Theorizing Sartre's Bad Faith in International Relations: Climate Change, Deception and the Negotiation of International Order

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how climate-vulnerable states charge major carbon emitters with bad faith behaviors, how those emitters respond in ways that often confirm the bad faith charges, and what vulnerable states propose as policy alternatives. Using an existentialist conceptualization of bad faith and Bassan-Nygate and Heimann's four response mechanisms – projection, distortion, displacement, and rationalization – we identify how major emitters try to negate bad faith claims in ways that are deceptive of the self and the other. Major emitters require self-reflection to identify how they are not meeting international climate policy agreements and begin to address what they must change (about themselves), but vulnerable states note that this reflection is absent. This study of 399 speeches by national leaders at three climate summits opens directions for scholars, activists and policymakers to understand how interactions around bad faith illuminate the politics of bad faith and the potential for change this contains.

KEYWORDS	climate change, international relations, existentialism, responsibility, bad faith, shame
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INTRODUCTION

Despite the scientific consensus on the catastrophic consequences of failing to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the international community's response remains woefully insufficient, especially the response by high-emitting countries (UNFCCC 2023). Despite the agreement at COP28 to transition away from fossil fuels, *"oil and gas exploration is booming"* (IISD 2024). Since 2020, rich countries, including many that self-brand as climate leaders, such as the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and Norway, *"have issued two thirds of the global number of oil and gas licenses"* (IBID.). In response, a variety of actors continue to call out high emitters' inaction, including actors from countries "vulnerabilised" (WEATHERILL 2023) [1] to the effects of climate change, which are often the least responsible for global emissions. At a crucial point in the choices about the future of the international system and in our responses to climate change, this paper interrogates bad faith as a phenomenon so far understudied in International Relations (IR).

In this paper, we argue that beyond merely *shaming* other countries into action, bad faith charges help countries to (1) question positionalities within the international system around leadership and responsibility; (2) expose deception; and (3) offer an alternative to the outcomes that bad faith produces. Our understanding of bad faith goes beyond shaming as it includes explicit references to positionalities within the international system. Yet it borrows from the mechanisms of exposing inconsistencies between a country's autobiographical narrative and its actions that commonly characterize accounts of shaming (SEE GUSTAFSSON 2015; STEELE 2008).

Our critical examination of how climate vulnerable countries make claims of others' bad faith is rooted in the understanding that global environmental challenges cannot be disentangled from issues of equity and fairness or from discussions about the very nature of the international system. Consequently, the research contributes to a growing body of literature that calls for a more integrated approach to addressing climate change, one that would prioritize the needs and rights of various vulnerable populations, decolonize climate change and our knowledge production (SULTANA 2022) and question the protection of a fossil fuel 'way of life' (MCLAREN – CORRY 2023) rather than alternative forms of social and political order. Bad

faith understood in this way points to the centrality of human choice in remaining tied to forms of 'unfreedom.' Here, bad faith is a human choice that requires being upheld cognitively, discursively, and materially despite exposure by others. We argue that Sartre's account of bad faith links to acknowledging responsibility for the choices we make in conditions of absolute freedom.

Building on this argument and on recent literature in existentialism and IR (HOM – O'DRISCOLL 2023; SUBOTIĆ – EJDUS 2021), we develop a more explicit and operationalized theorization of bad faith in IR to examine its relevance for how international climate politics are negotiated. Even though bad faith and existentialism more broadly are *"oriented toward two major themes: the analysis of being and the centrality of human choice"* (LEVI 1962: 233), IR literature has been slow to make explicit the centrality of those two facets of bad faith as they materialize in international climate politics. Instead, IR tends to highlight good faith attempts and structural complexity as reasons for inadequate action (SEE PELOPIDAS – VERSCHUREN 2023).

Our paper is structured as follows. We start by discussing shame in IR to build the groundwork for our theorization of bad faith. We argue that shame and bad faith draw on similar mechanisms, although bad faith adds a dimension around the negotiation of positionality. We follow by examining various conceptualizations of bad faith as reflected in the literature on theories of justice, negotiation theory and existential philosophy. Next, we operationalize the concept of bad faith in our methodology in reference to our dataset, which consists of speeches from key international climate summits. Our empirical analysis then focuses on internal and external bad faith charges and response mechanisms. We conclude with a discussion of future research directions regarding the practical, conceptual, and normative dimensions of bad faith's role in international politics.

SHAME AND SHAMING IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

In 2022, UN Secretary-General António Guterres (UN 2022: NO PAGE) said at the launch of the third Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report that *"this report…is a litany of broken climate promises. It is a file of shame, cataloguing the empty pledges that put us firmly on track towards an unliveable world."* The use of the word shame indicates the centrality of this

emotion in mobilizing action and attempts to expose moral culpability and responsibility. For this reason, shame has received some recognition in the IR literature (GUSTAFSSON 2015; STEELE 2008; YOUDE 2014; ZARAKOL 2010). Others have examined the geopolitics of shaming to understand why shaming others can produce improved or worsened outcomes (TERMAN 2023).

Actors might deploy "naming and shaming" strategies to draw attention to transgression or injustice (SEE DANNENBERG ET AL. 2023; GUSTAFSSON 2015; HAFNER-BURTON 2008; ILGIT – PRAKASH 2019). Scholars are, however, divided over whether such strategies are fruitful in terms of mobilizing action. For instance, Bassan-Nygate and Heimann (2022: 1) argue that *"state and non-state actors often try to provoke moral emotions like guilt and shame to mobilize political change. However, tactics such as 'naming and shaming' are often ineffective, suggesting that policy makers engage in norm violations in ways that minimize moral emotions."* Terman (2023) also suggests that shaming can have an unintended opposite effect: the shamed actor uses their defiance of the shaming accusation to mobilize domestic public support and may even worsen human rights violations to reinforce the point. Others, nevertheless, argue that naming and shaming can work, depending on the type of audience, the norm relevance and the statuses of those shaming and shamed (DANNENBERG ET AL. 2023).

A key element in shaming is the exposure of transgressions of socio-politically contingent norms. Yet shaming is also relational and is a strategic instrument. It *"is a social process of expressing disapproval, with the intention of invoking negative feelings in the person being changed. Shaming, unlike purely deterrent punishment, involves a moral component of consciousness-raising, labelling, and persuasion to convince others to change their behaviour"* (KOSCHUT 2022: 497). This persuasion with the aim to convince others to change a course of action or practices rests on the invocation of a negative feeling. This largely depends on who can produce or invoke negative feelings in whom and what kind of relationship exists between the shamer and the shamed.

