

# Environmentalists Heading for the Collapse

The Evolution of Earth First!'s Narratives of Past, Present and Future

Master's Thesis History of Society

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## 1. Introduction

An AIDS epidemic drastically reducing the human population would be considered a disaster by most people. By some radical environmentalists under the banner of Earth First! (EF!), it was considered a possible solution to prevent disaster. To understand these defenders of nature, one has to understand that pessimism about the future. Earth First! was founded in 1980 to be more radical and more vanguard than all previously existing environmentalist and conservationist organisations. Putting the earth first and other matters second, the group grew from a handful of American conservationists into a worldwide radical environmentalist movement. Inspired by *The Monkey Wrench Gang* by Edward Abbey, their preferred method in the 1980's became sabotage. They spiked trees to prevent loggers from being able to safely use chainsaws, blocked roads and held tree sits. Over the course of their existence many things changed and their loose organisation allowed for different views and ideas to come and go. Underlying their ideology were larger notions of history and time. The need to save the earth did not come out of nowhere, there was no sudden calamity that threatened the earth. According to EF!, it was human society that had led to the ecological catastrophe that was going on. The actions of the EF! activists can be traced back to what their role in the present is and that in turn relates to their interpretation of the past and their expectations of the future.

Founded in 1980, EF! still exists today, although many things have changed since then. EF! is now a distinctly transnational group that often organises locally, but can at the same time be considered a coherent global movement. One thing in particular that unites the movement is their magazine, which was officially called simply *Earth First!*. In 1983 the subtitle *the radical environmental journal* was added, which was changed to *the journal of ecological resistance* in 2011. To avoid confusion, it is generally referred to as the *Earth First! Journal* or *EF! Journal* and this is also how it is referred to in articles in the magazine itself.

### 1.1 Research question

The self-perceived role of a movement in its own time requires a certain idea about where the world is, or could be, heading. This thesis aims to uncover the course of history in the eyes of EF!ers and how such ideas changed as the movement itself changed, grew and evolved. The research question of this thesis is: *How does Earth First!'s narrative of the past, present and future evolve between 1980 and 2006?* Historical narratives were analysed in

*Earth First! Journal* to determine how EF! configured history in accordance to their ecological visions and how they perceived their position and role in history. As the movement changed over the course of its existence and the mainstream environmental debates also evolved, EF! saw changes in its ideas as well, having to adapt to these internal and external changes.

The thesis is divided into three empirical chapters, each focusing on a specific period in the history of EF! that shows some coherence in the development of their narrative. The three periods are 1980 to 1987, 1987 to 1995 and 1995 to 2006, with some occasional overlap. The periodisation is based on both the historical development of EF! as a movement and on the evolution of their visions of past, present and future. The research will show how these two run parallel. From founding and getting established to a period of internal turmoil to internal stabilisation while facing an external threat.

The second chapter seeks to answer the question how Earth First! initially formed a coherent historical narrative, between 1980 and 1987. EF! was founded in 1980 by a handful of people, but through the 1980s steadily grew into a larger and very active movement. It was only over the course of several years, rather than right from the start, that EF! canonised the philosophy of deep ecology, developed its particular methods of activism and that it definitively established its loose organisational structure. Consequently, the discourse in *EF! Journal* evolved during this period to towards an increasingly coherent ideology and narrative. EF! gained a distinct narrative, and a vision that made them a unique part of the conservationist and environmentalist movement. The choice for 1987 as the end of this period is based on the fact that in that year tensions between two factions erupted in the journal. This marks a break from the steady and fairly linear development of EF! until then and from the generally homogenous discourse in the magazine.

In the third chapter, the question is to what extent did the ideological conflict within Earth First!, between 1987 and 1995, also involve competing narratives of past, present and future? From the late 1980s and into the 1990s, there was a great a deal of turmoil in Earth First!. As more left-wing activists become involved, the direction and philosophy of the movement was heavily debated. Meanwhile, by the early 1990's the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) emerged from the British EF!, modelled after the Animal Liberation Front, they were much more radical than even EF! and would become a high domestic terror priority in the

United States.<sup>1</sup> With so much going on with splits, splinters and struggles, this is an important period to analyse how discursive struggles featured historical narratives in determining the course of the movement. What role did competing narratives of time play in these developments, who dominated the discourse and consequently held the ideological power? I end this period in 1995 as by then the debates have calmed down and hence the phase in which internal turmoil is the biggest factor in the evolution of discourse and narratives ended.

The fourth chapter focuses on how the evolving discourse on (eco)terrorism affected Earth First!'s narrative of past, present and future, between 1995 and 2006. As soon as things calmed down internally, the direction of the movement became subject to change once again but now due to external factors. Public discourse on terrorism went through significant developments during the 1990s and early 2000s and through the notion of ecoterrorism EF! was dragged into this. In these circumstances, it is the question how this affected EF!'s visions of past, present and future. The period is ends in 2006 as that year is a significant break for EF!'s discourse and arguably for environmentalism as a whole. In the wake of hurricane Katrina, Al-Gore's documentary-film *An Inconvenient Truth* pushes apocalyptic environmentalist thought to the mainstream in the form of climate change. EF! too, in 2006, EF! turns to climate change as well, shifting partially away from the wilderness focused apocalypse.

A narrative of the past, present and future is a historical narrative. Humans tend to take the unstructured past and weave it into a story. Through emplotment, events are connected to each other and they are framed so as to become meaningful in some way to the present.<sup>2</sup> This thesis will look at the narratives that are expressed by the Earth First! movement and deals not just with how the past is emplotted, but also how this past is connected to their imaginations of the future and consequently the role they play in the present.

Historical narratives are an aspect of historical culture and understanding the other aspects is useful for understanding this research. Maria Grever and Robbert-Jan Adriaansen provide a framework for historical culture and how to analyse it in the chapter 'Historical

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1. John E. Lewis, 'Animal Rights Extremism and Ecoterrorism', FBI, accessed 24 January 2019, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/animal-rights-extremism-and-ecoterrorism>.

2. Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), 13.

Culture: A Concept Revisited' in the *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education*. The authors distinguish three levels of analysis of historical culture: historical narratives and performances of the past, mnemonic infrastructures, and underlying conceptions of history.<sup>3</sup> The first level has already been mentioned, but the other two are useful to be briefly introduced as well.

A mnemonic infrastructure is the infrastructure that provides a community with a synchronised historical culture. Through a shared infrastructure, members of a community share a historical culture. This infrastructure can consist of annual celebrations, education or museums.<sup>4</sup> For Earth First! the main medium is literature. The *EF! Journal* should be viewed from this perspective as providing a shared narrative for the whole movement, possibly making them a community with an own historical culture. It also can provide insights into what kind of books on history are commonly read, what anniversaries they celebrate and so forth. By 'synchronising' the movement, such infrastructure creates a collective memory. This experience of a history that feels shared makes EF! a mnemonic community. Through stories and rituals, they develop a historical culture different from other communities.<sup>5</sup>

The third level of analysis concerns the underlying conceptions of history. This constitutes ideas on what history and time are and the relationship between past, present and future.<sup>6</sup> These conceptions are the basis for historical narratives and are of interest for this thesis as the members of EF! do not necessarily share the same views on this matter, let alone that their conceptions of history are consistent with those dominant in the society that they live. The concept of apocalypticism, a view that a great catastrophe is soon to occur, is of importance and will be explained in more detail in section 1.2. To answer the research question of this thesis, the levels of historical narratives and underlying conceptions of history are the most important. Specifically, the historical narratives that can be found in the *EF! Journal* will be analysed to find the implicit underlying conceptions of history within them.

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3. Maria Grever and Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, 'Historical Culture: A Concept Revisited', in *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education*, ed. Mario Carretero, Stefan Berger, and Maria Grever (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), 77–78, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-52908-4\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-52908-4_4).

4. Grever and Adriaansen, 79–81.

5. Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 3–4.

6. Grever and Adriaansen, 'Historical Culture', 81–83.

## **1.2 Literature review**

Most literature on EF! has not been written by historians, but by scholars from other disciplines. Nonetheless, some of it provides some insights or background information on the narratives that EF! presents. In particular there are several texts that deal with apocalypticism in EF!, which is relevant to this thesis. There is also literature on EF! that focuses on entirely different aspect of the movement than this thesis. For example, a number of authors that wrote on the movement is interested in EF! primarily as a security threat, rather than as a social movement. Notable examples of such literature are Elżbieta Połusznna's *Environmental and Animal Rights Extremism, Terrorism, and National Security and The Earth Liberation Front and Environmental Terrorism* by Stefan H. Leader and Peter Probst. For most of these, the movement's discourse and ideology are not interesting in itself. If they consider it relevant at all it is as an explanation for its illegal activities, its recruitment or for profiling so-called 'eco-terrorists.' They do provide background information that is useful for understanding what kind of movement EF! was and is, it is research that is not truly on the same topic as this thesis, even if it concerns the same movement.

The structure of this literature report is as follows. The first texts that are discussed will be those that do not directly relate to EF!, but are on radical environmentalism in wider sense and are still relevant to this thesis. Then, literature on EF! itself will be discussed. Finally, I will zoom in on apocalypticism in relation to environmentalism and EF!. Although some of this may also be considered to belong to any of the previous categories listed, I consider it useful to give a more chronological overview of what is written on apocalypticism and EF! because this gives a clearer view of the development of this particular scholarly subject.

### **1.2.1 Radical environmentalism**

The book *Human Rights and the Environment: Philosophical, Theoretical and Legal Perspectives* by Linda Hajjar Leib contains a good general introduction to the subject of environmentalist thought, particularly in its first chapter 'Historical and Philosophical Underpinnings of the Environmental Movement'. It is not specifically about EF! or any other

movement in particular, although EF! is mentioned in a footnote.<sup>7</sup> Instead the chapter examines the foundations of environmentalism in general. Although it does not mention this itself, its subject is actually more narrower than the title would suggest, for it is really about the roots of contemporary environmentalism and not about older precursors such as naturalism or romanticism. It does refer to such earlier instances, but it refers to them in so far as they relate to the current movement. So Malthus is for example brought up because he is important to the history of ideas on overpopulation in the current environmental movement.

There is also literature that is not concerned primarily with Earth First!, but is instead concerned with the even more radical Earth Liberation Front that in the 1990s emerged from EF!. Due to their shared history, this literature does also include research on EF!, but for the purpose of revealing more about the ELF. Michael Loadenthal's 'The Earth Liberation Front: a Social Movement Analysis' shows well how the two movements are deeply connected. As this article describes the formation of the ELF: "it was decided that as EF!, the movement would refocus on demonstrations, in effect creating the ELF as a new entity to continue producing illegal actions."<sup>8</sup> What is also interesting is that it mentions the *EF! Journal* as an above-ground platform for ELF, regularly reporting on its activities.<sup>9</sup>

A particularly useful article that focuses primarily on the ELF is 'Understanding the Ideology of the Earth Liberation Front' by Sean Parson. Again, this is an author who is not a historian, Parson is an assistant professor of politics and international affairs. Despite the article being about the ELF, it is still valuable as it does a very good job at providing background information on the ideology of EF!. In this 2008 article Parson aims to look at the ELF's ideology as something than just deep ecology. Not only did the ELF emerge from EF!, Parson, throughout the article, also mentions how various views expressed by the ELF relate to the EF!. He identifies three ideologies that are combined to various extents to form the

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7. Linda Hajjar Leib, 'Historical and Philosophical Underpinnings of the Environmental Movement', in *Human Rights and the Environment*, Philosophical, Theoretical and Legal Perspectives (Brill, 2011), 25–26, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w8h1t2.5>.

8. Michael Loadenthal, 'The Earth Liberation Front: A Movement Analysis', *Radical Criminology*, no. 2 (21 September 2013): 31.

9. Loadenthal, 36.



ideology of the ELF: deep ecology, social ecology and green anarchism also known as anti-civilizational anarchism or anarcho-primitivism.<sup>10</sup>

These three ideologies are useful in analysing competing narratives in the movement as they each in fact rely on a particular historical narrative. Deep ecology was invented by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess and its most important tenet is that humans are no more valuable than any other part of nature. This view, known as biocentrism states all life, human and non-human, has intrinsic value. Deep ecologists intend to make decisions not based on anthropocentric interests as modern society does, but based on the interests of the entire ecosystem. Deep ecology became central to ELF's ideology, both among founders such as Dave Foreman, as well as later members.<sup>11</sup>

Next is anti-civilization anarchism, or anarcho-primitivism, which is also referred to as green anarchism by Parson although in other contexts that term is used more generally. It is an ideology that opposes modern civilization principally and considers the invention of agriculture the greatest mistake in human history. It traces all modern problems to the transition from hunter-gatherer societies to farming societies and then everything becomes increasingly worse with further developments such as the industrial revolution.<sup>12</sup>

Social ecology is the odd one out among the three, as the only one that does not preach any kind of going back to nature. Created by the American thinker Murray Bookchin, social ecology links social issues to ecological issues. It states that the domination of man over nature, stems from the domination of man over man. It sees human society as a second nature that emerged from the biological first nature, rather than having separated from nature. Social ecology will play a role particularly in chapter three of this thesis.<sup>13</sup>

More recently, Parson wrote on a similar topic together with political scientist Emily Ray. Their 2016 article 'Reimagining Radical Environmentalism' tries to cover radical environmentalism in general rather a particular group, but the contents clearly build on the structure that Parson created in 'Understanding the Ideology of the Earth Liberation Front'. The three ideologies are generalised in the more recent article under three slightly broader

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10. Sean Parson, 'Understanding the Ideology of the Earth Liberation Front', *Green Theory & Praxis: The Journal of Ecopedagogy*, 50-66, 4, no. 2 (2008): 54, [https://www.academia.edu/518248/Understanding\\_the\\_Ideology\\_of\\_the\\_Earth\\_Liberation\\_Front](https://www.academia.edu/518248/Understanding_the_Ideology_of_the_Earth_Liberation_Front).

11. Ibid, 54-55.

12. Ibid, 56-58; John Zerzan, *Why Hope? - the Stand against Civilization* (Feral House, 2015).

13. Parson, "Understanding," 55-56.

categories. The first of these categories is ‘spiritual ecologies’, which covers deep ecology. The second category, humanist ecologies, includes social ecology, but is also broadened to include related ideologies such as eco-marxism.<sup>14</sup> The final category is that of the luddite ecologies, named after a nineteenth century movement that destroyed industrial machinery in England. This category does not really broaden much beyond the scope of green anarchism. This is understandable as in ‘Understanding the Ideology’ Parson already appeared to be struggling with coining a single term for the anti-technological current. With the term luddite ecologies it is easier to group together the ideologies that certainly share clear characteristics but may differ on the matter of anarchism or pre-industrial agricultural societies.<sup>15</sup>

‘Reimagining Radical Environmentalism’ is not very neutral. The authors clearly give their opinion on the ideologies, criticising deep ecology for example for not adequately understanding the relation between the human and non-human world.<sup>16</sup> It is however a useful tool in identifying the ideologies that are at various times mixing and struggling with each other in the dominant discourse of Earth First!.

### 1.2.2 Earth First!

One of the first to research EF! extensively was Rik Scarce. In 1990 his book *Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement* Scarce deals with EF! as one of four groups that are central to understanding the new radical environmentalist movement. The other groups he lists are Greenpeace, Sea Shepherd and the Animal Liberation Front. The book is rather broad going into not just their philosophies, but also the people, the actions and the history of these groups. It also borders on popular literature, lacking a very focused research goal and not being peer reviewed. It was also written before Scarce obtained his PhD and eventually becoming a professor of sociology.

*Eco-Warriors* is a valuable source especially for understanding the organisational forms and the tactics used by radical environmentalists. According to Scarce, some of the characteristics of these kind of activists is that they favour direct action, and act largely with

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14. Emily Ray and Sean Parson, ‘Reimagining Radical Environmentalism’, *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory*, 7 January 2016, 6–8, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199685271.013.43>.

15. Ray and Parson, 8–9.

16. Ray and Parson, 3–4.

small groups rather than large hierarchical organisations.<sup>17</sup> Scarce also claims that radical environmentalists do not hope to achieve victory by themselves. Instead they do what they can with the means that they have and focus on how it plays in the media, to influence public sentiment.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, this directly contradicts a claim by Dutch EF! activists in 1996, who stated that the difference with the more mainstream Milieudefensie was that with EF! they could take actions to actually halt constructions and polluting practices while Milieudefensie was focused only on publicity.<sup>19</sup>

Scarce also coins the term “eco-wall”, a wall built over hundreds of generations that keeps ecological reality out.<sup>20</sup> Nature both within us and outside us is removed from us by this wall, and it is this that for radical environmentalists is at the core of environmental issues. They are driven by an ecological consciousness that does not value humans more or less than other living beings and that radically changing (industrial) society is necessary for both humans and other species to survive in the future.<sup>21</sup>

Of those who have written on an academic level on Earth First! specifically, Bron Taylor is the one who has produced the most. In fact, Taylor was the one who compiled the digital collection of EF! writings that this thesis is primarily based upon. Taylor is a professor of religion, nature and environmental ethics and this is clearly reflected in his writings on the radical environmental movement. His work tends to focus on the religious and spiritual aspects of EF! which is relevant to my research in some ways. Taylor has written dozens of publications related to environmentalism or EF!, but not all are relevant in the context of analysing EF!’s view of history. Furthermore, he has written many articles on the religious aspect, but later wrote entire book on that same topic which makes those previously written articles less relevant. In the end, there are two books by Taylor that are an essential backdrop to this thesis. The first is *Ecological Resistance Movements: The Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism*, the second is *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*.

