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Analysis of Ecofascist Tendencies on Reddit

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ABSTRACT

Eco-fascism is a far-right ideology that attributes climate change to the

Global South, focusing on rhetoric about overpopulation and excessive fossil fuel

consumption. It avoids addressing systemic issues such as resource distribution

and sustainable energy production, instead advocating for a so-called 'cleansing'

of the world, often through acts of mass violence, as evidenced by the Christchurch

shooting. This research builds on literature that adopts a liberatory outlook on

climate change, such as decolonialism, ecofeminism and anti-imperialism, to

analyze how ecofascist tendencies are expressed in a small-scale sample of a

Reddit community that discusses climate change. The study finds that while the

analyzed community is not overtly eco-fascist, it does exhibit eco-fascist

tendencies and shares space with explicit fascists who call for violence against

vulnerable groups.

DEDICATION

To all those on the margins of society, struggling under the weight of an oppressive system, especially to the people of Palestine who are enduring a brutal massacre at the hands of a settler-colonial state: A better world is possible, and we will lead the way.

To my family: My parents, brother and late grandfather. Thank you for always supporting me. I miss you all.

To Simran: I am smarter and saner because of you. Thank you for always being there and pushing me to do better things.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

Climate disasters as effects of continued climate change have been getting more severe, especially in the Global South. In 2022, floods in Pakistan killed 1,739 people and caused $14.8 billion worth of damage and $15.2 billion worth of economic losses (World Bank, 2022). Since June 2024, India has been experiencing a severe and sustained heatwave, breaking temperature records and claiming 219 lives (Singha, 2024). These disasters are not limited to the Global South; in 2023, Canada faced its most severe wildfire season yet, affecting all 13 provinces and territories, and burning up to 5% of Canada's total forest area (Lowrie, 2023). Extreme weather events are increasingly frequent, with rising sea levels, prolonged droughts, and intensified storms impacting millions globally. Climate crises are not in the distant future anymore — they are part of our current reality.

With this surge of climate disasters, the anxiety about climate change has worsened and climate denial is becoming a harder position to uphold. As mainstream conservatism continues denying climate change, the extreme right-wing has interestingly folded climate change into their belief system. This acceptance of climate change by the far-right to garner support for their cause and use that for violent, extremist ends is known as 'eco-fascism.' According to Richards et al. (2022), "Expressions of 'eco-fascism' on the part of the far and extreme right emerge from political-ideological environments in which media and political actors in the Global North blame climate change on the Global South, through rhetoric about population control and fossil fuel usage" (p.1). The debunked myth of overpopulation (Green et al., 2022) is perhaps the most common way this is represented, as the burden of the earth's ecological issues is

placed on an exponentially growing population in a system with finite resources. Eschewing any structural changes in resource production and usage, these narratives often call for a kind of 'cleansing' — killing off a part of the world to solve ecological crisis.

This research analyses certain online communities that discuss climate change, and how eco-fascist tendencies are expressed in these communities, specifically relating to the topic of overpopulation. The idea of overpopulation is also a commonly held and mainstream belief. One 2020 United States survey found 71% of respondents believed that human population growth is worsening climate change, and 69% of respondents believe society has a moral responsibility to slow human population growth if it is making wildlife extinctions worse (Zacharias, 2021). However, a vast amount of scholarship and activist research, from the realm of climate science (Green et al., 2022), agriculture (Mortimore, 2013) and economics Bhushan (2018), has found that increasing population has little effect on climate change when compared to CO2 emissions in the Global North. This has led to 'overpopulation' being termed a myth. Yet, these tropes stay persistent in mainstream discourse.

Eco-fascism as a research subject sits at the intersection of three important contemporary discourses: climate change, right-wing extremism, and decolonization. Analyzing eco-fascism in the field of media explores the radicalizing affordances and impact of online platforms, and how the normalization of eco-fascism rhetoric can lead to acts of extremism against immigrants and people of colour, as seen in the Christchurch shooting. This analysis also examines the weaponization of environmental concerns to

promote xenophobic and racist ideologies, thereby distorting genuine ecological advocacy and undermining efforts toward inclusive and equitable climate action.

Due to inadequate infrastructure, limited access to resources, and socio-economic disparities, among other factors, countries in the Global South experience the climate crisis's impact most acutely, despite contributing the least to climate change (Friedlingstein et al., 2023). This research builds on literature that adopts a liberatory outlook on climate change, such as decolonialism, ecofeminism and anti-imperialism, tracing the origins of overpopulation rhetoric back to European colonialism and considering how ecofascism affects people in the Global South and immigrants. Colonization, which systemically brutalized, looted, and divided the populations of the Global South, has left enduring inequities between the 'developed' and 'developing' worlds. This study seeks to identify rhetoric that harms vulnerable groups, particularly those in the Global South.

Significant academic work critiques overpopulation rhetoric to impose restrictions on women's bodily autonomy, which include easy access to abortion and contraception. This research staunchly opposes that ideology. The broader initiative of decolonization aims to restore the agency that was forcibly taken from the most vulnerable populations worldwide through the extraction and violence of Western colonialism. Upholding women's right to bodily autonomy is pivotal to reclaiming that agency, and universal access to abortion and contraception should not just be a privilege, but a basic human right. This research is also neither pro- nor anti-natalist in its approach; instead, it aims to examine how the conversation about overpopulation showcases ecofascist tendencies. It does not aim to make moral judgements about people's reproductive choices.

Literature Review

Origins of Population Control

The origins of population control theories can be traced back to the English priest and economist Thomas Malthus, who first published 'An Essay on the Principle of Population' in 1798. He proposed that population growth would outpace food production, leading to mass starvation and famine. Malthus' work was highly influential in British policy at the time and contributed to the enactment of the 'Census Act of 1800' (UK Parliament, n.d.), which was instrumental in monitoring the population in Great Britain. Malthus argued that humans tended to utilize the abundance of resources for expanding their population instead of ensuring a sustained high quality of life, which would keep sections of the population 'trapped' in poverty and starvation. One of the proposed solutions that Malthus provided to combat this population problem was the abolition of the English 'Poor Laws.' The Poor Laws were a system of economic welfare for the poor that emerged in the late medieval era. Malthus (1798) argued that this welfare system contributed to the rise in the price of commodities and undermined the resilience of the poor. Malthus was closely related to the early liberal capitalism movements, with the likes of Adam Smith. The liberal perspective of 'personal responsibility' and individualism is reflected in Malthusian ideology, wherein the attribution of poverty shifted from systemic issues to the actions of the individual.

The impact of Malthusian thought and the discourse around global population control grew immensely in the 20th century with the publication of the book *The Population Bomb* by Paul R. Ehrlich (1971). Ehrlich introduced most people to the idea of overpopulation and its so-called effect on the environment and even influenced policy

around population control in the and 70s (Mann, 2018). Ehrlich argues that overpopulation will be the cause of mass starvation and resulting social upheaval across the world. The book is full of failed predictions, a significant one being that India would not be self-sufficient, with its population far outstripping its food production by 1971, and that the country's population would starve out. Among Ehrlich's many proposed solutions, such as a tax on 'additional children' and a monetary incentive for men to get sterilized, he contended that aid should not be given to 'hopeless' countries like India and Egypt, which should be just left to starve to death.

The attitudes reflected in Ehrlich's work seem to be an implicit agreement with a eugenics-like 'cleansing' of the Global South. His texts are full of Orientalist perspectives that uphold ideas of Western supremacy that doles out society-saving aid to the deserving. While Ehrlich's ideas are deeply rooted in Malthusianism, his ideology is even more regressive, blaming overpopulation, especially in the Global South for Earth's ecological issues, and the imminent collapse of the world. His perspective shuns any significant analysis of the history of the vast extraction of resources carried out by Western colonizers, or the inadequacy of the system of global capitalism. My research contends that this is not a result of insufficient research or a constraint in his study; rather, it stems from ingrained racist beliefs, such as the notion that an excess of poverty-ridden people of colour is the fundamental issue in the world.

