

# Hazardous Hope. Exploring New Ways of Narrating Toxic Bodies and Landscapes

**Veranstalter** Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

**Veranstaltungsort** Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

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## Workshop at LMU München, May 6–7, 2020

May 6-7, 2021, Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, Ludwig Maximilian University Munich, Germany.

Confirmed keynote speakers as part of the annual Rachel Carson Center Tandem Lecture are Kate Brown (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge MA.) and Natascha Sadr Haghghian and Ashkan Sepahvand (Institute for Incongruous Translation).

### **Submissions by December 11, 2020.**

We all live in a permanently polluted world and in polluted bodies. Some more than others, but nobody escapes the myriads of toxins, chemicals, heavy metals, and plastics emitted by the metabolism of capitalism. As a global common commodity, toxicity often moves along hierarchies of coloniality, discriminating along the lines of class and gender—the siting of hazardous waste dumps or dirty industries are striking examples of these processes. As a consequence, doleful narratives have often been congruent to stories of hazardous pollution. In contrast, this conference on Hazardous Hope seeks to reconsider our troubled times of probably irreversible toxic pollution in the Global South and the Global North through the lens of hopeful, yet critical, ways of engaging with this unprecedented condition of life for humans and more-than-humans. This way, we intend to push forward the recent discussions in the Environmental Humanities on radical or slow hope (Christof

Mauch) or ecologies of hope (Graeme Wynn) that move beyond the widespread narratives of 'doom and gloom.' We strive to shift the focus to stories of resilience and resistance as well as to hope-emphasizing ways of narrating our toxic lives beyond victimhood. Critically hopeful visions have the potential to promote agency and emotional health for affected communities, activists and engaged scholars.

One such hopeful strategy of resistance was explored by Zina Saro-Wiwa in her video installation *Karikpo Pipeline* (2015). Male dancers wearing antelope masks danced amidst the Ogoniland, a region in the Niger delta that the Royal Dutch Shell company used for oil extraction until 1994. The Ogoni people, which her family is part of, use the Karikpo mask to imitate the strength of animals. This ritual was used to conjure fertility for agricultural lands, a practice that is juxtaposed by the wasteland that was left behind by the Shell company. Only after 300.000 Ogoni protested against Shell's presence in the region in the mid 1990s, the oil company left the region. The infrastructure of oil extraction still remains, however, and so does the toxicity. This is a narrative that takes the toxic heritage seriously but deals with it in encouraging ways, both problem and future oriented. The historical account of the protest movement, its inspiring leaders and the artistic reinterpretation and re-appropriation of contaminated sites in Nigeria is just one exercise in what we call Hazardous Hope.

We invite theory-driven as well as research-based papers coming from the entire breadth of the Environmental Humanities, including but not limited to Environmental History, Science and Technology Studies, Anthropology, Geography, Political Ecology and many more. Paper topics could speak to some of the following questions:

**1. Narrating Hazardous Hope:** How do human and nonhuman actors experience forms of pollution in their everyday life? How can practices of resistance and resilience inspire hope? How do we as scholars tell stories and present our research in conducive ways?

**2. Celebrating Hazardous Hope:** In what context did hopeful narratives turn out to trigger positive change? What are historical examples of environmental movements and activists driven by notions of hope fighting pollution? Were these narratives of hope more successful than the more prominent narratives of doom and gloom?

**3. Defying Hazardous Hope:** What are the dangers of adopting hopeful narratives? How have 'green' narratives been co-opted by market mechanisms and hijacked for easy technological fixes? On the other hand, do we need to consider technological fixes while framing them as part of a broader way to move forward that includes behavioral and systemic change?

The workshop is organized by the Hazardous Travels DFG Emmy-Noether research group, in collaboration with the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.

Financial support for travel and accommodation is available. In case of future travel restrictions due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we will also welcome online contributions. The conference will be held in English.

Please send your paper abstracts of 1-2 pages and a short bio-blurb by December 11, 2020, to the following address: [haztrav\(at\)rcc.lmu\(dot\)de](mailto:haztrav@rcc.lmu.de)

If you have questions concerning the conference please contact:  
[haztrav\(at\)rcc.lmu\(dot\)de](mailto:haztrav@rcc.lmu.de)

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[Further Information \(Link\)](#)

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