CJR

Czech Journal of
International Relations
Mezinárodní vztahy

Research Articles

Book Review

Research Articles

Grappling with the Climate Crisis in IR: Existentially, Psychologically, Interdisciplinarily

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ABSTRACT   The introduction to this special issue argues that International Relations (IR) needs to give greater consideration to the existential and psychological implications of the accelerating climate crisis. Starting from debates about the disciplinary suitability of IR to meaningfully tackle an issue as all-encompassing as climate change, this introduction gives a short overview of how the problem of climate change has conventionally been conceived, and finds that IR has so far not sufficiently appreciated the psychological implications of the climate crisis. Yet, such a perspective is sorely needed, as climate change is not only an environmental problem but also a problem of existentialist sense-making, and because IR's actors are themselves deeply affected by changes to the physical world that they are a part of. Consequently, this introduction provides a sketch of what an existential-psychological inquiry into the implications of climate change could look like and concludes that, regardless of the current state of the discipline, IR has a duty to *become* a discipline that can meaningfully contribute towards mitigating the climate crisis.

INTRODUCTION

There is now widespread agreement that climate change is the most pressing issue of our times (VON UEXKULL – BUHAUG 2021), constituting a multifaceted process that is already transforming our world and posing an existential threat to ecosystems and species alike, humanity included (RIPPLE ET AL. 2024). Although later and to a lesser degree than other social science disciplines (PEREIRA 2017: 11; SIMANGAN 2020: 213; THIERRY ET AL. 2023: 2), International Relations (IR) has begun to recognize the significance of climate change as one of the most visible and urgent manifestations of the Anthropocene.[1] This is evident in the growing scholarship on climate security (FLOYD – MATTHEW 2015; MCDONALD 2021), climate governance (DELLMUTH ET AL. 2018; HICKMANN 2017) and the green economy (ALBERT 2020). Yet, as engagement with climate change in IR is growing, so are questions about whether it is ontologically, theoretically, and methodologically equipped to do so, reflecting anxieties about the continued *"relevance"* of IR in the face of climate change (E.G. MITCHELL 2017: 4, 22; PEREIRA 2017: 2; SIMANGAN 2020: 213) and other worsening global problems (CRILLEY 2024; NEWELL 2024).[2] Is IR a suitable discipline to address a challenge as profound and all-encompassing as climate change?

Critics point to IR's inherent state-centrism and anthropocentrism, which privilege narrowly conceived national interests and the pursuit of power and material resources at the expense of planetary concerns (FIERKE – MACKAY 2023; MITCHELL 2017), and highlight the discipline's Western-centrism amidst its adherence to problematic modernist epistemes, like the Cartesian divide between human and nature or the commitment to a linear progression of time (CHANDLER – CUDWORTH – HOBDEN 2018; HARRINGTON 2016). They criticize the discipline's *"dealing in death"* (NEWELL 2024: 331), for example via a normalization of militarism, economic growth and anthropocentrism, noting IR's failure *"as both a system of knowledge and institutional practice"* to address the ongoing sixth mass extinction and meaningfully challenge the commitment to capitalist practices that underpin it (BURKE ET AL. 2016: 501). At its worst, IR seems like the handmaiden not only of *"power and destructive elite interests"* (ROTHE – MÜLLER – CHANDLER 2021: 5) but of *"extinction"* (BURKE ET AL. 2016: 507) – a source of our current predicament rather than a potential solution.

Of course, these criticisms of, inter alia, IR's anthropocentrism, state-centrism and even racism are not new (E.G. HOBSON 2022; LING 2014; WALKER 1993), although they arguably take on renewed force in the face of the ongoing climate crisis. Still, we can observe that there is a growing scholarship within the discipline that engages with non-state and non-human actors (CONNOLLY 2013; FISHEL 2023; YOUATT 2023), that builds on non-Western theories and challenges modernist epistemologies (AGATHANGELOU – LING 2004; FAGAN 2017; LATOUR 2017; WEATHERILL 2024), and that exists not only at the margins but within mainstream journals and institutions. IR is a diverse discipline that has changed and developed over the past decades, partially as a result of environmental changes (CORRY – STEVENSON 2017: 2; HUGHES 2024: 287), and justified criticisms of many of its more traditional assumptions should not take away from its demonstrated ability to expand its range of analysis, challenge its own metatheoretical assumptions, and incorporate, albeit often belatedly, new breakthroughs in knowledge from other disciplines (CF. CORRY – STEVENSON 2017; SIMANGAN 2020: 216).

It is perhaps in this spirit that some scholars defend the ability and necessity of IR to engage with climate change. While there is broad agreement on the need for more change and that learning from and with other disciplines is vital (BURKE ET AL. 2016; CHANDLER – CUDWORTH – HOBDEN 2018: 207; HUGHES 2024; MITCHELL 2017), some still see grounds for hope in the increase of progressive engagements with climate change's security implications (MCDONALD 2024), in the discipline's familiarity with regional perspectives, which can amplify the voices of those historically marginalized (SIMANGAN 2020), and in IR's potential to consider non-human life through global institutions and international law (BURKE ET AL. 2016; FISHEL ET AL. 2018). More than that, proponents point out that IR is one of the few disciplines whose foundational concern is with the notion of survival (BURKE ET AL. 2016: 517; MITCHELL 2017; PEREIRA 2017),[3] and whose perspective is, from the outset, more-than-national. This makes it *"the obvious home for considering how humanity (divided as it is) deals with the challenges of sharing a singular and finite space"* (CORRY – STEVENSON 2017: 1). Add to that the ongoing popularity of IR as a field of study, as well as its proximity to the centers of power that make international politics, and it seems no exaggeration to say that IR has a moral obligation to do its part *"to end human-caused extinctions"* (BURKE ET AL. 2016: 502).