This is clear from the very opening of the book, where Ehrlich (1971) recounts an experience he had in a cab in Delhi,

> The streets seemed alive with people. People eating, people washing, people
> sleeping. People visiting, arguing, and screaming. People thrust their hands

through the taxi window, begging. People defecating and urinating. People

clinging to buses. People herding animals. People, people, people, people. . . .

[S]ince that night, I've known the feel of overpopulation. (p. 1)

At the time of Ehrlich's cab ride, Delhi's population was at a bit over 2.8 million,

compared to the 8 million people living in Paris at the same time. However, no alarms

were raised about the overpopulation of France. Instead, "Paris in 1966 was an emblem

of elegance and sophistication" (Mann, 2018, para. 13). It is hard to interpret this stance

as anything other than one rooted in racism.

It is important to point out the ideology underscoring *The Population Bomb*, as it

is a foundational text that has formulated the conceptions of overpopulation for millions

of people, and significantly influenced climate communication, making it imperative to

establish the xenophobic roots of the concept of 'overpopulation' (Mann, 2018). Overall,

analyzing the origins of population control gives an insight into the ideologies that are

carried over into modern population control ideas and eco-fascism. Malthusians and Neo-

Malthusians claim that poverty and food insecurity persist because of the higher

population of Global South nations, and their inability to meet production levels that

could sustain population increases. In doing so, they ignore the important role colonialist

extraction played in increasing and maintaining poverty in the Global South and

implicitly or explicitly, blame poverty on the actions of the poor.

Criticism and the Epistemological Problem

Critiques of the Malthusianism and neo-Malthusianism came throughout the 20th

and 21st centuries. One of the most substantial criticisms of neo-Malthusianism came

from Danish economist Ester Boserup (2002). Boserup challenges the Malthusian

relationship between environmental resources and food production, which asserted that the relatively slow growth in the food ceilings served as the upper limit for the more fast-paced potential growth in population. In her research, Boserup found that the inverse relationship is more evident, arguing that increases in population pressure trigger the development or use of technologies and management strategies to increase production commensurate with demand. In short, she proves that an increase in population leads to an increase in food production.

Mortimore (2013) analyses food production data from the past 50 years and finds that per capita food production has kept pace with population growth, contrary to neo-Malthusian expectations. Moreover, Mortimore's analysis also reveals that global food production meets the capacity to feed everyone on the planet and that food insecurity is not a problem of overpopulation but is attributable to distribution failures. He asserts "[p]ersistent poverty does not necessarily indicate system incapacity. It does, however, suggest market failure" and "a case can be made that inability to buy, as well as an inability to produce, drives the persistence of poverty" (p. 40). This analysis shifts the focus of battling food insecurity and scarcity of resources away from coercive population control and to larger structural issues, such as equitable resource distribution and sustainable methods of resource production and usage.

However, criticisms of Malthusianism are also often inadequate. Boserup's (2002) analysis is one of the most significant critiques of the relationship between population and production, claiming that "necessity is the mother of invention" (Rogers et al., 2008). I approach this perspective with caution, as it implies that the hardship and poverty experienced by numerous individuals in the Global South serve as the catalyst for

significant technological and social advancements that enhance production. This stance fails to sufficiently acknowledge the colonialist and capitalist exploitation of the global south and lacks viable solutions for poverty alleviation. Mortimore's (2013) analysis, while successfully shifting the focus to the failure of capitalist markets in distributing resources equitably also does not adequately point out the role of colonialism in the persistent poverty of the Global South, focusing more on increasing food production and self-sustainability.

There have been important criticisms of Malthusianism that have included an analysis of colonialism's role in population management, however, they have not garnered much mainstream support. Barry Commoner (1975) explores the connection between poverty and population growth, challenging the conventional framing of this relationship. He contends that the swift population increase in the developing world stems from insufficient living standards, asserting that it is poverty that triggers the upsurge in population, rather than the reverse pattern commonly suggested. Commoner writes, "As the wealth of the exploited nations was diverted to the more powerful ones, their power, and with it their capacity to exploit increased. The gap between the wealth of nations grew, as the rich were fed by the poor" (p. 190).

Overall, the breadth of foundational research on this subject shows an epistemological problem. Embedded within the core of population control are ideologies of white and Western supremacy (Shanaah et al., 2024), neoliberal individualism and classism (Dyett & Thomas, 2019). Frey (2011) asserts that in the early 1950s, a potent transnational 'epistemic community' emerged from the Western world. This community, primarily led by North Americans, coalesced around shared values, norms, and policy

recommendations, influencing international agencies and national governments to address population-related issues. While this ideology claimed to be liberal, it operated with inherent paradoxes. Despite advocating for reduced inequality, it perpetuated privileges that reinforced disparities. While their methods were often coercive, such as providing monetary incentive for sterilization, which targeted poor and desperate people, their narratives revolved around freedom and individualism. It advocated for the 'reproductive Westernization' of individuals and comprehensive societal modernization but often prioritized decreasing the number of poor over alleviating poverty. My research analyzing eco-fascist themes in online social media views it through this epistemological lens and provides an analysis that challenges the Western episteme.

Gap in Climate Change Communication

Bergman (2021) identifies oversight in climate change communication that neglects to acknowledge the privilege that people in the Global North have, the unequal impact of the climate crisis and the impact of colonialism on climate change. Bergman identifies two tropes in climate communication that encapsulate that. First is the 'Equally Responsible' trope, which identifies every human on the planet as an equal participant in the climate crisis. This trope not only puts a disproportionate amount of blame on the people who contribute least to climate change, it obscures the role of fossil fuel companies, that make up most of the world's CO2 emissions. By blaming this large mass of people for the actions of a few, it also promotes solutions like population control, over more systemic solutions like renewable energy. Bergman asserts that depicting the climate crisis as caused by humans "results in the notion that getting rid of some of them – it does not matter who - might benefit the climate. If people are contributing to climate

breakdown, fewer people mean less climate breakdown" (p. 13). This is a trope which media communication about climate change often adopts.

The second trope that Bergman (2021) identifies is 'The Fear of Crisis,' which espouses an immediate urgency to act in the face of the climate crisis. Bergman stresses the positive effects of the urgency to act, especially when this is used for resistance against the fossil fuel industry. However, Bergman notes two major issues with this trope. First, the pressing need for immediate action tends to minimize the reality that numerous individuals have already endured the consequences of climate breakdown. Bergman states that framing the adverse effects of fossil fuel use as a predicament primarily impacting the future is inherently privileged, as it overlooks the current suffering experienced by many. According to Bergman, "A call for panic because the house is on fire is disrespectful: it has been burning for quite some time now, and the servants living in the attic have already lost their lives" (p.14). Secondly, the imperative to take immediate action, driven by fear, can foster decisionism. In this scenario, the narrative of crisis might bypass democratic decision-making, maintaining the existing status quo instead of fostering a re-evaluation of the system that led to climate breakdown in the first instance.

Overpopulation is a widespread belief, often in the Global South as well. Stripped of its context, beliefs like this emanate 'neutrality.' Bergman (2021) argues that neutrality in climate communication is a privilege. The narrative that assigns equal responsibility to everyone for climate change dismisses discussions about the disproportionate resource consumption by the Western world. Notably, Bergman contends that seemingly neutral ideas still uphold Western privilege despite claiming impartiality in their approach.

Climate change is often "presented in a manner that aims to be non-aggressive and politically neutral. By not recognizing the differences between people, the idea of 'colour-blindness' can actively exclude people who experience that neutral often means 'white'" (Bergman, 2021, p. 9). Such oversight creates gaps in climate change communication, fostering what the author terms a 'Fascist creep'—a space where fascist ideas infiltrate both radical and mainstream subcultures. As the visible and tangible effects of climate change escalate, heightened anxiety prompts people to seek solutions. Still, without a critical examination of climate change communication addressing inequality and broader structural issues, eco-fascist ideologies gain traction.

Williams & Mos-Shogbamimu (2021) make a similar argument, asserting that 'structural' racism, which is defined by patterns of disadvantage that emerge from the overall functioning of the global system, leads to the disproportionately worse effects of climate change being experienced by people in the Global South. They argue, there "is no committee of White people plotting to oppress Africa by disrupting the climate, but we can identify racism by its outcomes. The climate crisis will harm people of colour most, while they have contributed the least to the problem" (p. 17). This gap in mainstream climate change communication often leaves topics of colonialism, imperialism and privilege out of the conversation. This research argues that there exists a spectrum concerning beliefs about overpopulation, ranging from a moderate stance to the extremist position of eco-fascism and that uncritical regurgitation and the normalizing of moderate overpopulation ideas in media can lead to a radicalizing of people into extremist ideologies.