Indeed, being shamed does not necessarily mean the shamed feels any shame (TERMAN 2023). They may visibly "correct" their behavior as the shamer demands, but for instrumental reasons, for example to remain in an international organization or to be able to gain access to alliances or financial resources. Beyond instrumentality alone, scholars examine the central role

of shame as an emotion that states can feel in response to inconsistencies of narrative and behavior. Steele (2005: 527) suggests that *"it is unnatural for a state to identify itself one way and to 'perform' acts in a different way."* Similarly, *"the source of [...] shame is less important than its effects on the state [that lead it] to try to rectify the resulting imbalance between behaviour and self-narrative"* (YOUDE 2014: 429). In historical context, the state-centric international order and national identities are inherently inconsistent because they embed inequalities and injustices (FIERKE – MACKAY 2023; INNES 2023; LERNER 2023) and draw on a long history of violent inclusion and exclusion. This means actors within the international system have long considered ways to incorporate (often violent) inconsistencies. One such mechanism is deception.

BAD FAITH DECEPTION AND THE NEGOTIATION OF POSITIONALITY

It is the deception of the self and the other that is central to shame and shaming *together* with a negotiation of positionality that we are particularly interested in. We argue that the combination of these factors makes a theorization of bad faith necessary for an understanding of the international politics of climate change. For this reason, shaming resonates with some of our empirical discussions. Shaming follows a logic of exposing wrongful actions and inconsistencies. A theorization of bad faith and how it is leveraged as a charge, however, allows us to expand on how actors can draw on *mechanisms* that resemble shaming *while* negotiating the positionality within the international system and the relationality that underwrites the shaming dynamic. Underlying this argument is Sartre's insistence on the choice inherent to bad faith.

In the literature, two facets of bad faith that concern its ontological and epistemological status stand out. First, justice and negotiation theories understand bad faith as not being true to one's declared intentions. In Rawls' theory of justice, for example, stability of justice requires *"the assumption of everyone's willing compliance with the requirements of justice"* (FREEMAN 2023: N.P.). As a result, "the parties cannot take risks with principles they know they will have difficulty complying with voluntarily. They would be making an agreement in bad faith" (IBID.). This largely translates into the understanding of bad faith in negotiation theory, although it is added to by a lack of intention to come to an agreement (FICK 1989: 90). Some call this

"false negotiations": the actors perceive it as being in their interest not to conclude negotiations even when their stated intention contradicts their behavior (GLOZMAN ET AL. 2015). In both cases, the intention and the willingness to comply, bad faith and its opposite, good faith, are connected to a set of behaviors that different jurisdictions or case laws might specify according to a precedent but that will nevertheless return to the underlying themes of willingness and intention (SOURDIN 2012). Famously, Holsti (1962) argued that bad faith can also be present in the belief system of a negotiating party which influences the perception of the party negotiated with. This brings us closer to the role of deception of the self and the other in theorizing bad faith.

The relationship to one's identity has been central to existentialist accounts of bad faith, and best-known in Sartre's discussion thereof. Sartre adds two dimensions to questions of intention and willingness: that of self-deception (rather than the deception of the other) and that of a lack of authenticity. These two layers are substantive because they can tell us something about the politics of inaction as a process deeply intertwined with politics of the self's ability to entertain the possibility of change – a component that shaming literature can underplay. It has taken IR some time to bring existentialist thought into its canon. This prompted Ashworth (2023: 924) to ask, *"why is there no existentialist IR?"* In a Special Issue dedicated to existentialism in IR, the editors Hom and O'Driscoll (2023: 783) argue that *"there are practical and political reasons"* for returning to existentialism, given that we appear to be *"living through what has been termed an unfolding 'Age of Anxiety'."* The anxiety related to climate, here, is often referenced alongside other anxieties such as those induced by the Covid-19 pandemic, see also an earlier work by Subotić and Ejdus (2021). Rather than anxiety, however, we are interested in a crucial observation made by Henricks (2006) and others (SEE GORDON 1997; LECHABA 2021; ROBERTS 2004; SANTONI 2005), namely that bad faith and violence, oppression and indifference are connected and intimately tied to the very understanding of deception and recognizing the *"potentiality – a freedom to change"* (HENRICKS 2021: 63). Linking choices to freedom and bad faith is essential for our understanding of climate politics.

For Sartre, bad faith is, in essence, a form of inauthenticity, or *"a self-deception where someone uses their freedom to deny their freedom"* (ASHWORTH 2023: 928). The possibility of denying one's freedom rests on the

"distinction between 'being-in-itself' and 'being-for-itself'" (IBID.). Broadly speaking, 'being-in-itself' is that which 'is,' or rather an assumption of what Sartre calls 'facticity' – a form of 'factness' that presupposes an unchanging and somewhat fixed essence. We more commonly reference 'being-in-itself' when we utter sentences such as 'this is who I am,' or 'I am someone who…' without acknowledgement of the choice inherent to who we are. 'Being-in-itself' implies a self-imposed lack of freedom or choice – one that is dictated by an implicit assumption of essence. McClamrock (1988: N.P.) describes this aptly: *"being-in-itself is actual (rather than just possible) and contingent (rather than necessary)."* Allowing for the possibility of change, 'being-for-itself' is instead characterized by what Sartre considers 'transcendence' (SARTRE 2007). The latter *"cannot be defined by its current identity; it has a potentiality – a freedom to change – that makes it able to, in a sense, be what it is not"* (HENRICKS 2006: 63). Central to this distinction is Sartre's understanding of consciousness. In the first instance, consciousness is required to repress the possibility of change; in the latter it is central to transcendence itself. It might be in this normativity of consciousness that Sartre's account of bad faith renders a politics of bad faith possible beyond a mere psychoanalytical lens. Henricks (IBID.) develops this thought further, arguing in "Jean-Paul Sartre: The Bad Faith of Empire" that bad faith *"can be directed inward (toward oneself) or outward (toward others), and it can take the form of either objectification […] or a lack of responsibility for past and present actions…"* Bad faith in its normative essence is connected to consciousness of deception.