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17. Rik Scarce, *Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement* (Noble Press, 1990), 4–5.

18. Scarce, 6.

19. Alex van Veen, ““Geen Kilometer Asphalt Meer””, *Ravage*, 7 December 1996, [http://www.ravagedigitaal.org/1996/214/Geen\\_kilometer\\_214.htm](http://www.ravagedigitaal.org/1996/214/Geen_kilometer_214.htm).

20. Scarce, *Eco-Warriors*, 7.

21. Scarce, 31–40.

The first one, *Ecological Resistance Movements*, is a collection of essays, commissioned by Bron Taylor, on popular environmental resistance movements across the world. This 1995 book includes an essay by Taylor himself on EF! which includes insights on the narrative that they construct. However, Taylor does not focus on the historical narrative, but rather on the ecological one. Taylor provides a solid introduction to the worldview of EF! or at least the view they claim to adhere, but leaves a lot of room for a historian's perspective on the matter. What is interesting is that Taylor claims that EF! utilises stories to advance the three pillars of their ethics, which he says are the moral, ecological and political claims. The moral claim is that all species have intrinsic value and hence are worth no less than humans. The ecological claim states that there is a human-caused extinction crisis that necessitates taking action to prevent disaster. Finally, the political claim is that the current democratic system is either a sham to begin with, or distorted by corporate interests, so that it is not capable of responding appropriately to the looming catastrophe.<sup>22</sup> All these three claims are necessary for it to make sense to take direct action in the way that EF! does. Without the first pillar there is no need to protect the environment per se, without the second pillar there is no urgency for radical change, without the third pillar taking direct action outside of the democratic political system is not required.

What is most interesting for this thesis is the second pillar, because that claim implies a view of history and time. It is treated only very briefly by Taylor, but he does give some pointers that are helpful for exploring this further. First, the idea of urgency seems important to a movement like EF! because it gives them a special place in history. It essentially marks the present as a crossroad in time where a choice between two paths for the future are available. Either humanity causes ecological collapse, or it adapts to the threat and prevents that disaster. Taylor does not explore this theme in-depth and there lies the task for this research. In addition, Taylor's description of EF!'s views are static, it considers EF! as having a stable worldview. This may be in part because the book was published in 1995 when EF! had existed for only 15 years.

The other book by Taylor of importance is *Dark Green Religion*, is more recent being first published in 2009. As the title suggests this book explores the concept of a dark green religion coined by Taylor. He uses this term as an umbrella for diverse beliefs that consider

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22. Bron Taylor, ed., *Ecological Resistance Movements: The Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 11–34.

all life to be sacred.<sup>23</sup> It is quite closely related to deep ecology, which stresses the inherent value of all life regardless of its usefulness to humans. However, dark green religion is broader than that and not all adherents of deep ecology consider it religious.<sup>24</sup> Taylor divides dark green religion into animism and Gaian Earth Religion, and also remarks on its connection with paganism and pantheism.<sup>25</sup> Taylor deals with EF! in this book at several points, because one of Taylor's main interests is the connection between dark green religion and radical environmentalism.

I am not entirely convinced of the direct importance of green spiritualism among the radical environmentalist movements, although undeniably Taylor is right that it is present. However, spiritualism does not appear to be a driving force behind environmentalism. It is not what motivates the activists, but seems more of a subcultural phenomenon. What is important are the subtler religious elements that Taylor identifies. In particular, apocalypticism as an element of radical environmentalist thinking. Taylor identifies a gloomy pessimism that the world as we know cannot be saved anymore and that the ecological catastrophe is about to happen very soon.<sup>26</sup> This combination of ecological thinking and perception of time is central to this thesis. Despite Taylor's extensive writing on the subject, he leaves plenty of room for additional research. He has increasingly been focussed on the aspect of religion and spirituality among radical environmentalists. This no doubts affected EF!'s discourse, but it is only an influence on it, it leaves open the historical discourse itself. It is for this reason also that in this thesis, religion is rarely touched upon, despite this being a relevant factor. It has simply already been largely covered by Taylor.

### 1.2.3 Apocalypticism

There is an academic discourse on the environmentalist view of past, present and future. The discussion on apocalypticism can be traced to Taylor, as mentioned before, and to Martha Lee in the 1990s. Martha Lee's *Earth First!: Environmental Apocalypse* in particular is where an academic discourse on EF and apocalypticism really takes shape.<sup>27</sup> In this book Lee

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23. Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (University of California Press, 2009), ix, 10, 13.

24. Taylor, 224.

25. Taylor, 14–15, 223–24.

26. Taylor, 84–86.

27. Martha Frances Lee, *Earth First!: Environmental Apocalypse* (Syracuse University Press, 1995).

looks at the evolution of EF! and the emergence of rivalling factions within it, all within the general theme of apocalypticism.<sup>28</sup>

Martha Lee distinguishes millenarianism and apocalypticism in relation to Earth First!. Millenarians are focused on the new society after an incoming crisis. Apocalypics in contrast focus on the imminent apocalypse and do not care much about the human future after that.<sup>29</sup> Lee argues that the biocentric view of EF! is important for its apocalypticism, because due to biocentrism there can be both concern for the postapocalyptic future and at the same time not be focused on future human society. Biocentrism, as part of deep ecology, does not consider human life any more or less valuable than other lifeforms and hence a collapse of human society is not so disastrous as it would be in most apocalyptic views.<sup>30</sup> In this sense there is perhaps less contradiction between millenarianism and apocalypticism, by focusing the postmillenarian future on non-human life.

The book is one of the rare cases in which the author actually takes into consideration changes over time and competing narratives. Unfortunately, it was published in 1995, at a time when some of those developments were still taking place. For example, only in 1996 would the Earth Liberation Front, that had split from EF! in the United Kingdom in 1992, also appear in the United States. As a result, Lee could also assess what had happened so far at that point, without knowing how the movement's developments would end up. Her definition of apocalypticism and contrast with millenarianism however are very useful in analysing EF!'s historical narratives, particularly when it comes to expectations of the future.

Taylor extensively reviewed Lee's book and is rather harsh, but this has the advantage of showing clearly the differences in interpretation. What adds to this is that Martha Lee in her book also explicitly refers to Taylor and judges his work up until then. Lee accepts Taylor's religious analysis of EF! to some extent, but notes that he is lacking when it comes to the political aspect of EF!.<sup>31</sup> She does however build on the religious interpretation that Taylor proposed by going into apocalypticism and millenarianism which have their origins in religion. Taylor in his review seems remarkably unhappy with Lee's arguments. His criticism is relevant to this thesis as he argues against the sharp distinction that Lee makes

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28. Lee, ix-x.

29. Lee, 18-19.

30. Lee, 19.

31. Lee, 14-17.

between apocalypticism and millenarianism. His argument is that the pessimistic and optimistic views are more related to each other than one would instinctively assume.<sup>32</sup> This criticism has merit, but does not discredit Lee's framework as a whole, rather it gives reason to be more flexible with it and not maintain a clear cut distinction between apocalypticism and millenarianism.

By the end of the 1990s much of the scholarly debates about EF! have slowed down. It is not entirely certain why, but a possible explanation is that the Earth Liberation Front is by then gaining much more attention. The debate around apocalypticism does not die out entirely however, starting with Michael Mikulak. Michael Mikulak has come perhaps the closest to the aim of this thesis in 'This is the End: Earth First! and Apocalyptic Utopianism' from 2007.<sup>33</sup> In this article Mikulak examines EF!'s narrative of time as a justification of monkeywrenching (sabotage). The most important claim that Mikulak makes is that apocalypticism is central to EF! and how the movement acts. He also remarks that rejecting this longing for a prehistoric past as mysticism or ill-informed romanticism ignores the very real attraction it has on people.

Mikulak's arguments contain some inconsistencies. For example, Mikulak keeps citing EF!-founder Dave Foreman to support his claims, but Foreman had left EF! by 1991. That choice is grounded of course, as Foreman pioneered the monkeywrenching tactic and so certainly his views are important in that regard. However, his article does not refer to any timeframe whatsoever which raises some questions. When the article was published, EF! had existed longer without Foreman than with him, so do his views still reflect those of EF!?

However, despite its flaws and it being barely cited, Mikulak does deserve credit for his focus on the relation between views of time, interpretations of history and actions taken to reach a desired future. It is exactly those links that make these kinds of narrative analyses useful. It reveals how through discourse people translate situations, developments and events into physical actions that they take. In this case apocalypticism links environmental destruction taking place to EF! conducting sabotage.

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32. Bron Taylor, 'Review Commentary: Green Apocalypticism: Understanding Disaster in the Radical Environmental Worldview', *Society & Natural Resources* 12, no. 4 (1 May 1999): 379–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/713847368>.

33. Michael Mikulak, 'This Is the End: Earth First! And Apocalyptic Utopianism', *FORUM: University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture & the Arts*, no. 05 (12 December 2007): 1–22.

#### 1.2.4 Gaps in the literature

This literature provides not just a solid background for this thesis, but also a clear justification for this thesis. There is a significant gap in literature on EF!. A lot was written in the 1990s and thus that only looks at EF! up until that point. However, strangely enough, what has been written more recently generally focusses on the same period as well. I will be looking not just at EF! in the 1980s and early 1990s, but also in the 2000s. This much longer timespan allows for a diachronic analysis, whereas existing literature has a rather static view of the movement, particularly research that is concerned with perceptions of time. Martha Lee is the exception to this and her work provides some guidance throughout this thesis, although being published in 1995 it is less enlightening for the final period that I study. Scholars have so far analysed Earth First! just as a contemporary movement, but it has existed for almost 40 years now, so it is about time that a historian's approach is brought in. Rather than trying to find one way to characterise the view of EF!, I will focus on how it changes over time and how there may be multiple conflicting views on time and history present at any moment. Some of the articles on apocalypticism, such as Mikulak's, try and make sense out of the contradictions that sometimes appear between the pessimistic view that the world is about to end and the dreams of a better future.

I believe that these contradictions are not something to be resolved. The narrative of movement that is so decentralised is more likely to show incoherence than being completely consistent all the time. The task is to identify these discourses and see how they engage and evolve over time. I also believe that focussing on apocalypticism has led to a too narrow view on EF!'s view of past, present and future.

I can achieve a more complete view thanks to a methodological difference as well. Rather than looking at important figures or prominent debates across a whole range of sources I will be intensely researching the *EF! Journal* for a consistent overview of the competing narratives of the movement. Previous literature does refer to the *EF! Journal* and other magazines as well, but just as some of the source among many that they have used. They cite one or several issues to back up their claims, but none of the articles and books discussed are specifically researches into *EF! Journal*.



### 1.3 Methodology

To get a consistent view throughout the years of EF!'s discourse, the movement's magazine forms the basis of this research. Bron Taylor provided his collection to the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, who digitalised it, allowing for easy access. This collection includes all *Earth First! Journals* from 1980 until 2012, as well as special editions and assorted publications such as introductory guides. It also includes some offshoots, including *Wild Earth*, *ALARM* and *Live Wild or Die*. The Journal has been published eight times a year (later changing to six a year). The earliest issues were made with a typewriter featuring small corrections written on it and a hand-drawn logo, while later issues are professional-looking magazines and nowadays there are also online newsletters and the like.

There are some advantages and some disadvantages to using their journal as the main object of my research. The upside is that the contents of the magazines are what the EF!ers wanted to publish at any point. To elaborate on this, the intended audience, the authors and the goal, all are useful for my research. The intended audience was both internal and external to the movement. Those that were part of the movement would read it, as would sympathisers, but except for issue no. 0, they were not confidential and so outsiders could read it just as well. This makes it valuable as its contents were thus likely an accurate expression of the thoughts of the movement. It was a medium for the editors and inner circle to inform and engage with the rest of the movement, but it would also to some extent conform to how they wanted to present themselves to the outside world and the views they wanted to express as a movement.

There are also some disadvantages to using the *EF! Journal*. The loose structure of EF! means that at times it is not entirely what clear vision is most dominant among those that identify as EF!ers. The journal contains conflicting opinions, especially when there is a lot of internal discussion and these discussions are never formally resolved as there is no formal organisation at all. However, it is still possible to identify trends in the ideas of EF!ers by considering what they debate and what they do not debate. Comparing two sides in a debate reveals certain assumptions that both parties apparently agree on. These assumptions change over time and different issues become matter of debate. This allows for some certainty on what ideas are representative for the majority of EF!. Another weakness is the flipside of one of the advantages, namely that the magazine is also open to readers from the outside. It could be that in some cases the ideas they wanted to present as a movement

become secondary to public image concerns. Especially once law enforcement became more and more interested in their activities, they have to become more careful in what they publish. Sometimes this is thinly veiled, such as sabotage instructions featuring a disclaimer that EF! of course does not actually promote such activities. At other times there is can be more ambiguity, which will show particularly in the fourth chapter.

This thesis is a research into EF!'s history of ideas, focusing on conceptions of history. I examined the writings for what they tell about ideas and narratives and not so much for historical events. It are the ideas of the movement that are researched, not the activities. Dominating the ideology and vision of the movement cannot be imposed through formal authority, due to the loose structure of the movement, hence it is very visible due to multiple factions publishing in the *EF! Journal*.

I went through issues of the Journal looking for a number of things: ideological pieces, reports on actions and polemic pieces. Together these elements gave insight into EF!'s ideas which may contradict each other at times, but do take place in coherent discussions with a limited amount of different positions. All these things form aspects of EF!'s vision that together form a whole that may be more or less coherent. There were also parts of the magazine that I did not read, such as poems and songs. I also could not read in detail every issue ever published in the period I researched, but I did go through almost all of them at least. I identified three distinct periods in which the history of the movement can be divided, which form the basis of my sub questions. Certain events, described in secondary literature, have also guided my focus. For example the cracking of Glen Canyon dam, Foreman leaving the movement and the War on Terror. Furthermore, all the Journal issues are full-text searchable PDFs, which means the desired information can be swiftly found.

A lot of elements from the *EF! Journal* are not explicit about conceptions of history, but are still valuable. They report on environmental news for example, which has more implicit information. What do they consider problems, what makes them outraged and what seems to be their preferred outcome? Even more implicit are their reports and overviews of actions that have taken place. This provides an overview of what they actually do and so it reveals where they consider themselves to be in history. What is their role in their time to go from the past with their perceived problems, to a better imagined future? These types of articles have received less attention however. The main focus has therefore been on explicit expressions of vision and less so on dry reports of activities and the like.

In the following chapter I will begin with analysing how EF! tried to establish a coherent conception of history in its early years. In chapter three, the clashes between ideas and their roots in historical narratives from the late 1980s until the mid-1990s are examined. Chapter four covers the final period until 2006 in which not internal conflict, but external pressure transforms EF!'s conceptions of history. Finally, chapter five will connect all these periods to show the evolution of EF!'s underlying conception of history over time.

## 2. No compromise: Conceptions of history of an emerging Earth First!, 1980-1987

Earth First! emerged in 1979 and was formally founded in 1980 by a group of American men, mostly coming from existing conservation organisations. Organisations like the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society were established groups with long histories, being founded in 1892 and 1937 respectively. EF! appeared on the scene to shake these traditional groups up with direct action and a refusal to compromise.

This chapter explores the early history of EF!, during which it was not just founded, but gradually adopted an ideological and organisational consistency which had not been fully developed from the start. First, the origins of EF! will be briefly discussed to provide some context. This is followed by an analysis of how EF! went beyond mere preservation of still existing wilderness by expressing the desire to recreate wilderness. The next step will reveal that this is grounded in a particular conception of history that deviates from the linearity of history as it is commonly conceived in contemporary Western society. The issue of overpopulation will be used as an example of the kind of apocalyptic expectations that emerge within that framework of historical narratives. Finally, by the late 1980s a move from separating society and wilderness to a rejection of society as a whole appears.