The question then becomes how this is to be done. In addition to the identified need for greater interdisciplinary engagement we also need to look at IR itself.[4] Given that a discipline like IR not only provides us with a set of ideas and practices, but first and foremost with *"a way of understanding the nature of problems and policymaking per se"* (ROTHE – MÜLLER – CHANDLER 2021: 6), it is useful to start with an overview of the different ways in which the problem of climate change has been understood so far, and to highlight missing perspectives. This is the task of the next section. The section that follows elaborates on one of the identified missing perspectives, namely the existential and psychosocial implications of climate change. While acknowledging the valid criticisms of the discipline's anthropocentrism, it argues that its lack of interest in how climate change affects humans' interiority and their being-in-the-world is a far-reaching blind spot. The case for an existential-psychological perspective forms the background to the contributions to this special issue introduced in section four. These foreground the psycho-sociological dimension of grappling with climate change while also speaking to and drawing from other disciplines, like agrarian populism, philosophy, social psychology, or utopian studies. Finally, the conclusion returns to the question of IR's disciplinary suitability and reflects on its ethical responsibilities.

WHAT KIND OF PROBLEM IS CLIMATE CHANGE?

What counts as an issue or a problem is constructed, of course (CF. BACCHI 2012), and this includes scientific facts like climate change or global warming (PETTENGER 2007). Identifying climate change as a phenomenon that exists and is currently happening in the world does not by itself imply that it is a problem requiring a solution, nor does it tell us what to do about it.[5] How one views a phenomenon and whether one constructs it as a problem will depend, inter alia, on one's prior experiential knowledge and one's ontological and epistemological assumptions, that is, one's worldview or cosmopraxes (KATZENSTEIN 2022; QUEREJAZU 2022). Seeing as academic disciplines are an influential way to structure and generate knowledge (CORRY 2022), it is not surprising that the majority of IR's engagement with the Anthropocene, and subsequently climate change, follows the discipline's traditional interests in security, geopolitics, global governance, and international law (SIMANGAN 2020: 216). Consequently, beyond an IR-specific understanding of climate change as an issue of international or global

politics,[6] we can also identify commonalities in the way the problem is constructed within its various subfields.[7]

Thus, while for some outside of the discipline climate change is a problem of scientific and technological capability, that is, of humanity lacking knowledge about climate change or the technological means to mitigate it in time (GRUBB 2004; PRINCIOTTA 2011), for many within the political sciences addressing climate change is not so much a problem of technological capability as of political will, specifically the willingness to subordinate short-term material gains and economic growth to longer-term planetary concerns (LEVINE ET AL. 2012). In this reading, limiting the effects of climate change is theoretically possible but practically superseded by the desire for sovereignty, economic gain, and the comparative material and security advantages that are perceived to follow from that (BERNSTEIN 2002; FALKNER 2017). Such a construction of the problem as one of competing national interests reflects the logic of traditional power politics (CF. FALKNER – BUZAN 2022), one that is unable to see climate change as more than a collective action problem or a market failure (BERNSTEIN – HOFFMANN 2019; STAVINS 2011; STEVENSON 2013). Analyzing solutions to collective action problems is of course the focus of the global governance literature, where other scholars see the crux of the problem. In this view, we have so far failed to adequately tackle climate change because there is no supranational authority that can facilitate binding collective action and solve the problem of free riding (KEOHANE – VIKTOR 2016; WEITZMAN 2017). Current global governance structures are too much subject to power politics, beholden to the interests of veto powers, and lacking in representation, social justice and equality (NEWELL ET AL. 2023). In other words, the prioritization of national interests and economic growth could in theory be overcome through effective global governance, yet the current institutional landscape is failing in that regard.

In a way, this global governance perspective could be said to operate at the most practical level, promising far-reaching effects if successful, and drawing on solutions with a reasonable record of success in other issue areas. Yet, this is also one of its greatest limitations, as climate change is arguably not a problem comparable to previous issues like nuclear proliferation or the disappearance of the ozone layer (HULME 2009: 291–293). It is infinitely more complex, touching on all aspects of life and requiring a complete

break with the politics that got us here. To this end, some scholars see the solution in norm theory, arguing that what is needed in domestic and international politics is a shift from consequentialist exchange-based thinking towards an ethics-based logic of appropriateness (MITCHELL – CARPENTER 2019; SIKKINK 2024). Such a strategic approach to normative change could learn from past successful campaigns, like the ban on land mines, and target, for example, the use of fossil fuels.[8] Yet, for others this does not go far enough and speaks to climate change being primarily a problem of a failure of the imagination – not only a failure to envision a world post capitalism, but also a failure to imagine a world not divided into nation-states or comparable discrete and competing units (CONVERSI 2020; GHOSH 2016; LATOUR 2017). Accordingly, any solution to climate change has to start with developing the political imagination and conceiving a community that is truly global. Others go even further, arguing that a change in the imagination has to extend beyond our economic and political systems to the precepts of our modern epistemes themselves. From this perspective, the climate crisis is the result of those problematic modernist assumptions that made the invention of the nation-state and industrial production possible (SEE TAYLOR 2004), assumptions about the separation of humans from nature, progress and the linear flow of time, the primacy of the individual, and the ideal of utility maximization (BIERMANN 2021; FAGAN 2017; GHOSH 2016; MITCHELL – CHAUDHURY 2020; ROTHE – MÜLLER – CHANDLER 2021).