At the heart of deception of the self or the other lies knowledge of the fact that one deceives about. Bad faith, for Sartre (2018: 88), therefore *"implies that the liar is fully aware of the truth he is disguising. We do not lie about something we do not know about."* What is important for our discussion of climate politics is that this ignorance can become a form of self-deception of a truth known, or a strategy to counter the effects of truth. Climate change politics in its insufficient realization of action today maps neatly onto self-deception and requires justification and explanation, given its known existential stakes. In other words, *"I cannot in effect will 'not to see' some particular aspect of my being if I am fully aware of exactly the aspect that I want not to see… I flee in order not to know, but I cannot be unaware that I am fleeing, and a flight from anguish is just one way of becoming conscious of anguish…"* (IBID.: 84–85). This means *"that people are prone, when in an untenable*

situation…to attempt magical solutions" (BUSCH 2013: 169). The untenability Busch references is also a product of the anguish that comes from fleeing from oneself. We argue here that in the politics of bad faith, a bad faith charge leveraged by actors requires an exposition of this flight in addition to rendering this exposition relevant for one's positionality within the international system. If I expose, for example, weakness in the flight from oneself, I also position myself anew. I question the imposition of facticity (a climate vulnerable country) in reference to the bad faith charge leveraged at others.

Since bad faith lies include a future projection ('I cannot change,' 'This is who I am'), this projection is different from truth. We cannot speak the truth about a future that has not yet happened. We can only envision the possibility of making choices about the potentiality of the ability to change. In this way, *"bad faith is a way to live the impossibility of ever fulfilling an always-deferred self-foundation through a belief that one has achieved it,"* rather than living with the admittedly unsettling realization that we only approximate what we believe ourselves to be able to approximate (IBID.: 169). Rather than merely lying to oneself, bad faith includes strategies to evade the truth of the necessary potential for change, or to keep it hidden by recourse to magic or set belief structures about 'how things are.' This mode turns us into a 'being-in-itself,' and can degrade others to a 'being-in-itself.' Given that this relies on facticity ('this is how things are in essence'), 'being-in-itself' can inscribe violent, oppressive or dehumanizing social 'facts' as the essence of a group of people or a person rather than a product of structural injustice or inequality. Nevertheless, actors can also question the establishment of 'facticity' or 'factness' by exposing bad faith in others.

Sartre's account of bad faith links to acknowledging responsibility for the choices we make in conditions of absolute freedom. The urge to limit the acknowledgement of responsibility for our choices is connected, then, to the bad faith of reducing ourselves to a 'being-in-itself.' Certainly, there remain multiple questions about the persistence of social facts and the conditions they impose upon the ability to choose freely. Structures such as colonialism, or oppression, create conditions that limit the ability of an individual to choose. Since climate change is a product of the *"complexities of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, international development, and geopolitics that contribute to the reproduction of ongoing colonialities through*

existing governance structures, discursive framings, imagined solutions and interventions" (SULTANA 2022: 1), these limits translate into existential questions and everyday lives far removed from the relevance of a theorization about bad faith – what matters is its effects. Meanwhile, *"there is something to be said about insisting that one is 'a fact' in a world predicated upon your remaining a fiction in a colonial fantasy"* (SEALEY 2018: 163). In other words, *"in choosing this mode of bad faith, I create for myself a stable ground upon which I might feel my 'realness,' and so against racialized and gendered stereotypes that exist for the sake of colonial (and postcolonial) power"* (IBID.: 164). Sealey argues that choosing bad faith as a strategy can address the unsettling that is established through colonial projects' fictionalized narratives about the other, narratives that produce ontological insecurity in oppressed and marginalized communities (SEE LERNER 2023).

The duality of bad faith means that its relevance in international climate politics is twofold. First, bad faith can be a strategy for ignorance and deception that requires response mechanisms and choices that substantiate or establish 'facticity' ('being-in itself'). Second, it can be used to challenge this facticity productively by exposing others through mechanisms that also underlie shaming. We are interested in this duality of bad faith in reference to the politics of climate change because we argue that bad faith can be used to deceive and simultaneously challenge what is possible. We argue that this is largely descriptive of the relational interactions of heavy emitting countries and those that self-identify as climate vulnerable. However, this distinction forecloses any analysis of how actors of climate-vulnerable countries can deceive marginalized communities *within* climate vulnerable countries. Nevertheless, the duality connects bad faith as self-deception with mechanisms commonly referenced in the shaming literature as exposure of inconsistencies and the ability to negotiate one's positionality through the negotiation of facticity in this process. What we highlight here is that bad faith charges add a layer of questioning of the relationality that underwrites shaming logics. While shaming mechanisms seek to expose other actors, bad faith charges *additionally* negotiate relationality and the projected facticity established by the party that is being charged with bad faith. Practically, this means that bad faith charges not only expose the inconsistency of an actor (the shaming part), but also question the facticity established through the bad faith behavior, for instance being a country that is naturally vulnerable to the effects of

climate change. In the next section we explain how we operationalize the analysis of this duality methodologically.

OPERATIONALIZING BAD FAITH IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: METHODOLOGY

We seek to demonstrate the form and content of how actors challenge bad faith in other actors' behavior on accounts of the charge of bad faith itself, the response mechanism that the accused responds with to such charges, and the alternative vision that those who challenge bad faith offer. We draw on moments at which assumptions about the international system and the state of climate politics are presented publicly and internationally. Our study builds on three international climate summits, starting with the Climate Ambition Summit in December 2020, and followed by the Leaders Climate Summit of April 2021 and COP26 of November 2021. We focus on how state leaders deploy charges of bad faith and how this not only exposes others but also questions the 'facticity' inherent to bad faith charges. We caveat the analysis by acknowledging that many non-state actors take part in this process. We focus on state leaders to test how leaders formulate bad faith charges and what this means for the negotiation of positionality beyond the exposure of bad faith. While international summits may not be reflective of the international system at large, the consensus requirement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process and the significant publicity as well as pressures to ratchet up ambition prior to COP26 mean that these summits were significant in 'taking stock' and outlining future ambitions together with questions around how such ambitions are to be realized. We analyzed 399 speeches from the three summits. For each summit, we produced transcripts of speeches or drew on the texts of those that were transcribed officially and available online. To substantiate our analysis of the emerging themes, we also drew on secondary literature.

