

Mobilising civil society: can the climate movement achieve transformational social change?

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Abstract

Recognising how close humankind is to precipitating dangerous climate change, activists are seeking strategies to achieve transformational social change. But are they there yet? This article asks: what are the most important steps that grassroots climate activist groups would need to take to achieve that goal? The article's initial focus is on the global fossil fuel divestment movement, a leader in contemporary grassroots activism. It argues that the movement will only realise its potential when it engages in broader networks and alliances, overcomes the psychological 'hard wiring' that makes people resistant to climate change bad news, and engages in 'big organising'. However, the movement's greatest contribution will be as part of broader 'webs of influence' involving multiple actors and agendas and a diversity of strategies and mechanisms. It argues that these can play important roles in steering events on the global stage. It concludes that while states and international agreements will be crucial to achieving a low carbon future, bottom up approaches driven by advocacy organisations and their allies and wider networks and webs of influence are also important, not least in stimulating changes in beliefs and norms, and through this, in influencing behavioural change.

Keywords: governance, divestment, climate change, activism, networks, social movement.

1. Introduction

Climate change is of such a scale and complexity as to defy simple or single solutions, therefore action on many fronts is necessary to address it. The Paris Climate Agreement is a considerable advance but its reliance on voluntary mechanisms suggests the need to look beyond government action alone for effective action (Christoff, 2016). Multiple initiatives involving multiple climate actors at multiple levels will be necessary if climate change is to be contained, including a transformational grassroots movement capable of raising public consciousness, nurturing a new norm and through this, political pressure for a rapid transition to a low carbon economy.

This recognition prompted Bill McKibben and others, at the urging of mainstream environment NGOs, to launch the global fossil fuel divestment

movement, comprising 350.org (hereafter 350¹) and subsequently, other activist groups. This movement is principally based on an ethical argument: 'If it's wrong to wreck the climate, then surely it's wrong to profit from that wreckage' and, for that reason, institutional investors should divest their fossil fuel assets.

While the movement's ostensible target is institutional investors who it pressures to divest, its real target is the fossil fuel industry, which it identifies as the villain of the piece. Its aim is to remove the industry's social license to operate, threaten its reputational capital and turn it into a pariah. Doing so is intended to raise public awareness of a climate change crisis and of the role of fossil fuel extracting companies in precipitating it, and to nurture a new social norm: go fossil free.

The movement has a clear and credible theory of change (governments will only take decisive action where a groundswell of public opinion compels them to do so): a clear target (the fossil fuel industry); and an established set of actions (divest) which are aligned around shared values (it's wrong to profit from climate change). This is in marked contrast to the experience of the 'Arab Spring' and 'Occupy' movement where mass demonstrations energised followers and gained substantial attention but were not underpinned by any coherent ongoing strategy and were ultimately unsuccessful.

The divestment movement has made impressive progress during the first five years of its evolution, having persuaded 688 institutions and 58,399 individuals across 76 countries to commit to divesting from fossil fuel companies. The value of assets represented by these institutions and individuals is conservatively estimated at US \$5trillion, up from \$3.4 trillion the previous year (Arabella Advisors, 2016). However, it is not yet, and would not claim to be, either alone or with its allies, a transformational social movement².

In previous articles, the writer examined the divestment movement's evolution, aims, and strategies thorough the lens of the social and environmental movements literature. That analysis showed how the movement has developed an organisational vehicle facilitating effective mobilisation and grassroots activism, exploited political opportunities, engaged in innovative and sometimes disruptive forms of protest and used cognitive framing and symbolic politics to gain media interest and persuade the public of the importance and legitimacy of its claims (Gunningham 2017a, b). The relative instrumental, structural, and discursive power of the movement and its adversaries was also examined, showing how, notwithstanding the fossil fuel industry's deeply embedded

¹ The number 350 was chosen because 350 parts per million is, according to some scientists, the maximum acceptable concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, beyond which 'dangerous' climate change becomes increasingly likely.

² 'Transformational social change' in this article is not used as a term of art but simply implies far reaching change, as in a transition from a carbon based to a low or zero carbon economy. A transformational social movement in turn is 'a group of people with a common interest who band together to pursue a far-reaching transformation of society. Their power lies in popular mobilisation to influence the holders of political and economic power'. (O'Brien et al., 2000, p. 12).

structural and instrumental power, the movement has managed to shift the contest onto a terrain where it holds a comparative advantage.

These arguments will not be rehearsed here. Instead this article asks: what are the most important steps that would need to be taken to achieve transformational change: by 350, by the wider climate change movement of which it forms a part and by a web of other climate actors? The article's initial focus will be on 350 because it is at the leading edge of transnational *grassroots* activism, and indeed was established largely because an effective grassroots movement did not exist (in contrast to policy oriented, lobbying, knowledge disseminating, green consumerist and partnership based NGOs) (Beinecke, 2015)³. However, since its ultimate success will depend largely upon its interactions with other actors, not just within the climate movement but also more broadly, these webs of influence are also explored.