These different constructions of the problem of climate change – as one of national interests, capitalist logics or political imagination – are not mutually exclusive. Given that climate change affects all areas of life, it stands to reason that it requires engagement across multiple registers of thought, from the practical to the philosophical. Indeed, it is the coming-together of all these aspects that makes it a so-called "wicked" (HULME 2009: 334) or even "super wicked" problem (LEVINE ET AL. 2012), reaffirming the aforementioned need for more interdisciplinarity. And yet, in spite of the range of existing scholarship, some aspects still seem to be missing from the analysis in IR. One such aspect, identified by critical scholars, is the neglect of the nonhuman or more-than-human. Accordingly, we need to move away from the hubristic assumption that humans are the managers or custodians of the earth and give greater consideration to relational entanglements (KURKI 2020) and the agency of non-human beings. To quote Milja Kurki, *"climate change is so many other things than a climate change problem to*

be solved by humans in the international politics of humans" (IBID.: 119), which is why this scholarship advocates for a decentering of human agency and acknowledgment of factors outside of human control. Problematizing the Anthropocene's anthropocentrism in this way not only challenges long-held IR assumptions about the primacy of survival and the naturalness of the human perspective (CHAKRABARTY 2018; CONNOLLY 2013; FAGAN 2017; MITCHELL – CHAUDHURY 2020), but adds both analytical and normative value by providing a new point of view and exemplifying what non-anthropocentric thinking could look like. While this line of research is still relatively underrepresented in IR, it has already profoundly enriched the discipline.

A second aspect missing from IR, and the one stressed in the remainder of this article, emerges out of what one recent essay described as climate change being too often *"still a story of the world out there: the world outside of us"* (ALDERN 2024) – something that is as true for IR as it is for popular culture and news reporting. What is missing from IR's scholarship on the Anthropocene and climate change, then, is the impact of climate change on the inner worlds of humans as both biological and philosophical creatures (SEE ALSO BJÄRSKOG 2023). The essay focuses on the human brain and the neurological and socio-behavioral changes caused by global warming, but to this we can add the emotional and psychological consequences of becoming aware of climate change. This re-focus on the human perspective is not to undermine the important criticism of anthropocentrism in the discipline, but to recognize that humans, as part of the world's relational entanglements, do not emerge unchanged and unaffected from the present situation. While the assertion that IR *"seeks to explain the world of human interaction"* (FREYBERG-INAN 2006: 248) is based on the problematic separation between the natural and the social sciences, and continues to be used to marginalize analyses that center the non-human, it also highlights that humans have a particularly flexible and intentional kind of agency which makes them world builders (HAMILTON 2017; MITCHELL – CHAUDHURY 2020). This ability comes with the capacity for self-reflection and, importantly, for taking responsibility. We do well to see trees, fish, and planet Earth as actants (CONNOLLY 2013; FISHEL 2023; MORTON 2013), but they are not intentional actors who grapple with the consequences of their actions the same way humans do. To say this is not to assert the moral superiority of human existence, but to reiterate that it is important to understand human interiority when (some) humans can clearly do so much harm. Even denialism

requires, after all, some level of awareness of climate change. In her bibliometric analysis of IR's engagement with the Anthropocene, Simangan finds that IR *"with its humanist foundation, is not as engaged […] as [other] social science disciplines dealing with the environment or other non-human aspects of nature"* (2020: 213–214). In addition to a lack of engagement with the more-than-human, then, this also points to an underappreciation of humans being themselves deeply affected by the changes they have wrought, precisely because they are part of, and not separate from, nature.

CLIMATE CHANGE AS AN ISSUE OF EXISTENTIAL SENSE-MAKING

I want to suggest that IR has so far not sufficiently considered how humans grapple with the Anthropocene and all its implications, even though as a largely psychological discipline it is well equipped to do so. IR can be considered a psychological discipline because it is centered on theories that *"rely on implicit psychological microfoundations"* (KERTZER – TINGLEY 2018: 320) even when they are *"not self-consciously psychological"* (IBID.: 329), as is evident, for example, in realism's focus on fear and survival or liberalism's emphasis on trust and cooperation. Accounting for this psychological dimension is crucial to understanding international politics, especially as it relates to mitigating the climate crisis. Humans, and thus all actors in IR, are meaning-seeking beings who need to find their place in, and give meaning to, the world they find themselves in. Struggles in finding answers to such existential concerns can trigger psychological coping mechanisms, which is why it is important to focus on how actors grapple with this new condition of the Anthropocene. When talking about coming to terms with our climate changed present, scholars frequently use terms like *"wrestle"* (FISHEL 2023: 226) or *"groping towards an understanding"* (HAMILTON 2017: VII), yet for me the word 'grapple' captures the work that goes into making sense of our changed condition most intuitively. Thus, here I use the word 'grapple' deliberately for two reasons. First, conceptually, it conveys the struggle and conscious effort involved in developing an awareness and coming to terms with the existential consequences of a fundamentally new and challenging reality. It indicates what a difficult process it is, not only to imagine a spatially and temporally extensive phenomenon like climate change, but also to grasp one's role in it and all the manifold implications for one's existence. Second, analytically, focusing on the process of grappling allows us to investigate a wide range of actors

across all levels of analysis, and ask who is grappling, with what difficulties, and with what effects, thus enabling us to inquire into the socio-political implications of existentialist sense-making.

Awareness of climate change, as of the wider Anthropocene, leads to a process of grappling because climate change is not merely a *"threat multiplier"* (SEE CULLUM 2024), that is, a scientifically complex environmental problem presenting such diverse practical challenges as food shortages, extreme weather, inter-group conflict, displacement, and state failure. Rather, it is a temporally and spatially unbounded phenomenon raising existential questions and unsettling our relationship with time, space, technology, and each other. Put differently, *"[c]limate change is not just an environmental, but also a psychological problem"* (CLAYTON 2020: 5). To understand this, it is helpful to think about Heidegger's notion of *"being-in-the-world"* (2010: CHAPTER 2), which describes how humans do not exist separately from an abstract world but are always already enmeshed with *their* environment, which forms part of their subjective world. It is through this that selves and subjectivities emerge. Put differently, humans secure their sense of self by situating themselves in time and space (BERENSKOETTER 2014) and anchoring their identity to their social and physical surroundings (EJDUS 2017; GIDDENS 1991). Consequently, changes to the geophysical environment, as well as changes to the socio-cultural milieu, can be deeply unsettling, triggering strong emotional and psychological responses, and potentially even undermining one's sense of self.

