

The Far Right and the Environment: Politics, Discourse and Communication

The Far Right and the Environment: Politics, Discourse and Communication. Edited by Bernhard Forchtner. Routledge, London, 2020. 334 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-47789-6, £120.00 (hardback), £34.99 (paperback and e-book).

Public perceptions often link the environment, and environmentalism, with left wing and liberal causes – people think of Greta Thunberg, of Greenpeace and Green political parties. However, the environment has played a key part in right wing, and beyond that far right, messaging. Nationalism, for example, has a very strong sense of connection between a people and the physical environment – with concepts of a mother or fatherland and slogans like the Nazi ‘Blood and Soil’ (see Uekoetter 2006) which has now been adopted by the ‘alt-right’. As the environment takes an ever increasing role in our public political discourses then it raises important questions about how these far-right understandings develop, how they are presented and how they react.

Consisting of 17 essays, and broken into 4 discreet sections, *The Far Right and the Environment* seeks to explore the different and myriad ways in which a broadly defined far-right has engaged with and used the environment within their rhetoric. This is primarily broken down by geographical region, though the European focus of the work is shown with 3 of the 4 substantial sections focusing on the continent, with the rest of the world – specifically America – in the fourth. Though some may wish for a greater geographical range, the tighter focus on Europe does allow for a more cohesive examination of the subject with comparisons between the groups studied in chapters made easier.

In the introduction, editor Bernhard Forchtner lays out the analytical underpinning of the book, and the definitions used to understand both the Far Right and what is spoken about in terms of the Environment. In choosing to use broad definitions of the far right this does mean that the range of groups does vary between specific parties who are committed to, and at times were successful, in electoral politics through to broad groups. This means the groups under study within the book varies from groups on the more traditional end of the radical right such as Farage-era UKIP through to extreme right parties and movements like the German NDP or the ‘alt-right’. While at times the differing nature of these groups can act as a barrier to deeper understandings through a more comparative approach to the chapters, it equally recognises the diverse and groupuscular nature (see Griffin 2003) of the far right. By not restraining itself to a tighter focus on one particular part of the wider far right phenomenon it allows for a broader understanding of the differing ways in which the environment and environmentalism is used.

An important contribution is made in the first section of the book, with chapters from Ruth Wodak and Anders Hansen. These chapters anchor the work, with Wodak’s work providing an exploration of the particular version of populism we see on the far right, and which is explored in the other chapters. Familiar to readers of New Consensus understandings of fascism as a particular type of populism distinct from the general use of the word and a source of their self-perceived authority, this understanding has the far right envisioning themselves as the true voice of the people in opposition to a corrupt or uncaring establishment – presenting the far right as an authentic voice to be trusted, taking on the authority of the people. The chapter by Wodak is especially welcome for its look back into the past few decades to explore where these particular populist ideas and movements

have come from, providing a temporal context to the contemporary movements the other sections explore.

Hansen's chapter conversely explores the field of environmental communication research. This is a valuable chapter for those who come from a more historical or other research background, providing not just an overview of the key contributors within the relevant parts of Discourse Analysis but a really deep exploration of the specific methodological approaches used throughout the book. Many questions that arose in reading of later chapters were answered by returning to these two opening chapters. Alongside the introduction, this chapter also helps break down the complexities within representations of environment, pulling the reader away from simply considering traditional environmentalism or climate change, and considering how those wider themes of the environment and natural space are used by the far right.

The geographically focused chapters begin with an exploration of the BNP and UKIP use of the environment within their politics by Emily Turner-Graham. As well as starting anglosphere readers off with a perhaps more accessible angle, this chapter is especially interesting both for its wide ranging exploration of the deep connection of the environment to national, and nationalist, identity in Britain and for its focus on how historic roots have drawn forward into the contemporary far right. Though this exploration leaves less room for the unpacking of the contemporary positions, it does highlight how important those different national contexts are for driving far right rhetoric. This continues throughout many of the chapters that follow, so while the table of contents may appear to be focused on the contemporary there is a very satisfying exploration of the historic developments that led to the current movements and their rhetoric.

Western Europe's section is completed by studies of France's Front National by Salomi Boukala and Eirini Tountasaki and an examination of the broad far right in Italy by Giorgia Bulli. This is followed by the Nordic Countries, with Christoffer Kølvrå tackling the Danish far right and Niko Hatakka and Matti Välimäki looking at the Finns Party. There is also a detailed examination of the interactions between climate change denial and the far right within the Swedish context by Martin Hultman, Anna Björk and Tanya Viinikka. The section on Central Europe takes in a number of interesting cases studies examining Austria with Kristian Voss, the Hungarian Jobbik party by Anna Kyriazi, the Czech far right by Zbyněk Tarant, the German far right by Bernhard Forchtner and Özgür Özvatan, and finally the Polish case study with Samuel Bennett and Cezary Kwiatkowski.

In the fifth section we move beyond Europe and to America. The first chapter in this section, by Jonas Kaiser, looks at the transnational linkages between German climate sceptics and the right wing in America. Though these transnational links have been explored variously in other chapters, this chapter focuses on how transnational networks – especially ones on the internet – are important, alongside the national contexts highlighted in earlier chapters, to understanding how these environment-linked discourses develop. Drawing on network analysis, it raises some fascinating questions and makes for a solid introduction to exploring the environmental discourse of US far right cultures. This section is completed by Blair Taylor's examination of the 'alt-right', Kyle Bogg's

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exploration of the 'alt-right' and patriot movements, and completing with a summative chapter from Bernhard Forchtner as editor.

This volume comes at a timely moment - not only is climate change and rhetoric around our environment increasingly entering mainstream debate, but it is also an increasingly polarising matter. Equally, this volume comes at a very timely moment after recent successes by broader populist forces since 2016, and some of the loudest of these such as Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro have used very prominent anti-environmentalist rhetoric that emphasises domination of the environment. This volume is then invaluable in emphasising the more nuanced and complicated relationship across the broader phenomenon of populism across into the far right, challenging some of the preconceived notions that many will have. With a heavy focus on Europe in this volume, it would perhaps have been welcome to see more of the international context, especially the broader American right given its identification within chapters as a key exporter of these right wing environment narratives, or even to push beyond Europe and North America.

Ultimately, *The Far Right and the Environment* takes a broad understanding of far right as well as a wide consideration of the environment and applies these in great detail into specific case studies primarily across Europe but also in the American context. For anyone with an interest in far-right movements and how they communicate their ideas this book is a most welcome contribution.

References:

Uekoetter, Frank. 2006. *The Green and the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Griffin, Roger. 2003. "From Slime Mould to Rhizome: An Introduction to the Groupuscular Right." *Patterns of Prejudice* 37(1): 27-50.