One important assumption in the following analysis should be emphasised, namely that addressing climate change is feasible within the political and economic structures of capitalism. As such, it does not engage with anti-capitalist 'system change not climate change' approaches⁴, not because such approaches should not be taken seriously (even where one disagrees with them) but because doing so would require an extended and entirely different analysis which is not practicable within the confines of a single article.

Following this introduction Part 2 examines the limitations of the divestment movement in its present form and what further actions and what broader alliances and networks it, and the the climate movement more broadly, would need to participate in if it is to catalyse a rapid transition from a fossil-fuel based to a low-carbon economy. Part 3 takes this theme further, arguing that the movement is best understood as part of a broader web of influence and that the interactions within this web will be crucial in generating the momentum necessary to precipitate far reaching change. Part 4 concludes.

Recognizing that activist networks are best studied through their campaigns and impact, a case study approach was adopted, the principal methodology being qualitative field-based research, which was undertaken in Australia, the UK and the USA, the three countries in which the movement has been most active. Specifically, 38 semi-structured interviews were conducted in accordance with generally accepted principles (Minichiello, Aroni and Hayes, 2008) with a sample of stakeholders including activists, campaign managers and influential figures within the movement, investment fund managers (particularly those vulnerable to public pressure), banks and industry consultants. Participant observation of campaign events such as national days of action, strategy meetings and local activist events complemented the interview data. Other

³ This is not to detract from the considerable achievements of transnational and largely grassroots NGOs such as Greenpeace and FOE but such organisations have broader agendas and at least at the time of writing, have a less active presence and less impact than the Divestment Movement within the sphere of climate activism.

⁴ I am indebted to an anonymous referee for this point.

documentation and data within the public domain were used to corroborate, illustrate and/or challenge participants' statements in interviews and to verify factual details and statements of intended aims and aspirations. Finally, the social movement literature was reviewed. While not all the issues raised in the previous paragraph can be fully addressed by a case study of a single social movement, this article does provide some provisional answers to a number of key strategic questions.

2. Towards transformation

2.1 Divestment's limited reach

We live in an age of networked governance, and a characteristic of recent successful social movements has been their capacity, facilitated by modern communication technologies, to develop such networks, encompassing not just their traditional allies but also other groups with whom they might make common cause (Castells, 2000). While the divestment movement has worked closely with like-minded organisations through vehicles such as the Climate Action Network (internationally), the Fossil Fuel Divestment Student Network (in the USA), the Stop Adani campaign (in Australia) and Fossil Free UK (in tandem with partners People and Planet and Operation Noah), it has largely failed to exploit the benefits of broader engagement. with 'a politically, economically and socially diverse range of stakeholders' that include 'a wider range of stakeholders, each with different aims but all with resources - such as expertise, knowledge, access, support or legitimacy - with which to bargain' (Bomberg 2012, 418 and 419) .

Indeed, when compared to a typical network combining 'the voluntary energy and legitimacy of the civil society sector with the financial muscle and interest of business and the enforcement and the rule-making power and coordination and capacity-building skills of states and international organizations' (Reinicke and Deng, 2000, 24), the divestment movement's alliances appear one-dimensional. For the most part, they have been concerned with coordinating campaigns with other like-minded activist groups rather than with creating 'a synergy between different competencies and sources of knowledge' (Dedeurwaedere 2005, 2) as more developed networks do. For example, there is little evidence of "mobilization networks' comprised of a diverse range of actors who share resources and bargain as they seek consensus on how best to 'steer' society towards a low carbon future" and each of whom has distinctive resources, specialisation and expertise which it brings to the table (Bomberg, 2012, 424).

Yet notwithstanding these limitations, the divestment movement has been the most prominent attempt to date to build a grassroots global climate movement, to the point where it is 'arguably the most effective and well organised enemy of fossil fuel in the world' (Stevens, 2016) and 'the fastest growing [such] movement in history' (Vaughn, 2014). Previous grassroots movements have sprung up at local level, but never managed to extend their reach or their

alliances, others have withered as many did following the Global Financial Crisis, or were 'subsumed in a wider push against corporate power' (Rosewarne, Goodman and Pearse, 2013, 11). Exceptionally, Greenpeace has maintained a genuine grassroots presence over many years, and Friends of the Earth (the core node in the anti-fracking movement in Europe) also has a grassroots component albeit in tandem with a heavy lobbying presence in the halls of power, but neither has focused its attention mainly or exclusively on climate change.

