

《論文》

# Apocalyptic Narratives attached to Climate Change Protests:

A Study on Roger Hallam

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## Introduction

Climate change has become one of the most important global political issue in recent years. The state of global climate change is such that we can “feel” it through the frequent extreme weather events around the world, and no one but extreme conspiracy theorists deny that this crisis actually exists. The climate change protests sparked by Greta Thunberg’s school strike have spread around the world as an important social movement.

In October 2022, a series of strange incidents occurred at museums in the UK and Germany. In London, tomato soup was thrown at Van Gogh’s “Sunflowers”, and in Potsdam, Germany, mashed potatoes were thrown at Monet’s “Haystacks”. The former was carried out by the members of “Just Stop Oil”(JSO), and the latter by the members of “Letzte Generation(Last Generation; LG)”.

This paper will focus on one of its key icons, Roger Hallam, in order to examine these recent trends in climate change protests. Hallam is an environmental activist who is one of the main members of JSO and was also closely involved in the founding of Extinction Rebellion (XR). I will show how his discourse corresponds to the actual actions of JSOs and LGs and how his ideas are occupied by the so-called environmental apocalyptic essence.

## 1 Roger Hallam

Hallam has an account on X (formerly Twitter) (@RogerHallamCS21) with about 39,000 followers (as of November 15, 2024)<sup>1)</sup>. He also has a channel on YouTube with about 7,400 subscribers (as of November 15, 2024)<sup>2)</sup>.

In 2020, he launched a political party called “Burning Pink” as a spin-off from XR, and put up candidates in local elections, as well as carrying out activities such as spraying pink paint on facilities they considered to be their enemies.

Born in 1966, Hallam was originally a small farmer, but, he says, climate change caused the family business to collapse, and he later became involved in the movement as an environmental and peace activist while studying civil disobedience at King's College London.

Hallam gave lectures at several universities and recruited university students to JSO's activities<sup>3)</sup>; in a January 2022 speech at the University of Glasgow, he allegedly told students that they "had to become revolutionaries" to avert climate catastrophe<sup>4)</sup>.

At this point, we should mention Extinction Rebellion (XR), of which Hallam was one of the co-founders. JSO has several predecessor organizations, including XR, an environmental organization founded in the U.K. in May 2008.

On February 14, 2022, members of JSO handed the following "ultimatum" to ministers at Downing Street, calling for an immediate halt to investment in fossil fuels. "If you do not provide such assurance [that investments in fossil fuels will cease] by March 14th 2022 it will be our duty to intervene – to prevent the ultimate crime against our country, humanity and life on earth."<sup>5)</sup> This February 14, 2022 is the date of the creation of the JSO. And as this "ultimatum" proclaimed, JSO's activities will intensify one month later.

## 2 Hallam's six conditions

In XR's 2019 publication of *This Is Not A Drill: An Extinction Rebellion Handbook*, Hallam wrote an article titled "The Civil Resistance". If we view XR and JSO as being continuous, this gives us important hints for thinking about what guidelines the current JSO actions are based on. In this paper entitled "The Civil Resistance", Hallam lists six conditions for the success of a movement.

The first condition indicated by Hallam is the following, which is that related to the scale of the protests. "First, you need the numbers. Not millions, but not a few dozen people either. You need several thousand: ideally, 50,000."<sup>6)</sup>

The second condition indicated by Hallam relates to the choice of the location where the protest will take place. "You have to go to the capital city. That is where the government is, that's where the elites hang out and it's also where the national and international media are usually based. The truth is, they don't mind you doing stuff in the provinces. They do mind when you set up camp on their lawn, because they are forced to sit up and pay attention."<sup>7)</sup>

The third condition that Hallam presents to us concerns the aspect of civil disobedience as a violation of the law. "You have to break the law. This is the essence of the non-violent method because it creates the social tension and the public drama which are vital to create change. Everyone loves an underdog narrative. It's the great archetypal story in all cultures: against all the odds, the brave go into battle against evil. Breaking the rules gets you attention and shows the public and the elite that you are serious and unafraid. It creates the necessary material disruption and economic cost which forces the

elites to sit up and take notice. Common actions are simple ones: sitting down in roads; painting government buildings.”<sup>8)</sup>

The fourth condition below concerns the non-violent aspect of civil disobedience. “It has to stay non-violent. As soon as you allow violence into the mix, you destroy the diversity and community basis upon which all successful mass mobilizations are based. The young, the old and the vulnerable will leave the space. So people need to be trained to stay calm and groups need to be assigned the role of intervening when tempers flare up. This needs to be organized, and non-violent discipline is rule number one for all participant.”<sup>9)</sup> By presenting these conditions, Hallam is trying to assert that he belongs to the mainstream of non-violent civil disobedience, from H. D. Thoreau via Gandhi to Martin Luther King Jr. According to his pamphlet, Hallam was involved in the peace movement in the 1980s and was arrested and imprisoned several times.