Colonization

The topic of overpopulation, resource distribution and poverty in the Global South are inexplicably linked with the history of, and the continued effects of Western colonialism across the world. Colonialism defines much of the social reality and understanding of our contemporary world. Ideas believed to be fact by people in the Global North often find their roots in colonial myths. In Frey's (2021) historical analysis of the Western epistemic communities that pushed the idea of overpopulation, he claims that for much of human history, a growing population was a preferable development for society. He writes "Since the sixteenth century, states and empires have regarded growing populations as an asset and as instruments of power and symbols of grandeur" (p. 76). This population density symbolized fertility in both people and land, indicating a healthy and prosperous society. The abundance of resources in such areas made them targets for European colonization. Historically, population has not defined the poverty and lack of resources in the Global South; colonial extraction has.

Raychaudhuri (1985) links the state of mass poverty in India to the agricultural institutional reforms implemented after 1813, under British colonial rule. These reforms, he argues, deprived small landowners (including both landlords and tenants) of much of their surplus and led them to landlessness. His analysis explores poverty in the context of the pre-colonial agrarian economy, and how it relates to the levels of mass poverty seen after colonial rule. By incorporating Indigenous sources into his research, his analysis shows that underdevelopment and food deficit in South Asia is not a pre-colonial phenomenon and that mass poverty as we understand it now, is a result of colonial accumulation. While income disparity and poverty existed in pre-colonial South Asia, the

'modernizing' efforts of colonial powers did not alleviate these issues; instead, they exacerbated them. Raychaudhuri writes:

> The all-too-familiar phenomenon of today's mass poverty was thus already an established fact of life by the time the population began to increase at a steady pace. Thereafter, given the pyramidal structure of rural society, there was a concentration of the increasing numbers in the lower rungs, until the very poor accounted for a half or more of the rural population. (p. 801)

Malthus theorized that three checks would keep the global population regulated — war, famine and diseases. However, rather than serving as a viable theory for explaining the causes of famine, Malthusianism was employed to deliberately create famine in British colonies. Chatterjee (2023) claims the British employed Malthusianism in India to support the principles of laissez-faire economics and minimal government intervention, in the face of a famine. This meant the colonial government did not intervene in times of food shortages, exacerbating the crisis that often led to famine. Chatterjee contends that "the ideas of social Darwinism and Malthusianism inherent in colonial policies restricted the ability of the colonial state to combat food shortages despite the tools and techniques of modernisation that were at its disposal." (p. 371)

Ambirajan (1976) explores how Indian administrators during colonial rule addressed the issue of famines with both a long-term perspective and an immediate sense of urgency. When dealing with famines as an immediate concern, the pressing issue was how to allocate limited resources most effectively. The established colonial doctrine suggested the solution lay in maintaining the free market. Liberal, free-market philosophies such as Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' influenced their strategies for

distributing scarce grain resources during shortages. However, the relentless population law proposed by Malthus provided the intellectual foundation for the Indian administration's long-term perspective on famines. A belief in Malthusian population theory reinforced the short-term, negative approach to handling famines. Ambirajan points to the paradoxical nature of colonial government : "What is the point of saving lives now if those same people would suffer again in the future?" (p. 5)

Davis's (2000) research finds that during the British Raj, India's grain economy hinged on a unilateral relation of exploitation. He contends that during periods of devastating famines in Indian History, annual grain exports from India increased exponentially, meeting the food requirements of 25 million people. Davis adds, "indeed, by the turn of the century, India was supplying nearly a fifth of Britain's wheat consumption at the cost of its own food security" (p. 59). Davis finds that food shortages and famine in pre-colonial India did not occur on the scale and intensity as they did under the British colonial rule; in pre-British India, village-level food reserves were larger, patrimonial welfare was more widespread, and grain prices in surplus areas were better insulated against speculation.

Colonialism informs much of the contemporary existence of the Global South, and the philosophies behind conceptions of overpopulation are inexplicably linked with the history of European empire-building. Proponents of overpopulation, Malthusianism, and, subsequent ecofascist ideologies often defend their views by claiming them to be based on logical, rational thinking which is backed by science. However, much of the history and current existence of Western science is based on mythologies of colonialism, often rooted in racist and xenophobic assumptions. Nobles et al. (2022) outline the

xenophobic history of science, influenced by the legacy of colonialism, apartheid, forced labour and imperialism. This scientific foundation replete with false hypotheses, provided legitimacy for white supremacy which provided grounds for discriminatory policymaking. As Nobles et al. assert, "people in power who advocated or participated in colonization and/or slavery used science, scientists and scientific institutions to rationalize and justify these practices" (p. 226).

Colonization is still defended on the grounds that it brought science, technology and modernity to the countries that were colonized. Nobles et al. (2022) point out two flaws in this argument which are the false beliefs that "Europe's knowledge was (or is) superior to that of all others, and that non-European cultures contributed little or nothing to the scientific and scholarly record" (p. 227). To comprehend the parallels within modern ecofascist movements, it is crucial to examine how colonialism was rationalized. Both employ similar logic, advocating for control and development by the West while asserting that their particular way of life and existence is the superior one. Instead of focusing on alleviating poverty and resource distribution and advocating for a more sustainable society, Western proponents of ecofascism blame population growth, while overlooking the West's role in climate change.

Ecofascism

Broadly, ecofascism has been used to describe the appropriation of environmentalism by the far-right, and as such, has had its conception evolve as the rhetoric of the right-wing has shifted over the years. Environmentalism and 'green' politics are considered to be the domain of the left wing, while the right wing's association with the environment is seen as one of climate skepticism. However,

environmental fascism has been a core part of European fascism from its origin and is gaining ground again in contemporary fascist movements, as anxieties around climate change heighten.

Rueda (2020) explores the concept of 'Blood and Soil' environmentalism, which was a central tenet of Nazi ideology that intertwined ecological principles with extreme nationalism and racism. This notion glorified the rural farmer, idealizing a connection between the German people (blood) and their native land (soil). According to Rueda, this "is the core belief behind the ecofascist concerns towards nature, a belief related to identity anxieties rather than to a progressive longing for environmental justice" (p. 99) The idea that the ecofascist's focus on ecology and the environment is merely rhetorical, is highlighted by a substantial amount of research into ecofascism. Chalecki (2024) claims that "for environmental terrorists, the tool or target is a critical natural resource, but the motive is to force political and/or ideological change" (p. 2). Ecofascists argue that the state must be protected from immigrants and other groups deemed impure, as these individuals are believed to cause pollution and environmental harm.

A prominent form of ecofascism argues that humans, merely by existing, are comparable to an invasive species and pose a threat to the natural environment. This rhetoric is frequently directed toward immigrants, portraying them as pollutants engaged in 'environmental warfare' against the native white population (Hughes et al., 2022). Protopapadakis (2014) claims that such ecofascists believe that uncontrolled human propagation threatens natural equilibrium, necessitating a drastic population reduction by any means, and to them, this reduction is unlikely to be implemented in a liberal democratic state.

While these conceptions of ecofascism provide a theoretical foundation for understanding this movement, this research focuses on how overpopulation is used as a rhetorical device to blame immigrants and people in the Global South for climate change and environmental destruction. This focus on overpopulation as a component of ecofascism is considered for two major reasons. First, as Zacharias (2021) finds, the idea that overpopulation is the cause of climate change has rooted itself in the majority of public opinion (p. 86). This allows the research to explore how components of ecofascism present themselves in mainstream discourse around climate change. Second, since the problem of overpopulation is thought to be a 'third-world' issue, emphasizing it as a rhetorical tool enables the research to adopt a decolonial and anti-imperial perspective. This approach examines how narratives about overpopulation in mainstream climate discourse support global hegemonies and reinforce white supremacy.

