at deeper levels. And can you imagine, in Ghana -- beautiful, off the coast of the Atlantic -- it is seven miles off-shore part of where these oil discoveries are. Seven miles off-shore. If there is any kind of disaster, which many of us think is inevitable, the repercussions, not only for the environment, but for the economy, and for the people, will be disastrous from that moment and for decades to come.

So we are here to say no to the current imperial project. To say it's not about bringing power to Africa, but bringing greater power and control to Big Oil, the very folk in the 1% who have too much power already ... I feel like Michael has said everything, you know he said it all already -- particularly in an environment of climate change where we see Africa is at an epicenter of the climate catastrophe, where we see already -- I know folks in this room lived all the horrors of Sandy -- you don't need to be told about the coming dangers, you didn't need to read the U.N. Climate Report. You've experienced it already. On the other side of the Atlantic, similar reality. People are experiencing it now.

So the rising sea-levels are very evident; particularly all along the coast. Where, because of the colonial experience, all the capital cities are all along the coast, and you already see dramatic increases in the rising sea-levels, which are already having an impact on peoples' ability to survive today. So, particularly in an area with climate change happening at such a steady pace, we've got to raise our voices to demand a different way.

And I guess I'm here because I am absolutely excited about particularly the movements for change that are happening now. The movements for change that are demanding that we look at and tackle issues: these fundamental issues of inequality, fundamental issues of how our economies are structured. Understanding that unless you protect the workers, unless you protect those upon whose land these resources lie, unless you look at the sustainability of the very planet that we live in, we are all doomed.

So there are these movements for change ... and we still have to hold up the Occupy Movement, and all that it brings right. (How many Occupiers are in the room? Alright!) You know, all that it has brought in terms of visioning a better world, in terms of demanding new ways of organizing ourselves, of organizing our movements, of organizing our communities, of talking with each other, of bringing in voices of those who have been excluded for far too long. It is the inspiration of young people that I think has ignited change in places throughout this world.

And I guess there has been a lot of attention placed on Tunisia, but I'm here to say, there were in the past three years twenty-two African countries with similar uprisings. Unfortunately, they all didn't have the leaders leave. Sometimes the road is long, and it's not linear, but what has happened is it's been young people taking the lead. It's been trade unions finding their voice, at long last in some instances. It's been some opposition leaders finding new strategies to organize, and it's been women -- hello! -- it's been women. We hold up half the sky, but far too long we've been excluded from decision making. And what you see in these uprisings is this incredible power. "Power to the people," there is so many ways in which the musicians say it best. But it is that power to vision a better world, and to take the steps to make that happen.

And so, I think, it is young people, particularly those steeped in activism, steeped in art and culture. So one of the examples ... we don't have lot time to talk about it, because these things are flying at me quickly ... but one of the examples I hold up is a movement in Senegal led by young hip hop artists that demanded democracy, demanded that the voice of people be heard. So a hip hop artist leads a movement that essentially demanded a change in the government, and we could go into each of these examples, but I think the extraordinary thing, at a time when we are talking about the complacency of young people is to say no. No, we need to shed light on what is happening.

I think it is critical to give voice, to give a platform to those who are demanding change, and making it happen in places around the world. I applaud, for example, Desmond D'Sa, who won the Goldman Prize this week. A South African environmentalist fighting Big Coal. Drawing the linkages between Big Coal in South Africa, and the fact that the same South African company has now drawn ties with Big Coal in America, and is involved in fracking and extraction in African-American communities in Louisiana. So I was stunned that Goldman would give a prize to an organizer like that. Connecting the dots, focusing on the power of people to bring change.

So my to-do list is a long one I know. Maybe we can talk about it more in the Q & A, but I think it is important, particularly of this group, to understand that you have the power, and I think raising our voices at all levels: city council, particularly in New York where there are some progressives on the move with a new mayor and all of that. We were wishing for the same in D.C., but not quite there yet. We'll keep trying. But it is raising our voices at all levels that is critical at this moment in time, and I think that it is absolutely possible. So the city council, your members of Congress, as well as the Administration at the White House sees your power. Continue.

I know some of us have been at this for long time, but continue to dig deeper to find the energy, to find the strength to keep pushing our vision of a better world. It is, I think, what is necessary not only really to save our movements, but to save our planet, and it is critical now. Some of the issues that I think particularly here at this moment it is important to pay attention to: arms control treaty. I know many in this room are already working on it, but many saw the arms control treaty as one way to stem the flood of weapons into particularly resource-rich areas which are where the conflicts are happening, and to stop the U.S. arms manufacturers and the ammunitions manufacturers from peddling their deadly weapons throughout the world. And the U.S. must sign [the treaty], and it will take people in this room pushing to make that happen.

There is a particular ask I have for people in New York state, and that is around this question of drones. We don't have time to talk about the drones now, but is a critical element of the expansion of the U.S. empire, particularly in the African context. And so organizing that is already being done in Syracuse, New York, showing that people are paying attention, needs to be ramped up, needs to be amplified. Stop the spread of drone technology and all that is happening. Connect the dots to, not only the expansion of drones in Africa, the expansion of drones here in the U.S. as well, and continue to raise our voices there. Michael already talked about the issues on the environment, I don't have time, but I guess I just want to thank you on a beautiful spring day for taking the time to be here, and for including all of us. I feel truly, truly honored to have been here. And I look forward to the dialogue, and to finishing the rest of what I had hoped to say. Thank you all.