Our data analysis rests on three steps. First, we identify bad faith dimensions between deception of the self and deception of the other, although we acknowledge these categories are not necessarily analytically distinct. We then subdivide internal and external bad faith charges in the abdication of responsibility and negotiations in bad faith. We code our

transcripts accordingly, and track expressions and narratives that connect to the abdication of responsibility and negotiations in bad faith (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: HOW WE CODED BAD FAITH CLAIMS AND ASSOCIATED BEHAVIORS

Bad faith dimension	Bad faith charge	Description of concomitant or observable behaviors
Internal: deceiving the self	Abdication of responsibility	Includes deflection onto structures or 'magical' solutions such as not-yet-developed technologies, or others such as other heavy emitters. Simangan (2023: 855) maps this as 'hubris' of the Anthropocene. Inaction as a consequence is explained by structural issues or inability to change (despite a 'good faith' intention). Universalism and future-looking timescales can play a role, for example in side-lining historical emissions and injustices as part of the problem identification or by ignorance of lived effects of climate realities.
External: deceiving the other	Negotiating in bad faith	Can materialize in multiple behaviors, including agreeing or committing to a course of action but inadequate attempts to realize those commitments. This can include praising one's leadership role while continuing to produce harmful outcomes. It can mean accusing others of a set of behaviors while drawing on the same set of behaviors (hypocrisy). Can also mean investing efforts into watering down ambitious language, and mechanisms to tarnish the outcomes of a negotiation process or to limit the credibility of governance structures or other actors.

Next, in the second step, we identify what we consider response mechanisms to bad faith charges. We draw on Bassan-Nygate and Heimann's (2022) use of the (normatively and practically problematic) distinction between immature and mature response mechanisms. We do so while acknowledging that Bassan-Nygate and Heimann's work is closely related to only one aspect of our bad faith work, namely the component of shaming and exposure. As argued, however, this aspect of bad faith does not fully allow the second aspect to be studied, namely that of the negotiation of positionality. We study this aspect of bad faith charges through the narrative expressions and alternatives referenced in step 3. Bassan-Nygate and Heimann (IBID.: 6–7) identify four immature response mechanisms, "projection," "distortion," "displacement," and "rationalization." Here we are interested in how response mechanisms' behavioral effect and inconsistencies materialize at the international level and what this means for how actors negotiate positionality in reference to them.

Projection *"is the attribution of one's own negative qualities to others"* (IBID.: 6). In this regard, two aspects of projection interact with each other: *"an ongoing and constantly modifiable dialectic between projection into social defence systems and introjection of that system into the psychic defence system"* (ADAMS 2014: 14). The same logic applies at the international level as state actors may project responsibility ("others need to assume responsibility") or feed this projection into the international system ("we will not be able to reduce emissions if everyone continues to emit"). Underlying projection is a somewhat defeatist logic that overshadows culpability and responsibility for one's actions. Distortion, instead, is characterized by *"grossly reshaping external reality to suit inner needs"* and *"may encompass persistent denial of personal responsibility"* (BASSAN-NYGATE – HEIMANN 2022: 6). Distortion is at the heart of self-deception. It can also involve acknowledging climate change but denying the relevance of historic emissions or injustices as they exist now. Distortion is closely connected to the universalizing impulse of the Anthropocene that disregards any actor's historic responsibility. It can be closely connected to 'future-oriented' narratives that relegate historicity to a secondary status. Displacement, as the third immature response mechanism, *"is the redirection of feelings towards a less cared for object, altering the target of the impulse"* (IBID.: 7). This can translate into displacing anger, for example, onto other persons than the person that triggered the emotion. At the international level, displacement might also reference the displacement of responsibility onto non-human processes and forces such as technology or the economy. Lastly, rationalization *"is the justification of attitudes, beliefs or behaviour that may otherwise be unacceptable by an incorrect application of justifying reasons or the invention of a convincing fallacy"* (IBID.). Rationalization could also include minimalizing the risk of the effects of climate change as something expected to occur far in the future, or elsewhere.

Lastly, we track the alternatives that are being proposed by those who self-identify as climate vulnerable. Here climate vulnerability is a means to establish facticity in response to the fictionalized narratives that response mechanisms enable (such as universalization of vulnerability) while also challenging the bad faith of the assumption that 'things are as they are.' We trace this re-positioning of climate-vulnerability by identifying its constituent parts: first, the positionality of the actor deploying climate vulnerable narratives; second, narratives that sketch out the character

of the international system; third, narratives that identify the relational and tempo-spatial logics underpinning climate vulnerable narratives; and fourth, subjects and objects as expressed through the identification of responsibility and mechanisms to address the challenge (see Table 2).

TABLE 2: THE ALTERNATIVES CLIMATE VULNERABLE STATES OFFER

Constituent part	Narrative expression	Examples
Positionality	Positions the self in reference to the understanding of the international system. The actor identifies their place within the international system.	Vulnerable, weak, small, major state
Character of the international system	Characterizations of the international system and designating 'ideal' end states	Multilateral, malevolent, benevolent, competitive
	Narratives can reference what 'drives' the system	Can map onto theoretical perspectives (anarchy, cooperation) and motivations (self-interest, belonging)
Relational and tempo-spatial logics	Positions the relational and tempo-spatial logics, including actor responsibility and time frames	Interconnectedness, solidarity, but also vulnerability, strength, cooperation, togetherness, we-ness
Subjects and objects of governance	Designates responsibility to act and mechanisms to enact change	Problem and solutions; identification of what needs to change; governance logics and objects

CHARGES OF BAD FAITH IN INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS

We now present the empirical analysis based on analyzing 399 speeches delivered at international climate summits along the analytical steps outlined in the methodology. Note that neither internal nor external deception is discrete. They interact with each other; the lines between them blur. We identify two themes that emerge in the category of the abdication of responsibility: that of the failure to recognize historical responsibility and that of blindness.

ABDICATION OF RESPONSIBILITY

Failure to recognize historical responsibility

The first important theme that emerged in our analysis is that of the failure to recognize the historical and uneven responsibility for the climate crisis. Climate-vulnerable countries opted to remind the international

community and heavy emitters of their historic responsibility while connecting the climate crisis to a historically entrenched culpability in reference to colonialism and exploitation. This left open the possibility to change course, in fact, to *take responsibility* for history.

