

PLENARY

ENVIRONMENT PANEL

THURSDAY, 15 APRIL 2021
13:15 -14:15

ECOLOGICAL CRISIS AND COLLECTIVE IMPASSE

Alice Mah, University of Warwick

We live in an era of intensifying ecological crisis, on a scale of existential threat to life on the planet—smothered and poisoned by toxic waste, on the brink of climate catastrophe.

Crisis has become the norm, overlapping across social, ecological, and economic spheres. Yet despite increasing public attention to crisis there is also fatigue, fanned by the relentless news cycle, not to mention the pandemic. Scientists warn that alarmist accounts about the climate emergency have not been stark enough, and that there will be dire consequences for life on the planet even with substantial international efforts to reduce emissions. Nothing short of unprecedented collective action on multiple scales is required to mitigate the worst effects of the unfolding disaster, which will disproportionately impact marginalized and vulnerable communities. This begs the question: amidst polarized worldviews, crisis fatigue, powerful corporate incumbents, and systemic inequalities and injustices, what kind of planetary collective action is possible? How can we heal these social and ecological chasms, to do the necessary collective work to mend the future of our communities and our planet? As sociologists, we need to wake up and recognize the existential urgency of the ecological crisis, sharpening our criticisms of corporate power and analyses of social inequalities, and advancing alternative visions that offer more than just a sliver of optimism.

Biography: Alice Mah is Professor of Sociology at the University of Warwick. She is the author of *Toxic Truths: Environmental Justice and Citizen Science in a Post-Truth Age* (with Thom Davies, 2020), *Port Cities and Global Legacies* (2014), and *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place* (2012). Her latest book, *Plastic Unlimited: How Corporations are Fuelling the Ecological Crisis and What We Can Do About It*, will be published with Polity Press.



COLLECTIVELY REORGANISING SOCIETIES IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE BREAKDOWN

LEON SEALEY-HUGGINS, UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Prominent responses to climate breakdown have neglected to address the underlying forms of social organisation patterning its root causes. Here I suggest we must be alert to the legacies of racial capitalism in (mis)shaping these responses, and look to more collective post-capitalist futures, if we can ever hope to survive the unfolding hellscape.

Biography: My work centres on the social and political relations of climate breakdown, with a focus on the Caribbean region. In my research I consider the sociology and politics of the climate crisis, investigating what climate justice means in the context of global historical, and present, inequalities. I am particularly keen to bring a sociological lens to bear upon what are often very unsociological, and depoliticised, discussions of climate breakdown.



‘CLIMATE CRIMES, DIVISIONS AND FUTURES’

Nigel South, University of Essex

Climate threats arise from ecocidal and criminal behaviours that we can identify and should be responding to; climate inequalities are becoming more evident around the world; and the versatility of capitalism has seen the marketisation of ‘escape routes’ from the constraints of climate crises, which will now be invigorated by the fear of future threats from eco-viruses. As examples of this trend, Long and Rice (2020) suggest ‘climate urbanism facilitates projects that protect some urban populations while simultaneously increasing the vulnerability of others’, Simpson et al (2019) have described the off-grid responses to coping with water shortage crises as ‘climate gating’, and elsewhere I have discussed the ideas of ‘arcologies’ and ‘bunkerisation’. This presentation considers these trends in relation to the global shock of Covid and the still imminent impact of climate change – a future in which sociological analysis of social, cultural and economic divisions will be needed more than ever.

Nigel South is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Centre for Criminology, University of Essex, UK. Since the late 1990s he has been involved in developing a ‘green perspective’ in criminology and is co-editor of *The Routledge Handbook of Green Criminology* (2nd edition, 2020). With co-authors and co-editors, recent books include *Water, Crime and Security in the Twenty-First Century: Too dirty, too little, too much*, Palgrave,

2018; *Environmental Crime in Latin America: The theft of nature and the poisoning of the land*, Palgrave, 2017; and *Introducción a la Criminología Verde: Conceptos para la Comprensión de los Conflictos Socioambientales*, Editorial Temis S.A., 2017.