There remains however, considerable scope for the divestment movement to achieve far more than it has so far done. For example, as a leader of the Serbian Otpor movement once pointed out: 'if we want to win, we need to step out of the university bubble and work with ordinary people' who are not already connected with the movement's networks (Engler and Engler, 2016, 69). This insight is every bit as relevant to the climate movement as it is to other campaigns and indeed this is increasingly recognised in the United States, where 350 is beginning to develop 'transition alliances' with diverse social actors which are serious about addressing climate change (Boeve, 2015). However, this is far less the case in the UK and Australia. For example, in the UK, one 350 campaigner, acknowledging the limited networks that had been developed beyond 'the usual suspects' pointed particularly to lack of engagement with financial institutions as an example: 'we don't have contacts with financial markets, apart from two small ethical investment managers. That's about it'. Similarly, in Australia, another campaigner, echoing the comments of others, reported that 'one of my chief frustrations is our inability to overcome the hurdle of engaging broad audiences'.

While a failure to network more broadly, is a critique that is particularly apposite in the case of the divestment movement, it also applies, at least in some jurisdictions, to many other climate NGOs. Certainly some of these, in contrast to 350, are involved in lobbying and other forms of engagement with mainstream politics and politicians. Some too have begun reaching out to indigenous and health groups amongst others. But for the most part, outside of the USA, these initiatives are still relatively limited, an impression that was confirmed by one consultant with extensive experience of working with climate NGOs internationally: 'I don't see a commitment to inter-sectional organising. Australia is ten to fifteen years behind North America'. To a lesser extent, the same criticism can be made of UK climate NGOs although at one time the Stop Climate Chaos coalition might have been an exception.

Recognising the limitations of the current modus operandi of 350 and its like-minded allies, particularly in Australia and the UK, raises the question: what could be done differently and what might it take for the climate movement to realise its transformative potential? This question will be addressed in three parts: (i) recognising the critique above, by exploring the need to build broader alliances and how this might best be achieved (section 2.2); (ii) through harnessing various opportunities such as exploiting the vulnerabilities of opponents, digital amplification and various scaling up techniques (section 2.3);

and (iii) building and taking advantage of webs of influence to maximise effectiveness (section 3).

2.2 Building broader alliances

As this section will argue, there are multiple means of extending the climate movement's networks and establishing mutually beneficial relationships with other climate actors. The latter include other civil society organisations, the politically disengaged, the political right, the state, international organisations and business dominated epistemic communities.

Understandably, building broader alliances, particularly with unlikely bedfellows, can be challenging. For example, finding common cause with trade unions can be problematic, particularly where some members are employed in fossil fuel related industries. Here the climate movement's increasing emphasis on a *just* transition to a low carbon economy, and a clear articulation as to how displaced workers would be treated, and new jobs in renewables created, will be crucial. A focus on communities that will be impacted by the closure of fossil fuel facilities and on mitigation and compensation funds in tandem with a new 'green industrial policy' will be crucial. The latter might arguably be on the model of the German *Energiewende* (Healy and Barry, 2017) and form part of a broader roadmap of a socially and economically just transition. This however, is a long way from current thinking within parts of the movement. As one activist acknowledged: 'we have difficulty forming relationships with unions, I think largely because the movement too easily slips into stereotypes ... there are elements of the climate movement that make it difficult to support a great deal of the work being done in the union movement'. Nevertheless, in the US at least, climate NGOs, including 350, are increasingly emphasising that environmentalism is good for the economy and that addressing climate change provides considerable job-creation opportunities and genuine 'blue-green' alliances are being established.

Developing relationships with some on the right of politics also becomes important given the desirability of developing as broad a coalition as possible, but has been largely neglected to date. Doing so will require identifying areas where conservative principles are consistent with environmental protection or tacitly agreeing to disagree about many things (including even the very existence of climate change), while working together where common ground can be found. Home solar panel systems for example, may be supported by some on the right because their purchase is consistent with the free market, consumer choice, and national security. As one Green Tea Party member put it: 'Rooftop solar makes it harder for terrorists to render a devastating blow to our power grid. There's nothing more centralized in our nation' (Kormann, 2015).

While developing broader alliances across the ideological divide will not be easy, and risks blunting the movement's radical edge, it should not be forgotten that addressing climate change is not inherently inconsistent with right-of-centre

values: Margaret Thatcher recognised that climate change was important and needed to be addressed and American conservatives such as William F Buckley and Barry Goldwater were also strong advocates for action to protect the environment (Farber, 2017). Having said this, in the USA it has become an article of faith for Republicans to deny the importance and often the existence of climate change, suggesting the need for a substantial reframing (a new technological revolution, green jobs, climate change as a threat to our values and lifestyle etc) to better engage with the right and to transcend political tribalism (Marshall, 2014). Indeed, insofar as the polarisation of right and left can be overcome and useful advocacy coalitions developed, it is likely to be through a reframing of the climate issue. Such a reframing would involve multiple narratives, one or more of which would engage particular sectors of the population, and mindful that, as in a war, people who disagree on many things may still unite in fighting a common threat. And wherever such broader connections can be made it will be fundamentally important to 'actively hire new people from the under-represented group who can work through *their* networks. Then enable them to develop communications that speak to others like themselves using their own values' (Marshall, 2015, emphasis added). The broader lesson is that it is vital to enlist trusted messengers and to work with local partners who are credible figures within their own communities, whether these be Republicans, indigenous leaders, influential religious figures or trade union officials.