Dyett & Thomas (2019) critique overpopulation discourse by adopting a critical decolonial and ecofeminist lens. The research analyses ideas of some of the most prominent and powerful economic actors like Al Gore and Bill Gates to explore the subtle racist and sexist undertones in the overpopulation discourse, which place the burden of climate change on the Global South, often time pushing birth control for racialized women in the Global South as a solution. This scapegoating of climate issues diverts attention from examining hegemonic power structures, such as Western capitalism and overconsumption, which are significant contributors to climate change. Dyett & Thomas recognize the gap in climate communication that overlooks the legacies of colonialism and Western imperialism by claiming that "while critiquing colonial legacies is incredibly important" it is also necessary to "point out that the legacies of

colonialism are still presenting themselves in post-colonial societies and institutions today" (p. 210).

Tilley & Ajl (2023) highlight the similarities and synergies between eco-fascist and liberal forms of populationism, both of which perpetuate reproductive injustices against Indigenous women and women of color worldwide. They argue that these injustices are increasingly justified under the guise of climate change mitigation. They link the notion of overpopulation as a cause of climate change to its colonial and white supremacist history and argue that due to a lack of serious reckoning with this legacy, liberal environmentalism continues to incorporate white nationalist priorities into its policy-oriented analyses. According to them, this population fix is an

> ideological thimblerig that justifies a capitalist world-system structured to extract value and resources from peoples of colour in the periphery – extraction which super-exploits and degrades peripheral labour, social orders, and ecologies, and drives migration to the core. Such flows are then remoulded and represented as natural facts and threatening forces to northern audiences through populationist discourses to justify border violence and political exclusion. (p. 202)

The authors advocate for an anti-imperialist eco-socialist shift towards equitable exchange on a global scale, aiming to end the flow of undervalued resources from the Global South and limit the contaminating activities these resources enable.

Zacharias (2021) explains how many contemporary policy proposals are rooted in eugenics, unjustly blaming marginalized individuals for environmental problems and advocating for restrictions on their reproduction. Additionally, they point out that even well-intentioned policies aimed at reducing population growth by expanding voluntary

access to reproductive health care for environmental reasons could threaten marginalized people's reproductive autonomy if they fail to consider the broader conditions that limit their ability to make autonomous reproductive choices. The author claims that "any proposals that aim to address climate change through individuals' reproductive choices are misguided and dangerously threaten people's reproductive power." (p. 25).

Zacharias also highlights the excessive consumption of the world's wealthiest, the high emissions of multinational corporations, and the resulting economic inequality which renders people of colour the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change while being the least responsible. Systemic racism in housing and social policies, combined with capitalistic disparities in wages and social support, means that people of colour are more likely than white people to live in neighbourhoods with overcrowded housing and limited access to clean air and water. Climate change only intensifies these challenges.

In a critical response to a recent study that links overpopulation with climate change, Green et al. (2022) prompt a shift in climate discourse from topics of overpopulation to overconsumption. The authors assert that while population growth is often cited as a culprit, the current decline in global biodiversity can be more accurately attributed to unsustainable consumption patterns. Wealthy nations with a colonial past, particularly those in Western Europe, the United States, and Canada, are driving this decline by exploiting natural resources at an excessive rate for financial gain. Shifting the focus from population to overconsumption provides a more ethical and effective foundation for long-term biodiversity conservation efforts. By addressing the root cause of excessive consumption of the wealthy, more sustainable frameworks for preserving Earth's biodiversity can be considered.

Ecofascism Online

Eco-fascist rhetoric and radicalization have led to extremist acts of violence against people of colour, often immigrants from the Global South, situated in Western nations. Macklin (2022) provides a comprehensive analysis of how contemporary extreme right groups respond to critical issues such as climate change, population growth, and mass migrations. By delving into the extreme right-wing's unique interpretation of environmentalism, rooted in Nazi ideologies of safeguarding the spiritual connection between humanity and nature, the paper draws parallels between historical perspectives and current ideologies driving mass-casualty hate crimes, exemplified by incidents like the Christchurch and El Paso shootings. The perpetrators of both these violent acts claimed to be ecofascists and targeted areas with a high immigrant population. The connection between online radicalization and targeted mass violence extremism can be seen in these acts of violence, as Christchurch shooter infamously referred to a contemporary meme before committing his acts of horrific violence (Romano, 2019).

Eco-fascist ideas have also made it into mainstream politics. Jordan Bardella, head of the European candidate list for Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National during the 2019 European Parliamentary elections proclaimed that "Borders are the environment's greatest ally; it is through them that we will save the planet." (Macklin 2022, p. 980). According to Macklin, the opposition to immigration is often framed as an immediate environmental concern. This argument contends that immigration contributes to heightened capitalist consumption, thereby raising concerns about the likelihood of missing environmental targets related to climate change.

Dehumanization and 'othering' of marginalized groups is a key rhetorical tool of fascist movements. Massanari and Chess' (2018) research into the misogynist, anti-feminist memes about the Social Justice Warriors (SJWs) often portray women and men with non-hegemonic bodies, as 'diseased and monstrous.' This incitement of disgust against marginalized groups is what Nelson (2023) claims is at the core of 'stochastic terrorism.' Stochastic terrorism is the violence carried out against a certain group, catalyzed by ideologically driven hate speech. Ecofascists often use dehumanizing language against immigrants and people of colour, thereby creating the conditions by which more radical and violent action against vulnerable groups is carried out.

This research explores how components of ecofascism are expressed in online communities, by building upon already existing literature. Richards et al., (2022) explore various expressions of eco-fascism and gauges their influence by analyzing their use on the far-right, white nationalist online forum Stormfront. Their research aims to address the overlooked aspects of how ecofascism is discussed online, particularly how extremists exploit popular climate ideas to gain mainstream support. It examines the rhetoric of ecofascism, wherein the Global North blames the Global South for climate change, citing arguments about rising populations and fossil fuel consumption, and often advocating for authoritarian solutions like extreme population control measures.

Similar to other literature on ecofascism, Richards et al.'s exploration of ecofascism on Stormfront finds that right-wing movements appropriate climate change and ecological issues to propagate nationalistic and identitarian beliefs. Discussions about environmental issues on the platform often involve advocating for eugenicist population control measures to address perceived resource scarcity and the environmental impact of

different populations. These discussions also involve treating nonwhite migrants as 'polluting' or 'foreign species.' Like the 'rational' ethos of Reddit, users on Stormfront incorporate pseudo-scientific content, using misappropriated race science to justify their white supremacist views. Richard et al. suggest "that the public ways in which far- and extreme-right discourse on ecological-environmental issues is cultivated via platforms such as Stormfront, indicates a potential future avenue for the mainstreaming of eco-fascist ideation" (p. 23).

Hughes et al. (2022) analyze the online ecology of ecofascism, utilizing data gathered from both Telegram and Twitter. The content analyzed in their research reveals a romanticization of a historical, 'traditional' past that is supposedly free from the evils of modernity, such as environmental degradation, lax gender codes, and global migration. Moreover, the shared content often consists of simple memes that associate pristine natural environments with the historical past and white supremacy. According to Hughes et al., "ecofascist circles take advantage of the functionality of social media platforms to rapidly share simplified ecofascist ideas across broader far-right social networks" (p. 1015). Thus, their efforts are more focused on spreading ecofascist thought within the larger far-right movement, rather than on systematically organizing ecofascist ideology or creating a clearly defined social movement centered around ecological priorities.

Broadly, the literature on contemporary ecofascism suggests a growing consensus that ecofascist ideology is gaining mainstream support. The destabilization of the environmental, political and economic landscape in the Global South due to the effects of climate change and the legacy of colonialism has led to an increase in immigration and refugees into Western nations (Kenny & Miller, 2022). Mainstream conservatism's

continued denial of climate change in the face of increased climate disasters and rising

temperatures has allowed the far-right to adopt climate change as a way to mainstream

their extremist beliefs and use environmental issues for fascistic ends. This is exacerbated

by the gaps in mainstream climate communication, which often eschews conversations

about colonization, capitalism and systemic issues facing vulnerable communities. This

cultural landscape, where better-informed information about climate change is not being

communicated to mainstream audiences could lead to further harm to immigrants and

people of colour, possibly even violence.

