



## Academic Essays

# Governing “decadent cities”: The far-right as agents of climate counterinsurgency

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### Abstract

Ecological crisis has given rise to a range of discussions over “climate fascism,” “green nationalism,” “fossil fascism,” and “eco-fascism.” Several authors have advanced the thesis that climate adaptation will be shaped by an increase in authoritarian politics or an uptick in organized violence (e.g. at the borders of nation-states) as states deploy counterinsurgency tactics against climate refugees and environmental activists. My article inverts this proposition by arguing that far right politics emerges as a contingent possibility in the mode of counterinsurgency governance. I propose the framework of “relations of counterinsurgency” as a means of understanding how counterinsurgency manages crises of urban governability by remaking the spaces of uneven urbanization. I then argue that to theorize contemporary far right climate politics, we should ask what the term eco-fascism does rather than what it is. My argument is that, as climate change makes increasing claims upon political institutions, relations of counterinsurgency allow far right actors to constitute their agency and subjectivity.

**Keywords:** *counterinsurgency, climate change, uneven urbanization, far right, eco-fascism*

### Introduction

In his short book, *Fascism*, Mark Neocleous (1997: 17) notes that war is “the fascist universal.” According to fascist mythology, the alienation created by modernity is not to be overcome through class struggle, but by realizing the will of the nation. Here, nationalism is not simply cultural or even racial belonging: the nation is a spiritual entity through which each and all can be reconciled to the natural order of life. According to fascists, this natural order of things expresses the racial genius of the nation. War and

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violence emerge as absolutes; they are natural because the natural order is a necessarily violent one, designed to expel and exterminate the weak, diseased, and sickly. In waging war, not only does the nation cleanse itself and returns to the natural order of things, it also shapes or renews the spiritual character of nationals. War is “the fascist universal” for it confers existential significance, alongside the nation, in a social order imagined on a naturalized basis (Neocleous 1997: 17).

While Neocleous argues forcefully that war is a central concept of fascism (together with nature and nation), his analysis takes for granted the spatial practices (and their variegated expressions beyond the national) that a territorial notion such as war would suggest. As many scholars have argued, warfare is now largely an urban affair; cities are not just military targets but they are also the battlefield (Graham 2011; Coward 2008). Moreover, counterinsurgency strategy largely dominates the tactics and strategies of contemporary battlefields across the globe. *Pave* Neocleous, my aim is to draw out the spatial logic that organizes and links counterinsurgency and the far right within one movement as a global political force. While scholars have established a link between counterinsurgency and the far right in terms of how returning soldiers “bring the war home” (Belew 2018; Ahmad 1971), this paper draws out a theoretical connection, that I will argue frames climate politics.

Although counterinsurgency theory can be traced to pre-20<sup>th</sup> practices of war, it is only during the post-WWII wars of decolonization that it becomes an art of war *sui generis*. It becomes a theory and practice of reconstituting empire and a new global order against the struggles for self-determination across the world (cf. Grandin 2010). In most accounts, counterinsurgency is presented as a repressive power whose aim is to produce a social order by pacifying restive populations (Kienscherf 2011; Williams 2011; McQuade 2012; Wall, Saberi & Jackson 2017). In fact, counterinsurgency often ‘invents’ the insurgency through its own violent intervention. And when it claims that its goal is to win the hearts and minds of a population through social reforms and humane forms of warfare, here again, it often ‘constructs’ that so-called population as a bounded unit with common behavioral patterns and attitudes (see Schrader 2016). As Stuart Schrader (2022) argues, counterinsurgency must be taken as a regime of global governance “inseparable from” capitalist processes of world-making: “Understanding this process of remaking worldwide social space requires analyzing how states act to take what is assumed to be general or generalizable (e.g. the threat of communist subversion) and try to achieve geographic extensiveness preemptively or in response.”

