

CALL FOR PAPERS

Black and Green? Towards an Environmental History of the Oil Industry

Organizers: Odinn Melsted, Cyrus Mody, and Simone Schleper (Maastricht University), Christof Mauch (Rachel Carson Center)

Venue: LMU Munich

Date: 15–16 June 2023

Deadlines: 20 February 2023 for proposals; 26 May 2023 for precirculated papers

With accusations against the international oil industry's contribution to environmental degradation and anthropogenic climate change on the rise, oil companies have reacted by advertising their investments in renewables, pollution control, and more recently "net-zero" efforts. Among concerned publics like environmental activists, however, these counter-narratives are often perceived as "greenwashing"—i.e., superficial efforts intended to confuse rather than sincere steps toward needed change.

Suspensions about the effectiveness and sincerity of Big Oil's environmental mitigation efforts have a long history. Yet, some oil companies have been at the forefront of alternative energy development, such as ARCO Solar, Scallop Nuclear, or Union Geothermal. In the late 1970s, Exxon and Schlumberger even contributed to the first rechargeable lithium-ion battery, arguably a green transport technology. Several oil actors have shaped the environmental movement itself, such as Maurice Strong, the oilman who chaired the United Nations' first environmental conference in 1972 and became first director of the UN Environment Program. Were all those activities simply "greenwashing" as we now understand that term? Or do we need to historicize this concept and differentiate between greenwashing campaigns and genuine efforts by oil companies?

Bringing together scholars working on various aspects of oil (and gas) and environmental histories—black and green—this workshop aims to unpack the concept of "greenwashing." It aims to engage with the existing literature on the environmental history of oil, while opening future directions for research collaborations on the environmental strategies pursued by oil companies themselves. The workshop is jointly run by the NWO-funded Vici project "Managing Scarcity and Sustainability: The Oil Industry, Environmentalism and Alternative Energy in the Age of Scarcity, 1968–1986" (PI Cyrus Mody, Maastricht University) and the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, Munich.

Paper topics include (but are not limited to):

- **Regulation and mitigation:** atmospheric and ecosystem pollution by wells/pipelines/tankers/refineries/gas stations; industry measures to deal with and/or prevent environmental impact; flaring vs. utilization of natural gas in a historical perspective; oil/gas conservation measures and regulations.
- **Front-stage and back-stage negotiations:** struggles (and more positive engagement) with environmental agencies, internal/external environmental impact studies; public vs. internal

positions on environmental problems like photochemical smog, acid rain, or anthropogenic climate change, and associated debates/policies.

- **Coalitions and disputes:** conflicts with citizens/communities/organizations/authorities over exploration/drilling/pipelines in non-developed or protected areas; oil industry confrontation/cooperation on environmental issues; oil entrepreneurs funding environmental organizations; “leave-it-in-the-ground” conflicts in historical perspective.
- **Lobby and campaigns:** environmental public relations and greenwashing campaigns; industry funding of nature conservation or other environmental philanthropy.
- **Transition and renewal:** oil industry investments in alternative/renewable energy; research on alternative fuels or battery technology; oil industry outlooks and transition scenarios.

We welcome proposals that engage with one or more of the above themes. We invite scholars of all ranks, including PhD students. Contributions should relate to the activities of specific international oil/gas companies, related organizations (such as OPEC or CONCAWE), or the industry as a whole. We especially welcome papers with a focus on the Global South or other regions that have received less attention in the oil/environmental history literatures. The workshop will be held in person in Munich over two days on **15–16 June 2023**. Invited participants will be asked to submit a short discussion paper (3.000–5.000 words) for precirculation prior to the workshop. Accommodation and travel expenses will be covered by the workshop organizers. We strongly encourage train travel where possible; international air travel costs within reasonable means will also be reimbursed. We seek to publish an edited volume or special issue based on the workshop papers.

Please send proposals with an abstract of 300–350 words and a short CV (in a single PDF file) to events@rcc.lmu.de by **20 February 2023**. For further information or practical questions, please contact either Odinn Melsted (o.melsted@maastrichtuniversity.nl) or Cyrus Mody (c.mody@maastrichtuniversity.nl).



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