### 2.1 The formation of Earth First!

In order to make any sense of the visions and narratives coming from Earth First!, it is important to first take a look at what exactly EF! is, how it was created and by whom. The founding of Earth First! is shrouded in mystery and legend. The most common story is that five men, mostly from wilderness preservation backgrounds wandered through the Pinacate desert for a week in 1980. These five men were Dave Foreman, Howie Wolke, Ron Kezar, Bart Koehler and Mike Roselle. After spending a week away from technological society, they returned in Foreman's VW bus and Foreman proclaimed: "Earth First!".<sup>34</sup> There are many variations on the story however and also contradicting stories, and what really occurred is unclear.

What is known as that in the course of 1980 these men began something new after being disillusioned with mainstream environmentalist and wilderness groups. Foreman had worked for the Wilderness Society for many years as a lobbyist and apart from Roselle the

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34. Lee, *Earth First!*, 31–32.

others had similar background in the Wilderness Society, Sierra Club or Friends of the Earth. Inspiration came from *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, a novel from 1975 by Edward Abbey about a group of environmental activists that use sabotage to protect wilderness.<sup>35</sup>

The very first issue of the *Earth First! Journal* was not published for the general public, but is instead a draft for those involved with the founding of the movement. This volume 0, issue 0, was sent in 1980 to a small group and was primarily aimed at getting things started, pitching some ideas and asking for suggestions. The first real edition of the Journal was published in November of 1980 and featured a hand drawn logo. Right from the start they present themselves as different from other wilderness preservation groups by stating that they will not just protect and preserve nature, but that “it is time to recreate wilderness.”<sup>36</sup>

At this time the structure and nature of Earth First! as an entity was not entirely determined yet. Initially, it had features of a formal organisation, with members and a ‘Circle’ that led the organisation. At the same time, it strove to be fairly non-hierarchical. The formal organisation would fade away quickly and EF! as an informal movement would crystalize in 1982, when after a short period under Pete Dustrud, Dave Foreman become editor again. Dustrud had issues with the eco-sabotage instructions published in the magazine.<sup>37</sup> It was then that Foreman suggested:

“Because EF! is not legally a formal organization. this paper is a private business to meet the requirements of the law. And that may be the solution to our questions. Let EARTH FIRST! be a movement, a non-organization. But within that movement is the publication EARTH FIRST!, an independent entity serving the movement.”<sup>38</sup>

In practice, the role of founders such as Foreman and Wolke likely remained considerable, to which Dustrud’s resignation piece also points.<sup>39</sup> At the very least, Foreman remained editor until 1987, giving him influence over the movement in that way.

It did not take very long for EF! to grow and grab public attention. One of the first major actions they conducted was the so-called “Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam”, during

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35. Scarce, *Eco-Warriors*, 58.

36. Dave Foreman and Howie Wolke, *Earth First!*, 1 November 1980, 1.

37. Pete Dustrud, ‘Dear Readers, You Now Have a New Editor’, *Earth First!*, 1 August 1982, 2; Dave Foreman, ‘Editorial’, *Earth First!*, 1 August 1982, 2.

38. Dave Foreman, ‘This Publication’, *Earth First!*, 1 August 1982, 2.

39. Dustrud, ‘Dear Readers, You Now Have a New Editor’, 2.

which a group of Earth First!ers unfurled a black plastic wedge of over 90 meters long from the Glen Canyon Dam, making it appear as if it was cracked.

It should be noted that Earth First!'s environmentalism was not quite like most current day environmentalism is. Issues like acid rain, global warming and pollution are occasionally acknowledged, but these were far from being the primary issues for EF!. Instead, the group's main concern at the time was wilderness, protecting wild nature.

This is reflected in their actions, while some early activities like the Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam were rather humorous, EF! quickly distinguished itself from other groups by their willingness to break the law. Their strategy revolved around 'ecotage', sabotage for ecological goals. EF!ers also call this 'monkeywrenching', throwing a wrench in the industrial machine. Since 1982, *EF! Journal* featured a regular column called 'Dear Ned Ludd', a reference to nineteenth century anti-industrial technology saboteurs. In this column various instructions and tips were given on how to conduct sabotage. There was a disclaimer stating that EF! did not condone or endorse this and that they do not commit any illegal activities, which gives a good indication to how serious the suggested actions were. One recurring favourite type of action of EF! for example is tree spiking. A spike or nail is hammered into a tree that is scheduled to be cut down, usually the logging company is then warned about this. It is an effective method because if an electric saw hits the spike, the machine breaks. During the 1980s, the method was refined by making use of self-made ceramic spikes, which cannot be detected by metal detectors.

Such acts inevitably led to media exposure and although usually not portrayed in a very positive light, it also led to an enormous organisational growth. From an organisation of a handful in 1980, EF! grew to a movement of possibly 10 000 people in 1984.<sup>40</sup> EF! had become active all over the United States and also emerged Australia, although further international expansion would not take place until much later.

Ideologically, EF! had been expressing biocentrism from the very start. Biocentrism entails a worldview that is centred on all life, as opposed to anthropocentrism that revolves around only human life. An early draft document from September 1980 describes some of the basic principles of EF!. These include that "wilderness has a right to exist for its own

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40. It is of course impossible to truly determine the number of EF!ers as it is a matter of self-identifying rather than of registered membership. The figure, based on public statements by Foreman, is suggested by Lee, *Earth First!*, 84.

sake”, that all life has inherent value, that humans have no claim to dominating the earth and that humankind should live “in dynamic harmony with the total biosphere.”<sup>41</sup> In fact, even the name Earth First! reflects these principles: “All human decisions should consider Earth first, humankind second.”<sup>42</sup>

Despite the clear influence of this kind of thinking it was only starting in the mid-1980s that EF! began advocating Deep Ecology that was first developed by Norwegian Arne Næss. Already in 1982 did Foreman express his support for deep ecology, calling it the most important philosophical current of the time. He also remarked that most would likely never have heard of it however.<sup>43</sup> It was only by the mid-1980s that EF! as a whole becomes increasingly affiliated with deep ecology. Næss, together with American deep ecologist George Sessions summarised the basic principles of deep ecology in the *EF! Journal* of June 1984. At the core it is mostly an elaboration of the implied biocentrism already present in EF!. The main tenets include the intrinsic value of all life regardless of its value to humankind, the necessity of a drastic decrease in human population and that the quality of life should be prioritised over an increasingly higher standard of living.<sup>44</sup>

## **2.2 Beyond preservation: recreating wilderness**

The first issue of the magazine already suggested a particular view of human history. The stated goal to “recreate wilderness” implies a desire for a reversal.<sup>45</sup> It is not a claim of going back to the past per se, but it is one of wanting to revert the current development of human society.

Still, at this point the actual goals of the group are very concrete and narrowly focused on wilderness preserves . The first issue includes a list of potential preserves based on eco-regions in the United States. The list is representative for the style of Earth First! in these very early days: a curious mixture of concrete ideas backed by conservationist experience, provocative extreme ideas and absurd joke ideas. Most of the list falls under the first, for example the “Greater Yellowstone Preserve” shows a considerate realistic approach. Some roads are to be closed off, but most can remain and most developments can

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41. Dave Foreman, ‘Earth First Statement of Principles and Membership Brochure’, 1 September 1980, 1, [http://www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/key\\_docs/rcc00098005-0-1\\_0.pdf](http://www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/key_docs/rcc00098005-0-1_0.pdf).

42. Foreman, 1.

43. Dave Foreman, ‘Around the Campfire’, *Earth First!*, 21 September 1982, 2.

44. George Sessions and Arne Næss, ‘The Basic Principles of Deep Ecology’, *Earth First!*, 20 June 1984, 19.

45. Foreman and Wolke, 1.

remain as well. The famous Old Faithful geyser is also to remain accessible, which is also an interesting show of willingness to compromise.<sup>46</sup>

What I would consider provocative extreme ideas is the proposal to make the entire island Hawaii a preserve.<sup>47</sup> In 1980 the island had a population of close to 100 000 which does not seem to be an obstacle, which is in sharp contrast to the consideration that a geyser popular among tourists receives in the case of Yellowstone.

Finally there are the absurd joke ideas, which in this case is also very obviously present. Included in the carefully composed list based on eco-regions is "Wilderness designation for the moon."<sup>48</sup> This absurdism is a returning theme in EF! and especially in the early days. The Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam is another example of the use of humour by EF!ers. In the same first issue of the *EF! Journal* as the proposals, country musician Waylon Jennings is cited: "'I've always been crazy, but it's kept me from going insane."<sup>49</sup> The group wanted to make clear that their radical ideas do not mean they lacked humour, but to the contrary, that it was necessary to laugh.

By February, 1981, EF! had no unifying ideology yet, and in fact explicitly states so. Editor Dave Foreman writes: "Let's all recognize our pluralism and be tolerant of it."<sup>50</sup> At the same time, a more coherent view was developing already at this point, it just appeared pluralist because its focus was not along the usual left-right lines. Some new discrepancies do appear quite soon however as well. Earth First! initially appeared to have a quite straight forward wilderness preservation approach at first, as the proposed preserves show. This was clearly influenced by the more traditional conservationist background of many of its founders, but already in late 1981 a very different narrative is presented. The *EF! Journal* of October, 1981 starts with the blunt statement "civilization is a hoax."<sup>51</sup> It appears similar in a sense to the demand to make the moon a wilderness preserve, but despite that tone, there is more behind it. Of course, surely it was meant to provoke and opening with such a bold statement helps and fits the style of EF!, but that statement was also elaborated in this case.

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46. 'Earth First Platform', *Earth First!*, 1 November 1980, 3.

47. 'Earth First Platform', 4.

48. 'Earth First Platform', 4.

49. Foreman and Wolke, 1.

50. Dave Foreman, 'The Pluralism of Earth First!', *Earth First!*, 2 February 1981, 3, [http://www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/key\\_docs/ef\\_1\\_3\\_0.pdf](http://www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/key_docs/ef_1_3_0.pdf).

51. 'We've Got to Do Some Motherin'', *Earth First!*, October 31, 1.



The article is one of the most interesting of this very early phase of EF! and so an in-depth analysis is apt. The first sentence, “civilization is a hoax”, is already a statement with strong implications for the historical narrative of the author. This unfavourable view of civilization is repeated several times in the article and is a reaction against the common view of history as progress. The unsigned article, presumably by then-editor Foreman provides the following historical narrative:

“Nor can the last ten thousand years of deviancy led by patriarchal thieves who propound the morality of taking more than one gives, endure. The record of thievery from the life of the cosmos; the great forests of China, the soils of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, the breadbasket of North Africa, the forest of Europe, and the destruction of the natural life of the American Continent is only the beginning of the dynamics of industrial civilization. Its continuing, exponential increase of biocide that reaches toward the fallacy of materialist salvation, that of power and wealth, is rapidly reaching its conclusion, biological entropy.”<sup>52</sup>

It is a provocative summary of human history that clearly emphasises the negative impact of human society on non-human life. The “ten thousand years” is not a randomly chosen period, taking into consideration the previous statement on civilization, this refers to the birth of civilization. More precisely between 12 000 and 10 000 the first agricultural societies started to develop in the fertile crescent and the reference to “the soils of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley” make clear that is indeed what is referred to.

This part has a very explicit historical narrative, describing human history as “rapidly reaching its conclusion.” In other words, the human history of the past ten thousand years is destined for disaster at the end. It is a negative view of history, but notably different from a decline narrative such as that of Oswald Spengler. It is not the fall or decline of a civilisation that is viewed negatively here, instead history is actually viewed as progressing, but it is the progress that is viewed as problematic. The history of progress by its very nature is paired with ‘biocide’, and biological entropy is to be the conclusion of progress.

Despite these harsh words, this narrative does not seem to have further consequences yet. There is now a narrative in the making of progress viewed negatively, but following issues do not show a real desire to return to the past. Just analysing the magazine

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52. ‘We’ve Got to Do Some Motherin’’, 1.

for statements that indicate a belief in an imminent catastrophe provides an incomplete picture. It is now clear that such views are indeed quite common, but there is also reason to believe that this is far from the whole story. As the saying goes: actions speak louder than words. Earth First!ers did not spend the 1980s sulking, waiting for the end.

### **2.3 Separating wilderness from modernity**

In February 1982, *EF! Journal* republished an article written by Dave Foreman in *The Progressive* that more or less provides a summary of what, at least in the eyes of Foreman, Earth First! is.

“The idea of wilderness, after all, is the most radical in human thought – more radical than Paine, than Marx, than Mao. Wilderness says: Human beings are not dominant, Earth is not for Homo sapiens alone, human life is but one life form on the planet and has no right to take exclusive possession. Yes, wilderness for its own sake, without any need to justify it for human benefit. Wilderness for wilderness. For grizzlies and whales and titmice and rattlesnakes and stink bugs. And ... wilderness for human beings. Because it is the laboratory of three million years of human evolution – and because it is home.”<sup>53</sup>

The concept of wilderness is labelled as being the most radical thought, because it is fundamentally at odds with current human society. It is not just a different way of organising society, it is something outside of it altogether. Wilderness is that which is not dominated by humanity, which does not serve humanity, but instead exists for its own sake.

The vision of the future that Foreman expresses in this article does not fit with any common conception of history. There is a clear rejection of history as progress, evident from the rejection of civilisation and human expansion. Defending wilderness is the central aim of EF!. However, history is not truly portrayed as decline either. Although human history is viewed negatively because society is increasingly detached from nature it does not appear to be so that Foreman rejects it as a whole.

Earth First! in these early years expresses a split vision of the future which both rejects and tolerates human civilisation. It calls for a withdrawal of modern civilisation, but

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53. Dave Foreman, ‘Earth First!’, *Earth First!*, 2 February 1982, 5, [http://www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/key\\_docs/ef\\_2\\_3\\_sm\\_0.pdf](http://www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/key_docs/ef_2_3_sm_0.pdf).

only at certain locations. The list of wilderness preserves in the first issues showed this, calling for closing roads and development in some areas, but then also mentioning that the Old Faithful geyser is to remain accessible. To even take that in consideration at all means that the goal is not a complete dismantling of human society as it is right now. The future envisioned still has tourists visiting geysers. The February 1982 article by Foreman also states “Keep Cleveland, Los Angeles”, further indicating that the desired outcome is not to do away with urban civilisation.<sup>54</sup>

Views such as those expressed by Foreman require for time to be able to diverge spatially. Wild areas are in permanent pre-historic state, while simultaneously other places are the site of modern civilisation. His goal is to return designated areas to a primitive pre-civilised state. That in those regions the goal is indeed going back in time can be derived from the way he describes it.

“identify areas – big areas – that can be restored to a semblance of natural conditions, reintroduce the griz and wolf and prairie grasses. and declare them off limits to modern civilization.”<sup>55</sup>

The choice of words is important: “restored” and “natural conditions” point to the intended outcome not being a new stage, but a return to a state of being that is perceived as having previously existed. This discourse can be found throughout many articles. Going back to volume 1, issue 1, which stated that it was “time to recreate wilderness, identify key areas, close roads, remove developments, and reintroduce extirpated wildlife.”<sup>56</sup> Again words that refer to a return to a previous state like “recreate” and “reintroduce.” Another example, this time from March 1983, written by Howie Wolke:

“2. Wilderness Recovery Areas: These areas will be managed to assure that they will revert to a wilderness condition. All roads will be closed and obliterated via re-contouring and re-seeding with native species. Nature will do the rest. The physical rehabilitation work could be done by a “Youth Demolition Corps,” consisting of unemployed inner-city teenagers.”<sup>57</sup>

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54. Foreman, 5.

55. Foreman, 5.

56. Foreman and Wolke, 1.

57. Howie Wolke, ‘Editorial: Rare III’, *Earth First!*, 21 March 1983, 3.

Recovery, revert, re-seeding, rehabilitation. There is a constant use of the prefix 're', indicating the intended state of being is to be again. It also differs from what conservationism usually implies, namely to protect what exists right now. Earth First! wants to give back to nature, and it wants that for the sake of wilderness itself, not for any human purpose. That is why roads need to be closed, because it has to be wilderness, not recreational nature. Aside from the language, the explicit message is just as important, declaring *areas* off limits to our *modern* civilization, is clearly separating historical development on a geographical basis.

Clearly aiming for some kind of reversed history, the goal is not a total transformation of the entire planet, it locates ecologically important areas and only in those areas revert to a pre-civilised state. This remains a constant factor within this early period, from 1980 to 1987, that this chapter encompasses. A 1984 article by Ed Abbey and Pablo Desierto shows more elaborately how this forms a concrete narrative of history. While Abbey is of course a familiar figure, it is not clear who Pablo Desierto is, quite possibly being a pseudonym. Regardless of that ambiguity, it is not published as a letter, nor as a personal opinion piece, but as a proposal by Earth First!. The article concerns a proposed six million acres forest wilderness preserve in Arizona. "Humankind has achieved almost total mastery over the planet Earth during the past 200 years."<sup>58</sup> With that line the article opens, which is perhaps unusual for a rather concrete proposal, but is very useful for this research. Again this line shows that it does see a form of progress in human history, but it then goes on to state that "population growth, industrial expansion and the destruction of the ecosystem now threaten the basis of every form of life, including the human."<sup>59</sup> This suggests that progress is also leading to doom. This appears to be paradoxical, but does not have to be. The authors reject not progress itself, but progress at the cost of wilderness and ecosystems.