The field of psychology has long recognized the emotional and identitarian impacts of climate change, identifying, inter alia, different kinds of climate anxiety (CLAYTON 2020), ecological grief (CUNSOLO – ELLIS 2018; HEAD 2016), and climate change denial (WEINTROBE 2013). Anxiety here emerges as a response to uncertainty, while grief is a response to loss, in this case often of a cherished place, an envisioned future, or a sense of self. Denial is a common initial response, as both anxiety and grief are unpleasant feelings which can pose a threat to one's identity. Denial is, however, often also socially embedded (NORGAARD 2006) and can become entrenched when *"there is anxiety that parts of the self will not survive change that now feels catastrophic and [like] too much to face"* (WEINTROBE 2013: 40). Further, scholars have identified new emotional experiences like 'solastalgia' and 'Anthropocene horror' as a result of the climate crisis. The former refers to *"the distress*

that is produced by environmental change impacting on people while they are directly connected to their home environment" (ALBRECHT ET AL. 2007: S95), that is, the loss of the ability to derive solace or comfort from one's home (IBID.: S96). By contrast, the latter describes a more diffuse horror that is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere, *"a present but subdued [...] background unease"* (CLARK 2020: 66) in the face of the ubiquity and normalization of environmentally destructive practices (IBID.: 77). These experiences tend to be accompanied by devastating and disorienting feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, like when they generate the sense that one's prior systems of understanding are no longer true (CLAYTON 2020: 2) or entail the loss of belief in a future worth living in (CUNSOLO – ELLIS 2018; HEAD 2016). In other words, the field of psychology has demonstrated the importance of anxiety, grief, denial, and social changes for understanding individual and collective responses to climate change.[9]

By and large, IR has been slow to engage with this dimension of climate change, even though it is home to a large literature on, inter alia, identity (CAMPBELL 1998; RINGMAR 1996; RUMELILI 2004), emotions (BLEIKER – HUTCHISON 2008; CRAWFORD 2014; GELLWITZKI – HOUDE 2022), and psychological response mechanisms (FAIZULLAEV 2017; FROSH 2014), and thus in principle amply equipped to carry out such inquiries. IR is also no stranger to investigations into trauma, hope, and discontent (EDKINS 2003; FIERKE 2012; HUTCHISON 2016; TÄNGH WRANGEL 2018), and it is, as has already been noted, a discipline that is fundamentally concerned with existential threats and survival. Given that climate change is nothing if not an existential matter, the relative lack of socio-psychological inquiries into the political implications of grappling with this existential challenge is surprising. There are exceptions of course, like Heinrichs' (2024) investigation into maladaptive routines as a response to the climate crisis, McLaren and Corry's (2023) identification of climate policies as a threat to fossil fuel-dependent *"ways of life"*, or Fierke and Mackay's (2023) exploration of unacknowledged grief and collective agreements not to know. But on the whole, that even a growing, and ostensibly suitable, subfield like Ontological Security Studies (OSS) has so far barely engaged with the issue of climate change demonstrates the general neglect of this aspect of the issue in IR (FOR EXCEPTIONS, SEE MAITINO – VIEIRA 2024; POHL – HELBRECHT 2022). To illustrate what such a psychologically informed inquiry could look like, it is useful to take OSS as an example.

OSS theorizes the effects of anxiety, and related emotions like shame or guilt, on the self, focusing especially on the behaviors actors engage in to protect their sense of self, even at the expense of physical security or other supposedly more 'rational' concerns (MITZEN 2006; RUMELILI 2015). The assumed goal of every actor is to maintain a coherent sense of self, which they do via, inter alia, narratives, routines, and successfully situating themselves in time and space (GIDDENS 1991). Considering the profound impact of climate change on both our sense of time and our physical being in space, OSS thus seems like an especially promising approach for investigating the implications of phenomena like climate anxiety or climate grief. In addition to asking general questions about how climate anxiety manifests in international relations[10] and how both climate change and climate action affect actors' identities, such an inquiry could also investigate the formation of new subjectivities under such conditions, as well as the extent to which efforts at maintaining a coherent sense of self get in the way of effective climate action and produce climate denialism. It seems plausible that efforts at stabilizing the self might sustain 'fantasies' of survival, net zero emission, or *"cool[ing] the planet back to pre-industrial levels"* (KING ET AL. 2022), even as irreversible losses of home spaces and changes to the physical environment force many to reconfigure their identities. Such an approach could be fruitfully complemented with recent insights from the temporal turn in IR, which has excavated the crucial role of time constructions in situating ourselves in the world (HOM 2020; HUTCHINGS 2008), and learnings from Science and Technology Studies, which highlights the constitutive role of technology in creating visions of the future (JASANOFF 2015, 2021). The point is not that an ontological security lens is the only way to get at the socio-psychological dimension of climate change – only that what is needed is an approach that takes seriously the *existential* challenge posed by climate change. The climate crisis has an impact on our inner worlds that we need to grapple with. To paraphrase Roy Scranton (2015), continuing to live in the Anthropocene might mean to learn how to die. To this end, the philosophical and psychological literature on existentialism in IR also seems promising, seeing as it deals with questions about the meaning of life and death under conditions of radical uncertainty (HOM – O'DRISCOLL 2023; RUMELILI 2021; SIMANGAN 2023; VAN MUNSTER – SYLVEST 2021).