Reddit and Toxic Technoculture

Reddit is a social news platform where users can post, share, discuss, and rate

news, personal stories, political theories, and ideas. Registered users submit content like

links, text posts, and images to themed 'subreddits,' which other members then vote up or

down. Redditors can upvote material they find interesting or valuable and downvote

content they find off-topic or uninteresting. Highly upvoted material—both links and

comments—appears higher on the site or subreddit's front page, thus receiving more

attention from viewers (Massanari, 2017). The system of upvoting and downvoting

serves as a form of community self-regulation, where community-approved posts and

comments are upvoted, and more made visible while the disapproved content is

downvoted out of visibility. This laissez-faire approach to determining relevance

encourages conduct viewed by many Redditors as highly democratic, resulting in strong

support and adherence to this form of content aggregation. Betteridge (2016) claims that

this form of self-governance for visibility establishes a type of attention economy in

which the "incentive to produce content is driven by the need to make it conform to a

specific community expectation." (p. 25). This reinforces the cultural practices and the social structure of the website.

Massanari (2017) uses the phrase 'toxic technoculture' to describe Reddit and similar platforms that entangle themselves in 'geek masculinity.' Massanari describes this toxic technoculture as ones that "demonstrate retrograde ideas of gender, sexual identity, sexuality, and race and push against issues of diversity, multiculturalism, and progressivism" (p. 333). Reddit's geek masculinity also embraces "a kind of techno/cyberlibertarian ethos, valuing the notion of a rational, autonomous individual and meritocratic idealism" (p. 332). Such ideologies contribute to the homogenous white male character of the community while critiques regarding the limited diversity are often dismissed under the guise of choice, suggesting that the lack of participation from women and people of colour is due to their own disinterest. This perspective overlooks the structural barriers that may make participation challenging or unappealing for these groups.

Certain platform affordances on Reddit have led to toxic technoculture. Reddit diverges from conventional social networking platforms like Facebook TikTok and instead resembles early internet message boards, with threaded reply chains. Reddit users are pseudonymous, which means unlike the full anonymity provided by platforms like 4chan, Reddit users' activity is tracked and recorded on their user accounts. However, there is no requirement (or expectation) that this account be related to your real-life identity. Additionally, Reddit does not require an email address to sign up, which makes having multiple accounts, or 'alts,' a much easier task.

All of this creates a sturdy foundation for forming far-right and alt-right communities on Reddit. Massanari links this to the formation of '#Gamergate' and 'thefappening' on the platform. While Reddit was infamous for its lax moderation policies, letting hate communities thrive without scrutiny (Isaac, 2020), the platform has taken a stricter approach to moderation after it banned /r/the_donald and other hateful subreddits in 2021. However, hateful rhetoric continues to flourish, albeit in a more subdued manner, often manifesting as implicit expressions of animosity towards marginalized communities.

Lundmark & LeDrew's (2019) research into the /r/athesim community on Reddit also explores this idea further, finding that the atheism community positions itself as being aligned with more rational and logical thinking, in contrast to religious people, who have submitted to irrationality. Posters and commenters on Reddit in conversations around overpopulation and environmental collapse often utilize similar rhetoric, claiming their ideas are based on reason and logic. They often cite the 'scientific' literature that has been informed by the brutal colonial past, to position themselves as instruments of scientific reasoning. They often appropriate socialist talking points, proclaiming 'there can be no infinite growth on a finite planet.'

This idea originates from the book *The Limits of Growth* (Meadows & Club of Rome, 1972), which argues that unsustainable growth increases industrial resource consumption, environmental pollution and population growth could cause a major global collapse. Despite the text's Malthusian leanings, the authors conclude by saying

Although the effort may initially focus on the implications of growth, particularly of population growth, the totality of the world problematique will soon have to be

addressed. We believe in fact that the need will quickly become evident for social innovation to match technical change, for radical reform of institutions and political processes at all levels, including the highest, that of world polity. (pp. 193 - 194)

Alt-right and Hate Speech

There is a breadth of scholarship revolving around the use of memes and ironic jokes in digital spaces as a way of normalizing and perpetuating hate, especially regarding the alt-right. Munn (2019) recognizes three cognitive phases shared by the radicalized users of irony-filled online platforms. First is 'normalization,' in which extremist right-wing viewpoints are often packaged in seemingly ironic and silly internet content. The second phase is acclimation which occurs when individuals become accustomed to a more extreme 'new normal' due to the sheer volume of content they consume as part of an online right-wing group; it occurs "through psychological habituation rather than conscious, rational affirmation. After all, the sheer volume of right-wing content and the velocity at which it is posted ensures that each claim and counterclaim can never be individually assessed" (Munn, 2019, para. 24). The third phase is dehumanization. Dehumanization is a psychological prerequisite for extremist acts of violence. Fascist ideologies require a group of people to blame for societal problems, and the dehumanization of those people often allows easier justification of violence against them.

In a study of the now banned /r/altright subreddit, Grover & Mark (2019) detect three 'warning behaviours,' through textual analysis: fixation, which is defined as behavior indicating an "increasingly pathological preoccupation with a person or cause"

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(p. 194); identification, when the user either identifies themselves as a hero, identifies

with a past, violent role model or identities with their ideological in group; and leakage,

which is the intent to do harm to other groups of people. Grover & Mark find that the

/r/altright community on Reddit "presented clear signs of known warning behaviors of

violent extremism, particularly fixation and group identification" (p. 202).

Rieger et al.'s (2021) research into hate speech in fringe online communities

contends with the ideas of 'implicit' hate speech, which is a subtler form of hate speech

that is often reinforced by "by spreading negative stereotypes or strategically elevating

one's ingroup" (p. 2). One form of implicit hate speech is the intentional spread of 'fake

news,' where deliberate false statements or conspiracy theories about social groups are

circulated to marginalize them. Rieger et al. give the examples of the European migrant

crisis when online disinformation often targeted immigrants by associating them with

crime and delinquency. Such implicit forms of hate speech are commonly used to evade

automatic detection systems and to disguise prejudices and resentments within seemingly

ordinary statements. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the broader context of hate speech

rather than focusing solely on the occurrence of individual (and often ambiguous) hate

terms.

Methodology

In analyzing climate communication tropes, Bergman claims, "mainstream

Western climate change communication often leaves these topics – with their links to

colonialism, imperialism, and privilege – out of the conversation" (p. 2). Bergman goes

on to illustrate that this gap in climate change communication can lead to a 'fascist

creep,' where the conversation about climate change gets infiltrated by extremist rhetoric,

which can lead to growing ecofascist sentiment. Building on these ideas and the scholarship around ecofascism in online spaces, this research will analyze ecofascist rhetoric on one Reddit community engaged in conversation around the climate crisis.

A combined 15 samples were collected from the /r/collapse community which is a subreddit that discusses the potential collapse of global civilization and addresses other aspects in addition to climate like war, political unrest and international affairs. The subreddit has over 500,000 subscribers, and more than 40 moderators. The community is active, with dozens of new threads and hundreds of comments posted every day. The community discusses news, analysis and opinion pieces, both from traditional journalists and site users alike. The subreddit's sidebar summarizes the community as follows:

> Discussion regarding the potential collapse of global civilization, defined as a significant decrease in human population and/or political/economic/social complexity over a considerable area, for an extended time. We seek to deepen our understanding of collapse while providing mutual support, not to document every detail of our demise. (/r/collapse)

Samples were collected by searching for the term 'overpopulation' using the subreddit search bar. After reviewing numerous posts and comments from the search results, six key tropes emerged. A total of 15 samples were selected, with 2-3 samples representing each trope. These samples showcase the most persuasive rhetoric used to argue for the belief in overpopulation. By 'persuasive rhetoric,' I refer to posts and comments that effectively utilize data, sources, or progressive ideas to strengthen their argument. The selected posts are also generally well-received. All but one of the samples had a positive upvote-to-downvote ratio, with many comments supporting the original

poster's views. Even the one sample with a negative upvote ratio (below 50%) includes comments that agree with the original poster, making it a valuable contribution to the analysis.

