

We Are the Earth That Defends Itself: An Exploration of Discursive Practices of Les Soulèvements De La Terre

Authors : Sophie Del Fa, Loup Ducol

Abstract : This presentation will focus on the discursive practices of Les Soulèvements de la Terre (hereafter SdIT), a French environmentalist group mobilized against agribusiness. More specifically, we will use, as a case study, the violently repressed demonstration that took place in Sainte-Soline on March 25, 2023 (see after for details). The SdIT embodies the renewal of anti-capitalist and environmentalist struggles that began with Occupy Wall Street in 2009 and in France with the Nuit debout in 2016 and the yellow vests movement from 2019 to 2020. These struggles have three things in common: they are self-organized without official leaders, they rely mainly on occupations to reappropriate public places (squares, roundabouts, natural territories) and they are anti-capitalist. The SdIT was created in 2021 by activists coming from the Zone-to-Defend of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, a victorious 10 yearlong occupation movement against an airport near Nantes, France (from 2009 to 2018). The SdIT is not labeled as a formal association, nor as a constituted group, but as an anti-capitalist network of local struggles at the crossroads of ecology and social issues. Indeed, although they target agro-industry, land grabbing, soil artificialization and ecology without transition, the SdIT considers ecological and social questions as interdependent. Moreover, they have an encompassing vision of ecology that they consider as a concern for the living as a whole by erasing the division between Nature and Culture. Their radicality is structured around three main elements: federative and decentralized dimensions, the rhetoric of living alliances and militant creatives strategies. The objective of this reflexion is to understand how these three dimensions are articulated through the SdIT's discursive practices. To explore these elements, we take as a case study one specific event: the demonstration against the 'basins' held in Sainte-Soline on March 25, 2023, on the construction site of new water storage infrastructure for agricultural irrigation in western France. This event represents a turning point for the SdIT. Indeed, the protest was violently repressed: 5000 grenades were fired by the police, hundreds of people were injured, and one person was still in a coma at the time of writing these lines. Moreover, following Saint-Soline's events, the Minister of Interior Affairs, Gérald Darmin, threatened to dissolve the SdIT, thus adding fuel to the fire in an already tense social climate (with the ongoing strikes against the pensions reform). We anchor our reflexion on three types of data: 1) our own experiences (inspired by ethnography) of the Sainte-Soline demonstration; 2) the collection of more than 500 000 Tweets with the #SainteSoline hashtag and 3) a press review of texts and articles published after Sainte-Soline's demonstration. The exploration of these data from a turning point in the history of the SdIT will allow us to analyze how the three dimensions highlighted earlier (federative and decentralized dimensions, rhetoric of living alliances and creatives militant strategies) are materialized through the discursive practices surrounding the Sainte-Soline event. This will allow us to shed light on how a new contemporary movement implements contemporary environmental struggles.

Keywords : discursive practices, Sainte-Soline, Ecology, radical ecology

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