All of this is to say that IR already has many of the conceptual and theoretical tools for exploring the psycho-social dimension of climate

change and is thus well-placed to do so. Yet, to say that IR *can* investigate the psychological effects of climate change is not the same as saying that it *should*. There are at least four reasons why IR should pursue this research agenda. First, in disciplinary terms, IR is *"in many ways a psychological discipline"* (KRICKEL-CHOI 2021: 7). To the extent that climate change affects the human condition and our collective psychological wellbeing, it is incumbent on IR to investigate whether its "psychological microfoundations" need rethinking. Second, a socio-psychologically informed approach to climate change presents an opportunity for IR to rethink many of its foundational modernist assumptions, such as ideas about progress, the human-nature divide or the linearity of time. In this way, it is an opportunity to develop overall better explanatory accounts of contemporary international politics, beyond the phenomenon of climate change. Third, to the extent that research is performative and (re)productive of our world(s) (ARADAU – HUYSMANS 2014), taking seriously that climate change is something that is experienced in the here and now by real people can help drive home the urgency of the climate crisis in the present, as opposed to it being seen as a hypothetical scenario that is still in the future.[11] Lastly and relatedly, there is a normative argument to be made for pursuing such a research agenda, given the urgent need to tackle this principal political problem of our times. If there is any chance that looking at the psychological dimension of climate change can help us understand and overcome inhibitors to climate action, there is no justification for leaving this angle comparatively underexplored. In this spirit, the next section introduces the contributions to this special issue, which take up this challenge but also combine a focus on actors' psychological underpinnings with insights from other disciplines in unique ways.

GRAPPLING WITH THE CLIMATE CRISIS IN IR

To summarize, we can observe that there is a lively debate within IR about whether it can, and how it should, deal with the problem of climate change, that attention to the psycho-political dimension of the climate crisis is curiously missing, and that there are good reasons for why IR itself needs to grapple with this dimension of climate change. The contributions to this special issue tackle the issue of grappling in various interdisciplinary ways, foregrounding, inter alia, how climate denialism goes hand-in-hand with having one's self-identity challenged, how needs of the self (for justice

or recognition) can override other concerns, and how actors constantly work to re-situate themselves in time and space, for example by constructing competing visions of the present predicament and the future. In this way, the contributions assembled here present a first step towards inaugurating an IR research agenda focused on the existential-psychological dimension of climate change.

Heinrichs and O'Loughlin (2025) draw from existentialist philosophy to investigate the politics of international climate negotiations, specifically how climate vulnerable countries seek to confront heavy emitters for their failure to engage in meaningful climate action. By theorizing and methodologically developing Sartre's concept of bad faith, they present an account that not only centers the role of human choice, and therefore responsibility, in maintaining behavior that puts life on earth at risk, but that also points to the mental gymnastics necessary on the part of heavy emitters to keep living with the knowledge of what they are doing. Sartre's notion of bad faith links choice to identity by foregrounding that a lack of authenticity requires acts of self-deception, that is, the conscious denial of one's freedom to be and act differently. Confronted with such bad faith charges, heavy emitters tend to resort to various forms of psychological denial, while climate vulnerable states use these evasive responses to challenge the governing logics of the international system and renegotiate their own positionality within them.

Continuing the theme of identity and climate cooperation, Hanson and Reboredo (2025) develop a framework to assess the effects of inequality on climate cooperation and policy implementation. Inequality — both between and within countries — has been shown to be a major barrier to successful climate action because related identities (as, for example, developed or developing) influence perceptions about the fairness of climate policies. Given that perceived fairness is a major determinator of the success of collective action, it is crucial to systematically locate those areas in climate policymaking where inequality-related identities might lead to contestation, and to do so across scales, that is, from the individual, national and regional to the global level. To this end, Hanson and Reboredo draw from Social Identity Theory to identify seven criteria that have been shown to facilitate intergroup cooperation, and give some examples for their application in IR. Ultimately, this framework not only enables the

identification of friction points that can lead to the failure of climate action, but also provides guidance for increasing the rate of climate policy implementation.

Matejak and Mahmutović (2025) provide in many ways an empirical illustration of this framework, investigating how the EU's climate policies are perceived as unfair by people on the ground, specifically by farmers who view them as an undemocratic imposition by ignorant elites. Situating their study in the context of global farmers' protest movements, they focus specifically on the 2023–2024 farmers' protests in Slovenia to analyze how these farmers make sense of new environmental regulations and their own role within the climate change discourse. By combining the theoretical insights of agrarian populism with a methodology centered on affective-discursive practices, Matejak and Mahmutović are able to identify the underlying grievances and concerns of the protesting farmers and how these affect the implementation of environmental policies in agriculture. A key insight is that these farmers feel painted as the 'villains' of climate change and underappreciated considering their crucial role in society, but that they are not necessarily climate skeptics or anti-science, despite what the piggybacking of the far right on their protests might suggest. Given the rise in agrarian environmental policies and the transnational nature of farmers' protest movements, farmers also emerge as important actors that should be taken seriously in IR.

Investigating a different aspect of our contemporary populist moment, Crescentino (2025) analyzes the role of environmental denialism within the agendas of Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and Argentina's Javier Milei. By bringing populism studies into conversation with utopian studies, he shows that even conservative and reactionary political projects, like those of Bolsonaro and Milei, contain within themselves visions of a utopian and reformed future. Specifically, both of these populist leaders paint a picture of a utopia of absolute autonomy, that is, of freedom from state intervention for individuals and freedom from international commitments for states, which would restore economic prosperity. This liberal utopia is positioned as a counter to the present-day dystopian narrative of the climate crisis, which both Bolsonaro and Milei view as manufactured by *status quo* elites. In propagating this account, both leaders exploit people's real economic hardships, mobilize grievances about a colonial Global North hindering

the development of the Global South, and justify extractivist and environmentally destructive policies in the name of sovereignty and the idea that "nature should serve man". Ultimately, Cresentino argues, climate skepticism and denial are not ends in themselves but strategic tools within the far right's broader agenda to disrupt the entrenched, supposedly socialist, *status quo*.