As voiced by the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Gaston Browne (LEADERS SUMMIT ON CLIMATE DAY 1 2021: 2:08:59–2:13:55), at the Biden Summit of 2021: *"We remind that [sic] the 44 members of the Alliance of Small Island States, through no fault of their own, confront the greatest threats of climate change. The 44 AOSIS members, are the least contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, but the most affected by climate change. Collectively, they emit just 1.5 percent of the emissions of industrialized nations."* This language was almost unanimously expressed by all those who used climate vulnerable narratives. Echoing the sentiments of others, the President of Palau Surangel S. Whipps, Jr. asked more strongly at COP26 in November 2021 (UNFCCC 2021: N.P.), *"how long must we suffer under colonization," as "we are once again being invaded by the most powerful nations on earth by the results of their unbridled emissions, exploiting us for their benefit and our detriment"?* At the Climate Ambition Summit of 2020 (3:58:15–3:58:24), the President of the Marshall Islands, David Kabua, also connected the issue to historical narratives of the resilience of communities as they withstood *"colonialism, displacement and war"*, and *"nuclear tests."* This reflects Hamilton's (2019: 625) argument that a universal reading of climate change *"implies a denial of local practices, cultures, languages, histories, and colonial legacies and of violence and terror."*

The silence regarding or failure to recognize historical injustices is a means of abdicating responsibility by universalizing the problem and challenge. Bad faith charges that deploy narratives of historical injustices are a means to reclaim *"the racialised and gendered colonial logics that underlie vulnerability discourse […] [that] naturalise the suffering and loss of those deemed vulnerable"* (WEATHERILL 2023: 1). Bonilla (IBID.: 3) likewise argues that *"vulnerability is not simply a product of natural conditions; it is a political state and a colonial condition…"* This matters because *"the solutions to vulnerability are different if it is understood not as inherent, but as an actively reproduced condition that is being resisted by vulnerabilised communities"* (IBID.). Bad faith charges are thus a form of agency deployed in the face of a naturalized 'facticity' about the existing and future loss of vulnerabilized communities. Challenging the facticity by highlighting the long legacy of

historical injustices is thus a means to move beyond the limitations that this facticity imposes.

Blindness to climate effects

The second theme that connected to the abdication of responsibility and deception is that of high emitting countries' blindness to the existential impacts of climate change. This frequently connected to calls for action, solidarity and climate justice. Blindness in this regard is a blindness towards the *"naturalised suffering of vulnerabilised communities"* (WEATHERILL 2023: 1) that leads to an abdication of responsibility on the part of the major emitters as they do not recognize their responsibility for the choices they make. The charge of blindness connects to actions beyond words. It is a means to foster recognition.

"Are we so blinded," asked the Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Mottley (UNFCCC 2021: N.P.) at the Opening Plenary of COP26, *"that we can no longer appreciate the cries of humanity[?]"* She posed the following insistent questions: *"what must we say to our people living on the frontline in the Caribbean, Africa and the Pacific when both ambition and some of the needed faces are absent? What excuse should we give to our failure? In the words of Eddy Grant, 'will they mourn us on the frontline'"?* At the Climate Ambition Summit of December 2020 (N.P.), she likewise underlined that: *"...at the global level we need to move from placatory rhetoric to real effective action or numerous nations across the world will be robbed of their future. I would like to believe that the major emitters are not capable of what would in essence be close to climate genocide. I would like to believe that we are visible and indispensable for them. Let us therefore together act on the responsibility which the climate crisis imposes on all nations and all peoples."*

Allen Chastanet, the then-Prime Minister of Saint Lucia (CLIMATE AMBITION SUMMIT 2020: N.P.), also highlighted that *"we cannot continue being stuck in a planning project preparation of assessment phase. I implore you to support us in our implementation effort [and] at the same time play your part in contributing to the global emission reduction."*

The blindness that Mia Mottley referenced also connected to statements that expressed the material and existential consequences thereof.

Beyond their being recognized for their climate vulnerability, the description of the lived reality of climate change of communities on the frontline is a means to show what inaction means beyond not meeting targets or realizing metrics. Gaston Browne, the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, outlined the following at the Leaders Climate Summit (2021: N.P.) in April 2021: *"We are literally teetering on the edge of despair. Over the years, the debt of small states has risen to unsustainable levels, because of repeated borrowings to rebuild and recover from continuous debilitation by natural disasters, arising from climate change... For some small states, even these inadequate instruments are denied, because of the false criterion, of middle and high per capita income, which ignores the huge vulnerabilities that small states face."*

In other words, the existing mechanisms by which funding decisions are made are deeply embedded in international governance structures that have created enormous debt burdens for countries such as Antigua and Barbuda. These are not mere structural conditions, but, instead, they enable or disallow the livelihood and lives of communities and people. This reflects work on the *"historical practices of debt exploitation and extraction"* that *"have contributed to the making of vulnerability to climate change"* (SHELLER 2018: 974).

Beyond shaming, bad faith charges of climate-vulnerable countries are a means to encourage heavy emitters to critically reflect on what their choices mean for climate-vulnerable countries but also question the very logic entrenched in vulnerability itself. This call for introspection goes beyond shaming strategies because it questions the underlying positionality within the international system by seeing it as a product of choices made by some actors, not of essence or geography. The expression of the effects of the choices of heavy emitters is a means to remind them of their responsibility for and the consequences of *their* choices.

NEGOTIATING IN BAD FAITH

Bad faith negotiations are expressed as a lack of will for or interest in achieving adequate outcomes, and as backsliding on or failing to realize existing commitments. Stalling negotiations and inhibiting ambitious outcomes mirror what can broadly be considered a hypocrisy charge that connects to negotiating in bad faith. This also comes closest to mechanisms

of shaming. Parties can negotiate in bad faith outside or in the context of any of the UNFCCC governance areas such as commitments on Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), climate finance targets, in particular the 100bn USD climate finance target, which was renegotiated at COP29, or the Loss and Damage Fund.