This research uses Critical Discourse Analysis to analysis the selected samples. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a theoretical framework employed in linguistic research to investigate the inherent power dynamics and social structures embedded within language. Huckin et al.'s (2012) paper lays out the foundation for understanding discourse as a complex interplay of language, ideology, and societal norms. This approach emphasizes the examination of language use within specific contexts, aiming to unveil underlying power relations, inequalities, and hidden ideologies.

Huckin et al. (2012) provides a framework for CDA that is particularly pertinent to contemporary research due to its comprehensive methodological tools and theoretical insights. By analyzing discourse critically, the method can be beneficial for uncovering subtle mechanisms of power, bias, and socio-political influence, elucidating how language perpetuates and reinforces societal structures. This is especially crucial for studies seeking to unravel implicit biases or challenge prevailing narratives. It offers a systematic approach that involves examining not only the linguistic features but also the broader socio-cultural context. Such an analysis enables a more nuanced understanding of the intricate relationships between language and power structures.

CDA is carried out in two steps. The first is to read the text as a 'typical reader,' outside the role of the researcher who is intimately aware of the subject matter. The second is to 'step back' from the text and look at it critically. This involves revisiting the text at different levels, raising questions about it, imagining how it could have been

constructed differently, mentally comparing it to related texts, etc. Generally, this second stage goes from large (text-level) features to small (word-level) ones, though the exact sequence might differ from case to case. Huckin (1997) emphasizes that is important during this second stage not to lose sight of the first stage; that is, one should always keep the ordinary reader in mind while critiquing the text. This allows the analyst to focus on those features that seem to have the potential of misleading the unwary reader. Huckin highlights omission or deletion of certain facts, or ideas as a form of manipulation that often goes unnoticed in surface level readings of text. This concept plays a critical role in the analysis of this research, as differing perspectives, especially coming from the Global South, are often omitted in the sample.

Presupposition as an element of CDA refers to the background assumptions or beliefs that are taken for granted in a text. These are often implicit and not directly stated, but they shape the meaning and interpretation of the text. Huckin argues that presuppositions can be used to reinforce power structures and ideologies, as they can limit the range of possible interpretations. Insinuation on the other hand, is the process of suggesting something indirectly or subtly. It involves implying a meaning without explicitly stating it, often using language that is ambiguous or open to multiple interpretations. Insinuations can be used to manipulate or persuade audiences, as they can evoke emotional responses or create doubts without providing concrete evidence. Huckin emphasizes the importance of critically examining insinuations to uncover the underlying power dynamics and ideologies at play.

This research aims to challenge aspects of Western epistemology around climate change that causes people to blame people in the Global South and immigrants as causes

of climate change. The analysis will look at and how Western colonization and violence are often overlooked in narratives of overpopulation and global poverty. Communities that believe in these ideas position themselves as rational and scientific, claiming that they base their ideas on empirical research. This position is taken to assert that members of this community are not racially biased. However, the community has a specific focus on populations in the Global South and often advocates for the transfer of power to Western countries, coercive birth control and limiting bodily autonomy for people in the Global South.

Building on these theoretical frameworks, the following research question has been developed:

- RQ: How are ecofascist tendencies expressed in Reddit communities engaged in climate change discourse?

Six thematic codes emerged from the analysis performed: (1) *Dehumanizing language,* (2) *Carrying capacity,* (3) *Blaming immigrants,* (4) *One child policy,* (5) *Moderator comments,* (6) *Defending against accusations of ecofascism*

Analysis

Dehumanizing Language

Dehumanizing language, often used concerning human reproductive capability, is a common theme in the sample. Commenters use words like 'breed' or 'multiply' to refer to people they believe are the cause of overpopulation, likening their existence to non-human organisms such as farm animals or microbes. One of the user's comments reads "I don't understand why they keep breeding like rabbits... it looks like literal hell over there...." (066logger, 2023) in a comment specifically discussing India's population size.

This language is frequently combined with terms like 'mindless' or 'brainwashed' to suggest that the reproductive decisions of the targeted individuals are perceived as lacking intelligence and are seen as contrary to their own or the planet's best interests.

This dehumanizing rhetoric is mostly used against people in the Global South who are deliberately or implicitly viewed as 'sub-human' or as organisms that exist solely to breed and therefore responsible for the collapse in the West's standard of living. European colonizers depicted Indigenous peoples as barbaric and sub-human to justify violence against them, and to strip Indigenous peoples' human rights (Sartre et al., 2001). Similarly, various fascist beliefs have consistently demonstrated a tendency to dehumanize those perceived as the 'other' to achieve their violent objectives. Dehumanizing language is used against people from marginalized groups, such as immigrants, to compare them to animals and insects that 'invade' a community or space (Jones, 2023).

> Another commenter that uses similar dehumanizing language writes:
>
> Because most people are brainwashed to think they are free instead of knowing they were bred like cattle for their workpower You see overpopulation as a problem, but capitalism sees as a great tool to get cheap labor. People are born in a closed system where the only way to survive is to trade your life for food and a place to sleep *{sic}* (cenzala, 2022)

Invocation of language like 'brainwashing' also lets the commenters project the idea that people who are blamed for overpopulation, lack agency in their actions. This further likens them to the actions of animals, dehumanizing them further, while allowing them to portray themselves as the smarter and rational ones. The comment elicits capitalist

exploitation, not as a source of interconnected systemic problems, but as a system that is being fed by people who they believe are overpopulating the planet. The blame is placed on the people, not the machinations of capital. While contemporary proponents of overpopulation attempt to separate themselves from the fascists of the past, their beliefs are epistemologically linked and thus, often use similar rhetoric.

Carrying Capacity

An often-reinforced theme that emerges in the discourse around overpopulation on /r/collapse is the idea the planet has a finite, and empirically proven 'carrying capacity.' The users claim that the earth reaches a natural limit in how many people it can sustainably hold, with respect to food security, available land and resource use, with one commenter arguing:

> Before exploiting fossil fuels, the Earth's carrying capacity was around 1 billion humans. We have artificially, temporarily, and dramatically increased the carrying capacity by using borrowed energy. While at the same time our civilizations industrial activities have vastly degraded the biosphere and thus reduced the carrying capacity. There is no way the Earth could now sustain even one billion humans without fossil fuel inputs. (ItyBityGreenieWeenie, 2022)

The actual number of this carrying capacity varies from one billion to five billion people. These comments are often qualified with ideas that the 'green revolution' and the increased fossil fuel usage are what has caused the current population to meet their food requirements. Also attached to this trope is the idea that working on a larger systemic issue, such as a massive shift in how food is distributed across the world, will not help alleviate the issue. One such comment claims,

If we barely can feed 8 Billion with the use of all tricks like artificial fertilizer -

how exactly are we going to feed 9 or 10 Billion? And please dont use the

nonsensical food is wasted argument. Because even if its true - you just cannot

magically transport all the extra food from the US to Africa without most of it

rotting away before it arrives *{sic}* (Tiredworker27, 2023)

The use of the concept of carrying capacity by Redditors showcases two points

relevant to this research. First, it illustrates the user's biases, as their estimates for

carrying capacity are modelled around maintaining a Western, highly consumptive and

wasteful lifestyle. Secondly, the use of carrying capacity as a rhetorical tool is often used

to dismiss concerns for institutional changes, like better resource distribution, increasing

production of sustainable sources of energy, and lowering consumption in the Global

North. Carrying capacity is seen as an empirical fact, thus justifying their rejection of

broader issues.

The argument that increased fossil fuel usage is primarily driven by developing

countries is often used rhetorically to shift blame for rising emissions onto these nations.

Critics highlight the necessity of fossil fuels for providing essential resources, such as

food, in these countries. However, this perspective overlooks the significant emissions

stemming from non-essential activities in the developed world, such as those from tech

data centers (Calvert, 2024) and private transportation. (Sun et al., 2022). This likens the

growth in the developing world as 'artificial,' inherently destructive and an affront to the

natural progression of humanity.

The concept of carrying capacity as empirical evidence for overpopulation is

misleading. Research on carrying capacity reveals that it is not a fixed biological limit but

is instead shaped by social and cultural factors. It is influenced by social institutions such as the welfare state, the availability of sustainable energy sources, and prevailing patterns of living (Seidl & Tisdell, 1999). Judgments based on notions like ecological resilience, sustainability, and economic collapse, which underpin concepts like carrying capacity, are subjective interpretations rather than facts.