Lastly, Yamada, Melin and Chen (2025) take on the challenge of denaturalizing those ideals that form the backbone of Bolsonaro and Milei's utopias and that deny the reality of climate change by framing it as something spatially and temporally distant. They do so by incorporating insights from Mahāyāna Buddhism to deconstruct the framing of nuclear energy as a green here-and-now solution. Starting from the curious recent rise in the popularity of nuclear energy as a solution to both climate and security concerns, they analyze the pro-nuclear campaigns in Japan and Taiwan – two countries that have embraced nuclear energy as a one-stone-two-birds solution. They find that both campaigns build on modernist ideas about the division between humanity and nature, the linear progression of time, and the veneration of the autonomous individual. These, they argue, are precisely the beliefs that enable the exploitation of nature (and people) and maintain the current capitalist system that brought climate change about. Consequently, the embrace of nuclear energy is not a solution to the climate crisis but an expression of its continuation. To counter the pro-nuclear narrative, Yamada, Melin and Chen introduce Mahāyāna Buddhism's relational understanding of space and time as an alternative to modernist cosmological assumptions.

These contributions underscore the socio-psychological nature of negotiating the climate crisis and begin to draw out its existential dimension. They show how the social and geophysical changes wrought by global climate change clash with actors' ideas about themselves and their role in the world, leading not only to geopolitical tensions and climate denial, but also to the actors' attempts at re-situating themselves in time and space. The contributions provide snapshots of different places in the world where different actors grapple with climate change in different ways, and together they hint at a complex picture of not only environmental, geopolitical and economic dynamics, but existential and psychological ones as well.

In the process, they reconfirm the value of learning from and with other disciplines, which is perhaps a particular strength of IR.

CONCLUSION

This introduction opened with the debate about the suitability of IR as a discipline for engaging with the climate crisis and the Anthropocene more broadly. Yet, what becomes clear in the course of this special issue is that, regardless of its suitability right now, IR has a duty to *become* a discipline that can account for climate (in)action and contribute towards potential solutions. Standing back is not an option, especially given that IR already routinely deals with many aspects relevant for the climate crisis, like global governance, the international economy, or the political imagination. Beyond narrow concerns about the discipline's continued "relevance", then, IR scholars have a responsibility to do all they can to contribute to our collective understanding of the climate crisis and thus to its mitigation. The good news is that IR can build on already existing resources and practices, like its demonstrated ability to incorporate new subjects of analysis or to critically rethink some of its core assumptions, although care needs to be taken not to simply add ever more perspectives without also transforming some of IR's more harmful practices. The recent surge in scholarship on the non-human is a case in point, as is the 'relational turn', with both approaches not only providing new perspectives on the problematique of climate change (E.G. FISHEL 2023; KURKI 2022), but challenging, and thereby enriching, conventional IR in more fundamental ways (E.G. CHEN – KRICKEL-CHOI 2024; KURKI 2020). In a similar vein, this special issue makes the case for two further developments in the form of, first, a more explicit embrace of interdisciplinarity and, second, greater systematic attention to the psycho-social dimension of existential grappling with the experience of climate change.

IR's tendency to import theories and concepts from other fields of study without exporting anything 'back' in return is a source of ontological anxiety to some, giving rise to discussions about a discipline-wide inferiority complex and calls for more internal coherence or the development of a commonly shared positive definition of its subject matter (GUZZINI 2020; ROSENBERG – TALLIS 2022). By contrast, this special issue shows that interdisciplinarity is one of IR's greatest strengths. Not only does it indicate

theoretical openness and a willingness to learn from and with others, but IR's fracturing of these 'external' bodies of knowledge through its unique lens of 'the international' generates new and original insights which help our understanding of the world. Learning from social theory, which led to constructivism, and quantum theory has arguably led to a wider range of sophisticated IR analyses, and the contributions to this special issue confirm this point. By bringing agrarian populism, utopian studies, social psychology, and Eastern and Western philosophy to bear on traditional IR themes like international negotiations, popular protests and energy security, they draw our attention to as-of-yet-underappreciated aspects of the climate crisis. An IR discipline committed to doing its part in mitigating the impacts of climate change will have to foster this kind of openness and be less self-conscious about taking ideas from elsewhere – especially because climate change is such a mind-bendingly complex phenomenon that no single discipline can possibly provide a comprehensive picture of its implications. IR's tradition of 'borrowing' from other disciplines might thus prove to be of particular usefulness.

Regarding the second development, as mentioned, IR is already a deeply psychological discipline by virtue of its interest in the world of human interaction and its major theories being based on assumptions about what humans are like. What is needed, then, is not an increase in imports from the field of psychology per se, but a turning of this already existing psychological lens onto the problem of climate change, based on a recognition that climate change is as much a psycho-philosophical problem as a problem of power distribution or collective action. As Scranton writes in *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*, *"the conceptual and existential problems that the Anthropocene poses are precisely those that have always been at the heart of humanistic inquiry: What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to live? [...] What does my life mean in the face of death?"* (2015: 20). Yet, what is changing in the face of climate change is the answers we give to those questions. To grapple with the climate crisis is to come to terms with the way it changes how humans situate themselves in time and space, interact with each other, give meaning to their lives, and imagine their futures. It is a focus on these processes of grappling that is needed to better understand this socio-psychological aspect of the climate crisis. Like the incorporation of more extra-disciplinary knowledge, such a development would foster the skill of seeing different worlds, of moving away from

a universalist bird's eye perspective and putting oneself in the shoes of those who face the climate crisis in different ways. The contributions to this special issue show that it is many different actors who grapple with the effects of climate change in different ways, not only vulnerable states and fossil fuel-dependent countries but also individual politicians, farmers, and many others, and that these actors do not emerge from this process unchanged. To this we might add that IR scholars, too, are currently engaged in a process of finding their place in a climate-changed present, and that we can expect IR to change as a result. There is reason to think that this change will be for the better.