In this article, following Schrader’s spatial analysis, I argue that contemporary far right ecological expressions, tendencies, and movements are a product of counterinsurgency as governance. Critical geographers and urbanists have pointed out that spatial practices play a constitutive role in how the far right has managed to get a foothold globally. Accordingly, acts of describing space (e.g. as disordered or unruly) are also normative because they help to delimit borders between self and others, define the boundaries and composition of communities, and help imagine social orders and belonging (Koch 2022; Ince 2011; Santamarina 2021). Such spatial practices are not only the prerogative of states in their exercise of sovereignty but also form part of the everyday and the political action of social movements and non-state actors (Lizotte 2020; Ince 2011). Focusing on spatial practices, as Natalie Koch (2022: 7) argues, also shifts the attention from regimes or pre-constituted spaces (such as the nation-state) to “practices of government as site of analysis.” Thus, I situate counterinsurgency as a governance practice that produces social relations that delimit the range of possible climate action and from which far

right politics draw its vernacular and subjectivity (i.e., its contemporary form more than its ideology).

Ecological crisis has given rise to a range of discussions over “climate fascism,” (Parenti 2011) “green nationalism,” (Conversi & Hau 2021) “fossil fascism,” (Daggett 2018; Malm and the Zetkin Collective 2021) and “eco-fascism” (Biehl & Staudenmaier 2011). Several authors have advanced the thesis that climate adaptation will be shaped by an increase in authoritarian politics or an uptick in organized violence (e.g., at the borders of nation-states) as states deploy counterinsurgency tactics against climate refugees and environmental activists (Gelderloos 2022). My article inverts this proposition by arguing that far right politics emerges as a contingent possibility in the mode of counterinsurgency governance. Next, I propose the framework of “relations of counterinsurgency” as a means of understanding how counterinsurgency manages crises of urban governability by remaking the spaces of uneven urbanization. I then argue that to theorize contemporary far right climate politics, we should ask what the term eco-fascism does rather than what it is. My argument is that, as climate change makes increasing claims upon political institutions, relations of counterinsurgency allow far right actors to constitute their agency and subjectivity. That the far right is developing into a historical force in the era of climate politics, is because counterinsurgency is a world-making mode of governance.

## Towards Climate Fascism?

Is “climate fascism” on the horizon? Christian Parenti (2011) predicts just that in *Tropic of Chaos*. Climate change, he argues, will deepen existing inequalities created by the Cold War and neoliberal politics, leading to social disorder on a planetary scale. States of the Global North will respond to the chaos with global counterinsurgency. This program of “militarized adaptation” or what he also calls “the politics of the armed lifeboat,” will bring forth “climate fascism” (Parenti 2011: 11). Accordingly, this fascism will be characterized by rising political repression and authoritarianism in the Global North and counterinsurgency in the “failed states” (characterized by anomie) of the Global South. Tropics, littoral zones, shorelines, borders, fences, and walls will be sites of multiple political crises triggered by the convergence of ecological and societal collapse.

If such a dystopian account appears familiar, it is because our imagination has been conditioned by blockbuster Hollywood movies that exploit the notion of collapse. However, what is concerning in Parenti’s account is his failure to question his central categories such as the notions of “failed states” and societal “anomie.” The former is a post-Cold War concept concocted by the United States (U.S.) security apparatus and was explicitly designed to legitimate imperial interventions (Call 2008). As for the latter, ethnographic accounts of the Global South have consistently refused this most conservative aspect of Durkheimian sociology. In fact, they show that societies persist despite exposure to repeated crises because of the collaborative and ethical practices of inhabitants (see Biehl 2013; Simone & Pieterse 2017). That is, their endurance is *social* and not anomic. Such is the literary account of climate catastrophe also offered by Octavia E. Butler (2019) in *Parable of the Sower* who cautions, with lessons drawn from the plantation history of the U.S., that violence remains within, and not outside, of *social* relations and determinations, no matter how arbitrary it becomes.

In fact, as I will argue, Parenti gets the relationship between counterinsurgency and climate change upside down. Ecological crisis will not birth counterinsurgency as “climate fascism,” but instead it is the existence of counterinsurgency as a “mode of governance” (Harcourt 2018) that conditions the possibility of responding to climate change. Within this range of responses, far right politics – whether it is to be called “climate fascism,” “fossil fascism,” “green nationalism,” or “eco-fascism” – is a contingent possibility. Here, I understand governance in Foucauldian terms: it involves discursive and institutional arrangements that order social relations, the implementation of forms of political reasoning that seek to condition the behavior and practices of individuals and groups, and the presupposition of a (subject) population as an object of knowledge and target of coordinated actions. Counterinsurgency, then, is more than a tactic of warfare; it is a form of governmental action that seeks to fabricate a social order (cf. Neocleous 2000).