The fifth condition presented by Hallam is as follows. “It has to go on day after day. We all know A-to-B marches get us nowhere - and the truth is, neither does blocking a capital city for a day. It’s in the news and then it’s over. To create real economic cost for the bosses, you have to keep at it. The first day or two, no one is bothered. After a few days it become ‘an issue’. After a week it’s a ‘national crisis’. This is because each day you block a city the economic costs go up exponentially – increasing each day.”<sup>10)</sup> In fact, road blockades on the M25 in London and the A103, 110 and 114 in Berlin continued day after day, causing a great burden and risk to city life (and resulting in a fatal cycling accident in Berlin).

Finally, Hallam lists the following sixth condition. “Last but not least, it has to be fun. If we can’t dance at it, it isn’t a real revolution. The artistic communities need to be on board: it’s a festival. We are going to show the media that we’re not sitting around waiting to die any longer. We’re gonna have a party. Obviously.”<sup>11)</sup>

This paper, written by Haram under the name XR, is distinctive in that it is in line with the activities currently being carried out by JSO and LG. As a whole, it is full of a certain “brightness” that anarchism possesses. Therefore, the paper is an effective tool for recruiting people to their climate change protest activities. In this paper, the “darkness” - i.e. one of the important element of environmental apocalypse - that was present in Haram’s pamphlet “*Advice to Young People, as you Face Annihilation*” is completely hidden.

### 3 Hallam’s Apocalypse

In 2019, he was arrested for planning to fly a drone over Heathrow Airport as part of a campaign against its expansion. While in prison, he wrote a pamphlet called “*Advice to Young People, as you Face Annihilation*”. We can read the full text on the Internet, and we can also watch related videos of him on YouTube.

In this pamphlet, while referring to civil disobedience and Martin Luther King, Jr., Hallam also talks about his own background, but when it comes to talking about climate change and its

consequences, the description changes to what could be called an environmental apocalypse, and moreover, to the most extreme version of it. The end of the world is depicted with a sense of urgency, in the form of catastrophic consequences of climate change, the collapse of the world's coastal areas due to rising sea levels, and food crises.

He rejects the government, corporations, the middle class, as well as Greenpeace, the liberal left, and even the radical left. In any case, everything other than direct action in the way that Haram thinks is a path to destruction and annihilation. He calls the generation of young people who are the target of this pamphlet “the last generation,” and describes (in a desperate tone) the apocalyptic situation that (he claims) will accompany climate change as follows:

“Public order will break down, and it will happen quickly. Because people get hungry. People will break into stores and into houses and take what they can and kill those that stand in their way. The endpoint of social collapse then is war played out in every city, every neighbourhood, every street. This is what’s going to happen to your generation, and this appalling situation is liable to become commonplace. A gang of boys will break into your house demanding food. They will see your mother, your sister, your girlfriend, and they will gang rape her on the kitchen table. They will force you to watch, laughing at you. At the end, they will accuse you of enjoying it. They’ll take a cigarette and burn out your eyes with it. You will not be able to see anything again. This is the reality of climate change”.<sup>12)</sup>

What Hallam targets through this grotesque narrative, which seems somewhat ridiculous and prophetic, is not the reason and deliberation of youth, but rather their intuitive fear and anger about climate change. In other words, what is expected to be triggered is a shudder in the face of a certain “urgency” of the apocalyptic scenarios resulting from climate change.