Allies might also be sought in other unconventional places. For example the political, military and humanitarian risks of climate change are becoming increasingly apparent, suggesting opportunities to make common cause with such unlikely bedfellows as the security forces and the military and more comfortable ones with aid agencies and charities like Oxfam. Other connections are already being made, as with a coalition of 30 Australian health and medical groups which launched a world-first National Climate and Health Strategy framework in 2017, or the incorporation within the Stop Adani campaign, discussed below, of some indigenous groups. Similarly, Paul Gilding has suggested the potential for alliances 'between those concerned about economic and political stability, those who are inspired by the technology and business opportunities and those concerned about climate change' (Gilding, 2011, 6). Currently, USA 350.org Executive Director May Boeve and her colleagues have gone much further than their counterparts in the UK or Australia, taking the view that climate change connects *every* issue and emphasizing the importance of identifying how those connections might be developed (Alter, 2015). Developing such alliances however, is very much a work in progress.

A closely related need is to find ways of engaging with those who feel left behind by globalisation, including many of those who voted for Trump and Brexit and the growing number of those who have lost faith in the major political parties. This will not be easy. Hochschild, for example describes how in southwestern Louisiana, one of the most polluted environments in America, voters are strongly opposed to environmental regulation and climate change denial is

deeply embedded (Hochschild, 2016). Such analyses provide a rich understanding of the beliefs of such communities but offer far less as to ways in which those beliefs might be successfully challenged, while others writing on this topic tend to approach it with bemusement tinged with despair (Bageant, 2007). Yet the formation of the Green Tea Party, mentioned above, and of such offshoots as Floridians for Solar Choice, an ‘inchoate alliance of libertarians, Christian Coalition conservatives, liberal environmentalists, and eighty-five Tea Party groups’ suggests that understanding the motivations of those who feel disenfranchised and engaging with at least some components of this amorphous group, might pay dividends. The movement itself must take some responsibility for not reaching out to those who are attracted to populism. One activist for example suggested that the movement suffers from: “a form of intellectual elitism that claims a debatable acceptance of minorities at the expense of inclusion of others – particularly the working class”.

So too and in contrast to the political right, the climate movement has not fully come to terms with the fact that ‘close [election] campaigns are decided by the least informed, least engaged voters. These voters do not go looking for political news and information’. This necessitates ‘brutally simple communication with clear choices that hit the voter, whether they like it or not’ (attributed to an advisor of former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper quoted in Mogus, 2015). The implication is that climate activists need to focus more on engaging with community based media, regional and local newspapers and bloggers (Mogus, 2015). They also have to identify a framing that connects effectively with such a disengaged section of the public and continue repeating it through multiple avenues and in multiple ways in the hope of ‘sending a breakthrough signal in a tuned-out world’ (Mogus, 2015).

Equally important will be gaining ‘the support of state actors to endorse their norms and make norm socialization part of their agenda’ (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, 900). This is also something the divestment movement has not so far done, and indeed scepticism about the possibilities of constructive engagement with the major political parties has often resulted in their being consciously by-passed. Certainly, the movement’s model of change assumes that ultimately, once a sufficient proportion of the public is persuaded of the need for far-reaching climate action governments will follow, but its failure to engage with the latter directly and in the short term, may prove to be a misjudgment, at least on the evidence of social movement theorists such as Finnemore and Sikkink (1998). Having said this, some other climate NGOs *have* directly engaged with the political process and particularly with progressive forces within mainstream politics. Friends of the Earth’s attempt to pressure the UK Government to pass the Climate Change Bill is one well known example (Nulman, 3, 24, 143). The importance of such initiatives is also emphasized by those who point out that the most powerful impact on public perceptions of climate change in the United States is the stance taken by a polarized political elite (in the US, Democratic Congressional action statements and Republican roll-call votes (McDonald, 2009, 52).

The divestment movement, in particular, has also made few efforts to connect with potentially sympathetic International Organisations (IOs). According to one 350 campaign manager: 'as a campaign tactic we don't lobby international organisations ...but we sometimes conduct forums they might come to.' Nevertheless, 350 has received endorsement from the high echelons of a number of such organisations. These include the World Bank, the United Nations Environment Program and the International Energy Agency. Such approval has served to increase the movement's legitimacy and authority and to underpin the credibility of its message as well as providing leverage and resources not otherwise available (reference removed). Greater contact with such organisations would nevertheless be beneficial, as for example in ensuring that the movement and these organisations were 'singing from the same song sheet'. Networking might also reveal untapped opportunities for such organizations to act as 'orchestrators' by, for example, 'building private capacities... convening, facilitating and participating in collaborative arrangements; [or] providing material and ideational support'. (Abbott, 2011, 2). While 350 may not consider such networking the best use of scarce resources, some other NGOs have expended much more energy on such networking but in doing so are not infrequently captured by the UNFCCC process (Rosewarne, Goodman and Pearse, 2013, 14).