"Ideally, a compromise between industrial growth and wilderness preservation should be settled on a 50/50 basis; that is, half of the land to be set aside primarily for human use, and the other half preserved for the needs of other living creatures."<sup>60</sup>

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58. Edward Abbey and Pablo Desierto, 'Earth First! Proposes 6 Million Acres National Forest Wilderness in Arizona', *Earth First!*, 1 May 1984, 8.

59. Abbey and Desierto, 8.

60. Abbey and Desierto, 8.

The word “ideally” is very important here, this is not a watered down compromise or short-term goal. It is the preferred outcome and that outcome does not only still assign half of the land to human society, it also allows for the continued existence of an industrial society. The article does also makes several references to this also requiring a reduced population, but it does not call for returning human society to a previous stage in history, it only does so for those areas that Abbey and Desierto want to return to a state of wilderness.

#### **2.4 Overpopulation: ‘The Question of Babies’<sup>61</sup>**

The matter of overpopulation plays an important role in the historical narrative of EF!. At the start it was not an issue, the brand-new group of activists were very narrowly focused on wildlife and wilderness preservation. However, as the group developed a more complete and coherent vision, the existence of humans becomes a more prominent topic as well.

The June 21, 1982 issue of *EF! Journal* kicks off the debate on human population with an article published under the pseudonym Chim Blea titled ‘The Question of Babies’.<sup>62</sup>

Secondary sources state that the actual author of these is Dave Foreman, but do not refer to any evidence for that, unfortunately. In this article Blea argues in favour of sterilisation and portrays it as being in line with ecological principals. “There are too many of us. And no one can dispute the fact that if we were fewer we would have less impact on Earth and other life forms”<sup>63</sup>

This sentiment turned out to not be that of just an individual: the next issue of *EF! Journal* included two letters by other EF!ers that thanked Blea, and shared their own experiences. One of them provides an anecdote about a conversation with the five year old daughter of a friend to illustrate her motivation to do so:

“I told her I thought there were too many people on the Earth, that too much human and other suffering takes place and that by not making more she could have a better future, as could the antelope like those who trotted across the valley before us and disappeared into the sagebrush.”<sup>64</sup>

This letter reveals a similar motivation as the piece by Blea, stating that the amount of humans is the problem. The more humans, the more all life on earth will suffer. The letter,

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61. Chim Blea [Dave Foreman], ‘The Question of Babies’, *Earth First!*, 21 June 1982, 2–3.

62. Chim Blea [Dave Foreman], 2–3.

63. Chim Blea [Dave Foreman], 3.

64. LR, ‘Letter to the Editor’, *Earth First!*, 1 August 1982, 3.

signed only with “LR, NE Oregon”, also shows some difference with the original article, however, which connects to the next issue: misanthropy.

Misanthropy, the general contempt for humanity, can often be connected to EF!’s concern about overpopulation. In ‘The Question of Babies’, Blea confesses “misanthrope though I may be.”<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, some views can be considered simply a concern about the effects that human population growth has on ecosystems, which can be clearly seen in the anecdote from LR’s above. She shows no inherent dislike for humans, but instead seems to be motivated primarily by concern for life, both human and non-human.

During the 1980s, some people seem to radicalise to the point of being nothing less than anti-human. Addressing this however also requires addressing the matter of apocalypticism and millenarianism, which Martha Lee wrote on extensively. Drastic reduction of human population can be related to these two concepts just as they can be to misanthropy. While certainly pessimistic, an analysis of articles expressing the most extreme views on humans will show that misanthropy is not entirely the same as apocalypticism. At the same time, there is also often an overlap and in many cases a relation between apocalyptic and misanthropic views, feeding into each other.

As discussed in the first chapter, according to Lee the distinction between apocalypticism and millenarianism works out somewhat differently for EF! as a result of their biocentric worldview. Apocalypticism normally has less mass appeal thanks to the lack of concern for their own future communities or lives. Biocentrism however poses that humans are not the only historical actors of importance, the ecosystems are. The own community for biocentrists would also include non-human life.<sup>66</sup> In regards to the overpopulation question this means that the apocalypticist characteristic of disregarding the post-apocalyptic future for humans is due to a concern for postmillenarian non-human life.

However, some of the views expressed on overpopulation can be regarded as evidence to the contrary, although still pointing to millenarianism. EF!ers have not only agitated against overpopulation because of its non-human consequences, but very often also because of its effect on humankind itself. In the ‘Question of Babies’, Blea for example urges the reader to not reproduce:

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65. Chim Blea [Dave Foreman], ‘The Question of Babies’, 2.

66. Lee, *Earth First!*, 19.

“Not only do our babies cause the Earth to suffer but they will suffer themselves. Because of hunger, oppression, disease, and war. Because human society, psychology, and politics are in chaos. Because human population will soon be drastically leveled. Because there are too many of us.”<sup>67</sup>

If not out of concern for the environment, then out of concern for fellow humans people should still follow the same advice. This points to a more millenarian view, as the state of future human society is a concern. Population reductions will occur anyway and by voluntarily reducing population the future of those humans that do remain will have a better life. The line in the passage cited earlier that says “by not making more she could have a better future”, also points to this.<sup>68</sup> This again implies a transformation of society including concern about post-apocalyptic or postmillenarian humanity.

To call the early EF! entirely millenarian nonetheless would be an oversimplification. Certainly, such elements were present, but one should be cautious in trying to fit individuals, let alone an entire movement, into neat ideological boxes. Both apocalypticist and millenarian ideas can be found and are often contradictory *EF! Journal* contains evidence towards the EF!ers not actually being all that sure what they thought. In the February 1982 issue Foreman is ambiguous about what he expects that EF!’s actions accomplish.

“The cynical may smirk. “But what can you really accomplish? How can you fight Exxon, Coors, David Rockefeller, Japan, and the other great corporate giants of the Earth? How. indeed. can you fight the dominant dogmas of Western Civilization?” Perhaps it is a hopeless quest. But is that relevant? Is that important? No. what is important is that one who loves Earth can do no less. Maybe a species will be saved or a forest will go uncut or a dam will be torn down. Maybe not. A monkey wrench thrown into the gears of the machine may not stop it; But it might delay it. Make it cost more. And it feels good to put it there.”<sup>69</sup>

This is interesting because it shows that, when confronted with it, Foreman could not solve an apparent contradiction in EF!’s ideology. That is, the contradiction between the conception of history that understands human society as racing towards disaster, and the

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67. Chim Blea [Dave Foreman], ‘The Question of Babies’, 3.

68. Chim Blea [Dave Foreman], 3.

69. Foreman, ‘Earth First!’, 5.

actions with direct pragmatic goals that EFi takes. In the above excerpt Foreman showed this exact problem. A hopeless quest when taking into account the corporations and dogmas of civilisation, but then more hopeful when it comes to saving a species or a forest. He then dismisses the issue by stating it is a sort of duty, one “can do no less.” It is tempting to try and distil a homogenous, internally consistent historical culture from EFi, but Foreman’s words indicate that such a conclusion would be misleading, if even he, a single person, is unsure about his vision of the future. The inconsistencies are themselves very much part of the evolving narratives of the movement.

## **2.5 Against civilisation**

Although their narrative is often incoherent, figures like Foreman, Wolke and Abbey all seemed to have had more or less similar perceptions of past, present and future. They rejected modern society only partially, fearing that the growth of society (industrially, numerically and spatially) will lead to disaster. They saw that problematic growth as inherent to human history thus far, but in spite of that, they did not totally reject modern society either. Over the years they became increasingly apocalyptic and misanthropic however, while others became more concerned with social justice.<sup>70</sup>

In 1985 the new associate editor Christopher Manes presented a notably different narrative. The misleading title of the article is ‘In Defense of *Western Civilization*’ [emphasis in original]. Manes indeed defended western society in this article, but with the important detail that he meant the tribal Europeans before the Romans conquered them. Manes wanted to make a point to those that idealised Native American culture. These people rejected Western civilization for being the root of all (environmental) evil. Manes posed that while indeed Western civilization has caused much more environmental harm, it is incorrect to consider this a characteristic of Western civilization. Manes historicised the issue to point out that this difference is most likely primarily because the West gained more means to do harm, rather than intrinsically being more inclined to do so. Manes states:

“I suppose this rejection is really a kind of shorthand for a deprecation of modern industrial society - which indeed needs deprecating. Still, it results in an historical displacement which assigns the unnatural values of the present to all of Western

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70. Lee, *Earth First!*, 109–13.



history. This distorts the issue. If the task at hand is defending Earth, then we have to be very precise about what we're defending it from. And that is not some generalization like Western civilization."<sup>71</sup>

The problem Manes sketches here is that industrial society is equated with Western society. This is problematic because this makes current societal problems inherent to Western civilisation, rather than the current state of affairs specifically. Manes does not seem to reject the view of indigenous cultures being more ecologically conscious. What he criticises is the idea that this is inherent to indigenous culture and that Western culture is by its very nature environmentally harmful. Manes argues that that which some environmentalists appreciate in contemporary indigenous culture used to be present in ancient Western culture. Manes's historical narrative is not copied by the rest of EF! however, as an article from the same year on the relocation of the Navajo and the Hopi reveals.

"Most of the indigenous peoples of the world, before their cultures were so heavily impacted by contact with European "civilization," lived in tune with Earth. The concepts of parks or wilderness areas were foreign and unnecessary because they lived in harmony with their environment, and wild nature was a part of their daily existence. Native people no more needed National Parks than eagles need air traffic control."<sup>72</sup>

This quote expresses exactly the view that Manes criticised, placing the blame on European culture. At the same time, the very strong 'noble savage' tone of the above is in a way not entirely different from Manes's view either. Here too there is also a clear anti-civilisation message, romanticising a more primitive culture in tune with nature.

Manes also reminds somewhat of the article from 1981 that proclaimed civilization to be a hoax, but Manes's article is more articulate, more serious.<sup>73</sup> Manes's article is also different because he continued propagating this view. In an article from 1986, Manes addresses "The question of technology" that "lies as the heart of the environmental crisis."<sup>74</sup> Manes discusses the work of German philosopher Martin Heidegger, particularly his understanding of technology as being a relation between man and nature, as opposed to

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71. Christoph Manes, 'In Defense of Western Civilization', *Earth First!*, 1 February 1985, 19.

72. Eric Holle, 'The Navajo-Hopi Relocation', *Earth First!*, 21 December 1985, 16.

73. 'We've Got to Do Some Motherin'', 1.

74. Christoph Manes, 'Technology and "Mountain Thinking"', *Earth First!*, 2 February 1986, 21.

being a mere accumulation of machinery. Manes uses this to argue that “Deep ecology is not saving Earth from man; it is saving both Earth and humanity from complete effacement by technology.”<sup>75</sup>

These increasingly extreme views lead to one of the most controversial articles of the *EF! Journal* in 1987. Signed with ‘Miss Ann Trophy’, behind this pseudonym was in fact Manes once again.<sup>76</sup> The article was titled ‘Overpopulation and AIDS’ and celebrated the AIDS epidemic of the time as being a miracle for environmentalists. Arguing for population control was fairly common in *EF!*, but going from limiting birth rates to twisting a Voltaire quote to “if the AIDS epidemic didn't exist, radical environmentalists would have to invent one”, that surely is a radicalisation.<sup>77</sup>

The views expressed by Manes may not reflect a complete turn by *EF!*, in some ways anti-technological sentiments have always been part of the heterodox and contradictory narratives in the *EF! Journal*. But the approach of Manes can be seen as the herald of what is to come, of an *EF!* that is more divided, has stronger ideological positions that go beyond valuing in the existence of wilderness.

## 2.6 Conclusion

*EF!* has had its own particular conceptions of history from its very creation, but it took time for them to become a coherent whole. During the first few years, the influence of the more traditional preservation organisations such as the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society is still clearly present. Like these others, *EF!* makes a clearly geographical distinction between wilderness and modern society and focuses on designating areas as wilderness. The early *EF!* departed from its peers however in that it not only aimed for protecting what was still there, but also to recreate wilderness. The conception of history that started to take shape followed from that basis, separating society and wilderness. The historical narrative underlying this is a non-linear direction of time. Whereas human civilisation goes into one direction, wilderness remains untouched and is hence outside of human history, or more accurately outside of history since the advent of agriculture. This separation is a key

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75. Manes, 21.

76. John S. Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses* (OUP Oxford, 2013), 206.

77. Miss Ann Trophy [Christopher Manes], ‘Overpopulation and AIDS’, *Earth First!*, 1 May 1987, 32.

characteristic for EF! in this early phase. At the end of this period the historical narratives evolved towards a more general opposition to modernity, humanity and society.

### 3. Between the Vanguard and the Masses: competing historical narratives, 1987-1995

In this chapter, I will analyse to what extent ideological conflict within the movement is reflected in the historical narratives that appear in the *EF! Journal*. The ideological debates have been included in other studies of EF!, but not their relation to historical narratives. Of great importance is the divergence of the different sides and their visions of the future. There is a lot going on between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s, so the focus will be on a number of interrelated debates that show well how conceptions of history and future tie into it. First there was the so-called 'Great Debate', between Social Ecology and Deep Ecology or more precisely between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman. Second, the 'social' versus the 'biocentric' faction, with people like Judi Bari and Mike Roselle viewing environmental issues as interconnected with social issues. This partially overlaps with the first debate, the ideas of the social faction are similar to social ecology while biocentrism is a cornerstone of deep ecology. Third, I will analyse the many sided debate on misanthropy, which I will use as an example how the social versus biocentric faction debate reflects a clash between visions of past, present and future. Before all that, I will be a present a brief overview of the developments of EF! in this period, to provide some context.

#### 3.1 New generations

Late in 1987, tensions suddenly erupted between various ideological factions in Earth First!. Friction had doubtlessly been present for a while, the loose structure of EF! had been noted for years to lead to a very diverse movement with republicans and anarchists, vegans and hunters, all grouped together. *Earth First! Journal* had shown little conflict most of the time, with the exception of the 1982 trouble with editor Pete Dustrud, who left after disagreements about the use of sabotage. But by the late 1980s, EF! had evolved way beyond what it once started as and this was not perceived to be all that positive by some. The prospect of EF! becoming a mass movement worried Dave Foreman as it ran counter to the group's original purpose. He expressed that EF! was not meant to encompass the entire environmental movement and that if EF! attempted to include too much, it would lose its purpose. EF! should not mellow, but stick to what EF! was meant to be. Foreman feared that many people started joining EF! simply because it's fashionable. He remarks in 1987 that EF! has been experiencing 'growing pains' and subsequently this becomes increasingly visible

from then onwards in the contents of the magazine.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps it was an editorial choice to start publishing more critiques, or maybe it really only took off from 1987 onwards, either way the polemics were followed by a concrete factionalising of EF! in the form of new magazines taking a different direction and eventually in the early 1990s the emergence of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) with its more radical methods such as arson.

This period was one of factionalising and division, but paradoxically there were also opposite developments taking place at the same time. While some left Earth First! itself, the *EF! Journal* also became the voice of more than just what was strictly in the name of EF!. A prime example is the significant amount of reporting on the activities of Sea Shepherd, a marine conservation organisation founded by Paul Watson as a more radical splinter from Greenpeace. Sea Shepherd's leader Paul Watson even called them the navy to EF!'s army.<sup>79</sup>

Throughout this phase of EF! there is considerable continuity. Constant elements are wilderness area proposals, discussions on overpopulation and a focus on action that brings environmental destruction to a halt or slows it down. Wilderness area proposals aim at saving wildlife and their habitats, restoring forests, protecting ecosystems and so forth. They do not differ much from earlier proposals, they are generally vast areas, focused on maintaining biodiversity and often include the closing of roads. A primitivist vision of the future also appears in various forms and debated at various times, but they do not cause a major schism.

### **3.2 Social ecology and historical culture**

The major division within the broader radical ecological movement as perceived by those in EF!, was the debate between Deep Ecologists and Social Ecologists. Both ideologies bring quite distinct visions of history and time with them. Deep Ecology has been discussed in quite some detail in the previous chapter, but Social Ecology is notably absent during the early years of EF!. In contrast to Deep Ecology, Social Ecology is much more human-centred and not at all misanthropic.

Social ecology and deep ecology are presented as worlds apart by their proponents, however there is some overlap as well. Both are worldviews that see humanity as being part

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78. 'Around the Campfire: The Question of Growth in Earth First!', *Earth First!*, 21 June 1988, 32.