Blaming Immigrants

Perhaps the most overtly fascistic trope that emerges from the sample is the blaming of immigrants for global environmental problems. The comments in the sample express this idea by claiming that immigrants and their children compete for the same resources that the 'native' population of these Western countries, where poverty and food insecurity also exist. One commenter writes,

> Can someone please explain to me what's racist about realizing space and resources are finite? What's racist about regulating how many people can come into your country, to use said finite space and resources? There are children going hungry in the U.S. in 2017. We can't feed our own people, so let's let more of them through the floodgates, who will have children of their own, who will have less to eat than the kids that are already here. We're just screwed aren't we? ([deleted], 2017)

This idea is often paired with the rhetoric that immigration is primarily a tool for corporations to import cheap labour into developed countries to keep wages lower.

Immigrants have historically been a central point of concern for fascist groups, being blamed for ruining the purity of their race, causing fray in their communities (Stanley, 2018), causing environmental destruction (Hughes et al., 2022). More recently,

the fascist 'Great Replacement theory' claims that ethnically, homogeneous white Europeans are being 'replaced' by immigrants of a non-European origin (Ekman, 2022). This trope shows that users on /r/collapse subreddit will often indulge in historically fascistic discourse if it is attached to Reddit's version of empiricism. It seems that users are also more willing to engage in anti-immigrant discourse when it is presented within an anti-capitalist frame, borrowing a progressive rhetoric. One comment that exemplifies this idea reads:

> The connection between migration and population increase is long known. That narrative is completely suppressed by the corporate mainstream because capitalism cannot function with a falling population. To capitalists importing people to financially rich nations is the same as importing the natural resources of financially poor countries. Human resources. (IIJOSEPHXII, 2016)

Corporations do benefit from immigration by creating a surplus labour pool, which can be used to lower wages across the board. However, this rhetoric is being used to continue blaming immigration for the problems faced in the West. Their discourse never extends to protecting immigrant populations from capitalist exploitation, safeguarding their rights or including them in more organized forms of labour. Immigrants, even within this anti-capitalist framing, are seen as the reason wages remain stagnant or lower in the West. Their labour is often regarded as inferior to that of Westerners, which legitimizes reactionary sentiments toward immigrants coming to the West to 'take their jobs.' Nolan (2023) claims that while corporations move across the globe to lower labour costs, they are unrestricted in their movements and are never challenged by border laws. He argues that the "process of human immigration is, at its

most elementary level, the mirror image of corporate relocation. The difference is the way that these two things are treated. Capital moves freely; labor is tightly restricted." (para. 3)

This rhetoric also betrays the material reasons why people are compelled to immigrate to different parts of the world in search of a better life. Capitalist exploitation, followed by centuries of colonial extraction, has left many nations with degrading environments, unstable politics and stagnant economies. Their desperation and vulnerability are being exploited by capital, while both reactionary and anti-capitalist groups distance immigrants from this reality in their discourse. This framing, where immigrants are seen as tools used by capitalists for furthering oppression, rather than part of the working class, serves to dehumanize them even further.

Support of One Child Policy

One trope that emerges from the sample and is seen broadly in discussions of overpopulation is the support and advocacy of restricting the number of children that a family can have. This is often termed the 'one-child policy,' after the social engineering campaign that was carried out in China from 1979 until 2015. This idea is sometimes modified to be even more disruptive, as some users champion a 'no child policy' that targets certain groups of people, such as women or people in the Global South. One post that exemplifies this best claims

> The only way to really avoid a complete collapse is to reduce our reproduction
> rate to one child per woman (...) This is especially true for countries like Niger,
> Chad or Mali that have among the higher fertility rates in world (6 child per
> woman) but are precisely the least able to afford (energeticlotuseater, 2022)

The trope highlights how online discourse around overpopulation often blames the most vulnerable groups for climate change and advocates for limiting their bodily autonomy as a solution. It sees procreation and childbearing only as responsibilities of women and claims that restricting their abilities to give birth helps lower global emissions. It implicates developing nations, with far lower per capita emissions (Friedlingstein et al., 2023) than 'developed' countries. It is important to reiterate that better access to abortions, contraceptives and good reproductive healthcare are important policies that protect women's bodily autonomy and health, especially in the Global South. However, actions that pressure women to seek abortions and contraceptives through social and financial coercion, by making people in the Global South feel responsible for overpopulation, contradict the principle of bodily autonomy.

This trope overlooks the implementation and the negative effects of one-child policies as seen in China. On a thread discussing the end of China's two child (formerly one-child) policy, one user writes:

> I guess this news item reflects mainstream nationalistic economic ideas, but in my view our fundamental global problem is overpopulation, and resource-use efficiency comes a distant second. Each nation has its own interests, but globally, more population growth is only going to make things worse. Again in my view, all that happens when you make things more efficient is that you get to pack more people on to the planet. (DHLaudanum, 2021)

However, even besides China's population falling below replacement levels, the one-child policy altered the social and demographic fabric in numerous and fundamental ways. It drastically changed family compositions, child sex ratios and population

demographics, causing societal and generational rifts (Cai & Feng, 2021). By omitting the social reality of the one-child policy, they treat people as merely a number and leave out important social contexts. While they claim the one child policy would make the world a better place to live for everyone, they ignore the observed negative effects of the policy. The invocation of the one-child policy is another misleading claim of a policy rooted backed with solid empirical evidence which is used to eschew conversation around systemic problems.

Moderator Comments

Something unique to Reddit's culture and affordances are comments pinned by moderators in threads within specific communities. In the collected sample, this is represented as moderators of the /r/collapse subreddit ask users not to advocate for violence or to use dehumanizing language in threads discussing overpopulation

> Gentle reminder that certain "solutions" to overpopulation violate reddit's TOS as well as our own rules and therefore will be removed + possible ban if they are advocated here (typically solutions involving violence or things like choosing who can reproduce) (ontrack, 2022)

Other moderator comments uphold the idea that overpopulation is a cause of climate change. They also indicate a clear intent to remove comments that label participants in the overpopulation discourse as 'racist' or fascist. Part of the comment reads "we have lower tolerance for the following offenses: (...) Bad faith attacks insisting that to notice and name overpopulation of the human enterprise generally is inherently racist or fascist" (StatementBot, 2024).

This trope offers an interesting glimpse into content on moderated communities like subreddits. Although explicit calls for violence are often absent, likely due to moderator intervention, evidence of overtly violent rhetoric and calls for genocide can still be found through these moderator comments. The moderators typically refrain from taking a moral stance on their decisions, instead citing Reddit's terms of service as the reason for removing hateful content. However, the contradiction in the moderator's stance is apparent. Eco-fascists, who openly advocate for genocide against marginalized groups, are clearly present in discussions about overpopulation. However, they are often treated as being on the same level as those who merely call out fascism in response to the linking of overpopulation with climate change. This false neutrality leads to disproportionate moderation, unfairly targeting those who challenge harmful ideologies within these communities.

Seering et al. (2019) highlight that moderators can influence pro and antisocial behaviours through their practices and example-setting, potentially turning online communities into safe spaces for hate. As noted earlier, Reddit contributes to 'toxic technocultures,' which are cultures fostered and sustained through sociotechnical networks and online gaming that marginalize those perceived as outsiders (Massanari, 2017). While a platform itself may not be inherently 'toxic,' it can still permit significant harassment and abuse toward marginalized people, exacerbating existing inequalities and reinforcing systemic discrimination. Similarly, moderators on /r/collapse and their acceptance of 'overpopulation as a cause for climate change' arguments lends itself to showcasing ecofascist tendencies.

Defending Against Claims of Ecofascism

A considerable number of comments reveal a trend where users and commenters frequently defend themselves against accusations of ecofascism for attributing climate change to overpopulation. These submissions often cite the rapid increase in population in the 20th century, the increased consumptive patterns of people and the high fossil fuel usage to claim that believing in overpopulation as a cause for societal collapse is not a fascist belief. Calling them ecofascist prevents "honest discussion about Overpopulation and its role in collapse", (Tiredworker27, 2022) as one user in the sample puts it. Another comment reads "(…) Yet there are people out there who try to discredit this fact by screaming "Ecofascism" or "Malthus" claiming that we could easily supply 10 Billion + people by just abolishing Capitalism" (Tiredworker27, 2023).