Also crucial to the climate movement's future progress will be the extent to which it is able to engage with business-dominated epistemic communities (Braithwaite and Drahos, 2000), and in particular with institutional investors. The latter can play a pivotal role in providing capital to finance the transition to a low-carbon economy, driven by the necessity to protect client assets from global climate risks. Specifically, over the next 15 years, an estimated \$90 trillion will be needed to facilitate low-carbon infrastructure investment, much of which only the financial sector can provide. Engaging with institutional investors on the issue of how this massive redirection of capital flows might best proceed, could give the climate movement a constructive influence in shaping the future in ways it has barely begun to contemplate. What further role, for example, might the movement play in facilitating a shift in risk perceptions such that asset owners and managers become more willing to invest in low carbon technologies? What would it take to persuade a wide range of financial institutions and asset classes to manage climate risks across the financial system as a matter of enlightened self-interest? How might the movement shame the recalcitrant who resist the pressure to embrace sustainable investment?

Moreover, the 'quiet revolution' (UNEP Finance Initiative 2017) in the perceptions and behavior of institutional investors that is in its early stages, gives the climate movement a rare opportunity to exploit divisions among institutional investors, and to engage in a 'divide and conquer' strategy that can, according to Braithwaite and Drahos's (2000) exhaustive study of global business regulation, be a particularly effective means for the weak to overcome the strong. Such action might involve: raising awareness about the need for such a revolution (for example drawing attention to how climate change threatens

water and food production supply-chains); lobbying governments and regulators to support it by means such as mandating disclosure of climate risks; threatening the social license of banks that persist in lending to fossil fuel projects; providing reputation rewards to those who embrace sustainable investments; and otherwise raising the consciousness of financial markets about the financial risks of fossil fuel investment. While the movement recognizes that 'it's best we stay behind the curtain [and] to have a public separation of advocates and private industry', its broader efforts to warn of the risks of 'stranded assets' might nevertheless be important in accelerating change at a time when there are the early signs of a 'deep shift' across the finance sector (UNEP Finance Initiative 2017).

2.3 Harnessing opportunities

While the climate movement must grapple with many obstacles, recognising and coming to terms with them also presents windows of opportunity. The latter include crafting climate change messages to be consistent with what we know about human psychology, exploiting the vulnerabilities of opponents, using social media to harness digital amplification, and using big data, directed action campaigns and other techniques to facilitate scaling up.

As psychologists point out, humans have perceptual, cognitive and affective information processing limitations that are 'hard-wired' and these make the threats of climate change difficult to appreciate and contribute to climate change denialism (Marshall, 2014; Markowitz and Shariff, 2015). Yet recognising these limitations opens up new strategies for change. For example, "human decision-makers, including policymakers, do not necessarily or even predominantly think, decide and act like *Homo economicus*" and so "we need to consider and use the full range of human motivations and goals and the full range of decision processes available to *Homo sapiens* as we consider action and behaviour change in the context of climate change" (Weber 2015, 563, 577). Connecting climate change to human health, mindful of Maslow's hierarchy (as a number of climate NGOs are now doing), may be one particularly fruitful strategy, given that in the US coal is responsible for an estimated 13,000 premature deaths each year and 800,000 globally (Endcoal). So also may drawing attention to coal being the largest source of man-made pollution worldwide, given that the public's aversion to pollution, in the US at least, is currently much greater than its concern about climate change (Ansolabehere and Konisky, 2014, 13-15, 171-175). Psychology further suggests that the burdens on future generations rather than the benefits of avoiding climate change should be emphasized and that appeals should be made to 'hope, pride and gratitude rather than guilt, shame and anxiety' (Markowitz and Shariff, 2012, 245). Finally, a framing that is couched in terms of there being a 'climate emergency' of such a magnitude that the public must be led into 'emergency mode' or put on a 'war footing' might more effectively penetrate public disengagement

(Salamon, 2016) particularly if it is coupled with a focus on the positive consequences of change (Weber, 2015, 577).

The ability to seize moments of opportunity and exploit the weaknesses of opponents also appears to be fundamentally important. For example, Gandhi understood that a vulnerability of British Rule was that it was built upon Indian complicity (Brown, 2011, 63) while the civil rights movement saw opportunity in the reliable violence of the police and others, images of which were broadcast internationally (McAdam, 2011, 75-76). But violence by agents of the State is unlikely to be prompted by the divestment movement, nor is the non-violence of 350 and its allies likely play out in the shadow of threatened violence by other sympathisers, a juxtaposition which arguably advanced the American civil rights movement (Nimtz, 2016). On the other hand, the divestment movement, like Gandhi, is adept at 'creating and manipulating images of moral resistance' and is well versed in political theatre (Brown, 2011, 59). Finally, 'successful movements depend critically on the capacity of insurgents to recognize and exploit the opportunities afforded them by environmental change processes' (McAdam, 2011, 70). This too is well recognized by the divestment movement, as its response to the proposed development of a mega-coalmine by the Indian company, Adani, described in section 3 below, amply illustrates. On the other hand, both corporations and governments are immeasurably more adept at playing their own media games than they were two or three decades ago.