Contradictions and failure to act in accordance with commitments

Regarding NDCs, a variety of actors assert that the Paris Agreement goals are not within reach while countries continue to invest in fossil fuels. Belizean Prime Minister John Briceño (UNFCCC 2021: N.P.), for example, clarified at the Opening Plenary at COP26 that *"to date, NDC's of the major emitters are not in line with the objective of the Paris Agreement"* and the *"same countries account for 3/4 of global emissions and 80 percent of global GDP, [channelling] trillions of dollars towards fossil fuels, while developed countries shirk their commitment to deliver a bare minimum of 100 billion US dollars per annum. This is rank negligence."* The President of the Republic of Palau, Surangel S. Whipps (IBID.), puts it in even starker terms, arguing that a Palauan tale of a boy who grew into a giant and thereby depleted the natural resources of Palau was *"eerily reminiscent of today's world, as the largest emitters with their insatiable appetite for advancement are continuing to abuse our environment[,] threatening our very survival."* He followed in saying that *"we must hold each other accountable"* (IBID.). Mia Mottley, the Prime Minister of Barbados (CLIMATE AMBITION SUMMIT 2020: N.P.), also added at the Climate Ambition Summit in December 2020 that *"our optimism and joy in Paris now seems short-lived. Global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise unabated and our window to end the crisis is closing."* The exposure of bad faith in these accounts of contradictions and the failure to act in accordance with ambitions helps expose the inconsistencies of the narratives of heavy emitters as they seek the agreement of countries that identify as climate vulnerable on international treaties. The success or failure of international negotiations not only rests on functional negotiation strategies, but also on realizing the commitments made prior to a new set of negotiations.

This is a crucial aspect to consider in the future of international climate governance. As the gap between ambition and realization will invariably widen, the fundamental mechanics of the international climate

architecture are put into question. Some scholars have argued that the Paris Agreement's ambition *"might result in widespread noncompliance inciting pledges that the countries concerned prove unwilling or even unable to fulfil. Should that happen, confidence in the Paris Agreement and its institutions might falter"* (STANKOVIC ET AL. 2023: 1). This lack of confidence is a result of a noncompliance predicated by an unwillingness or inability to fulfil the ambition, and of the continued contradictory choices that heavy emitters bear responsibility for. Here, bad faith comes in two forms: the charge of bad faith and the deception at the heart of contradictory behavior. While some countries might be unable to fulfil the ambition agreed on, charges of bad faith that concern the contradictions in continued fossil fuel investments in high-emitting countries can expose the choices underwriting unwillingness. In this way, they come closest to mirroring the mechanisms underlying shaming as exposing incongruence between narrative and action. This incongruence, however, has a secondary effect on the legitimacy of the UNFCCC system, which, if incapacitated by illegitimacy, could lead to more inaction.

Managing horizons of possibility

Another element of negotiation in bad faith is that of managing the horizons of possibility. This can encapsulate weakening ambition, creating institutional blockers, or delaying outcomes that were long asked for. This is particularly relevant in the so-called Loss and Damage negotiations. Mia Mottley (UNFCCC 2021: N.P.) argued in her opening speech at COP26 that *"the world stands at a fork in the road"*, *"one no less significant than when the United Nations was first created in 1945."* Mottley linked the call for climate finance, the overhaul of the international financial architecture, and an agreement on Loss and Damage to a system-level negotiation of the global system. While the calls for a Loss and Damage facility remained largely unanswered by the international community at COP26, Mottley succeeded in moving forward the so-called Bridgetown Agenda at COP27, which seeks to reform the international financial architecture, including organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). There it received greater attention, including in the COP27 cover decision known as the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan (ALAYZA ET AL. 2022). At COP28, the establishment of a Loss and Damage Fund was finally agreed on, although questions about the Fund's operationalization and replenishment remain.

The successful incorporation of Loss and Damage as a third pillar of the UNFCCC architecture alongside mitigation and adaptation shows that some changes are possible. However, how extensively they can shift debt burdens and how they can provide the much-needed Loss and Damage finance remains unknown. Institutionalized in the UNFCCC governance process through the Warsaw Mechanism in 2013, Loss and Damage had been a compromise measure (VANHALA – HESTBAEK 2016) while major emitters resisted such language.

"Too often," argued President David Kabua of the Marshall Islands at the Leaders Climate Summit (2021: N.P.), *"vulnerable countries hear the excuse that steep emission cuts are too costly, but political signals especially from the major economies shape decisions on investment and innovation for low carbon pathways."* The bad faith charge here relates to how such horizons of possibility enable policies to take hold, or future outcomes to be shaped. This brings us back to the essence of Sartre's responsibility in that choices carry outcomes that influence visions of the future. What kinds of choices are made today thus shapes actors' horizons of possibility and conceivability, for which we also carry responsibility.

The recognition of alternative futures or Loss and Damage is not only symbolic, but political and moral. A just realization of a Loss and Damage Fund would have significant consequences for the lives and livelihoods of millions of people, especially in vulnerabilized societies. A failure to address them can impinge on the legitimacy of the framework itself, lead to stalling negotiations in other areas, or even risk the credibility of any global response to climate change (OKEREKE – COVENTRY 2016). Given that criticism in this regard still exists, *"quantitative, aggregative approaches that have characterized mainstream climate research need to be supplemented by critical, interpretative work that traces the deep structures connecting people's sense of justice with the ways in which the sciences have represented their world"* (JASANOFF 2021: 7). While the acknowledgement of the Loss and Damage Fund shows that charges of bad faith can be deployed successfully to trigger reform, questions remain about whether this reform can translate into questioning the scientific logics underlying the models that calculate and govern loss and damage mechanisms. It remains open whether bad faith charges can widen horizons of possibility.

BAD FAITH CHARGES AND RESPONSE MECHANISMS

In terms of the response mechanisms, we find that distortion is more common than projection at least on the part of heavy emitters. This largely fits with what Simangan (2023: 855) describes in her work on IR and the Anthropocene as universalism and hubris. The universalist distortion rejects responsibility while recognizing a universality of climate change as a 'threat to humanity.' This is not to say that climate change does not pose existential concerns for all, but that this universalizing impulse *"carries the tendency to homogenise culpability and responsibility for the causes and consequences of the Anthropocene"* (IBID.: 862). The problem of the universalizing assumption is exemplified by Burke et al. (2016: 500), who call for a *"new global political project"* while arguing that *"we need not focus on who is responsible."* Such calls miss the mark of the distributional politics of climate change (SEE AKLIN – MILDENBERGER 2020) and the compensatory politics of loss and damage (SEE HUQ ET AL. 2013; WRATHALL ET AL. 2015). A *"new global political project"* (BURKE ET AL. 2016: 500) that does not engage with who is responsible, and who is impacted in different and compounded ways, is unlikely to bring about the transformative potential that Burke et al. envisage.