#### 4 Zion Lights

Let us consider here former XR spokesperson Zion Lights<sup>13)</sup>. She is a leading figure on the pro-nuclear environmental left, preaching the aggressive promotion of nuclear power<sup>14)</sup>. Lights was the editor of “The Hourglass”, an XR newspaper that was published from 2019 and continued for several issues until 2020.<sup>15)</sup>

Lights has set up an organization called “Emergency Reactor”, which is calling for nuclear power to be the solution to the problem of climate change. The organization makes the following claims: “Green groups: either back nuclear or back down. Either you’re against climate change or you’re against nuclear power<sup>16)</sup>”. While forcing people to make these binary choices, they also argue, “You can’t have it both ways. Stop hanging onto hippie-era conspiracy theories and join us in the fight of our lives to end this climate emergency. It’s not too late to be on the right side of history.”<sup>17)</sup>

After leaving XR, Lights exposed the cult-like atmosphere that Hallam and the people around her had. What is referred to as “hippie-era conspiracy theories” on the Lights group page above is an environmental apocalypse, as typified by Hallam himself. She describes her history of environmental activism over the past 15 years, her joining XR in 2018, her promotion from a local member to a spokesperson for XR as a whole, and various strange scenes she experienced at XR. Of course, this includes the episode surrounding Roger Hallam.

“When I first saw Roger in the XR office in London, I didn’t see his appeal. His wiry gray hair was unkempt, and he sat behind his desk every day eating pungent homemade hummus. I noticed he didn’t pay attention to people when they talked. That we were facing certain death was his justification (or rationalization) for being rude to everyone.”<sup>18)</sup>

“(…) Members called him a hero, and fell for his constant self-comparisons to MLK [Martin Luther King Jr.] and Gandhi. He referred to himself as a prophet, and “proved” he was a martyr through regular arrests and stints in jail.”<sup>19)</sup>

## 5 Great Flood

At least some of the participants in the JSO and LG seem to think that the degree of transgression of the law that is permissible is proportional to the degree of “urgency”. If the situation of climate change in reality is a crisis that can be compared to the legendary “Great Flood” in the “Book of Genesis” of the “Old Testament” (Genesis 7-1 to 7-24), then it is likely that people will think that secular laws, or ordinary laws, can be easily broken. On the contrary, breaking and stepping over the law would even be our duty (whether it is a moral or theological duty is a aside) to save our planet.

People who look at JSO and LG critically think of them as “strange people”, but from the perspective of JSO and LG members, who see climate change as an extraordinary “urgency”, those who do not take the same kind of action as them in the face of environmental catastrophe (probably the majority of society, or “we”) are the “strange people”. This means that in their eyes, “we” are like the people who “mocked” at Noah as he was building the Ark, in other words, the foolish and unfaithful people who were ultimately swallowed up by the Great Flood.

On October 28, 2022, Hallam posted on Twitter, referring to the Twitter account of environmentalist Kevin Anderson, that the time of judgment is approaching, and that if you want to know the ending of the story, you should stop reading *The Economist* and start reading the Old Testament.<sup>20)</sup> Unexpectedly, this kind of prophetic speech by Hallam touches on the core of the series of activities being carried out by JSO and LG.

## 6 environmental apocalypse

The element of environmental apocalypse attached to these climate change protest activities is not limited to Roger Hallam as an individual, nor can it be reduced to his peculiar mentality. As Jakub Kowalewski states, “Apocalypticism has become part and parcel of contemporary rhetoric surrounding the environmental crisis”<sup>21)</sup>. Keeping in mind Kierkegaard’s categories, Simon Thornton has proposed a distinction between three types of guilt in relation to climate change: ethical guilt, tragic guilt, and apocalyptic guilt, in order to analyze the religious mentality surrounding climate change protests<sup>22)</sup>. The “*Declaration*” (April 2022) of the A22 Network is full of an apocalyptic environmental atmosphere from beginning to end.<sup>23)</sup> There is an organization called the “A22 Network” that links over a dozen groups, including LG and JSO. This network was established with support from the Climate Emergency Fund (founded by Irene Getty of the Getty Foundation), which provides funding to JSO and other organizations.

“We are the Last Generation of the old world. We are here today to say we will create a new world – where humanity embraces itself, forgives itself, loves itself and commits to continue our great adventure. (...) The old world is dying. We are in the last hour, the darkest hour. This world is being decimated before our eyes. We are in between moments. What we do now decides the fate of both this world and the next”<sup>24)</sup>.

In addition, at the end of this “*Declaration*” there is the following sentence. “We are the Last Generation. But we are also the First.”<sup>25)</sup>

Recent examples of worldwide abnormal weather, the spread of the new coronavirus, and the nuclear war threat that suddenly became a reality after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine may have fostered a vague sense of anxiety among the general public, leading to an intensification of direct action against climate change.