As multiple civil society organisations have found, harnessing the social media and information technology has also become central to effective social action. Successful social movements are adept at using social networks to facilitate remote organising and the establishment of self-starting groups (Castells, 2012). For example, focusing promotion efforts on Facebook (and Facebook communities) in conjunction with videos that can be readily uploaded to that platform demonstrably facilitates digital amplification. Indeed, as Mogus has argued, the 'best way to grow momentum and influence is to piggy back on a sound digital strategy on top of solid real world organizing' (Mogus, 2015), combining off-line community organising with digital innovation (see generally Wolfson, 2014). For example, Jacobs (2016, 319) describes how online campaigning organisation, Avaaz, built support by 'deploying an imaginative combination of online petitions and email campaigns, with street protests and paid for advertisements in newspapers ... Avaaz acquired new supporters at a rate of a million a month. Entirely self-financed from small donations, it had reached 42 million global supporters by the time of the Paris conference'. Again, 350.org has been no slouch at harnessing social media but this is a rapidly evolving game in which no player can afford to lag (on which see the 'Bernie dialer' below). In short, the internet and social media provide considerable opportunities to disseminate information, raise funding, recruit volunteers, build a base of volunteers and donors and disseminate a message.

A final, and related key to success is scaling up, a technique exemplified in the Bernie Sanders Presidential Primaries campaign. Drawing from their experience on that campaign, Bond and Exley advocate a form of 'big organizing' that

leverages new, social technology 'to talk to everybody and allow thousands to scale up into leadership roles' (2016, 6) through directed action campaigns. While such campaigns have a centralised plan which incorporates agreed actions, performance targets and milestones, they distribute the work of achieving them to volunteers using such techniques as 'barnstorming' (using campaign rallies as a technology to bring people together to form volunteer-driven work teams). Barnstorms are designed to be replicable so that they can also be run by volunteers who have been recruited and trained by the organisers but who in turn can recruit and train others (and so on) so that the movement scales up rapidly. Those who sign up at barnstorms either volunteer to participate in phone banks that call voters across the country or agree to host such phone banks in their neighbourhood, recognising that 'the gold standard in any campaign for changing hearts and minds is a personal conversation between a volunteer and a voter at the door or on the phone' (Bond and Exley, 2016, 185).

A further breakthrough was the 'Bernie Dialer', a technology that enabled phone bank volunteers to engage in many phone conversations with voters per hour, rather than just a few, as had been the case when much time was wasted waiting on unanswered calls. In this, as in the campaign's other successful experiments, the key was to 'put consumer software, connected by custom coding, at the center of our distributed campaigning efforts.' (Bond and Exley, 2016, 169). 350.org has also been a pioneer in 'directed-network campaigning' but the experience of the Sanders campaign suggests a variety of ways in which that approach might be further refined. For example, Australian activist group GetUp has adopted phone campaigning and further refined the technology both to increase the number of meaningful phone calls to be made as well as allow phone campaigning to be conducted by people from their homes. GetUp! then passed on this technology to progressive activists in UK to use in the 2017 UK election.

One theme implicit in the analysis above, is that the climate war is one that must be fought on many different fronts, harnessing the combined efforts of many different protagonists. The divestment movement, for example, notwithstanding its considerable early successes, has no pretensions to attacking climate change either alone or on a single front. Divestment will be simply one strategy amongst many and 350 will be one activist organisation amongst others, albeit that it may well play a leading role in a broader Climate Convergence. What is needed, is 'coordinated action and collaboration across fronts of struggle and national borders to harness the transformative power we already possess as a thousand separate movements' (Global Climate Convergence 2017). Even this however, will not be enough. As described above, the climate movement must extend its reach beyond existing networks between activist groups and embrace new networks wherever common cause can be found, seeking to build a 'winning coalition of believers whose conceptions of socially desirable activity set the terms for subsequent moral debate' (Suchman,

1995, 592). To do so effectively will require an understanding of the role of webs of influence and how they might best be harnessed to the climate change cause.

3. Webs of influence

While the forces arrayed against the divestment movement have enormous material and structural power, while people are psychologically 'hard-wired' to reject climate change bad news and while there is considerable political and economic resistance to taking action on the scale that it needed, it is far from inevitable that a transformational movement built around climate change will fail. Braithwaite and Drahos's definitive empirical project on global business regulation (2000) shows how 'webs of influence' involving multiple actors with multiple agendas relying on a diversity of strategies and mechanisms, can in combination play important roles in steering events on the global stage. Webs of dialogue, for example, are available to the weak as well as to the strong and can variously induce cooperation, communicate informal praise and blame, build capacity, develop normative commitments and create spaces for complex interdependency (Braithwaite and Drahos, 2000, 553).