The distortion by heavy emitters that aims to universalize this discourse is in part a means to keep the international system's governing and operating logic intact. This type of distortion plays out in the language of heavy emitters who highlight the growth opportunities in climate action, or clean growth narratives. The consequence for global governance processes is that this type of agency does not question the guiding parameters of the international system per se. We see this reflected by China's President Xi Jinping (LEADERS CLIMATE SUMMIT 2021: N.P.), who, at the Leaders Climate Summit in April 2021, declared that we *"need to ride the trend of technological revolution and industrial transformation, seize the enormous opportunity in green transition, and let the power of innovation drive us to upgrade our economic, energy and industrial structures."* The uneven distribution of renewable energy and clean technology investments evidences that more work is needed to tackle the underlying dynamics of inequality and disparity beyond transitioning energy systems from one source to another (SEE IRENA 2024). In technological progress narratives, nature remains a resource from which to build and extract – for economic growth.

Examples abound. Prime Minister Johnson of the UK (IBID.) argued, *"we need scientists and all of our countries to work together to produce the technological solutions that humanity is going to need"* while also encouraging people to be *"constantly original and optimistic about new technology and new solutions."* Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (IBID.) proclaimed that *"if major economies in the room were to follow Canada's lead and adopt a rising price on pollution and commit to phase out coal plants, we would accelerate our global path for a safe, prosperous net-zero future"* without acknowledging that Canada remains the world's fourth largest oil producer and that *"if all licensed fields are fully exploited, the world will extract more than twice as much oil and gas in 2040 as is compatible with a 1.5 degree global warming limit"* (IISD 2024: N.P.). Finally, Biden distorted the US' role as historically the world's biggest emitter *"with some 20% of the global total"* (EVANS 2021: N.P.). China is currently the world's biggest emitter and cumulatively in second place in this regard thanks to *"its rapid, coal-fired economic boom since 2000"* (IBID.). China is also home to the world's biggest coal pipeline and while its renewable energy deployment is unprecedented it has started backtracking on ambitious climate language more broadly (SEE MYLLYVIRTA – TSANG 2024). These realities compound bad faith charges by pointing to self-deception in leadership claims *and* to strategies of projection that reflect the type of 'magic' thinking identified in the techno-optimistic belief in solutions not yet available. In that way, magic thinking becomes a form of deception or a mode through which forms of deception are expressed.

Rationalization also occurred frequently. We attended to how actors 'futured' climate effects as a threat looming on the horizon rather than effects materializing today, including in reference to risk 'management' strategies. Rather than framing conduct and the logic of international economic and political structures as a threat against which actors had to act, the othering of climate disconnected existing practices from the threat. US President Biden (LEADERS CLIMATE SUMMIT 2021: N.P.) stated, *"the world beyond 1.5 degrees means more frequent and intense fires, floods, droughts heat waves, and hurricanes tearing through communities, ripping away lives and livelihoods."* Representing effects as taking place only in a future beyond 1.5 degrees marginalizes the experience of effects that already occur today. Meanwhile, Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide (IBID.) argued that *"extreme weather events, such as torrential rains, forest fires, and heavy snowfalls are witnessed worldwide in recent years and climate change is set to be a major cause of such*

events" without referencing or acknowledging the causes behind climate change. Japan remains among the world's heaviest emitters and its Green Transformation (GX) Basic Policy continues to reference *"so-called 'clean coal' technologies in the power sector, in Japan and in other countries, a move inconsistent with pathways required to limit global warming to below 1.5 degrees"* (CLIMATE ACTION TRACKER 2023: N.P.). Besides, clean coal technologies are a misnomer because there is no such thing as 'clean coal'.

The response mechanisms outlined here demonstrate a variety of such mechanisms that partially underpins bad faith strategies and the evasion of responsibility. Whether heavy emitting countries are aware of these strategies as response mechanisms is difficult to test. Nevertheless, given the explicit charges leveraged at heavy emitters, they cannot be said to be unaware of their own choices or culpability. This means the behaviors summarized in this section on response mechanisms exhibit bad faith because they deceive the self and others. The choice inherent to bad faith deprives people and the planet of the possibility of change towards untested, yet alternative, futures. This produces two outcomes summarized by Fierke and Mackay (2023: 1) as, first, *"the need to acknowledge how past practice has set the stage for inequality and climate change in the global future"* and, second, *"the failure to look at the past [that] has transgenerational consequences, as present distractions contribute to an inability to 'see' the consequences of past and present action for future generations."* This 'un-seeing' is closely resonant of the type of consciousness that Sartre understands to be at the heart of bad faith and resembles a production of invincibility fantasies.

CLIMATE-VULNERABLE COUNTER NARRATIVES TO BAD FAITH

Given that we understand the duality of bad faith as mechanisms of shaming taken together with the renegotiating of positionality, we investigate in this section what narratives emerge as alternatives. We offer a reading of the narratives of bad faith from those countries that position themselves as climate vulnerable. A self identification as climate vulnerable could be a form of 'facticity' and the very underpinning of bad faith in Sartre's account. We nevertheless counter that vulnerability has as its inherent feature the acknowledgement of the possibility of change. It fluctuates between 'facticity' or 'being-in-itself' and change or 'being-for-itself.'

Those who deployed narratives of climate vulnerability, position their state as vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Since the successful deployment of narratives of climate vulnerability enables or makes possible the use of agency to influence institutional processes such as the UNFCCC (CHAN 2021), they can signal discursive and communicative strength despite the vulnerability. It produces a type of agency for those expressing this narrative because *"questions over the allocation of adaptation finance turn on the successful 'performance' of climate vulnerability"* (IBID.: 316). Here, performance is understood as the ability to claim a status as "particularly vulnerable," especially in the context of UNFCCC negotiations (CORBETT ET AL. 2019). Chan (2021: 315) demonstrates that the *"path-dependent character of how 'vulnerability' has been constructed in the UNFCCC process"* has also meant differing levels of recognition of special circumstances and agency.