To argue that counterinsurgency is a mode of governance, is to argue that it constrains the field of possible political actions and conditions the range of issues that can be properly politicized. Counterinsurgency governance delimits the political by manufacturing an oppositional catchall category labeled ‘insurgency.’ Politics thus becomes the legitimate range of issues that support order, security, peace, prosperity, and democracy as defined by certain (liberal) assumptions. If some group is to question why prosperity should mean GDP growth amidst inequality, it might find itself unceremoniously labeled as supporting a communist insurgency. Similarly, when anti-police brutality activists question the equation of security with the protection of private property, they are characterized as a bunch of anarchists bent on destroying the social order. In the same vein, then, counterinsurgency has delimited the range of what can be considered climate politics proper (cf. Mirzoeff 2011). To the extent that climate politics does not force the re-ordering of social relations, it can be admitted as a legitimate concern of public debate. Therefore, the opposition between counterinsurgency and a just climate change policy appears quasi-absolute given that a climate emergency requires immediate and wide ranging changes to social, political, economic, and cultural practices.

The point I’m making by bringing up an analytic of governance is that counterinsurgency is more than just repressive - it’s a power that produces social relations and subjectivities. To be sure, states have used counterinsurgency operations to protect the interests of extractivist and polluting industries above communities and peoples (Dunlap & Brock 2022). Critics such as Parenti, and more recently Malm and Zetkin Collective (2021: 239), maintain that fossil fascism is a (potential) social formation where repressive violence meets authoritarian politics to protect “dominant class interests.” In contrast, I contend that from a governance perspective, we can observe how counterinsurgency produces – and not merely represses – social relations, agencies, and subjectivities.

## Relations of Counterinsurgency

In counterinsurgency theory and practice, uneven urbanization has attained the status of a general condition of global threat – “the generalizable,” in Schrader’s terms – that is to be treated as object of knowledge and site of intervention. Uneven urbanization is not understood as the inevitable but necessary bump on the road towards successful

development. A new pessimist mood marks the urban turn in counterinsurgency strategizing: render the cities of the world safe so that they don't pose a threat to the homeland (Bunker 2014). This pessimist mood has run parallel with a security discourse that has diagnosed underdevelopment as a source of threat (Duffield 2014). Within this discursive constellation, then, uneven urbanization appears as a general condition, against which counterinsurgency can and must be deployed as a mode of governance to secure social order. To not govern through counterinsurgency invites the danger that uneven urbanization will create gang, terrorist, and pirate networks with access to global networks and infrastructures that will destabilize global stability. When counterinsurgency strategists speak of stability, they of course mean the maintaining of patterns of capitalist urbanization that create social inequality. The processes that birth uneven urbanization are assumed to be the natural order of the social.

As a governance project, therefore, counterinsurgency seeks to constitute itself in relation to urban populations and practices that it designates as threats. By *relations of counterinsurgency*, I refer to a governance project tasked with identifying those whose urban praxis threaten the continued reproduction of uneven urbanization and who must be compelled into accepting the terms of their dispossession, displacement, and exclusion. Counterinsurgency is not authoritarian – it is not seeking obedience, which would imply a form of inclusion into an existing order – but it is instead predicated on the disappearance of modes of life and ways of being that threaten the smooth (re) production of an urban order based on accumulation and private property.

Counterinsurgency's commitment to the cleansing of certain modes of life and ways of being reflects the deep contradiction between urbanization and regimes of accumulation. Scholars have theorized the multiple ways in which the production of space and processes of accumulation are co-constituted (Lefebvre [1970]2003; see also Harvey 2006; Massey 1994; Soja 1989). Despite the fact that those theorists are at odds with each other in conceptualizing the exact nature of this relationship, what is common to all, is the fact that spatial inequalities play a key role in organizing the productive capacities of the world economy at scale. In turn, the cycles of investment, disinvestment, and re-structuring produce the uneven and unequal geographies of globalization. Since WWII, urbanization and suburbanization have come to play major roles in mediating the co-constitution of accumulation and unevenness. As such, there is a deep contradiction between urbanization and accumulation, namely that capitalist processes produce *social insecurities* which must be balanced with a need for *political security* – now increasingly expressed at the urban scale. Thus, the "social cleansing" of those modes of life deemed a threat to the frictionless reproduction of an urban order that mediates the possibilities of accumulation and uneven globalization (Smith 2001). Simply put, counterinsurgency as mode of governance, manages the 'need' for social insecurities and urban security.