Crucially, on their evidence, *even weak strands in webs of influence often become strong by being tied to other weak strands*. For example, non-state actors committed to climate change action that might connect in this manner include: an investor coalition engaging with major extractives and utilities companies ('Aiming for A'); NGOs introducing climate change resolutions at the Annual General Meetings of companies with major carbon footprints (ClientEarth and ShareAction); others acting as 'conceptive ideologists' introducing the language of financial markets - stranded assets and carbon bubbles - into climate change debates (Carbon Tracker); the compilation of a comprehensive collection of self-reported environmental data on the carbon emissions of major corporations. (the CDP); the mobilisation of a critical mass of institutional investors committed to decarbonising their portfolios (Portfolio Decarbonization Coalition); and a network of large pension fund and asset managers who take a pro-active approach to managing risks and opportunities related to climate change (Institutional Investors Group on Climate Change). Sometimes too, allies emerge within state and international organisations: the United Nations Environment Program, the World Bank and the International Energy Agency are amongst those who have spoken out in favour of divestment. Meanwhile, The Guardian newspaper, under the umbrella of its 'Keep it In the Ground' campaign, and in partnership with 350, has also done much to draw attention to the climate crisis. And although the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation resisted 350's demands to divest, it has subsequently contributed \$2 billion to breakthrough renewable energy projects.

While few of the above actors have significant institutional power they may yet prove capable of enrolling 'more and more actors of increasingly greater clout to a project of network confrontation with the strong' (Braithwaite, 2004, 330). This is precisely what happened when NGO Carbon Tracker's analysis of the

vulnerability of financial markets to ‘stranded assets’ and a ‘carbon bubble’ was taken up by the Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney. He used the authority of his office not only to warn of the dangers that climate change raises for financial markets but to trigger a G20 Financial Stability Board investigation on the need for greater climate risk disclosure (Carney, 2016).

Similarly, the warnings about the potentially calamitous nature of climate change for investors and financial markets, issued by many of the actors identified in the previous paragraph, are increasingly resonating with parts of the investment industry. HSBC and Citibank, international consultants Mercer and McKinsey and the world’s largest asset management fund Blackrock, are amongst those who are now warning their clients of the pressing need to take climate risk seriously (Knight, 2016; Mercer, 2015). Given that ‘organizations share information, pool resources, and influence one another to adopt similar forms of collective action and collective action frames’ (Hadden, 2015, 10) once leaders take on an issue, fast followers and ultimately the rump of institutional investors, may follow. And where the pressure on their corporate targets comes simultaneously from a plethora of constituencies, rather than from a single interest group then it is much more likely to succeed, and even more so if it becomes possible to divide business in the manner suggested earlier.

Braithwaite and Drahos (2000) also provide evidence that ‘when NGOs can enroll a credible web of controls through learning how to pull the right strands of that web at the right moment, they can trigger global change – and have done so’ (Braithwaite & Drahos 2000, 612). Their chances of success will be much improved if they can capture the imagination of the public in powerful states, particularly if they are skilled in enrolling the mass media and choosing the ‘right moment’ to act. Activist movements are becoming increasingly opportunistic in identifying and exploiting such moments and in seeking to ‘consciously generate whirlwinds to take advantage of outside trigger events when they occur, and to sustain periods of peak activity’ (Engler and Engler, 2016, 261). One such moment is manifesting in Australia at the time of writing, as the federal government proposes to provide a loan of Aus\$1billion to Indian company Adani, to build one of the world’s biggest coal mines. The Stop Adani Alliance of NGOs is currently engaged high profile campaign on multiple fronts to stop the mine going ahead (Stop Adani).

The relationships between the various strands of the web are many and various. They include loose alliances with other activist organisations and occasionally with other civil society groups, which serve to amplify its impact. They do so variously by enrolling others with similar aspirations or values, swelling the numbers at particular actions (in itself an indicator of impact) and by increasing the legitimacy of the movement through its association with other, perhaps more respected, civil society groups, including mainstream and more conservative environmental organisations. Sometimes, network participants enhance each other’s agency by providing mutual reputation benefits (as in alliances between NGOs which draw from different legitimacy communities). Gaining and maintaining legitimacy, particularly moral legitimacy, is

particularly important because it is legitimacy that converts power into authority and thus enables organisations to become effective agents of change.