79. Gerry Nagtzaam, 'Gaia's Navy: The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society's Battle to Stay Afloat and International Law', *William & Mary Environmental Law and Policy Review* 38, no. 3 (1 May 2014): 627.

of nature, rejecting the separation of the human and non-human. Both also view most of human history and humanity's continuous economic expansion as harmful. However, whereas Deep Ecology pinpoints the issue on anthropocentrism, Social Ecology believes that ecological issues are the result of social issues.

Social Ecology is generally not openly adhered to by most EF!ers, but its influence is increasingly apparent starting in the late 1980s, but presented within a deep ecological discourse. In this part the historical culture embedded in Social Ecology is analysed, which in the next part will be used to reveal the visions of past, present and future of the 'social' faction within EF!. It is also because of the regular animosity between Murray Bookchin, who developed the theory of Social Ecology, and the biocentrist EF!ers that it is relevant. It is very much a worldview that the EF!ers know about and engage with. This makes it not only influential among (secret) adherents, but also a benchmark for opponents.

Social Ecology has a very different conception of history compared to the deep ecological views that EF! expressed in the previous chapter. The themes of apocalypticism and anti-human, anti-civilisation sentiments that were discussed are largely absent from Social Ecology. Social Ecology is explicitly utopianist, Bookchin believed to live "at a point in history when the boldest concepts of Utopia are realizable."<sup>80</sup> With "realizable", Bookchin means that society has advanced far enough that scarcity can be eliminated. That is not to say that everyone can have whatever they dream of, but that it is possible for all of humanity to fulfil their needs. The key to that is to dismantle capitalism and other forms of hierarchy. When compared to the bulk of EF! views in the previous period, this is their total opposite. Whether total apocalypticists or moderates, all had a negative view of historical progress. Progress was the root of the issue, due to industrial exploitation of the earth and population growth. From this view of the past followed the view of the future which was a return to the pre-industrial (or sometimes even pre-agricultural) past, often for a geographically restricted area. Bookchin on the other hand, while acknowledging that much of history has caused tremendous harm, believes humanity to be able to overcome these issues.

Bookchin rejects both anthropocentrism and biocentrism for being oversimplifications. The Social Ecological view of nature can best be explained by briefly examining Bookchin's own work.

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80. Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, 2nd ed. (Montreal-Buffalo: Black Rose Books, 1986), 75, <https://libcom.org/files/Bookchin-Murray-Post-Scarcity-Anarchism-1986.pdf>.

“Human beings always remain rooted in their biological evolutionary history, which we may call “first nature,” but they produce a characteristically human social nature of their own, which we may call “second nature.” Far from being unnatural, human second nature is eminently a creation of organic evolution’s first nature. To write second nature out of nature as a whole, or indeed to minimize it, is to ignore the creativity of natural evolution itself and to view it one-sidedly.”<sup>81</sup>

According to Bookchin, the separation of human society and nature is incorrect. He acknowledges that human society has particular characteristics that are different from non-human nature, but according to Bookchin that does divorce it from nature. It is not unnatural, but a product of nature. Second nature, society, emerges *from* first nature, it is a natural evolutionary process. His vision of the future involves a dialectical synthesis of first and second nature into a ‘free nature’.<sup>82</sup>

In 1989 Dave Foreman and Murray Bookchin met for “the Great Debate” and a page-covering summary was published in the *EF! Journal*. Not truly a debate, it was a joint talk and dialogue by Foreman and Bookchin at an event in New York. That it was considered “the Great Debate”, gives a good indication of the relevance of Bookchin to EF!. However, the report in the magazine remarks that “those who anticipated fireworks were disappointed.”<sup>83</sup> Both Foreman and Bookchin emphasised their similarities and that they were all part of the same fight, despite their criticisms of each other.

### 3.3 The social question

Since at least 1987, when Foreman expressed his concern about EF! becoming a mass movement, a clash between two factions had brewing. On the one hand there was the ‘biocentric faction’, which adhered strictly to deep ecology and focused solely on environmental issues, considering social matters to be of significantly less importance. Opposed to these were those that were accused of anthropocentrism and leftism by the biocentrists, usually called the ‘social justice’ or ‘social issues’ faction. Here they will be called just the social faction, to use a single term consistently and because it would be

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81. Murray Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism* (AK Press, 2007), 26–27, <http://new-compass.net/sites/new-compass.net/files/Bookchin's%20Social%20Ecology%20and%20Communalism.pdf>.

82. Bookchin, 47.

83. Bill Weinberg, ‘Social Ecology and Deep Ecology Meet’, *Earth First!*, 2 February 1990, 10.

incorrect to suggest that they are mainly focused on social justice or social issues, rather they connect social and environmental issues.

The first true precursor to the social faction had always been there, from the very start of EF!. Literally, because among the founders there was one who stood out: Mike Roselle. Unlike his peers who had backgrounds in conservationism, Roselle came from radical politics, starting with anti-Vietnam protesting in his teens.<sup>84</sup> Roselle's activities in EF! involved more civil disobedience, rather than monkeywrenching. In 1986, Roselle even became national campaign coordinator for Greenpeace, a much more moderate and mainstream environmentalist organisation.<sup>85</sup>

Tensions between the social faction and the biocentric faction increased greatly after an incident at the annual EF! meeting Round River Rendezvous (RRR). A group of 'anarcho-communists' called Alien-Nation that was active in EF! was concerned about the opinions expressed by Miss Ann Thropy [Christopher Mannes] and Edward Abbey, concerning AIDS, overpopulation and migration. These concerns were common to the social faction, the camp to which they, with their strongly leftist ideology firmly belonged. They were allowed to set up a booth at the RRR, but after a heated discussion this led to biocentric EF!ers disrupting Alien-Nation in the evening with chants and threats.<sup>86</sup> After this, Alien-Nation wrote a newsletter expressing their concerns which was also published in *EF! Journal* alongside heavy critiques of it by the biocentric faction.<sup>87</sup> From then on, the clash between the two factions intensified.

Although not claiming to adhere to Social Ecology, the social faction has much in common with the Social Ecologists when it comes to their visions of past, present and future. Roselle's focus on organising the masses already relied on a different vision and Judi Bari's alliance with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) is an even more significant break from the visions that had dominated EF! so far.

Judi Bari had experience as a labour organiser and brought this into EF! by 1988. The IWW started in the early twentieth century as a socialist general industrial union. Initially quite successful, by the 1980s it had become a minor organisation, but did manage to survive. Even for Dave Foreman, the IWW had been an inspiration, mostly as a form of

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84. Scarce, *Eco-Warriors*, 59.

85. Dave Foreman, 'Around the Campfire', *Earth First!*, 2 February 1986, 2.

86. Lee, *Earth First!*, 105–6.

87. 'Alien Nation', *Earth First!*, 1 November 1987, 17–18.



inspiration for forms of protest.<sup>88</sup> Bari had other plans however, she wanted the IWW to actively work together with EF! in California.<sup>89</sup>

The importance of this is that organising workers is a desirable strategy for the social faction, which requires a different narrative of ecological destruction. If humans in modern society are inherently an issue, which they have to be for both concerns about overpopulation and the desire for separating wilderness and modernity to make sense, than support for those whose job it is to cut forests is not quite logical. Lumber workers are however an ally for Bari, because her view of the relation between human history and ecological disaster is different.

Bari explicitly rejects the views of Murray Bookchin, and by extension that of Social Ecology, for being anthropocentric.<sup>90</sup> When it comes to visions of past, present and future, they are however quite similar. In fact, in spite of Bari's denial, Bookchin on the other hand does see a connection with Bari and other EF!ers.

"For example, in the past year, Earth First!'s northern California groups, and possibility others as well, appear to have veered towards a degree of social activism and perspective that is far more consistent with social ecology than with a deep ecology perspective, even as amended recently by Dave. As Redwood Summer organizer Judi Bari points out, Earth First! is no longer "just a conversation movement, it is also a social change movement." I applaud the general direction of this ideological shift."<sup>91</sup>

Bookchin considers Bari and more generally all EF! groups that take into account social issues as being similar to Social Ecology. The similarity that Bookchin sees, is tied to the historical narratives that they present. Bookchin's theory of first, second and free nature, is the total opposite of those that look to the past, whether they aspire to wilderness as restricted to particular areas, or reject modern civilisation as whole.

In 1988, Foreman stepped down as editor of the journal, appointing another biocentric hardliner, John Davis, as editor. Simultaneously, Foreman expressed his concerns about what EF! is becoming. According to Foreman, EF! stands at a crossroad where they will have to

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88. Lee, *Earth First!*, 120–21.

89. Judi Bari, 'California Rendezvous', *Earth First!*, 1 November 1988, 5.

90. Judi Bari, 'Why I Am Not a Misanthrope', *Earth First!*, 2 February 1991, 25.

91. Murray Bookchin, Dave Foreman, and Steve Chase, *Defending the Earth : A Dialogue between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman* (Boston, Mass. : South End Press, 1991), 121, <http://archive.org/details/defendingearthd00book>.

decide whether they want to become a mass movement or not. Although his tone is moderate he makes clear that, even if perhaps desirable, this is not how EF! was envisioned.

“We are the avant garde of the "ecology" movement. We are pushing the edge. We are provocative. We are creative. We are "extremists." We are exploring new ideas and challenging old assumptions. We are experimenting with new "tools." We are catalysts.”<sup>92</sup>

Foreman believes that if EF! were to become a mass movement, then it would be necessary for a new group to arise more radical than EF!, for that was purpose of EF!. The need for a vanguard is central to Foreman’s vision. Apparently, it is not perceivable for a mass movement which is radical enough. It is a key ingredient to connecting the present with his future vision. Eventually, he and others act accordingly, and so we are once again in 1990, with the exodus of the biocentric faction, off to do their own thing.

September, 1990, finally all the internal conflict came to a climax and a part of EF! broke off. The September issue is full of resignation letters. Leavers include editor John Davis, Dave Foreman and numerous others, that consider themselves to be the ‘biocentric’ faction.<sup>93</sup> The social faction also appears with some letters and articles in the same issue, denying the accusations launched at them by the leavers. Judi Bari lashes out at the leavers, arguing that separating how human society is organised and ecological issues, is short-sighted. Bari argues: “The only way to preserve Wilderness and the only way to save our planet's life support system from collapse is to find a way to live on the earth that doesn't destroy the earth.”<sup>94</sup> She is not actually opposed to biocentrism or to Deep Ecology, but her interpretation of it differs from the leavers.

While not very surprising, the split did not appear entirely unavoidable either. Diversity in views was always present in EF! and previously people like Foreman openly embraced it.<sup>95</sup> Davis too had indicated acceptance of different tactics, even those that were

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92. Foreman, ‘Around the Campfire: The Question of Growth in Earth First!’, 32.

93. John Davis, ‘Editor’s Note’, *Earth First!*, 22 September 1990, 2; Dave Foreman and Nancy Morton, ‘Good Luch, Darlin’. It’s Been Great.’, *Earth First!*, 22 September 1990, 5; Dale Turner, ‘Regrets and Relief’, *Earth First!*, 22 September 1990, 3; Kris Sommerville, ‘Renunciation’, *Earth First!*, 22 September 1990, 2; Nancy Zierenberg, ‘Time To Move On’, *Earth First!*, 22 September 1990, 2–3.

94. Judi Bari, ‘Expand Earth First!’, *Earth First!*, 22 September 1990, 5.

95. Foreman, ‘The Pluralism of Earth First!’, 3.

more leftist. He had previously called Judi Bari's alliance between *EF!* and the IWW, a revolutionary international labour union, "exciting".<sup>96</sup>

### 3.4 Misanthropy

The clear division between the visions of human history can be observed by looking at articles that deal with the same topic. A perfect example are the views of Christopher Manes from the biocentric faction, and Judi Bari from the social faction, on misanthropy. Manes of course is a recurring figure when it comes to controversial articles in *EF! Journal* and he does what he does best once again in late 1990 declaring that he is a proud misanthrope. In fact, he argues, it the burden of proof should not even lie with him on this, "given humanity's 10,000 year record of massacres, wars, ecocide, extinctions, holocausts, lethal dogmas, race hatred, casual slaughters, venality, corruption and coercion."<sup>97</sup>

Manes refers to his era as "the latter days of ecological crisis", a crisis which had started thousands of years ago already.<sup>98</sup> This talk of crisis indicates a great urgency, but perhaps also hopelessness, for it is an article promoting misanthropy. Another indication of this hopelessness is in the final paragraph, in which he imagines a philosopher in ancient Sumeria. In this empire, that according to Manes "began the doomed parade of civilization", the philosopher must have decried the foolishness of their way of life.<sup>99</sup>

"He went out and told people to go back to their nomadic way of life. He was probably laughed at or hanged; and Sumeria slowly slipped into the desert sands. That man, I assure you, was misanthrope."<sup>100</sup>

It is an imagination of the past, paralleling a perception of the present. The imagined Sumerian philosopher sees that the people should return to the pre-civilised way of life. It is a historical narrative, yet lacks even the claim that is based on the truth. Hence, the narrative serves not to reveal anything about the past, it only serves to make the argument of the author timeless. The ecological destruction is not the symptom of a specific civilization or a phase in history. It is all that human history is for Manes.

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96. John Davis, 'A View of the Vortex', *Earth First!*, 1 November 1988, 2.

97. Christopher Manes, 'Why I Am a Misanthrope', *Earth First!*, 21 December 1990, 29.

98. Manes, 29.

99. Manes, 29.

100. Manes, 29.

In response, Judi Bari wrote an article on why she is not a misanthrope. Bari dismisses the claim that humankind as a whole is the problem, pointing to the various cultures that have lived in ecological harmony for thousands of years. She agrees that the vast majority of humanity now lives according to the same culture of greed and destruction of the environment, but Bari does not see this as an inevitability of human history.

“Technocratic man, with his linear view of the world, tends to see tribal societies as earlier, less evolved forms of society, rather than as alternative, simultaneously existing methods of living on the earth. The presumption is that, given time, these cultures would somehow be corrupted like ours. But there is no evidence whatsoever that these ancient civilizations would have changed without our violent intervention. So it is not humans, but industrial-technocratic societies, that are destroying the earth.”<sup>101</sup>

Bari here reveals very clearly how her underlying conception of history and time are at the heart of her disagreement with the self-declared misanthropes. She rejects the linear view of history in which societies all go through the same stages, advancing to a higher level. This implies a similarity between the dominant narrative of history as progress and the pessimistic counter-narrative of a destructive human history, which can be derived from Manes, but also figures like Edward Abbey and Dave Foreman. The enlightenment narrative of progress and the misanthropic view of Manes both share the same linear plotline with a uniform direction.<sup>102</sup> This allows Bari to apply her critique of the “technocratic man” against Manes as well. Her vision does not equate moving through time with moving towards an industrial-technocratic society, but sees various forms of civilisation as potentially able to exist at any point in history. The move of many societies towards the industrial-technocratic is due to existing societies of that type violently assimilating other types, not due to internal factors.

Todd Shuman offers a third vision which takes a different angle and analyses the debate. Due to that analysis it is not just a primary source, but partially also a secondary source. Shuman’s analytical contribution comes down to the following:

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101. Bari, ‘Why I Am Not a Misanthrope’, 25.

102. Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 18.

“So, when you really at what is at stake in this debate, you see that much of it boils down to the old question of monkeywrenching versus mass non-violent disobedience, with neither side really engaging the key issue: they are shadow-boxing around the question of strategy.”<sup>103</sup>

In other words, what is presented as a debate about underlying worldviews, is in fact about strategy. The misanthropes favour the old ‘monkeywrenching’ strategy. The premise is that the vast majority of humanity causes harm in current society and there are only a handful of exceptions who do more good than harm. Promoting such a view naturally favours small groups or individuals doing what they can to limit the harm caused by humanity’s existence. On the other hand, those that favour civil disobedience such as Judi Bari and Mike Roselle, reject misanthrope and emphasise that it is a particular group of humans that is to blame. Bari points to “white technocratic men” and explicitly denies it is problem with human-kind in general.<sup>104</sup> This allows for the mobilisation of much larger groups of people, because it gives “a reasonable chance of gaining the support of all those other social groups.”<sup>105</sup> Shuman believes that the strategical consideration precedes the question of misanthrope. He states that “the demands of building a broad movement have given rise to a worldview quite different from that of the misanthrope.”<sup>106</sup>

There is more reason to believe the contrary however, that the worldview precedes the tactic. For Shuman misanthropy or not is a rhetorical choice that necessitated by what strategy is believed to be the most viable. There are two qualms with this analysis. First, it relies on a rather bold assumption that the two sides to the debate cannot truly have differing worldviews. Shuman makes the link between misanthropy and strategy quite clear, but he does not back his claim that strategy comes first. So, there is an underlying assumption to that conclusion, namely that the misanthropy debate is not sincere. Second, it ignores the fact that the belief in either strategy does not appear out of thin air. The belief in a strategy is itself tied to the views on misanthropy which are in turn linked to conceptions of past and future. This becomes evident if one imagines it were the other way around. If someone from the social faction such as Bari had misanthropic views, could she still believe

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103. Todd Shuman, ‘Misanthropy or No - Where Does It Go?’, *Earth First!*, 1 May 1991, 9.