ENDNOTES

1   This is not to deny that the discipline has seen some engagement with climate change for over 30 years. Yet, it seems to me that climate change's arrival in the mainstream is a product of the past decade or so (cf. Von Uexkull – Buhaug 2021).

2   It is worth pointing out that anxieties about IR's disciplinary "relevance" are not new and predate debates about climate change (see Guzzini 2020).

3   Some other fields concerned in different ways with survival are, for example, Conservation Biology, Extinction Studies, and Existential Risk Studies.

4   By interdisciplinarity I mean actively learning from other branches of knowledge and integrating their various insights to some extent.

5   For a critique of framing climate change as a problem requiring a solution, see Hulme (2009).

6   Of course, the construction of climate change as an 'international', 'global' or 'planetary' issue is also contested (e.g. Chandler – Cudworth – Hobden 2018).

7   While this article organizes the problematization of climate change around IR's major subfields, it is also possible to trace the changing disciplinary conceptualization of climate change over time; for example, from a problem concerning only the external environment to something that impacts on everything and everyone (Biermann 2021), or from a unitary problem to be solved through global governance to a process that cannot be solved but only mitigated and adapted to. I thank Gunilla Reischl for pointing this out to me.

8   For some of the difficulties with achieving normative change, see Kolmaš (2025).

9   Even apathy is thus understood as a response to anxiety and a way of grappling with the climate crisis (Letzman 2013).

10   The literature has identified different kinds of anxiety that might be relevant here, for example existential anxiety about death, epistemic or spiritual anxiety about the meaning of one's existence, and moral anxiety about the right thing to do (Berenskötter 2020; Simangan 2023).

11   I am indebted to Nicolai Gellwitzki for this point.

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NOTE

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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.

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 $\overline{(2023:\ 855)}$ 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"* $\overline{(\text{IBID.:}\ 862)}$. The problem of the universalizing assumption is exemplified by Burke et al. $\overline{(2016:\ 500)}$, 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 $\overline{(\text{SEE}}$ $\overline{\text{AKLIN – MILDENBERGER 2020}})$ and the compensatory politics of loss and damage $\overline{(\text{SEE HUQ ET AL. 2013; WRATHALL ET AL. 2015})}$. A *"new global political project"* $\overline{(\text{BURKE ET}}$ $\overline{\text{AL. 2016: 500}})$ 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 $\overline{(\text{LEADERS CLIMATE SUMMIT 2021: N.P.})}$, 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 $\overline{(\text{SEE IRENA 2024})}$. 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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From Disparity to Sustainability: Social Identity, Perceived Fairness, and Climate Cooperation

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ABSTRACT — In the International Relations (IR) literature, inequality has been identified as a major influence on climate policy cooperation and implementation. Identities formed by the multiple inequalities in the global order have become key organizing principles for climate negotiation and significantly affect whether policies are seen as fair. We focus on these inequality-related identities (IRIs) and present an analytical framework that translates concepts from Social Identity Theory for use in IR to systematically examine how IRIs affect perceptions of policy fairness and implementation. We contend that this framework is cross-scalar in character; that is, given the social basis of climate politics, the dynamics can be understood as social processes regardless of whether they are undertaken by states, international organizations, or individuals. We offer this framework as a tool for mobilizing insights from social psychology into IR research and understanding the ways social identities affect collective climate action.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is widely understood to be the defining collective action problem of the modern era (HORMIO 2023). However, more than 30 years after the first United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) treaty, global temperatures continue to rise, and the goals set out in international agreements are not being met (UNITED NATIONS 2023). Within International Relations (IR), research has identified some of the primary drivers of these deficiencies as broad failures in state-level implementation of international treaty obligations and the inability of global climate actors to successfully act in collaboration (KINLEY ET AL. 2021).

One of the key variables of – and barriers to – climate policy implementation and cooperation is inequality (KLINSKY ET AL. 2017). First, inequality has significant bearing on how the current crisis came to be and how it is experienced. As Roberts (2001: 1) once stated: *"Global warming [sic] is all about inequality, both in who will suffer most its effects, and in who created the problem in the first place."* Second, identities formed through processes of inequality (hereafter referred to as inequality-related identities – IRIs) affect whether climate policies are perceived as "fair". This is crucial as *"perceptions of what is 'fair enough' are central to [climate actors'] negotiation mandates and affect the likelihood of meeting their commitments and cooperating with others"* (KLINSKY ET AL. 2017: 2). Third, these identities have become key organizing principles for policy/norm contestation in multilateral settings and, in many ways, create the structure for the current impasse (KOLMAŠ 2023; OKERKE – COVENTRY 2016).

However, despite a growing literature on the matter across IR and related disciplines, there has been significantly less research attention paid to how IRIs affect perceptions of climate policy fairness across other scales (e.g., individual, national, regional) (LUBELL – ZAHRAN – VEDLITZ 2007). We view this as a significant problem as the successful implementation of any collective climate action, be it an international accord or a neighborhood recycling program, relies on the support and compliance of actors operating at different scales (MARWELL – OLIVER 1993). Moreover, the dynamics shaping climate actors' behaviors at the international level are often directly linked to local, national, or regional politics. In essence, we contend that to understand where and why international climate policies fail, it is necessary to understand perceptions of fairness and collective action across varied levels.

