
Book Review

Maria Nita, *Praying with Environmental Christians: Green Religion and the Climate Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), xi + 261 pp., \$139.99 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-137-60034-9.

Maria Nita's timely *Praying with Environmental Christians* provides what she calls a 'snapshot of the climate movement' between the disappointment (if not betrayal) of the 2009 climate summit in Copenhagen to the (tempered) optimism of the summit in Paris six years later (p. 227). During that period Nita conducted ethnographic research in Britain with an array of groups, from Christian anarchists such as Isaiah 58 to 'green' Christians such as Operation Noah, participating in and observing climate marches, climate camps as well as workshops and related gatherings and events. In this review I draw out two strands of the book I find particularly important beyond the no less significant task of documenting climate activism among and beyond British Christianities. These are firstly Nita's deployment of a highly original 'attractor model' (p. 66) to envision the networks of green Christianities in the UK and their complex porosities and proliferations across secular, protest traditions and various Christian traditions and second, Nita's insistence on 'faith identity' as the 'primary identity for religious activists' (p. 230), while simultaneously stressing the improvised character of much of Christian climate activist practice. I will take these evidently interrelated points in turn.

Nita's attractor model draws explicitly from three primary sources: Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory, Michael York's SPIN model, and Dominic Corrywright's web model (p. 69). These models stress the relational character of association in general, conceiving adaptive structures around which human and non-human elements gravitate to generate centres of power. Nita uses these models to experiment with envisioning the multi-stranded climate movement and the processes of aggregation, dissipation, and proliferation that characterise it. Nita suggests that her model draws also from physics, and it certainly opens out some intriguing methodological and theoretical possibilities for scholars interested in entanglements of contemporary religions and politics (p. 229). Particularly significant in my view is the manner in which the model maps the sites and occasions through which religious and secular elements combine to generate new and unexpected forms. In short, it brings together empiricism and imagination, a mark of Manuel DeLanda's impressive work on complexity and self-organisation which Nita cites, but perhaps could include more.

It is precisely these methodological and theoretical possibilities that seem to be threatened by Nita's psychological turn and insistence on the primacy of faith identity. For this reader at any rate, the most intriguing and provocative elements of the book are Nita's observations about complex formations, including 'a hybrid

secular-religious movement' (p. 109), green prayers marked by improvisation and spontaneity (p. 206), and eco-rituals performed by Christian groups that 'innovate on traditional repertoires' (p. 236). There is also Nita's brief discussion of 'lyrical trees', which she describes as a 'leitmotif in climate...spirituality' that 'enabled the blending or merger of the religious and activist identities' (p. 154). Nita argues that the lyrical trees generated across banners and pictures by secular and religious activists operate as slippery signifiers, crossing Christian and secular climate discourses. This language of creative mixing and blending is, however, repeatedly restrained by a heavy identity discourse emphasising 'opposing [religious and secular] identities' (p. 138) and an alleged 'conflict inherent in the secular green-faith division' (p. 147), amidst the claim that for Christian climate activists, faith is the 'primary source' (p. 145) of identity. Let me be clear: Nita is certainly correct that for certain Christians— as for certain anarcho-vegans—identity is cherished to be kept pure from the imagined defilements of difference (as if religions or cultures have ever not been hybrid, but that's another story for another time). But arguably, the greater sociological significance rests with the numerous sites and occasions in the climate movement documented by Nita and at which hybridity is implicitly and explicitly mined as a resource for the green transformation that is needed if human beings (and many other species too) are going to survive the Anthropocene.

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