For instance, the response to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, is one of the most documented examples of this relation of counterinsurgency. As the hurricane flooded mostly poor Black districts in racially segregated New Orleans, and the afflicted were left to face the elements on their own, the first response was a security one. The National Guard (with members returning from the Iraq war) and hired mercenaries (Blackwater) moved in to protect the city from "looters" while the Louisiana Department of Corrections built a make-shift prison on a bus terminal parking lot to cage those arrested. The term "looters" did a lot of ideological lifting, by drawing on the deep history of racism, to suggest that Black New Orleans was not entitled to survival strategies. It reveals that the operating "racial regime of security" (Camp 2009)

was designed precisely to strike the balance between maintaining an urbanized order that produces *social* insecurity and protecting a private property regime from threats (looters).

The security response to Katrina in New Orleans is indicative of the overt 'urban turn' in counterinsurgency theory and practice (Kilcullen 2013; Bunker 2014; Evans 2016). Military strategists note that the greatest threat to American and global security are not "failed states" but "feral" and "criminal" cities (Norton 2003; Bunker & Sullivan 2011). Others insist that the megacities of the South – which appear as inherently, if not 'naturally,' violent – are bound to pull the U.S. military into armed intervention (Harris *et al.* 2014). Military analysts apply this urban framework not only to cities of the Global South; they also understand unrests in the various settlement patterns of the Global North (the banlieues, ghettos, and estates) as symptomatic of a general crisis of urban governance (see Saberi 2019).

If in their writings, military analysts obsess over a number of cities such as Mogadishu, Rio de Janeiro, Detroit, or Nuevo Laredo, their real concern is not 'the city' as a unit but the processes of uneven urbanization. For example, the counterinsurgency guru David Kilcullen (2013: 42–43) argues that the "urban metabolism" of the city should be the site of analysis *and* target of military operations. In his analysis, the flow of information, people, and resources are inputs into the city's system that if not metabolized and disposed of through 'good governance' will produce economic inequality, crime, and conflict. The extent to which the city's "carrying capacity" processes those metabolic by-products will determine its "stability, sustainability, and resilience." Cut through the fancy terms such as metabolism and carrying capacity derived from urban studies, and what is at stake are the processes of uneven urbanization. Researchers and activists have noted that uneven urbanization has produced the unequal distribution of goods and services, spatial segregation, and urban precarity (cf. Davis 2006). However, to counterinsurgency theorists those very same outcomes of uneven urbanization are sources of threats to the urban order, and its capacity to mediate the production of space and the processes of accumulation.

Therefore, when counterinsurgency is deployed as a governance project to secure the urban order, its goal is to eliminate the capacities for self-defense by those who suffer the negative consequences of uneven urbanization. Counterinsurgency strategists have recognized such a need in the urban turn: it is not enough to wage war in cities, rather military operations will need to "shape" the battlespace (NATO 2003). This emphasis on shaping the battlefield has taken a literal form in Iraq. During "Operation Gold Wall" in Sadr City, Baghdad, allied forces erected a series of concrete barriers and turned the city into a patchwork of "gated communities," checkpoints, and protective barriers. In effect, the military built the terrain around the city and its population i.e. it became an urbanizing force. By reshaping urban space and boxing the population into manageable hamlets of concrete, the military was also reshaping social relations by intensifying ethnic tensions, reinforcing patriarchal norms, and entrenching class inequalities (Gregory 2008). As Frantz Fanon (2013) once observed, the colonial manipulation of space is designed to prevent the dominated from rebelling against their masters. In fact, violence becomes concentrated in the segregated spaces of the subjugated where it turns into "fraternal" conflicts. By displacing violence through spatial governance, counterinsurgency can thus sap the will for self-defense.