Classic studies such as Norman Cohn’s “*The Pursuit of the Millennium*” (1970) and Michael Barken’s “*Disaster and the Millennium*” (1974) show that when the existing framework for explaining the world becomes dysfunctional due to major disasters, epidemics, or colonialist invasions, etc. , and what apocalyptic and eschatological ideas emerged in various forms (communism, millenarianism, the Taiping Rebellion, the Ghost Dance religion, etc.) when the existing framework for explaining the world became dysfunctional due to major disasters, epidemics, and colonialist aggression. This perspective would also be applicable to the series of movements since 2022.

Kowalewski summarizes the “decolonial critique” (eco-eschatology) of “eco-eschatology” from two perspectives, based on Rote<sup>26)</sup>, Danowski and Castro<sup>27)</sup>, and Lanawana and Trafford<sup>28)</sup>. These are two issues that arise from the environmental apocalypse.

The first is the issue of catastrophes that have already occurred. Discussions focused on current or future catastrophes “disregards that many people in the majority world have already lived through the ecological catastrophe brought about by European colonialism and its repercussions”<sup>29)</sup>.

As per Kowalewski’s summary, citing Danowski and Castro, “for the native people of the Americas, the end of the world already happened – five centuries ago”(Danowski and Castro)<sup>30)</sup>, “the exclusive focus on the environmental disaster as a future or present ‘end’ of linear history blinds us to ‘ends of history’ experienced by colonised communities in the past”<sup>31)</sup>.

According to Kowalewski, the second problem concerns the concept of the “single timeline, which is expressed, for instance, in a narrative about future human extinction and which is common to contemporary eco-apocalyptic discourses(…)”<sup>32)</sup>.

Such a narrative gives the impression that “we are all in this together” (Rothe)<sup>33)</sup>, but in fact “depoliticises the environmental emergency by obscuring the historically and geographically specific effects of climate change.”

Moreover, “anti-political universalism” (Ranawana and Trafford) presented by “a single apocalyptic narrative” actually “conceals both how climate crises are temporally and spatially distributed, and how they are symptoms of ongoing imperialist practices” (Ranawana and Trafford)<sup>34)</sup>.

In this way, climate change protest activities, to use my term, acquire the potential to represent all of humanity in an unstructured way. By “unstructured” here, I mean that the only dimensions that matter are the Earth as a whole and humanity as a whole, and that the various differences that should exist in reality (differences between countries, classes, the northern and southern hemispheres, stages of economic development, etc.) are erased.

## 7 The “alleged” fundamental superiority of climate change protests over all other social movements

The following statement appears on the JSO’s Zoom meeting announcement page. This is instructive in considering their own cognition of JSO’s position.

“Climate collapse will mean the end of workers rights, women’s rights, all human rights. It is already the greatest injustice visited on the global south in human history. It is time to put everything aside, it’s either survival solidarity now or collective failure.”<sup>35)</sup>

These statements are reminiscent of the opposition between the former social ecology (e.g. Murray Bookchin) and deep ecology (e.g. “Earth First!”)<sup>36)</sup>. JSO is arguing that their environmental movement is more fundamental than the labor movement, the women’s rights movement, and all other specific and particular human rights movements (which would presumably include movements against racism, indigenous rights movements, and sexual minority rights movements).

This is because they believe it is possible for them to justify the fact that climate change protest activities are the ultimate foundation of all individual human rights movements and are a true human rights movement.

In this context, the following case from London contains many suggestions. In July 2023 members of JSO disrupted Pride in London parade. A few days prior to this, JSO had asked the organizers of Pride to express solidarity with the climate change protests. However, it was not accepted in the way that JSO wanted and negotiations broke down. The reasons given by the JSO to justify the interference included the use of a major soft drink float in the parade and the fact that one of the sponsors of the Pride Parade was a major airline. Eventually, a settlement was reached between the two sides at a later date.

JSO and LG believe that climate change protest activities are at the top of all social movements. In their view, such an attitude can be justified on the grounds that if the earth collapses due to climate change, it will all be over.

Therefore, minority rights movements, sexual minority movements, labor movements, etc. are all positioned below the climate change protest movement in the hierarchy of movements. The kind of “arrogance” shown by JSO at Pride in London can be seen as an incident in which their underlying fundamental beliefs became visible.