Communication of one's climate vulnerability positions the self as vulnerable, but also exposes the moral and normative problems of the actors challenged, their contrasting invincibility fantasy and the unequal structure of the international system within which actors are relationally situated. Responsibility here is to be located – empirically and morally – with heavy emitters, although it is not abdicated by those who self-identify as climate vulnerable. Injustices such as colonialism and nuclear testing are used to demonstrate the effects of the choices of others on countries that have suffered those injustices. This allows for a delineation of moral boundaries by incorporating longer time frames. Narratives that invoke historical, temporal relationality carry a sense of collective and temporal solidarity which can be a means to create the conceivability of a more equitable international order. Climate vulnerable narratives are a way of illustrating this. References to morality and the ethical responsibility to act can also underline the responsibility of heavy emitters, while referencing concerns over distributive justice as a key component of the future international system. Such references express concern about vulnerable countries' ability to shape the multilateral process, especially where they seek to *"subvert the status quo"* of inequality (CIPLET 2017: 1052). If green economy narratives were a form of ordering power to sustain the existing world economy, reflective of displacement mechanisms, narratives concerning vulnerability offer a counter-ordering power.

Meanwhile, actors contested a unanimous reading of scientific knowledge as universally applicable without acknowledgement of regional expertise. David Kabua, the President of the Marshall Islands (IBID.), clarified that they *"looked to work with what science and our regional knowledge has to offer and develop the plan in close coordination with our local communities"*, thus engaging in means to shift ontological foundations of knowledge production but also to invert hierarchically structured discourses of expertise. The social relationality and embeddedness (TAYLOR 2003) conception of the imaginary is present in these narratives, as are identity politics in the trajectory of relations (HERNANDEZ 2014). Nevertheless, more work is required to disentangle bad faith politics within climate-vulnerable countries as they concern the disparate vulnerabilities within climate-vulnerable countries or within heavy emitters. Class, for example, features as one lens through which bad faith analysis can help one go beyond the imposition of 'facticity' along the binary of climate-vulnerable and heavy emitter.

It follows that the use of climate vulnerable narratives by a variety of actors exposes bad faith in several actors and international processes. This connects to challenging immature response mechanisms as discussed above and instead draws out responsibilities for action in recognition of the historical responsibility for emissions. The most prominently challenged are the response mechanisms of displacement and distortion, as reflected in urgent calls for action and delivering on the promises made rather than delaying their fulfilment. Likewise, the urgency that underlines narratives of climate vulnerability undermines responses that seek to dislodge climate change as temporally and spatially distanced. Charges of bad faith are thus a means to challenge actors for expressions that represent a 'being-in-itself' towards those that acknowledge responsibility for choices ('being-for-itself').

CONCLUSION

Levi (1962: 235) reminds us in his account of Sartre that *"politics cannot avoid decision and choice. In every situation one must question ends anew, choose, and justify choice. And it is precisely in this free engagement that morality resides."* The promise of existentialism for IR and our study of international climate politics lies in this choice-based morality, not a fixed prescription of an end state. Normatively, the lack of sufficient action to reach a 1.5

degree temperature increase and curb emissions requires us to address the *"analytical and accountability failure"* to remedy assumptions about *"impossibility and good faith"* and instead hold leaders accountable (SEE PELOPIDAS – VERSCHUREN 2023: 8). This study of how charges of bad faith are deployed, the response mechanisms that correspond with the behavior of these charges and the alternatives offered, can invert some of the logics around which actors in the international system behave immaturely or maturely.

This paper initially discussed the difference between shaming and bad faith charges before mapping various aspects of bad faith relevant for a study of the international politics of climate change. We proposed a methodological approach to operationalize this work. In our analysis we found that bad faith charges are a means for actors to challenge the governing logics of the international system and expose the bad faith of actors – as conceptually conceived by Sartre as foregoing transcendence; these actors do not choose the freedom to change.

There remain important avenues for future research. First, communicative success in this regard depends on eliciting the desired recognition from target audiences, including heavy emitters, and this is not guaranteed. When *"considering that feelings of shame illicit a more defensive and disruptive reaction"* than guilt (BASSAN-NYGATE – HEIMANN 2022: 16), future work could examine the potential of narratives that address guilt rather than shame. How can bad faith charges invite coping mechanisms such as those found in guilt, and would those coping mechanisms necessitate a more authentic and honest self-examination that would question the 'way of life' as entrenched in fossil fuels and the histories of inequality, racism and colonialism that the international system is built on? This also connects to questions of the politics of care in a broad sense. How can bad faith behaviors that are so entrenched in an international system built on them re-invite transcendence and the genuine belief that an alternative world is possible?

Second, future research could explore how bad faith charges interact with the ways mechanisms of accountability and responsibility are developed, especially in reference to routines (SEE HEINRICHS 2024). How do actors who are recipients of the challenges voiced in bad faith charges decide which accountability mechanisms are acceptable and which are not? This is important: questions about the viability of the international

order will invariably link to how legitimacy is 'secured' as the effects of climate change worsen. Changes in the international system will happen regardless (CORRY 2020). Whether they are stewarded by a more normatively productive process and ontology that rejects the universalist assumptions of the Anthropocene (SIMANGAN 2023) is far from decided. These questions matter because work on the self takes time; time that many countries on the climate frontlines do not have.

Lastly, the discipline of IR needs to be more explicit about the possibility of bad faith and find mechanisms of accountability that can connect to policymakers and policy spaces. Far from being a descriptive discipline, IR too forms a part of the enabling or foregoing of the freedom to change alongside climatic changes and the effects that are a result of the practices and logics on which the international system is built. Rather than fearing taking an active part in shaping futures, IR scholars need to be more daring in carrying responsibility for choices and justifying them. A discipline that clings – desperately, some might argue – to a status quo might remain unfree, and stuck with an international system that is currently on track to cost us the Earth.

ENDNOTES

1 While we draw on the term climate vulnerable countries in this paper, we recognize that countries are not 'naturally' climate vulnerable. Vulnerability in this sense is a product of a set of extractive and often colonial practices and histories (see Ciplet 2017; Sheller 2018; Weatherill 2023). At the same time, a state-centric view of climate vulnerability often overshadows how differentiated vulnerabilities materialize within countries. That view reinforces a geography-centered naturalization of vulnerability.

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