As uneven urbanization has created massive disenfranchisement across the planet, the poor have developed a set of practices to defend themselves against expendability. These are practices that can be referred to as "urbanity," a term that encompasses

the experiential and relational aspect of urban living. As Abdoumalig Simone (2016: 9) has argued, even though cities are designed and governed at the expense of the majority, the latter must find ways to make the urban fabric work for them. Such practices necessarily resist institutionalization as urban residents must keep relations loosely organized so that they do not miss out on opportunities and schemes that urban life brings. Heterogeneity is thus at the heart of urbanity, for it is the precondition which allows urban users to encounter a variety of opportunities and experiment within city spaces that do not always bend to the norms of policing. Urbanity thus allows residents to maintain a “faith in the urban” to address the vicissitudes of daily living and becomes at the same time a “sensibility” that is “part of the struggle against being made expendable” (Simone 2016: 9).

If to residents, urbanity reinforces their capacity to defend themselves, to counterinsurgency it represents a threat to its ordering ability. Urbanity has a fugitive quality that resists control and capture, and thus rests beyond the apparatus of policing (see Simone 2019). Because of that, the security apparatuses of various states have become concerned with “ungoverned territories,” “no-go areas,” and “lawless zones” that provide safe havens to terrorists and criminals. For example, the Pentagon’s “Ungoverned Areas Project” finds that increasing urbanization and “tight-knit immigrant communities” allow “illicit actors” to “blend in and hide out within established social networks” in cities around the world (Lamb 2008: 25). The source of threat is not defined by a lack of visibility, but rather by the denial of cartographic power i.e., the ability to map out a totality of social networks due to the urban heterogeneity.

Urbanity and heterogeneity are threats because they disturb the smooth functioning of relations of counterinsurgency. By limiting how inhabitants use the city, counterinsurgency reveals itself as a mode of governance whose goal is to distribute vulnerability. Counterinsurgency, in effect, goes beyond its characterization as pacification (which assumes an already restive population). Its goal is to create what the philosopher Elsa Dorlin (2017) calls “disarmed bodies.” As opposed to Michel Foucault’s (1995) notion of a disciplinary apparatus that creates “docile” and obedient subjects who, without the threat of overwhelming violence, will fit into the designs of social and political order, to disarm is to create subjects whose capacity for self-defense is rendered illegitimate and illegible. As Dorlin argues, modernity is intimately linked to a social and juridical distinction between those who can claim a legitimate right to self-defense and those are rendered defenseless. To be made defenseless, in this case, does not mean to be deprived of agency. Rather, it hinges on a mode of power that constitutes a subject whose very agency is interpreted as violent and aggressive, thus prompting one’s exclusion from the realm of humanity. A defenseless subject – one deprived of the *right* of self-defense by processes that delegitimizes (and criminalizes) its *capacity* for self-defense – is one that can be exposed to all kinds of deprivations, especially their cleansing and disappearance.

Relations of counterinsurgency, therefore, speak to the creation of defenseless populations through a mode of governance that limit the use of the urban fabric. Far right politics, as a historical force, is a contingent possibility that arises from this mode of governance because it allows right wing actors to constitute an agency and subjectivity in relation to the so called threat of (uneven) urbanization.

## The agency of eco-fascism

Recent far right actors have justified their violence through a range of theories, from “white replacement,” “white genocide,” and “eco-fascism.” The shooters in Christchurch (New Zealand), El Paso and Buffalo (U.S.) have all claimed the label “eco-fascist” to justify mass atrocities. Typically, critics who attempt to counter “eco-fascism” seek to identify its ideological content, which they then proceed to connect to far right parties’ theory of society, nationalist programs, and racial politics (Forchtner 2020; Forchtner & Kølvrå 2015; Hamilton 2002; Lubarda 2020; Staudenmaier 1995). Their aim is to show how eco-fascism’s ideological content reinforces ideas of autochthony, belonging, racial purity, and sovereignty (Forchtner & Kølvrå 2015). Such approaches are useful in pinpointing how far right parties draw upon a range of ecological ideas, tropes, and rhetoric to position themselves on the terrain of social struggles in an era of heightened climate politics.