Sometimes, different climate NGOs play different but complementary roles. For example, Carbon Tracker made a considerable contribution as a conceptive ideologist though its conceptualization of climate change as precipitating 'stranded assets' and 'carbon bubbles', but, it was getting only limited traction until 350.org effectively translated and communicated its message to a broader audience. Unfortunately harnessing such complementarities is still a work in progress. Nevertheless, such alliances can increasingly be identified, as for example, with the Lock the Gate alliance in Australia, which has brought together farmers, landholders, indigenous groups (traditional Owners) and others who oppose coal mining and fracking in their locality, with 350, Greenpeace and others environmental groups with wider concerns. Through such alliances it may be possible to combine the informational capability, technical expertise and broader networking capability of national and international NGOs with the "local knowledge ...denser, local-scale networks, and powerful symbolic resources (eg locally resonant stories, images and messengers) that global climate change campaigns often lack". (Green, 2018, in-press)

Also important to the movement's impact are *elite allies* in the form of supportive IOs and key individuals within them, who have respectively, institutional and expert authority. The support of IOs is also strategically important since such organisations have the capacity to engage in 'an active process of international socialization intended to induce norm breakers to become norm followers' (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, 902), something which Finnemore and Sikkink argue is crucial to achieving broad norm acceptance. The relationship between the divestment movement and sympathetic IOs might also be thought of as one of mutual reinforcement. On the one hand, endorsement of divestment or recognition of the risk of stranded assets by IOs or influential figures within them, provides legitimacy to the divestment movement.

Over time, the divestment movement may also find ways to harness financial institutions as gatekeepers. After all, capital markets in developed nations have already devised a set of institutions and actors to help provide investors with the timely, accurate, information they need to make informed investment decisions. Auditors, credit rating agencies and financial analysts might end up playing a similar role in relation to divestment. Ultimately too, mainstream economic constituencies might also be brought into coalitions for decarbonisation (Meckling, Kelsey, Biber and Zysman, 2015). Although many of these business organisations may not share the climate movement's broader goals, they may find common cause in advancing at least some aspects of the low-carbon transition.

To summarise, developing a transformational social movement around climate change action will require a multifaceted approach. Of particular importance

will be building broader alliances on both sides of politics, enrolling state allies, linking with IOs, exploiting windows of opportunity and other external events and so on. Many of those activities need to be taken concurrently, and as rapidly as possible. Others however, are likely to be sequential. For example, an aggressive moral entrepreneur such as the divestment movement must advocate for norm change and garner broad based support to achieve it, but may only gain the traction necessary for co-ordinated international action when international organisations ‘act as conduits for the codification, monitoring and enforcement of policies based on those norms’ (Reich, 2010, 49)

The hope, to return to Finnemore and Sikkink’s classic account of transnational activist networks, is that the advocacy of norm entrepreneurs such as the divestment movement will be enough to mobilise multiple others, until a critical mass of actors embraces the emerging norm (the imperative to decarbonise) and a ‘tipping point’ is reached. That tipping point may well arrive when a sufficient number of institutional investors realise that maintaining investments in fossil fuel assets can only result in financial (and ecological) disaster, and embrace the transition to a low carbon future. At that point, driven by escalating civil society action, pressure from investors and a shift in public opinion, a number of important states, particularly those in advanced western democracies and (for very different reasons, China) are likely to begin in earnest to decarbonise their economies. A ‘cascade’ of states adopting the new norm is anticipated at this point, perhaps prompted by the threat of carbon tariffs. Subsequently, going ‘fossil-free’ becomes the new norm internationally, being further embedded as more states embrace it.

4. Conclusion

Keohane, Haas and Levy (1993, 14) concluded in their study, *Institutions of the Earth*, that ‘if there is one key variable accounting for policy change, it is the degree of domestic environmentalist pressure in major industrialised democracies, not the decision-making rules of the relevant international institution’. That pressure comes substantially from advocacy networks such as the divestment movement and its allies who when they succeed, ‘are among the most important sources of new ideas, norms and identities in the international system’ (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, x).

While only states can impose a price on carbon, only states can turn around the massive hidden subsidies on fossil fuels that hold back renewables, and only states can change intellectual property rights to stimulate new low-carbon or zero carbon technologies; bottom up approaches driven by advocacy organisations and their allies and wider networks are also important, not least in stimulating changes in beliefs and norms, and through this, in influencing behavioural change: ‘As ever throughout history, economic and social change will come from below, from a coalition of social movements and enlightened businesses, campaigners and visionaries’ (Jacobs, 2016, 322). Accordingly,

bottom up norm development driven by civil society may well be the foundation on which effective state action must be built.

Overall, the messy reality is that climate policy and governance is not only a process involving states and international agreements but also one involving civil society and the corporate sector. And it is not only an instrumental process of coercing changes in behaviour and in the exercise of material power, but an expressive and symbolic one of nurturing a new norm and institutionalizing a new set of moral principles. However, whether moral entrepreneurs such as the divestment movement, in tandem with a cluster of other climate agents, will realise their transformational potential and succeed in precipitating a 'norm cascade' and whether this, in conjunction with the higher level of international commitment evidenced by the Paris Agreement, will be enough to avert the cataclysm of dangerous climate change, remains an open question.

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