However, as gleaned from the analysis of the other tropes ecofascist tendencies present themselves in the discourse around overpopulation on /r/collapse. The use of dehumanizing language, anti-immigrant rhetoric and support of restricting bodily autonomy while refusing systemic changes, aligns more with fascistic ideas than anti-fascist ones. That, combined with the fact that this discourse often finds support from people who explicitly call for violence against marginalized groups, to the extent that it becomes a key factor in moderating policy on the subreddit, shows that accusations of ecofascism are not without merit. The ideological connections between contemporary overpopulation discourse and its colonial origins underscore its existence as a reactionary sentiment.

Discussion

From the analysis of the six tropes in the sample, certain ideas present themselves that help map the movement as a whole. First, users on /r/collapse showcase anxiety

about climate change and its cascading consequences on the planet and have found

overpopulation to be a compelling social problem through which to relay that anxiety.

They believe that because of overpopulation, collapse — which is mass starvation,

famine and death caused by a shortage of resources — is imminent. However, as food

insecurity, a lack of basic resources and the effects of climate change are problems that

are already being faced in much of the Global South, I contend that their anxieties lie

with these problems potentially presenting themselves in 'developed' nations, and less so

concern about the planet as a whole.

Second, the users often cite misleading concepts and facts to support their

arguments. This is exemplified in the use of the concept of 'carrying capacity' as a fixed,

and scientifically determined concept which, however, relies on very subjective

interpretations of our social world. This aligns with the culture of Reddit, in which users

present themselves as rational, empirically aligned commenters. The use of misleading

facts reveals that empiricism is being leveraged more for rhetorical purposes than for

advocating for effective policy frameworks to address climate change.

Third, Bergman's (2021) assertion that gaps in climate communication can lead to

a 'fascist creep' in the discourse around climate change is apparent in this analysis of

/r/collapse, and the discussion about overpopulation. Rarely, if ever, are topics of

colonization, imperialism, or white privilege addressed in relation to climate change or

overpopulation in their discourse. As earlier analysis shows, these communities do

exhibit ecofascist tendencies and include fascists who advocate for genocide against

people in the Global South, blaming them for climate change. This highlights a larger

issue within mainstream climate communication, and their continued exclusion of a decolonial approach to climate change.

Fourth, users engaged in the discussion of overpopulation often eschew or outright dismiss any conversations on broader, systemic issues and view the problems of climate change solely through the lens of overpopulation. Systemic problems are brought up only to subsume them into the larger discussion of overpopulation. Overconsumption, for example, is not seen as a disproportionate, unsustainable use of resources by 'developed' nations in comparison to the Global South. Overconsumption is viewed as a problem of too many people consuming resources, relegating this massive systemic problem to a simplistic explanation. I contend that users avoid conversations around larger issues as it absolves 'The West' broadly, and them specifically, for contributing towards the climate disaster. Acknowledging this reality would entail confronting a perspective that implicates the high standards of living prevalent in the West as being directly linked to the oppression experienced elsewhere.

Overall, this research finds that /r/collapse is not an outright ecofascist space. Calls for violence, overtly hateful language and other harmful behaviour are strictly moderated and removed, and users who engage in such behaviour are banned. However, the users in the subreddit still showcase eco-fascist tendencies and borrow much of the same rhetoric. While the discussion on the subreddit regarding overpopulation does not go into overtly violent territory, it still has the capacity to cause harm to vulnerable groups.

Conclusion

This research finds that in online discussions of climate change in relation to overpopulation, users will often denigrate people from the Global South and immigrants to assert a western dominance. This dehumanizing language is often used in a subtle, almost casual manner which allows them to evade moderation. These communities are also moderated by users who actively believe in the idea of overpopulation which allows more toxicity to fester. The language used is often not deliberate invocation of racist dog-whistles, but steeped in an ignorant, Western-centric view of the world. This 'othering' also allows users to shift attention away from systemic issues and their own complicity in climate change. Anti-capitalist rhetoric is also folded into this worldview; however, it is used to further the 'othering' of immigrants. Anti-capitalism is not necessarily pro-labour.

While the /r/collapse subreddit is not explicitly ecofascist in nature, as seen in the 'Moderator Comments' trope, fascist extremists often share the same space, calling for violence against vulnerable groups. This has significant implications for platform policies and online hate speech laws, as it allows the alt-right to mainstream by bridging into what is often considered a 'left' social issue. Online platforms, including Reddit, have been responsible for radicalizing users into extremist far-right circles, leading to real-life violence against marginalized people. The use of subtle language and the adoption of left-leaning ideas, masks the darker intent of the rhetoric used in overpopulation discussion, and falls under the threshold for moderation. The subreddit might not show violent intent on its own, but it could become a recruiting place for extremist groups.

This research offers a preliminary analysis of climate change discourse that builds on anti-imperialist and decolonial literature regarding climate change. It emphasizes the need for expanded studies that incorporate a broader range of platforms and related topics with larger sample sizes. The growing prevalence of far-right movements, rising climate change anxieties, and increasing calls for decolonization underscore the contemporary relevance of this subject and highlight the importance of further investigation. While the current research analyzes user-generated content on online platforms, further research can potentially cover more authoritative voices from mainstream sources, such as news publications and governmental policies.

Overcoming the issue of the increasing presence of ecofascist tendencies in discourse around climate change requires a shift in the episteme around climate change and Global South development. Tilley and Ajl (2023) call for an end of 'populationism,' from the far-right, liberal and even socialist circles. They call instead for an "honest reckoning with unequal exchange as the actual system of extraction, through which both environmental harm and reproductive injustice are enacted" (p. 214). A major cause of climate change is the continued emission of greenhouse gasses at an industrial level, built on the resources extracted from colonial and imperialist activities. Overpopulation, a colonial excuse for climate change finds its roots in the racist legacy of modern science, which has led to disastrous policy implementations that have intervened in the bodily autonomy of people from the Global South.

Climate change is a social justice issue, and climate science and policy should reflect that. Academia's approach to climate change should increasingly incorporate contemporary decolonial literature and embrace a more robust anti-imperialist and

decolonial perspective. This shift is essential to prioritize and protect the most vulnerable communities disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change. While fascism and its workings has fascinated academics since its inception (for better or for worse), more attention should be paid to people of colour, immigrants and other vulnerable groups. Researching the struggles they face under an increasing threat of fascism, what material changes would benefit them, and what gives them hope in the face of this struggle, can add to the arsenal of anti-fascist action and help build policy that better seeks to protect them.

Bhushan (2018) highlights a significant disparity in consumption, noting that the "richest 5 per cent Indians spend less than one third on goods and services compared to what the poorest 20 per cent Americans do" (p.7). This challenges narratives that blame rising consumption in the Global South for environmental degradation, rather than addressing the unsustainable lifestyles in the Global North. Incorporating sustainable practices observed in the Global South, such as denser urban areas (Dodman, 2009) and higher use of public transit (Sahu et al., 2023), could play a pivotal role in mitigating climate change globally, and better conceptualize more sustainable lifestyles.

Ecofascism is the result of the failures and gaps present in mainstream climate communication. It stems from a xenophobic, fascistic and ahistoric view of the world, that overlooks the devastation of colonialism and resource accumulation that has created a vast divide between the world's poorest and richest. It dehumanizes people of colour, devalues their bodily autonomy and seeks to assert control over their lives for the benefit of a privileged minority. It functions on an inherent colonial and white supremacist logic, positioning white people as sensible, civilized people in contrast to the 'savagery' of the

rest of the world. It seeks to establish power over the people of the Global South — a soft

power, through coercive contraceptive measures in the Global South (Frey, 2011) or hard

power through acts of mass violence, as seen in Christchurch (Bergman 2021). Its goal is

to appropriate the environment itself to further white supremacy. Ideas like these deserve

no space in public discourse or policies around climate change

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

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