In this section, rather than asking what eco-fascism is, I am interested in what it does for the far right. By taking eco-fascism as a practical orientation, I advance an understanding of far right actors’ claim to an agency and subjectivity whose conditions of possibility lies in relations of counterinsurgency and whose political orientation is towards the discourse of climate change (in affirmation or denial). Through this approach I understand race, nationality, ethnicity, or ‘society’ as a set of emergent political conceptualizations that far right actors employ strategically within a set of relations produced by a dominant mode of governance. As I argued above, relations of counterinsurgency are key determinants in producing the (urban) space through which political strategies and social dispositions are constituted. In my argument, counterinsurgency and the far right share a target: urbanization and an idea of planetary “urbanity.” Hence, as I discuss below, it becomes possible to bring under the same analytical frame far right actors who affirm a climate emergency and thus claim the label “eco-fascist” and those who dispute the reality of climate change, such as Anders Breivik for whom environmentalism is a neo-communist plot. In what follows, I read from the manifestos of far right actors to draw the connection to counterinsurgency.

A manifesto posted by Brenton Tarrant before he killed 51 people in Christchurch, “The Great Replacement,” contains many themes associated with far-right extremists. It includes the following tropes: white people are being replaced by migrants, the Islamization of Western societies, the social and cultural decadence of the latter, as well as the political corruption of the elites. The self-referential manifesto also includes a Q&A, where he asks himself about his “views” and he declares that “I am an Ethno-nationalist Eco-fascist. Ethnic autonomy for all peoples with a focus on the preservation of nature, and the natural order.” Some analysts have found his claims that he is an eco-fascist “shallow [...] little more than a simplistic repackaging of immigration as an environmental issue vis-à-vis overpopulation” (Macklin 2019). That his views are shallow and repackaged is a truism, but so are the other tropes mentioned above. After all, much of the underpinning notions of Western decadence and white replacement can be found in white supremacist tracks of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as Lothrop Stoddard’s (1920) *The Rising Tide of Color*.

Rather than dismissing his “scant engagement with the ecological philosophies of the contemporary or historical extreme right” (Macklin 2019), what if we treat Tarrant’s self-identification as an eco-fascist on his own terms? Namely, as a character in a plot that takes place in a grey zone between virtual and physical worlds. This is a plot that Tarrant created through his online interactions, his travels throughout Australia and



Europe, direct and indirect networking with other far right figures, and consumption of far right literature. Tarrant's role as an eco-fascist constitutes his agency in the plot: he is a man of action striving to save Western civilization from insurgent threats. In this plot, he has become part of a loose network of counterinsurgents (hence, also explaining his need to livestream the shooting) tasked with disarming the enemies of the West.

But, what is the context of the plot? Here, Tarrant's narrative meets those of other contemporary far-right extremists: they are actors in an urbanized context. Tarrant declares that the event that pushed him over the edge – he found his “emotions swinging between fuming rage and suffocating despair” – was “witnessing the state of French cities and towns,” where “the invasion of France by non-whites” was complete. Therefore, he states bleakly: “Its the cities where the struggle lies, its the cities where the invaders have massed, its the cities where the marxists have poisoned the institutions, its the cities where the traitorous media and corporations lie and its the cities where the anti-white politicians and the NGOs make their homes.” The focus on the urban, the obsession in repeating “its the cities” speaks to a form of unease over the status of urbanization. Eco-fascism thus allows him to take aim at his real target: “rampant urbanization” (and “ever expanding cities and shrinking forests”) that has destroyed the natural order. Tarrant cares very little for either trees or forests. What animates him is the manner in which non-whites and the invaders are able to use the cities to make a life. What animates him, beyond even race, is the social order created by urbanization.