104. Bari, ‘Why I Am Not a Misanthrope’, 25.

105. Shuman, ‘Misanthropy or No - Where Does It Go?’, 9.

106. Shuman, 9.

in mass movement strategies and favour social issues? It would seem very unlikely that one could have a disdain for humanity and yet still favour strategies that unite most of humanity against an elite. Misanthrope makes the masses themselves suspect, hence it is a question that logically precedes strategy.

The other step, taking it back to conceptions of history, can be reached with a similar reasoning. Placing the blame on humanity as a whole or not must be preceded by a view of history. The first question has to be: is the ecological destruction by humanity a historical inevitability or is there a level of contingency? This is what Bari's argument about tribal societies boils down to: history does not homogeneously move towards industrial-technocratic society.

What makes this hard to analyse is that the two visions do not claim different stances, but that they are competing for which discourse constitutes the truth. While other authors and I refer to a social faction and a biocentric faction, and such labels appear within the debate as well, the social faction does not call itself that. Judi Bari considers herself a biocentrist and a deep ecologist, even though her views deviate significantly. Her narrative competes with Manes for domination of the discourse which in turn determines the course of the movement as Shuman's article shows how closely related these views are to the strategies and tactics used.

The reason that the ideological conflict manifested itself primarily through a discursive struggle is the particular structure of EF!. It has no members and no leaders, it is only through a shared cause that they exist. Anyone can call themselves EF!ers, but adherence to a set of basic principles is required to give such a claim legitimacy. As a result, diverging visions are framed within the parameters of how the founders envisioned EF!. Even if new ideas differ significantly from that original conception of EF!, it is presented as being in line with it, otherwise it would no longer fit the banner of EF!. That's why the social faction does not distance themselves from biocentrism, but instead claim that their vision of including social issues naturally follows from biocentrism and Deep Ecology.

At this point it becomes difficult to assess which faction truly dominates EF!. My expectation was that with one part leaving the movement and creating a new magazine, *Wild Earth*, the remainder would be increasingly homogenous. To the contrary however, more controversy follows due to editorial choices, which does not reveal much about the

historical narratives themselves, but that need to be discussed as they affect the discourse of the journal.

After Bari's response to Manes was published, Manes wrote a reply back. Murray Bookchin, whose position Bari also criticised, also had sent a letter to *EF! Journal* to defend his position. The magazine published neither of these, but did publish a letter in the 'Dear Shit fer Brains' section.<sup>107</sup> The author Ken Shelton Jr. argues that Bari's article should have been titled "Why I am an Ignorant Shithead", because "behind every aggressive white male stands a pampered female, wheedling, whining and conniving, clamoring for more comforts and commodities."<sup>108</sup> Then, in the next issue, the staff baffles again, by publishing several letters that express anger at the editors for refusing to publishing Manes's and Bookchin's responses, while at the same time accepting a letter that is described as "misogynist", "degrading" and "slander".<sup>109</sup> The magazine offers no answer to any of these letters and no explanation of why they made the choices they do. The consequences of these editorial choices is that it becomes unclear what narratives actually circulate among the EF!ers at this point. Issues which caused the split in the movement also seem occasionally resurface, further adding to a confusing picture of the movement. For example, calls for a reduced population still appear every now and then, in both articles and letters.

### **3.5 Struggling with ideological coherence**

The split in 1990 did not lead to a more coherent narrative directly, quite the contrary. Finding a consistent vision is in fact becomes increasingly a characteristic of this period as well. Shortly before the split, evidence of this can already be found. In a long and detailed article by Jamie Sayen, the difficulty of forming a coherent plan for the future is evident. The article was funded by the Earth First! research fund, which reveals that there is strong desire for a positive programme. What I mean by that is that EF! is primarily a protest group. It acts against developments that it perceives as harmful, the characteristic use of sabotage is a tactic that can only be used in that way. Sabotage can only be used to execute a negative programme.

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107. Yes, that really is what the letters section is called for a long time.

108. 'Dear Shit Fer Brains', *Earth First!*, 20 March 1991, 3.

109. 'Dear Shit Fer Brains', *Earth First!*, 1 May 1991, 3.

“Efforts to recreate or replicate damaged ecosystems can never succeed. Even if we knew all the parts (down to site specific soil microbes and mycorrhizal fungi), we wouldn't begin to understand the web of relations. Furthermore, an undisturbed system today is quite different from what it was 100 or 1000 years ago. It may have the same appearance, but changes caused by climate, disturbance, succession, adaptation and evolution change it in ways no historian, archaeologist, or ecologist can ever fully know.”<sup>110</sup>

This is a rejection of any attempt to ‘return’ to a previous stage and very interestingly, an acknowledgment of the historicity of nature. The negative approach regarded contemporary wilderness to be prehistoric space, representing a pre-industrial, pre-agrarian natural past that needed to be saved from human intervention. Sayen’s view is radically different: nature in the past is not the same as nature now. Non-human life develops and changes just as well as human life does and an attempt to restore an ecosystem would ignore that.

Sayen had also expressed views on humanity, which were both profoundly apocalyptic and historically conscious. The best way to describe this would perhaps be to call it ‘post-civilisation’, as opposed to anti-civilisation. Sayen does not argue for a return to a primitive society, as anarcho-primitivist and other anti-civilization thought does, but a “second coming of primalism” with 10 000 years of experience from civilisation added to it.<sup>111</sup> Sayen considers this an important difference from Manes and Abbey. This conclusion is drawn from Andrew Schmookler, a writer that faced criticism from figures like Manes for a variety of issues, notably humanism. While Sayen agrees with much of the criticism, he does take from Schmookler’s book the notion that agriculture began not as a very unfortunate, but free choice. Rather it was a necessity due to population pressure. This is why it is important for Sayen that we “reenter the natural world with our memories of the failed experiment of the past 10,000 years profoundly imprinted in our minds and souls.”<sup>112</sup> It is necessary if humanity is to avoid making the same mistake again, population must not only be reduced, but kept stable.

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110. Jamie Sayen, ‘Taking Steps Towards a Restoration Ethic’, *Earth First!*, 1 May 1989, 14.

111. Jamie Sayen, “‘Anarchy’ Is Bagage’, *Earth First!*, 20 March 1987, 36.

112. Sayen, 36.



While in 1990 those who left and those who stayed both considered themselves biocentrists and as the misanthropy debate shows the two competing visions of history actually remain. By 1995 this is not always the case anymore and so in a way a true social faction only emerges then. Mira Goldberg, as part of a discussion on environmentalist-indigenous Canadian relations, writes:

“I see elements of Orton's article as reflecting a tendency among some radical environmentalists to make a distinction between "human-centered" issues and "earth-centered" issues and dismiss "human-centered issues" as anthropocentric and therefore not worth discussing. My difficulty with the "anthropocentric vs ecocentric" split is this: In order to halt the destruction of the earth, we must understand what is destroying the earth. This involves looking at power relations between humans.”<sup>113</sup>

Goldberg rejects the premise that bio- or ecocentrism is good and anthropocentrism is bad, and instead offers a view that has much in common with Social Ecology. Like Social Ecology, Goldberg wants to look at the social issues that are behind the ecological issues and like Social Ecology she wants to address power relations. This is similar to Bookchin who pointed to hierarchy as the heart of all issues. Goldberg also refers to classes and to neo-colonialism, topics that firmly belong to left-wing ‘anthropocentric’ thought.

EF!’s struggle with forming a coherent vision of the future becomes an open discussion over the years. Craig Beneville of the the editorial staff of *EF! Journal* puts forth the question rather bluntly:

“What is less clear, however, is how the needs of biodiversity are best served in the near future. In light of the structural barriers discussed above, should we pursue avenues of resistance that are more overtly revolutionary? Or would biodiversity be best served by a strategy that acknowledges the limitations within the system, but works for the strongest law possible because hopes of radical reform are too utopian? Perhaps we would be best off focusing less on law and more on making life hell for the eco-plunderers in the field?”<sup>114</sup>

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113. Mira Goldberg, ‘Towards Stronger Alliances: A Response to “Rethinking Environmental-First Nations Relationships”’, *Earth First!*, 2 February 1995, 3.

114. Craig Beneville, ‘After the Fall: Strategy Without Law’, *Earth First!*, 21 March 1995, 2.

These are no rhetorical questions, readers are asked to send their answers to the magazine, indicating a genuine desire for discussion about the strategy of the movement. It is not strange that these questions are raised, because while there were visions of the future and the past, the road towards their goals was always bit vague. Other authors, such as Taylor and Lee, consider EF! as apocalypticist or millenarian and not without good reason. Yet, neither total catastrophe nor radical change had occurred after 15 years of EF!. The more 'pragmatic' visions have not fared well either. Vastly increasing wilderness preserves as a goal has not materialised. Even with their slogan "no compromise", EF! had been basing many of their activities on environmental law. Yet, Beneville feels that "the bottom line is that when there is a serious collision – or the perception of a serious collision – between environmental law and the economy, the economy will emerge the victor."<sup>115</sup>

While philosophical and strategical debates rage in the US, in the UK the movement appears to go beyond it with the formation of the Earth Liberation Front. This is both a move away and towards the civil disobedience and mass movement strategies of the social faction. It surpasses the issue by separating monkeywrenchers and protesters. While UK EF! focuses on protest, ELF is 'free' to pursue much more controversial methods. When the Earth Liberation Front appears in the UK it is announced with an article in the *EF! Journal*. The ELF can be seen as an evolution of the strategy debate as Shuman sees it.

"Those machines have no right to exist; they've been turned into monsters. There's a philosophical jump between seeing violence as the last step to what we see should be the first. It is the only option, the first option."<sup>116</sup>

While EF! is struggling with itself and want it wants, the ELF go past philosophical debates and discussions on what strategy is the best. EF! has often argued that their methods are non-violent, even acts such as treespiking. To ELF, it is not important to appear non-violent and violent acts are not merely one tool of many. For ELF, as they state, it is the first and only option, although paradoxically, on the same page their call to action also emphasises non-violence. This non-violence however only applies to lives, not property. EF!'s policy was perhaps somewhat similar, but there is a crucial difference. EF! has stuck to acts of sabotage,

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115. Beneville, 2.

116. 'Earth Liberation Front Ignites Britain', *Earth First!*, 22 September 1992, 34.

which they label 'ecodefense'. ELF on the other hand actively destroys what they consider to be enemies of the earth, they go on the offense.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In the period from 1987 to 1995, EFi underwent many changes, yet it is hard to see a definite conclusion of the internal struggles. In the earlier period, a plurality of ideas was accepted in the movement, but as EFi grew moves towards homogeneity came up. This resulted in factionalisation in the late 1980s which led to a split in 1990. Those that remained were not at all united either, however. It is clear however that the turmoil is linked to visions of past, present and future. All the debates that were tearing the movement apart were at least partially a matter of such visions. Common to these various debates is a division by those who believe society can transform into something new and those that have no hope for modern human society. Under that broad umbrella more specific debates and positions can be clustered. While the majority of EFi's at all times claim to adhere to Deep Ecology and a biocentric or ecocentric worldview, a closer look revealed that one faction deviated more from Deep Ecology. This can be considered the 'social issues' faction. The social faction's historical narratives in particular reveal a considerable similarity with Social Ecology. Figures like Bari and Roselle saw the connection between 'human issues' and 'social issues'. They still considered themselves to be biocentric, but argued that if humanity was the problem, it is necessary to examine human society and what about it causes the ecological destruction. In their view, human history is not inevitably destructive to the environment and their desired future is not necessarily anti-human. The biocentric faction on the other hand does view history as inherently negative and rejects the possibility of society evolving towards a sustainable form.

After the split for years the social faction kept sticking to biocentric discourse and the debates very much continue despite the exodus of the 'old guard'. Mid-1990s this appeared to change however, not wanting to choose between anthropocentrism and biocentrism was no longer taboo. Meanwhile, new environmental challenges arose as we will see in the next chapter, as climate change awareness increased.

#### 4. Mailbombing Society Back to the Stone Age: Anti-Terrorist Discourse Feeding Apocalypticism, 1995-2006

The final period to be analysed is relatively under-researched. Most literature on Earth First! is concerned with the first ten or fifteen years. In later times, the more violent Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front grabbed much more attention. By 1995, the struggle between the social and the biocentric faction was largely over and internal divisions became less prominent. Divisions remained to some extent but no longer did they clash head on with each other and the social faction emerged as a clear winner. More so perhaps even than they had intended back then as we will see. In the meantime environmentalism in various forms was on the rise everywhere. The German Greens entered a government coalition for the first time in 1998, while on the other hand, the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) caused millions upon millions of dollars in damage, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) set all kinds of captive animals free, and the mysterious Unabomber turned out to be motivated by a desire to end industrial society to return to nature.<sup>117</sup> At the same time the role of EF! within the radical environmentalist movement became less clear.

At some point it seems there are no longer that many activities organised under the banner of EF! itself as there had been before. This makes it more difficult to assess the role of the movement, but it should not be understood as if EF! actually faded away. There was instead a new dynamic between all kinds of groups and organisations in which the same people were involved. Sometimes new movement names appeared just for a particular campaign. An example of this dynamic is Rod Coronado, who became a crewmember for the anti-whalers of Sea Shepherd in 1985, then started writing about those experiences for *EF! Journal* and in the 1990s acted as spokesman for the ALF during their fur farm raiding campaign. He became an editor of *EF! Journal* at some point and also had links to the ELF.<sup>118</sup> This shows how interconnected and loosely organised all these groups really are. EF! was never strictly an organisation and by this time it has evolved further to become more of an overlapping subculture focused on a magazine which ties into many of the other groups.

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117. Stefan H. Leader and Peter Probst, 'The Earth Liberation Front and Environmental Terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15, no. 4 (1 October 2003): 37–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550390449872>.

118. Sprig, 'Living the Truth: An Interview with Rod Coronado', *Earth First!*, 1 March 2003, 7, 58–59.

Central to this chapter is the question: How did the evolving discourse on (eco)terrorism affect Earth First!'s narrative of past, present and future in the 1990s and early 2000s? To answer this a variety of connected aspects have to be examined. First, a third ideological position appears that, like Deep Ecology and Social Ecology before, forms a backdrop to the narratives in this period: anarcho-primitivism. This anarchist tendency traces hierarchy and exploitation back to the transition from hunter-gatherers to agriculture. The negative impact of civilisation on human and non-human life intensified with the onset of modern techno-industrial society. Second, during the 1990s and early 2000s public and political discourse on terrorism evolved and so did the response to that evolution by EF!. The movement was grouped together with increasingly worse types. From the arsonists of the ELF to the infamous Unabomber, the charges of ecoterrorism become quite a headache. It becomes much worse when in 2001, as a result of 9/11, the concept of terrorism takes on a whole new meaning, and becomes central to both formal policy and discursive power relations. Third, these developments are reflected in EF!'s conceptions of history and particularly the future. Being marginalised by public discourse changes attitudes and expectations. Finally, this chapter will end with discussing the arrival of climate change on the agenda of EF!. The late prioritisation of the matter both reveals some things about the development of EF!'s narratives and forms a break that works well to close this period off.

#### **4.1 Anarcho-primitivism**

By the late 1990s, anarcho-primitivism became increasingly common in the *EF! Journal*. Prominent proponents of anarcho-primitivism start writing for the magazine such as Derrick Jensen and John Zerzan.<sup>119</sup> Some EF!ers leaned towards this line of thought since the late 1980s, when solidarity with indigenous peoples became more common in EF!. Christopher Manes's articles also often were close to anarcho-primitivist thought, but misanthropy is not the same as anarcho-primitivism. Anarcho-primitivism opposes civilisation, not to humanity.

Anarcho-primitivism is an ideology that can be explained in one sentence: humanity must return to their pre-agricultural, pre-industrial hunter-gather origins. Civilization is inherently unsustainable and so needs a constant important of life necessities such as food. It is ever expanding in search for more external resources which it conquers. That is referred

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119. Although Jensen distanced himself from both EF! and anarcho-primitivism by the 2010s, at this time he was still associated with both.

to as 'domestication', the transformation of animals, plants and humans from their wild natural state to tame and restricted. For humans this happens through virtually all social processes, from religion and politics to language and habits.<sup>120</sup> It is also known as green anarchism or anti-civilizational anarchism, but to avoid confusion, the term anarcho-primitivism will be used here regardless of the terminology in the source material. They are usually used as synonyms and when there are differences these are not relevant for this research.

