



UNIL | Université de Lausanne

# CALL FOR PAPERS

## Civil Society and the Law: Civil Disobedience, Protests and the (Re)writing of Environmental Politics

**An Interdisciplinary Conference**  
**Lausanne, 28-9 May 2020**

The last decade has witnessed a rise in the individual and collective actions related to environmentalism, including climate change marches, anti-speciesism demonstrations, combatting the use of pesticides such as Glyphosate, destroying GMO cultures, and resorting to jurisdictions to enforce environmental norms. Actions have multiplied both at the institutional level and at the margins of legality, through occupation and other acts of civil disobedience. These various movements appear to be animated by a common cause, namely the urgency of a mobilization borne by citizens to palliate governmental inaction with regard to environmental issues. Political unrest comprises a wide range of citizen movements which contribute, through marches, protests and other forms of non-violent action, to introducing new ideas and pointing out innovative directions to tackle environmental issues.

These movements form a valuable object of research, for they constitute the mirror of a plural and robust civil society that seeks to redefine itself as an actor of change. Through the variety of their repertoire and domains of actions, these movements testify to the creativity and inventiveness as the “weapons of the weak,”<sup>1</sup> recalling other great historical labor and rights struggles. Notably, Naomi Klein has suggested that the climate crisis requires a movement as militant and widespread as the struggle for abolition (of slavery) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This comparison recalls the issue at the heart of the abolition struggle: the discrepancy between positive law and what activists saw as higher laws. Is there a similar narrative underwriting the current environmental movements?

Bearing in mind the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach, we would like to propose a conference built around the various research angles studying these movements of popular mobilization, and in particular the representations and discourses on which they draw, and the narratives around which their protests and activism revolve. We would also like to examine how these movements are currently being portrayed and represented by the media, by politicians, artists and other cultural agents.

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<sup>1</sup> Scott, James C. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale U Press, 1985

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Keynote speakers: Agnès Michelot, Université de La Rochelle ; Graeme Hayes, Aston University

Agnès Michelot is a Senior Lecture (Maître de Conférence) in public law at the Université de la Rochelle. She specializes in issues of climate justice as developed by the French Social and Economic Council and the European Social and Economic Council (EESC).

Graeme Hayes is a reader in political sociology at Aston University. His research focuses primarily on social movements, and on environmental sociology, and in particular the collective responses to climate change and genetically-modified crops. He is an Editor of Social Movement Studies, a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of Environmental Politics and a member of the Editorial Board for the Amsterdam University Press book series, Protest and Social Movements.

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We welcome contributions from young and senior scholars working in social sciences, political sciences, law and the humanities, and everything in between!

Possible topics include (other proposals will be equally taken into consideration):

- narrating and performing acts of civil disobedience
- words matter: resistance, direct action, or civil disobedience?
- putting protest into perspective: the public and political role of scholars in helping activists anchor their claims in history and/or theory
- environmental dissent, a gendered matter?
- socio-economic backgrounds of environmental dissenters
- the discourses/ narratives / ideologies of protestors, and the narratives around which their protests and activism revolve
- portrayals of these movements by the media /politicians / artists / etc....
- non-violent disturbing action as a participation right within contemporary democracies
- the role of the judge in the dissenter's opinion: a disappointing relationship?
- impact of protests and social movements on national and international legislation
- nature as a moral person: how to protect the climate through the law
- the margin of appreciation doctrine as a potential answer to the undynamic nature of the law
- states' answer to unlawful acts of political nature within constitutional orders

Please send a paper abstract of 200-300 words and a short biographical note of 100-150 words by January 30, 2020 to [audrey.loetscher@unil.ch](mailto:audrey.loetscher@unil.ch) and [clemence.demay@unil.ch](mailto:clemence.demay@unil.ch)