The most recent atrocity in the U.S., shows a similar pattern of far right extremists' concern with urbanization. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, 2022, 18-year old Payton Gendron (also claiming the identification “eco-fascist”) drove over three hours from his hometown to Buffalo, NY, and murdered 10 people, all African Americans, at a supermarket. His Discord chat log revealed that he had intensively scouted several urban areas in upstate New York before settling on Buffalo (Weill 2022). His aim was to kill as many Black people as possible because they were “invaders.” His manifesto, a ‘coppypasta’ job, reveals that he was directly influenced by Tarrant (Amarasingam, Argentino & Macklin 2022). The choice of supermarkets in heavily urbanized areas, as was the case with the El Paso shooter, is not simply due to the fact that they are soft targets – i.e., less heavily protected than say government buildings – but because those highly commercialized spaces (together with malls) now represent the processes of urbanization more than anything else. Due to privatization, commercial spaces have replaced the public square as the locus of social life in urban areas. Across the U.S., it is those hybrid public-private spaces that thread the extended urban fabric.

To Gendron, as in all classic acts of dehumanization, the “invaders” have no agency and they flow in with the urban fabric. This explains his extensive scouting of urban targets to determine where the flow of invaders is at its highest concentration. (According to Gendron's Discord log, he decided against striking too close to home because there were too many whites). The urban, in Gendron's cobbled narrative, has become the real and monstrous agency that he must strike against. Paralleling Tarrant, Gendron claims the term eco-fascism irrespective of its content, because it allows him to constitute his agency in the face of the urban Moloch. To attack “rampant urbanization,” is to strike a counterinsurgent blow at the processes that mobilize the invaders and before they can constitute their self-defense.

The specter of the urban also haunts Anders Breivik, the Norwegian extremist for whom ecological concerns are a cover for a communist takeover (“green is the new red”). Although critics have pointed out how Islamophobia organized Breivik's worldview (Bangstad 2021), the urban dimension has largely been ignored. Breivik, in

fact, labels “islamisation” as a “secondary infection” and cites cultural decadence as the primary force that leads to national degeneration. According to Breivik, this cultural disorder results from the “destructive forces of the diversity/ethnic industries” and its symptoms can be identified in the “hip-hop mentality.” As someone who participated in hip-hop culture while living in relatively well-off and less diverse Western Oslo – compared to the immigrant and working class areas in the eastern parts of the city (see Eriksen 2018) – Breivik understands hip-hop as an urban phenomenon that he associates with decadence. He links hip-hop to a youth culture geared towards hedonism, cultural mixing, and urban practices of self-expression such as graffiti. It is such hybridization that Breivik wants to destroy. Finally, he fantasizes that in a culturally pure future, heterogeneity will be limited to “liberal cosmopolitan zones” that would act as ghettos and dumping grounds for all that is impure.

To far right activists, urbanization represents a menace. Although the urban condition is a marker of civilization to the far right i.e., the achievement of the cultural/racial genius of the nation, it is a double-edged sword. Cities tend to ostentatiously display the brute facticity of heterogeneity that reminds far right activists and other cultural conservatives that the nation’s supposed homogeneity is nothing but a mirage. Furthermore, the processes of uneven urbanization have pressed several layers of heterogeneity into the fabric of social life because inequality requires constant improvisation on the part of migrants, the poor, and those who are displaced. When far right activists make the case for nationalism, it is often made explicitly against the idea of urban multiplicities. They parallel the logic of counterinsurgency by interpreting the heterogeneous character of urban life as a general crisis of governance. They parallel counterinsurgency by seeking to reproduce defenselessness. They parallel the logic of counterinsurgency by interpreting urbanity as a threat to social order. Finally, they might even go beyond counterinsurgency by conjuring processes and categories of people that supposedly escapes counterinsurgency’s cartographic power.

Against the background of climate emergency, relations of counterinsurgency sets up the possibility for far right actors to constitute their agency. Ecological crisis will most likely increase the need for dependencies. It will likely require that the social is constituted through relations of vulnerability that allow people to withstand the regularity and interconnectedness of catastrophic events. Given the reality of planetary urbanization, climate crisis will demand an active engagement with urbanity in the short and medium term. Yet, counterinsurgency governance has created a mode of thinking and acting that actively militates against the possibility of a new planetary ecological reality. Relations of counterinsurgency have set the conditions for far right actors to constitute a definitive political agency that is in the process of making them an historical force. To both the far right and counterinsurgency, urbanity and heterogeneity are weaknesses of the new urban order that must be eradicated.