Anarcho-primitivism has a very clear conception of history. Its visions of past, present and future form the foundation of the entire line of thought. It can be summarised as technological progress being harmful for human and non-human life. In addition, civilisation always expands, in the process consuming a finite environment. Due to this, for anarcho-primitivists, human history is finite as well. The future cannot be ever more progress, new technology and further expansion. It is inevitable that it ends sooner or later. As civilisation is also perceived to be harmful for humans, anarcho-primitivists would prefer to see it end sooner rather than later. The future will thus be a return to the past, going back to the pre-agricultural way of life.

Just as in chapter three the ideas of Social Ecology overlapped with some EFLers that did not consider themselves Social Ecologists, the influence of anarcho-primitivism also expanded beyond its direct adherents. Theodore Kaczynski, similarly rejected industrial society in favour of humanity living a primitive lifestyle. Kaczynski criticises modern leftism and social justice and so has less affinity with the leftist anarchist values of most anarcho-primitivists.

It is worth mentioning that Kaczynski always writes from prison, as he is serving a life sentence. He is commonly known as the Unabomber, having conducted a seventeen-year bombing campaign in an attempt to bring about an anti-technological revolution. Three people were killed and almost two dozen got injured between 1978 and 1995, before he got caught soon after he managed to have *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* publish his manifesto named *Industrial Society and its Future* by threatening to continue sending mailbombs.

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120. Parson, 'Understanding the Ideology of the Earth Liberation Front', 56–57.

In the 35 000 word manifesto Kaczynski argues that actively destroying industrial society is a necessity and that this goal goes above all else. Kaczynski rejects modern leftism harshly and considers it a prime example of modern society's problems such as defeatism and self-hatred.<sup>121</sup> The primacy of industrial society as his main target also means that other struggles, against racism and racism for example, are of lesser concern. As the manifesto states:

“With regard to revolutionary strategy, the only points on which we absolutely insist are that the single overriding goal must be the elimination of modern technology, and that no other goal can be allowed to compete with this one.”<sup>122</sup>

This is a logical conclusion for all ideologies related to anarcho-primitivism. There is an identified root cause of most problems and as these problems worsen over time, overcoming the root cause must take priority over other issues. Kaczynski wrote a short story specifically with this message called ‘Ship of Fools’, about a ship that is heading towards icebergs. The people on the ship are squabbling about discrimination and oppression: a woman gets fewer blankets than men, a Mexican gets paid less, and so forth. The cabin boy tries to warn the others that the icebergs are a bigger issue than the others, but gets scolded for that.

“And all of the passengers and crew chimed in one after another, calling the cabin boy a fascist and a counterrevolutionary. They pushed him away and went back to grumbling about wages, and about blankets for women, and about the right to suck cocks, and about how the dog was treated. The ship kept sailing north, and after a while it was crushed between two icebergs and everyone drowned.”<sup>123</sup>

The message is that humanity is heading towards disaster. Short-term goals may be desirable, but they are irrelevant compared to facing the imminent apocalypse. This is reminiscent of why EF! was founded in 1980: putting the earth first, above all other issues and about not compromising.

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121. The Unabomber [Ted Kaczynski], *Industrial Society and Its Future* (Green Anarchist, 1995), 13–14, <https://nihilsentimentalgia09.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/unibomber-manifesto.pdf>.

122. The Unabomber [Ted Kaczynski], 46.

123. Ted Kaczynski, ‘Ship of Fools’, The Anarchist Library, 1999, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/ted-kaczynski-ship-of-fools>.

Zerzan and Jensen's views also become increasingly part of the generally accepted discourse within EF!. They appear in the magazine not as outsiders with a challenging critical views, but as authors that are of interest to EF!ers, for example, through (generally positive) reviews of their books.<sup>124</sup> Jensen is also interviewed after he publishes a new book, allowing him to express his views without much criticism for four pages.<sup>125</sup> They also pen articles expressing their opinion on topics which appear to be received as a valid perspectives, not at all alien to their audience.<sup>126</sup>

#### **4.2 Ecoterrorism: shifting public discourse**

The terrorist label had been stuck on EF! for many years already, but how they dealt with it evolved over time as how they envisioned themselves also changed. Tree spiking is the original cause of the label being put on EF!. It is lamented in 1995 by Leslie Hemstreet how misinformation on one serious injury that may or may not have been caused by a tree spike years earlier keeps being dug up by the media to portray EF! as violent lunatics and terrorists. This despite it being unlikely to have been caused by a spike, the spike most likely not originating from EF!, and large parts of EF! denouncing tree spiking after this incident.<sup>127</sup>

Soon after there is an intensification of the discursive battle on terrorism as Ted Kaczynski has his manifesto published and subsequently is arrested in April 1996. Several EF!ers address the fact that the press has falsely linked the Unabomber to EF!. Indeed several media outlets speculated about such a connection.<sup>128</sup> Editorial staff-member Craig Beneville sketches the problem with these accusations:

“When we are marginalized as terrorists it not only deflects criticism of corporate malfeasance away from the real criminals, it hinders our ability to communicate such

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124. Marcel Idels, review of *Running on Emptiness*, by John Zerzan, *Earth First!*, 21 June 2002, 52–53.

125. Tim Ream, 'Hate Civilized: Derrick Jensen Explores the Culture of Make Believe', *Earth First!*, 21 June 2002, 14–15, 50–51.

126. John Zerzan and Mikal Jakubal, 'Green Steal: Should EF! Work with the Steel Union?', *Earth First!*, 1 May 1999, 4; Derrick Jensen, 'Actions Speak Louder Than Words', *Earth First!*, 1 May 1998, 5.

127. Leslie Hemstreet, 'The Reporter Who Cried Wolf', *Earth First!*, 22 December 1995, 2.

128. 'Montana / Unabomber Case / Kaczynski | Vanderbilt Television News Archive', accessed 23 June 2019, <https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/broadcasts/166134>; Pierre Thomas; George Lardner, 'VICTIMS' NAMES FOUND IN CABIN', *Washington Post*, 9 April 1996, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1996/04/09/victims-names-found-in-cabin/80a69016-709c-4aab-a078-dbf00ab8022b/>.



criticism. The public will not believe Earth First!'s message if it perceives us as an extremist fringe element.”<sup>129</sup>

Beneville sees the terrorist label as a way to discredit and silence the legitimate message of EF!, it is a discourse that harms the movement. It is a similar message as Hemstreet wrote before, who also emphasised that the commitment to nonviolence and wished that coverage on EF! would become more positive.<sup>130</sup> Coinciding with Beneville’s article, Hemstreet also publishes a refutation of the accusations that Kaczynski and EF! were related.<sup>131</sup> In addition, *EF! Journal* sent an open letter to ABC News stating that they have been broadcasting lies about them.<sup>132</sup>

By labelling EF! as terrorists they are discredited, they are an enemy, not a side to be considered. This intensifies further after September 11, 2001, after the attack on the Twin Towers. President George W. Bush responded to that with his so-called War on Terror. Already labelled eco-terrorist before, the War on Terror added weight and legal consequences. President Bush (in)famously spoke the following words soon after 9/11: “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”<sup>133</sup> Of course, these terrorists did not belong to EF!, ELF or ALF. The speech aims at Islamic terrorism, not the domestic eco-saboteurs of EF!. However, in practice the radical environmentalist movement was affected just as well.

In the wake of 9/11, the U.S. government passed a range of legislation concerning terrorism, mostly as part of the Patriot Act.<sup>134</sup> This included upgrading various acts of property damage such as arson and sabotage from a felony to a terrorism crime.<sup>135</sup> At the same time a green scare emerged, with widespread concern for environmentalist extremism. Eco-terrorism was labelled a main domestic terror threat by the FBI.<sup>136</sup>

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129. Craig Beneville, ‘The Framing of Earth First!’, *Earth First!*, 1 May 1996, 2.

130. Hemstreet, ‘The Reporter Who Cried Wolf’, 2.

131. Leslie Hemstreet, ‘The Unabomber: Up Close and Personal’, *Earth First!*, 1 May 1996, 2, 26.

132. Craig Beneville, ‘An Open Letter to ABC Network News’, *Earth First!*, 1 May 1996, 26, 29.

133. ‘President Declares “Freedom at War with Fear”’, The White House: President George W. Bush, 20 September 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.

134. The common name given to the USA PATRIOT Act which stands for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001.

135. Steve Vanderheiden, ‘Eco-Terrorism or Justified Resistance? Radical Environmentalism and the “War on Terror”’, *Politics & Society* 33, no. 3 (1 September 2005): 429–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329205278462>.

136. James F. Jarboe, ‘The Threat of Eco-Terrorism’, FBI, 12 February 2002, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/the-threat-of-eco-terrorism>.

It was realised by EF! immediately that the War on Terror was relevant to them. Shortly after the attacks a number of articles are published on the consequences for the radical environmental movement. Anti-terrorism legislation, such as the Patriot Act, worry EF!ers to a great extent due to the aforementioned broadening of terrorism according to the law. One article claims that it would be possible for a whole range of people to get targeted by this law, from a protester breaking a window to kids vandalising a sign with a Boy Scouts knife.<sup>137</sup> Another issue is that: "PATRIOT would allow prosecution of people who 'support' the activities of 'terrorist organizations,' even if those organizations were not considered 'terrorist' when the support was given."<sup>138</sup> Meanwhile, addressing these issues becomes difficult due to the frame of being either with or against the terrorists. "Expressing dissent in this patriotic climate over a war between good and evil is a dangerous prospect: to criticize the hunter infers sympathy for the beast."<sup>139</sup> There is little room for nuance in mainstream media and politics at this point and EF! has to find a way out of this dilemma. This intensification of anti-terrorism in law and in discourse would lead to an intensification of EF!'s response to it as well.

#### **4.3 Ecoterrorism: the emergence of a new response**

EF!'s struggle with the terrorism discourse had its consequences. The initial response was distancing from terrorism by denying the accuracy of the accusations. In other words, EF! did not challenge the framework, they accepted it but posed that it was simply untrue that EF! were terrorists or related to others who were terrorists. That is of course a strategy doomed to fail because a small niche magazine cannot simply shout louder than mainstream media. In the following years, EF! shifted away from this approach. Instead, EF! turned from defensive to offensive. Rather than defend against the accusations against EF!, accusations of terrorism are raised against destructive industries and scientists.

This change can be attributed to the evolving discourse on terrorism in society and the inability of EF! to simply repel the accusations. When the press links EF! to the Unabomber in 1996, the reaction in the magazine is that it is slander. The EF!ers appear to be outraged and refute what is written about them. In 1999, EF! without much fuss

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137. Warcry, 'Are You a Patriot or a Terrorist? Intensifying Domestic Repression', *Earth First!*, 1 November 2001, 7.

138. Warcry, 7.

139. Jennifer Chesworth, 'The War of the 21st Century', *Earth First!*, 1 November 2001, 31.

publishes a letter by that same Unabomber, a significant shift from desperately wanting to distance from him. In this letter Kaczynski offers his opinion on EF!, arguing that EF! is not radical enough, but that there are some true revolutionaries among them and they should split and do their own thing.<sup>140</sup>

The ideas of Kaczynski emphasise the need to go on the offensive against civilisation. Environmentalists cannot protect what is left of wilderness so the culprit, modern technology, has to be brought down. Like the iceberg of 'Ship of Fools', ecological disaster appears on EF!'s horizon and without the public discourse in its favour, it makes no sense to apply for the position of good guys. Zerzan also argues that building broad alliances with workers is pointless, such tactics are aimed at transforming society into something better, but that is not going to happen. Collaborating with those whose livelihoods rely on industries that need to be utterly destroyed is a dead end.

The narrative has become one not just of resistance as it was, as evident from the EF! slogan 'no compromise in defence of mother earth'. Activities were in line with such a defensive stance: sabotage, blockades, tree sits. They were aimed at halting and slowing down development. The EF! of the 2000s is much more aggressive, which does not mean more violent per se. Rather it is aggressive in that EF! lashes out more, taking the fight to the enemy. Not just keeping progress at bay, but trying to push it back.

One striking example of this aggressive style is an article titled 'Most Wanted Eco-Terrorists', which EF! twists to mean those who cause ecological destruction and devastation.<sup>141</sup> EF! not only announces the goal to create a directory of people and organisations responsible for damage, it gives an example by including one and a half pages of names, emails, addresses and phone numbers of people that they consider 'eco-terrorists'. In particular these were all in some way involved with the development of cloning. The magazine states: "We feel the patenting of life forms made by the hand of man, is an atrocious undertaking." It adds to this bluntly "it must be reversed."<sup>142</sup>

While still related to nature, it is a very different aspect than the original EF! was founded for, which was wilderness preservation. Targeting scientists implies that civilisation does not just expand spatially, but also intensifies. Technology allows for stronger

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140. 'Dear S#!T Fer Brainz', *Earth First!*, 1 May 1999, 3.

141. 'Most Wanted Eco-Terrorists', *Earth First!*, 1 February 2002, 28–29.

142. 'Most Wanted Eco-Terrorists', 28.

domination over nature and genetic manipulation is opposed for being even more unnatural than civilisation has been in the past. The response to this is the shift from just defending nature to taking the fight to civilisation itself. “The Earth is not dying, it is being killed, and the people who are killing it have names and addresses.”<sup>143</sup> The language changes from protecting, to a full on war with the enemy. Departing spokesperson of the ELF, Leslie James Pickering, argues explicitly for a shift away from defence and its publication in the *EF! Journal* reveals that this stance is deemed acceptable by the staff.

“Any notion that alleged nonviolence is the only way by which to achieve liberation is ill-informed and condemning of the many other effective tactics that have, can and must be put into practice in successful revolutionary movements.”<sup>144</sup>

The author makes it clear that it is pointless to stick with only nonviolence in an attempt to appeal public opinion. There will be a negative reaction regardless, so a commitment to nonviolence only means throwing away tactics that might help achieve the goals of the movement. Such a disbelief in appealing to public opinion is no doubt informed by the experiences in the years before.

#### **4.4 The two collapses**

EF! developed an increasingly bleak worldview in these circumstances that is pessimistic even by apocalypticist standards. The essence is that the world will not be saved and that there will be no turning point. EF!er James Barnes writes in 1997 that he expects no revolution, but only famine, war and industrial collapse. Yet, this means no total annihilation either, humanity will survive, “much as they have always done.”<sup>145</sup> It is not an optimistic expectation of collapse leading to a joyful return to nature however. Barnes describes how horrible it will be:

“Now contemplate five billion people starving to death, maybe including yourself. Imagine an endless century of desperate migrations to overwhelmed refugee camps, old men left to die quietly in the sun, infants with dysentery draining their lives away, wide-eyed children with swollen stomachs. Imagine cholera or plague, and the young

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143. ‘Most Wanted Eco-Terrorists’, 29.

144. Leslie James Pickering, ‘Evolution of the Offensive: Using Everything We’ve Got’, *Earth First!*, 21 June 2002, 41.

145. James Barnes, ‘Dieback: A Vision of Darkness’, *Earth First!*, 20 September 1997, 3.

men gone to armed thuggery, brutalizing the wretched people. Don't think about the young girls.”<sup>146</sup>

Barnes wants to counter a romanticist view of what is to come, instead emphasising that what will happen is a disaster. The point is not to prevent that disaster, for that will not happen. It will be horrible and it will happen, that is what the message is.

Not all are so dreadful of the future, but the difference lies more in how their vision is presented than in the actual contents. Anarcho-primitivist author Derrick Jensen writes: “Our goal, like that of a demolition crew on a downtown building, must be to help our culture collapse in place, so that in its fall it takes as little life as possible.”<sup>147</sup> What these views have in common is that they expect two potential apocalypses, one avoidable, one unavoidable. On the one hand, there is an ecological collapse, ecosystems failing, the natural world being unable to function. On the other hand, there is industrial collapse, the implosion of modern industrial-technological civilisation. The belief is that humanity is heading for both as it is right now. What the goal is, is to postpone ecological collapse long enough, so that industrial collapse happens first. Once that happens, the process towards ecological collapse may be halted. Hence Jensen’s metaphor of a controlled demolition. Industrial collapse is unavoidable, but the goal in the present must be to make sure that after that collapse, the natural world is in a state where it can recover. One of the EF! editors, Emma, summarises the entire vision very well in just one sentence: “The object is to bring industrial collapse before ecological collapse.”<sup>148</sup> If the sequence is the other way around, ecological collapse induces the industrial collapse and that is not at all desirable. The ultimate goal is ecologically motivated, industrial collapse is a means not an end.

Martha Lee already published her book on EF! in 1995 and did not write on this period which only starts then, but her framework is helpful in analysing this. In this light, the above vision of ‘two collapses’ can be interpreted in both ways, but leans more towards apocalypticism. There is a millenarian element to the idea of ‘two collapses’ as it aims to transform society, from techno-industrial to pre-industrial. In that sense they are concerned with the world after the collapse. However, EF! is not actually building a postmillenarian society, rather they are making sure that there will be the right kind of apocalypse. For EF!

