

# HISTORY AND ECONOMICS SEMINAR

Tuesday 5 March 2024, 5.00pm GMT

Seminar Room 3, Cripps Court, Magdalene College



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*'Growing up nuclear': Childhood memories of nuclear power in Cold War Finland*



In January 2023, Finland's fourth nuclear power plant was finally completed after a twenty-year delay, albeit plagued with system and technical faults. The Finnish government's National Energy and Climate Strategy for 2030 report sets out their strategy to transition from coal and peat for heating to small scale nuclear. The government would have been further bolstered with the Energiategollisuus (Association of Finnish Energy Industries) report in 2023 that positive attitudes towards nuclear had grown to 68 percent. Yet, the roots of this "nuclear renaissance" and positive attitudes towards nuclear energy has not been placed under much historical scrutiny.

Since 2021 I have been working as a postdoctoral researcher on a project titled 'The Finnish Technological Sublime: Perceptions, imagination and self-representations of large-scale energy projects, 1928-2020'. The project has three focus areas to investigate the memories and imaginations of ordinary people concerning daily life close to large-scale energy infrastructure; historicise the role of democratic agencies in the planning and building of power plants; and to analyse the nexus between gender, memory, the self, and energy infrastructure. Over the course of this project, I have collected forty-five oral history interviews and consulted material deposited in the Finnish Literature Society, Urho Kekkonen Archives, National Archives, and Central Archives for Finnish Business Records (ELKA).

One of the central concerns of the project has been to trace the development of Finnish perceptions of democracy in the Cold War period in relation to large-scale nuclear energy infrastructural development. The first nuclear power plant was ordered and made with the Soviets. The paper will focus on the intimate ways in which people use energy infrastructure to perform their sense of trust in the government, illustrating the delicate balance between labour and the state. In doing so, I argue that 1979 was an important turning point not only in challenging "nuclear exceptionalism" after the Three Mile Island accident, but provided a politically safer context for Finns to express their concerns, worries, and expectations of Finland's nuclear and technopolitical future.