## Conclusion: Dystopia Now?

As I’ve argued above, counterinsurgency as a mode of urban global governance is the key condition that shapes the possibility for far right politics to become a response to ecological crisis. Rodrigo Duterte’s presidency in the Philippines illustrates that such a configuration is not only speculative. Politics and society in the Philippines are indelibly marked by counterinsurgency relations. From the U.S. colonial wars of the late 19<sup>th</sup>

and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to the present day, counterinsurgency campaigns have violently shaped the lives of ordinary Filipinos (McCoy 2009). An ongoing counterinsurgency campaign (backed by the U.S. military) against Islamist and Maoist insurgents has blended into the policing of urban spaces (Warburg & Jensen 2020). In addition, the Philippines lies on the frontlines of ecological crisis: despite being exposed to extreme weather for generations, climate change is increasing the severity of such events, resulting in death, displacement, water insecurity, severe droughts, and flooding. As a result, climate politics is always on the agenda since it affects everyday life (and death) and has generated a unique bureaucracy tasked with risk management and post-crisis relief. Politics and society in Filipino are thus profoundly shaped by those interwoven modes of governing the weather and counterinsurgency (Smith 2022).

In this context of climate change and counterinsurgency, enter Rodrigo Duterte, the far right president of the Philippines from 2016 to 2022. The postcolonial theorist, Vicente Rafael (2019: 146) has characterized Duterte's approach to politics as bearing the hallmarks of a "counter-insurgent style of governing." As mayor of the city of Davao, he ripped up the boundary between governance and counterinsurgency; to govern the urban is to engage in counterinsurgency. For instance, in the 1990s, Duterte initiated a violent war on drugs: the Davao Death Squad (DDS), which allegedly was under his control (and which, characteristically he never denied), executed 1424 people in the city between 1998 and 2015. The DDS engaged in operations of social cleansing, killing drug users, street children, and other criminal elements (see McCoy 2017; Rafael 2019).

The DDS and the Davao style of government were not just local products. Duterte adapted pre-existing counterinsurgency strategies that had been employed against Islamist and communist 'threats' to produce urban order. Subsequently, Duterte brought this same violent form of counterinsurgent urban governance to his presidency, appointing his chief of police from Davao to the Philippine National Police to oversee the war on drugs, now expanded to major urban areas. As the anthropologists, Anna Warburg and Steffen Jensen (2020) note, counterinsurgency produced urban space by creating a climate of fear and suspicion among urban inhabitants, delimiting their social interactions with each other, and effectively isolating some districts (because they had been marked as areas of disorder and drugs) from the city at large.

If urban counterinsurgency consisted of one key ingredient in Duterte's formula to power, the other was climate policy. Typhoon Yolanda, which killed 6300 people and caused extensive damage to the Philippines, brought Duterte to national prominence. He used the then government's slow response to elbow his way into the spotlight and proposed a form of climate populism. He promised to close mining operations, made climate change mitigation a central plank of his political platform, and adopted a pugnacious approach to multilateral climate action. Despite the populist rhetoric, during his presidency, Duterte responded to ecological challenges through counterinsurgency governance. During the drought that caused water shortages in Manila, he revived a dam project and progressively militarized it to provide water. This massive infrastructure project was typically accompanied by threats against environmentalists and indigenous groups. Consequently, those who sought to imagine a different political ecology were subjected to extrajudicial assassinations in a style that mirrored the war on drugs (Smith 2022).

The presidency of Rodrigo Duterte indicates that the dystopian ecological future, as imagined by Parenti and others above, is here and now. Although state formation in the Philippines has a specific history of counterinsurgency warfare, Duterte's rise to

power should not be seen as exceptional. Counterinsurgency is now the ‘normal’ mode of governance across the urbanizing planet. It is also how the uneven urban condition itself is experienced for a vast multitude of people across the planet (an indication being the number of anti-police protests across the globe). As the impact of extreme weather events is increasingly urbanized (cf. Goh 2021), from catastrophic flooding of cities to the devastation of infrastructures that sustain an urban planet, we can expect politics to be conditioned by relations of counterinsurgency. As such, it is those social relations established by projects of counterinsurgency governance that are shaping and will shape the form and content of far right politics.

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