

Insurgent Ecologies – Extremism and Climate Breakdown in Europe (programme)

Basic information

Date and time: Friday 8 September 2023, 10:00am – 5:30pm

Venue: Humanities Lab, Bushuis/Oost-Indisch Huis, Amsterdam and online via Zoom

Workshop coordinators:

- Dr Heather Alberro – Lecturer in global sustainable development, Nottingham Trent University (heather.alberro@ntu.ac.uk)
- Dr Andrew Telford - Assistant Professor in European Studies, University of Amsterdam (a.j.telford@uva.nl)

Event rationale and key questions

Socio-ecologically turbulent times are conducive to polarisation and radical responses. Worsening socioeconomic downturn, cultural antagonisms and climate-related insecurities have seen the rise of the populist far-right parties and far-right extremism across the Europe and elsewhere (Georgiadou *et al.* 2018; Schaller & Carius 2019). Worryingly, ecofascistic ideologies attributing blame for contemporary ecological decline to perceived population pressures by racialised ‘others’ seem to be undergoing a resurgence. The attacks in Christchurch and El Paso are but two notable examples of the deadly consequences resulting from the intersection of nationalistic fervour, white supremacy, and concerns over dwindling resources. Similarly, a growing number of far-right parties across Europe such as the former leader of France’s far-right political party National Rally Marine Le Pen are eschewing their former climate denialism in favour of a mode of ‘green patriotism’ that combines nationalist rhetoric with support for environmental conservation (Schaller & Carius 2019).

By stark contrast, in response to climate and biodiversity breakdown, radical environmental activists (REAs), along with many of today’s emergent youth environmental movements such as Fridays for Future, seek to address the *root* causes - ontological, ethical, structural - of socio-ecological decline (Alberro 2021). However, in response to environmental movements and particularly REAs’ direct-action tactics such as road blockades and the occupation of mining sites, many have labelled them as “extremists” and even “eco-terrorists” (Pośluszna, 2015). Environmental protectors around the world are increasingly under threat from state counter-terrorism measures, from new anti-terrorism legislation in the Philippines targeting climate protestors to the UK Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill which has introduced newly draconian measures seeking to criminalise nonviolent protest (Gayle 2022).

Together with the concepts of ‘eco-terrorism’, ‘environmental terrorism’ and ‘climate terrorist’ (Kohler *et al.* 2019), ‘extremism’ and ‘extremist’ have become salient political devices and discursive labels in climate change politics. In this interdisciplinary workshop, we would thus like to shed further critical light on the following:

- During desperate times when urgent and fundamental societal transformations are of the essence, what constitutes an extremist act or response?
- How is the label of ‘extremist’ conceptualized, applied, contested, reconfigured and deployed by different actors across the political spectrum in Europe in response to climate breakdown?
- How might hyper-nationalistic and racialised anti-migrant sentiments shift or intensify in the face of mounting climatic perturbations?
- What does increasing state repression of climate activism bode for activism and urgent responses to this crisis?

Programme

10:00: Welcome – Introductions by Heather & Andrew

10:10 – 11:40- Panel 1: Resurgent Eco-fascism and far-right ecologies

- Balša Lubarda – Damar Institute: *““Far-Right Ecologism and the (uneasy) climate acceptance: the problem of goalposts”* (online)
- Graham Macklin – University of Oslo, Norway: *“Nature is Fascism” – environmental collapse and the extreme right”*
- Ashton Kingdon – University of Southampton, United Kingdom: *“From Dark Forests to Lands of Ice: The Memeification of Eco Fascism, Fossil Fascism and Climate Determinism”* (online)
- Sonja Pietiläinen – University of Oulu, Finland: *“Natural’ (b)orders? Ecological nativism and racism in Finland’s radical right politics”*

11:40 – 12:00pm - Break: Tea/coffee

12:00pm – 1:30pm - Panel 2: Perspectives on social movements and climate activism

- Carolina Valladares Pasquel – CEDLA, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands: *“Social mobilization to leave fossil fuels underground. South and North perspectives”*
- Andrew Silke – Cranfield University, United Kingdom: *“Slipping towards the Precipice? Exploring the potential for climate protest radicalisation into extremism and terrorism”* (online)
- Harriët Bergman – University of Antwerp, Belgium: *“Violence in climate activism: We are nature defending itself”*

1:30pm – 2:30pm - Lunch: On campus

2:30pm – 4:00pm - Panel 3: Criminalising dissent: (Radical) environmental activism and state violence

- Andrea Brock – University of Sussex, United Kingdom: *“Eco-terrorism, ‘violence’, and counterinsurgency in defence of infrastructural colonisation – managing ecological resistance from above”*
- University Rebellion – Amsterdam, The Netherlands: *“We tried talking but the batons didn't reply”*
- Moira Birss – Independent researcher and consultant: *“The “crime” of land defense: the criminalization of environmental and human rights activism in the Americas”* (online)

4:00pm – 4:15pm – Coffee/tea break

4:15pm – 5:15pm - Keynote roundtable – ‘Resisting climate and ecological breakdown- where to?’

- Dana R. Fisher – American University (Online) – Keynote intervention: *“How Do We Save Ourselves: Giving Power back to the People to Shift from Climate Shocks to Climate Action”*
- Zuza Nazaruk – Environmental journalist
- Gina Peltier – Honour the Earth (Online)

5:15 – 5:30 – Closing remarks – Heather and Andrew

7.30 – Dinner: Indrapura Indonesian Restaurant