A similar case can be seen in LG’s activities in Germany. In Germany, farmers demonstrated in January 2024 against the reduction of subsidies for agricultural diesel. It was a strong protest in which many tractors blocked the road, but public sympathy was on the side of the farmers<sup>37)</sup>, and the government authorities did not respond harshly.

LG responded strongly, claiming that this was a double standard, and posted a mocking phrase parodying the slogan of the farmers, “Wir dürfen das. Wir haben Traktoren [We can do this. We have a tractor].” In Leipzig, there were even activists who performed by riding toy child-sized toy-tractors<sup>38)</sup>. In other words, from the perspective of some LGs, farmers are climate right-wingers who still seek subsidies for fossil fuels on the grounds of agriculture. In their own view, they believe that climate change protestors are unfairly discriminated in comparison to farmers. As has been widely seen in all religious and political movements, the sense of being attacked or persecuted has the function of strengthening unity and conviction within the organization.

## Conclusion

The issue of climate change is not simply a matter of natural science, but also requires an analysis of the religious nature of the protests against climate change, a comparison with previous environmental movements, and a humanities and social science perspective on issues such as the image and representation of the apocalyptic situation surrounding the environment.



Endnote

- 1) <https://x.com/rogerhallamcs21>
- 2) <https://www.youtube.com/c/RogerHallamUK>
- 3) <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/feb/14/just-stop-oil-activist-direct-action-against-uk-oil-infrastructure-target-petrol-stations-depots-refineries>
- 4) <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/feb/14/just-stop-oil-activist-direct-action-against-uk-oil-infrastructure-target-petrol-stations-depots-refineries>
- 5) <https://juststopoil.org/2022/02/14/breaking-just-stop-oil-youth-campaigners-deliver-ultimatum-to-boris-johnson/>
- 6) Hallam 2019, p.101.
- 7) *ibid.*, p.101.
- 8) *ibid.*, p.101.
- 9) *ibid.*, p.101.
- 10) *ibid.*, p.102.
- 11) *ibid.*, p.102.
- 12) Cf. Hallam 2021.
- 13) Lights' X account and her website are: <https://twitter.com/ziontree> <https://www.zionlights.co.uk/>
- 14) <https://www.thefp.com/p/climate-activism-has-a-cult-problem>
- 15) <https://web.archive.org/web/20200220031808/https://hourglass.news/index.php/back-issues/>
- 16) <https://web.archive.org/web/20221128043021/https://www.emergencyreactor.org/our-demands/>
- 17) <https://web.archive.org/web/20221128043021/https://www.emergencyreactor.org/our-demands/>
- 18) <https://www.thefp.com/p/climate-activism-has-a-cult-problem>
- 19) <https://www.thefp.com/p/climate-activism-has-a-cult-problem>
- 20) <https://twitter.com/RogerHallamCS21/status/1585945143739228161> <https://twitter.com/RogerHallamCS21/status/1585945148562997249>
- 21) Kowalewski 2022, p.XIII.
- 22) Thornton 2022, pp.157-171.
- 23) <https://a22network.org/>
- 24) <https://a22network.org/>
- 25) <https://a22network.org/>
- 26) Cf. Rothe 2020.
- 27) Cf. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2017.
- 28) Cf. Ranawana and Trafford 2019. <https://archive.discoversociety.org/2019/08/07/imperialist-environmentalism-and-decolonial-struggle/>
- 29) Rothe 2020, p.146.
- 30) Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2017, p.104. Kowalewski 2022, p.18.
- 31) Kowalewski 2022, p.18.
- 32) Kowalewski 2022, p.18.
- 33) Rothe 2020, p.146. Kowalewski 2022, p.19.
- 34) Ranawana and Trafford 2019. Kowalewski 2022, p.19.
- 35) <https://web.archive.org/web/20221130172051/https://juststopoil.org/zoom/>
- 36) I discussed this point in the following section of my book: Cf. Hamano 2009, pp.163-165.
- 37) [https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/bauern-proteste-81-prozent-der-deutschen-haben-verstaendnis-fuer-proteste-der-bauern\\_id\\_259562763.html](https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/bauern-proteste-81-prozent-der-deutschen-haben-verstaendnis-fuer-proteste-der-bauern_id_259562763.html)
- 38) <https://www.derwesten.de/politik/bauern-mittwoch-proteste-10-januar-stau-verkehrsbehinderung-habeck-b-id300786134.html>

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