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146. Barnes, 3.

147. Jensen, ‘Actions Speak Louder Than Words’, 5.

148. Emma, ‘Defeat in Disguise’, *Earth First!*, 20 March 2002, 2.

there are, as explained already, two apocalypses that are expected. Arguably it is, fully in accordance with Lee's definition apocalypticism, EF!'s concern only that the apocalypse will come and they "understand themselves to be responsible for ensuring particular conditions are met in order that the apocalypse may occur."<sup>149</sup> They expect an apocalypse and work only on the conditions for the upcoming collapse, the industrial collapse, before the ecological one. They are in that sense not busy with their role in a post-apocalyptic world, only with their role in the pre-apocalyptic one.

The influence of anarcho-primitivism on the narrative of the two apocalypses is impossible to miss. In the *EF! Journal* the two must be constantly read within each other's context.

"I asked a friend of mine years ago, "If you could live at any level of technology that you wanted, what would it be?" He said, "That's a really stupid question, Derrick. We can fantasize about whatever we want but the only level of technology that is sustainable is the Stone Age. And the only question there is, really, is: What will be left when we get there?"<sup>150</sup>

This anecdote by Jensen shows how all elements so far are connected. It is anarcho-primitivism that offers a path beyond the apocalypse. Its call for industrial collapse and the conviction that it is possible or even inevitable that humanity will return to a hunter-gather state. What will by then be left is the question of the two collapses, it is the need to bring down civilisation before it is too late.

#### **4.5 Climate change: the apocalypse goes mainstream**

Although the greenhouse effect was discovered in the late nineteenth century, it took almost a century for it to become major political issue. During the 1990s the international community held meetings and made agreements to tackle the issue. This resulted in the 1997 Kyoto protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Throughout this period from the mid-1990s onwards, climate change also appears increasingly commonly in the magazine. Yet, counter to what one might expect it did not take the centre stage. For a movement that considered itself always to be more radical, more vanguard than the mainstream, it is

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149. Lee, *Earth First!*, 19.

150. Ream, 'Hate Civilized: Derrick Jensen Explores the Culture of Make Believe', 15.

surprising that climate change remained a bit of a sideshow. Climate change matches the narrative of EF! that points to a man-made ecological apocalypse. Yet, for a considerable period, it is often mentioned as only one among many negative effects of modern civilisation.

Eventually there is a shift in this matter however and attention is brought to climate change. In 2006, a climate caucus is founded and suddenly a lot of articles appear on what direction to go with the climate movement, what strategies should be used, and so forth. This timing suggests EF! is not just not very vanguard in this matter, it actually lags behind the mainstream! In 2005, hurricane Katrina caused enormous damage in the United States, especially New Orleans. This natural disaster was possibly linked to climate change, which caused a large surge in media attention into the consequences of global warming.<sup>151</sup> In 2006, the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, about former U.S. vice-president Al Gore's campaign to raise climate change awareness, was released. The film, watched by millions of people, significantly raised awareness, knowledge and willingness to act on climate change.<sup>152</sup> The newly formed caucus readily admits that they have not done enough on this. "We have some serious catching up to do. As a matter of survival, we must bring climate change to the front and center of the nation's attention"<sup>153</sup> These words by the caucus indicate a significant and sudden shift. For around ten years, EF! had been presenting a relatively stable narrative that was not challenged internally. Sitchensis, the pseudonym of an EF!er who does solidarity work in New Orleans after the hurricane, points out how EF! has not been evolving and adapting anymore:

"It's high time to do a serious reevaluation of EF! strategy and tactics in the broadest sense possible. The idea that wilderness protection begins and ends in the forest needs to be debunked. At some point in the '90s, EF! became synonymous with treesits, road blockades and backwoods sabotage. Tree perches and road encampments were front-page news, a mecca for propaganda and biocentrist

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151. Kerry Emanuel, 'Climate Change and Hurricane Katrina: What Have We Learned?', *The Conversation*, 24 August 2015, <http://theconversation.com/climate-change-and-hurricane-katrina-what-have-we-learned-46297>.

152. Jessica M. Nolan, "'An Inconvenient Truth' Increases Knowledge, Concern, and Willingness to Reduce Greenhouse Gases', *Environment and Behavior* 42, no. 5 (1 September 2010): 658, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916509357696>.

153. Earth First! Climate Caucus, 'The Earth First! Climate Caucus: A New Birth in the No Compromise Movement', *Earth First!*, 1 May 2006, 36.

thinking, a breeding ground for new tactics and strategies, and a symbol of hope for thousands of people. But, at least on the West Coast, 20 years of this has long past a point of diminishing returns.”<sup>154</sup>

EF! has been focused on a specific niche, which was effective at first due to intensity and perseverance. By the time of writing, it has become long overdue however to reconsider their ways. Meanwhile, the authorities have adapted to the tactics of EF!, while EF! has not, to the point where they can no longer be effective.

The EF! approach to climate change is to fit the issue in the narrative that they have presented during the rest of this period as well: the two collapses. The ‘two collapses’ in the matter of climate change are brought up by Sitchensis. While quite critical, Sitchensis does present the same narrative of industrial and ecological collapse as discussed before.

“The end of industrial civilization imagined by most EF!ers is a great goal. Technology – and the controls on land and capital it requires – is a terribly destructive force to the environment and to people. But as much as I'd love to live in a post-industrial world, if one is to come about, then it must be on *our* terms and not the inadvertent result of disasters created by the powerful elite.”<sup>155</sup>

Industrial collapse must come before ecological collapse to save the environment, Sitchensis agrees with that. The manner in which he does so also confirms that this is the dominant discourse at this time within EF!, it is the point of reference for his own arguments.

The criticism is against an accelerationist interpretation that poses everything going downhill is a good thing. Sitchensis considers it naïve to think that a catastrophe caused by the elite would benefit the common people. The present plays a large role in this concern about the future. According to Sitchensis, hurricane Katrina and its aftermath are a taste of what the catastrophe would be like. From his experience, the bottom 90 percent of the population will be hurt the most as they have no means to prepare themselves.

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154. Sitchensis, ‘New Directions in Climate Justice: An Earth First! Call to Action’, *Earth First!*, 1 May 2006, 33.

155. Sitchensis, 34–35.



“If New Orleans is any indication, their collapse will first and foremost affect the same people who have always been exploited by civilization – those not part of the dominant race or the dominant class.”<sup>156</sup>

In this view, climate change strengthens the idea that industrial collapse must be brought about on the offensive. Climate change is portrayed as what happens if environmentalists do not act. The first collapse will then be the ecological collapse and it will be brought about by ruling class, which brings with it the certainty that those who will be hit the hardest will be the poor and oppressed.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter it has become clear that the public discourse on terrorism profoundly influenced EF!'s own discourse and through that their narrative of past, present and future. Unable to defend itself against the accusations of terrorism and the increasingly central role of anti-terrorist discourse in the public, EF! changes its tactics. So-called ecoterrorists, whether it are the arsonists from ELF or the mailbomber Kaczynski, are provided with a platform and nonviolence is less emphasised. The enemy also changes, it is no longer enough to protect a forest from logging, or some wolves from being hunted. Scientists involved with genetic manipulation or cloning are new foes as well. The radical environmentalists go on an offensive against techno-industrial society. Meanwhile, rather than refuting that eco-sabotage is a form of terrorism, EF! introduces a discourse in which those who destroy, exploit or dominate nature are the true eco-terrorists.

The idea behind this shift is that of two collapses. An ecological collapse and an industrial collapse, both lurking in the future. With the defensive strategy the idea was that during a civilizational collapse enough ecosystems, biodiversity and wilderness should have remained to continue to thrive afterwards. On the offensive, the urgency is higher, with time things can only get worse because society will not change en masse. The only option left is then to stop the destruction of life on earth before it is too late. This means that industrial collapse must come before ecology is damaged beyond the point of no return. Industrial collapse before ecological collapse. Despite all this concern about collapse, EF! does take quite some time before mobilising against climate change. They did not ignore it, but it never became a

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156. Sitchensis, 34.

priority until 2006 when it became a mainstream concern as well. It is fitted seamlessly within the two collapses vision at that point.

## 5. Conclusion

Over a span of 26 years, EF! witnessed several generations of activists come and go. From the small band of conservationists with a redneck image to social justice activists allying with trade unions to disillusioned primitivists. Visions of past, present and future also evolved over that same timespan. Three distinct periods have been identified in that evolution, with a certain degree of overlap between them. From 1980 until the late 1980s there is a founding phase. EF! first established itself in 1980 and during the following years the organisational form and the ideology of the movement crystallised. This transitioned into a period of internal fractionalisation and infighting, which reached its height in 1990, but kept smouldering well into the 1990s. Once things calmed down internally, it was the outside world that from the mid-1990s pushed the evolution of EF! as they became framed as terrorists.

In the founding phase, EF! separates wilderness from human civilisation. In the writings in the *EF! Journal*, history takes on a spatial dimension that is particularly characteristic of this period of EF!. Influenced by founding members with backgrounds in traditional conservationist organisations, the idea of designated wilderness preserves is central to the demands of the early EF!. Unlike those older organisations, such as the Sierra Club, EF! went a lot further than just protecting wilderness. It added more radical goals and direct action to conservationism. Wilderness was not just to be protected, it should be recreated. New areas were to be designated and closed off from modern civilisation.

While requiring certain assumptions about past, present and future, this spatial separation entailed a very pragmatic programme as well. It does not require all EF!ers to adhere to the same vision at all, as long as they agree that restoring areas to some state of wild nature is desirable. Even the little philosophical grounding that is present early on is left open to interpretation. All life has intrinsic value, for example, but this was not used to prescribe a stance on veganism or hunting.

Perhaps inevitably, this situation did not last. EF! grew quickly and gained numbers and fame. Becoming a more important group brought with it a desire for some more explicit uniformity as well. Once the founders could no longer oversee all activities themselves, it is through writing in the *EF! Journal* that they could still communicate their intentions. Through the magazine, deep ecology is increasingly given a platform, making it the semi-official philosophy of the movement. Biocentrism had been present at all times, but a

particular interpretation of it became dominant as well. This biocentrism is that of figures such as Dave Foreman, Edward Abbey and Christopher Manes. It puts wilderness above all else, with issues such as racism and patriarchy being simply less relevant than defending the planet. Apocalypticism and millenarianism overlap within this period. Humanity is not central to future visions, but due to the strong role of biocentrism this does contradict a very strong concern about life after the apocalypse, it just is focused mostly on non-human life.

Once EF! formulated clear ideas and a more coherent this itself caused instability. Being a diverse group united only by a commitment to defend wilderness, the more concrete and holistic narrative as espoused by prominent members, such as Foreman caused friction with those with different worldviews. EF! surged in popularity in that same period with thousands of activists, sympathisers and journal-readers under the banner of EF!. The audacious new group attracted environmentalists of all kinds, including those with a rather different analysis of how environmental destruction came about, and consequently on how to tackle it. The division between the biocentric and the social faction can be attribute to some extent to differing visions of past, present and future.

The particularly way in which the discursive battle unfolded, both claiming to adhere to deep ecology while offering wildly different interpretations, is the result of how the earlier phase. While not having a strict dogma, it did have a certain consistent discourse. The name of the movement is a statement by itself and so are the no compromise slogans. Deep ecology was introduced in line with that and without opposition. There could be no debate on these things. Putting the earth first, above other issues; refusing to compromise in saving wilderness; the acceptance of deep ecology's basic tenets. All of these were already established earlier on and not up for debate by the late 1980s. Instead, the factions compete for the meaning of these words and phrases. The social faction thus claims to reject social ecology and comply with deep ecology, but express a social ecology-like view of history. The biocentric faction leans towards a pure apocalyptic expectation of the future. This faction does believe that society can transform to become sustainable and expects a collapse. The social faction on the other hand desires a mass movement that brings about a transformation of society, ending the destructive nature of modernity without ending human civilisation.

In the final period examined in this thesis, outside discourse caused a shift in EF!'s narrative. Already controversial for its use of sabotage, EF! became more and more affected

by public discourse on ecoterrorism. The emergence of the Earth Liberation Front, first in the UK in 1992 and by 1996 in the US, made ecoterrorism a primary concern of the public and of authorities. The connection to ELF was EF!'s own doing as *EF! Journal* published ELF activities and showed some support for those activities. Another connection was not made voluntarily, however. After Ted Kaczynski is arrested as the Unabomber, several news outlets brought EF! in connection with him and claim that he was inspired by EF!. It turned out to be virtually impossible to simply refuting these charges and this dominant discourse on ecoterrorism resulted in a new evolution on the side of EF!. Instead of distancing from ecoterrorism, EF! started framing destructive industry as the true terrorists, while displaying support for violent tactics and those who were convicted for using such tactics.

By the late 1990s, EF! was far removed from the conservationists with just some more radical tactics that began in 1980. Instead of trying to limit and push back civilisation to save wilderness, civilisation is to be destroyed entirely. That industrial civilisation would end fairly soon was set in stone for the EF!ers, but still they were motivated to make it fall. This is the result of the long-present apocalyptic thinking evolving, influenced by the terrorist discourse, to involving two collapses. Without intervention an ecological collapse would occur and then take society with it. To prevent the ecological collapse, an intervention was to take place that hastens industrial collapse so as to occur before the ecological collapse. In a way the intention EF!ers has not changed over time, only by the early 2000s rather than just saving wild areas and forests to protect the environment they instead strike at the heart of the perceived threat.

The general development of Earth First! and the evolution of its visions of past, present and future are intertwined. Over the course of the 26 years of EF! history analysed in this thesis there has been a constant back and forth influence between the activities and goals of the group and underlying conceptions of history. Visions of past, present and future have evolved as a result of internal and external factors, but they have also had consequences of their own. Throughout the three periods it has been the interpretation of the course of history that has motivated EF!ers to act as they did. It was an analysis of the past, from which they extrapolated an expected future, and then concluding the necessary course of action that would be the most desirable. The evolution of visions of past, present and future was in within that framework. Other elements are quite stable in all the three periods. What is most beneficial is at all times and for all factions in accordance with

biocentrism, holding that human and non-human life are all of (equal) value. Historical narratives determine the differing conclusions with the same ethical basis. In the third chapter, investigating the phase of internal turmoil, the question whether or not the 'progress' of human history was inevitable or not is illustrative of this. If the past is regarded as the unavoidable course of humanity, an anti-human conclusion is drawn, because human life threatens non-human life. This is countered by those who regard human history as contingent, believing it is only modern western capitalist society that is the threat. The conclusion for them is thus that not humanity itself, but particular social and economic systems that threaten both human and non-human life.

Although most literature on this topic was outdated, it was often still relevant even for the time periods that were not covered by it. Counter to my expectations, Martha Lee proved to be the most useful secondary source when doing further research. The distinction between apocalypticism and millenarianism was not directly applicable but did serve as an excellent basis for analysing EF!'s historical narratives. On that basis a deeper understanding of the environmental apocalypse, its evolution and its nuances could be built. Michael Mikulak's analysis that the apocalypticism is an important factor in what type of action EF! would take is also correct in general. Here too there is additional nuance, as the nature of the apocalypticism evolved and so did the methods. This thesis has shown that there is a clear evolution, while Mikulak approached EF! as static. Bron Taylor's approach that focuses on religion and spirituality also does not cover the conceptions of history of EF!. While pagan elements can be found throughout the *EF! Journal*, their historical narratives are barely affected by this. The idea of the past that EF!ers have is not mythical, or at least they do not treat it as such. They attempt to ground themselves rationally and with scientific backing. That is not to say that this backing is always factual, for example in chapter two the 'noble savage' appeared. However, even if idealised and not quite true, it is at least perceived as an anthropological backing for their view of the past. Taylor is right however in connecting biocentrism and deep ecology to religion. The belief in that all life has intrinsic value appears in all chapters and especially in chapter three it is clear how this principle has a sacred value. Even when EF!ers have views that are somewhat at odds with deep ecology, they never reject it and instead adapt their ideas to the discourse of deep ecology.

The theoretical approach based on Grever and Adriaansen has shown both uses and limits. In general, the distinction between the levels of narratives, infrastructure and

underlying conceptions works well. It allows for a structured analysis and an emphasis on distilling underlying conceptions out of specific narratives. It does however on the level of mnemonic infrastructure still hold a narrow view on history, with an emphasis on the past. Looking at Earth First!, the future is a core element of historical culture and this is expressed not through remembrance, stories, rituals or artefacts. Instead, the historical narratives can be derived from their activism and from their plans. The activities of EF! are grounded in a conception of history that warrants those actions.

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