On this basis, we aim to contribute to the literature by constructing an analytical framework that can be used to systematically examine how IRIs affect perceptions of policy fairness and, thus, the likelihood of successful climate policy implementation. In assembling it, we mobilize theoretical innovations from social psychology, above all drawing from social identity theory (SIT) (TAJFEL – TURNER 1979). We view SIT as particularly relevant in this case as, considering the social basis of climate change policies and politics, the dynamics at play relating to both policy creation and implementation can be analyzed as social processes regardless of where (i.e., on what level) they are taking place. In sum then, the primary contribution of this paper is to translate insights about the effect of identity on intergroup cooperation from social psychology into an analytical framework that can be used in IR to locate identity-related areas of contestation at different scales.

Nevertheless, it bears mentioning at the outset that we also align our work with the cautions offered by Hymans (2002) and Ward (2017) about the "cross-disciplinary translation" of SIT in international relations. In social psychology, the unit of interest is the individual, even as they are examined or discussed as part of a group or other social context. This is an important consideration for any proposed application of psychological theory to another area of inquiry because it defines the appropriate space for translation. In the case of IR, it precludes any attempt to directly test a psychological theory because although state actors may often be perceived or written about as persons, they "have neither conscience nor feelings" (WOLF 2011: 117). Thus, we argue for a complementary rather than collapsed effort to understand how social identities created via processes of inequality influence perceptions of climate policies and the likelihood of successful intergroup climate cooperation.

The rest of the paper will be organized as follows. Section one will situate the contribution of our analytical framework within the IR literature, specifically in the field's attempts to understand how inequality undermines climate policy implementation. We describe how cross-scalar analyses of the influence of social identities (like developed vs. developing countries) on perceptions of climate policy fairness can provide a greater understanding of why international agreements have failed to reach high levels of implementation. Section two will then discuss SIT and its applications to climate policy fairness and relevance to implementation. The third

section will explain the criteria in our analytic framework and their value in examining the effect of social identities on perceptions of fairness and intergroup cooperation in a broad policy context. The fourth section will then narrow this discussion to provide examples for each criterion of how this framework can be used to examine the influence of IRIs on views and implementations of climate policy across different scales.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS: FROM CLIMATE FAILURES TO CLIMATE IDENTITIES

As noted above, inequality has been a significant point of emphasis in the IR literature on climate change for several decades. Broadly speaking, the literature has demonstrated how inequality has profoundly influenced the trajectory and outcomes of international climate change negotiations. Awareness of deep disparities in terms of both contemporary and historical emissions was, for example, central in structuring the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), which is fundamental to the UNFCCC and plays a key role in organizing international environmental governance (KOLMAŠ 2023). Yet, CBDR is among the most contested issues within the current climate change regime (PRYS-HANSEN 2020). Interpretations and implementations of the norm continue to be disputed, largely between groups of developed and developing countries. For example, Okereke and Coventry (2016) point out how developed countries have generally placed more weight on the "common" aspect of CBDR – therefore demanding more concessions from developing countries – while simultaneously rejecting action based on historical emissions records. Yet developing countries have instead stressed the "differentiated responsibility" aspect of CBDR and emphasized the need for both sustainable climate financing and growth-based exemptions. As Kolmaš (2023) points out, CBDR norms have become a non-starter, with the key tenets being contested between these groups to such an extent that the norm has never been fully accepted across parties, meaning coherent implementation becomes essentially impossible. The result is that the legitimacy of the climate regime itself has come under increasing question, particularly by members of the developing country bloc.

Considering these developments, we concur with Prys-Hansen (2020) that inequality not only is a source of mistrust between states but also leads to

both gridlock and apathy in terms of policy compliance and implementation. In this paper, we build on this understanding of the current climate regime as being locked in a state of stasis and implementation failure largely due to the influence of IRIs on perceptions of climate policy fairness; yet, we also aim to draw out these conclusions beyond the international scale, as this is but one part of the picture relating to collective climate action.

To extend our analytical focus and incorporate the varied social engagements that produce climate policy, we bring in the concept of scale, which originates in the discipline of geography but has increasingly been integrated into the IR literature. As Prys-Hansen et al. (2024) note, scale can be used in IR to foreground the intersubjective and co-constitutive relationships between divergent socio-spatial dynamics. Rather than creating hard edges around "international," "national," and "individual" levels, for example, scalar thinking allows for a broader conceptualization of actors in particular processes and allows for relational theorization. We view this as crucial in terms of understanding the totality of climate crisis policy implementation. To give an example, beyond the inter-country inequalities that we've thus far noted (e.g., developed vs. developing countries), Wilkinson and Pickett (2024) argue that high inequality levels within a society (i.e., intra-country inequality) make it more difficult to implement environmental policies as they are more likely to be perceived as unfair. Likewise, the authors found that high-inequality societies perform worse when it comes to environmental footprint, advancement on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and cooperation in implementing international climate treaties.

Bearing in mind the variegated ways in which inequality – both inter- and intra-country – can affect climate policy, how then can areas of contestation and failure be located and addressed? We argue that climate change perceptions, policy outcomes, and the identities that structure these across scales are best understood as social processes that are constructed, changed, and leveraged depending on social situations. Given this, we further argue that research accounting for the influence of social identities (i.e., identities constructed around group memberships, see below) on climate cooperation provides a path by which we can understand the multiple inequalities across the climate regime that affect the prospect of cooperation.

Importantly, social identities influence perceptions of climate policy fairness. As previously noted, perceptions of fairness are strongly connected to policy adoption and implementation (KLINSKY ET AL. 2017). Within the IR literature, fairness refers to views about processes, including the application of rules and their results (GRASSO 2007; ŽEBROWSKI ET AL. 2022). According to Zebrowski et al. (IBID.: 2), a policy is *"understood to be fair if (1) equals are treated equally and (2) 'unequals' are treated differently, according to the relevant differences among them"*. Policies that are perceived to be fair are also more likely to be adopted, implemented, and complied with (GRASSO 2007). However, judgments of who is equal and unequal, whether the treatment is equivalent, and what differences are relevant are all influenced by social identities. To date, the IR literature has tended to approach fairness at the level of state interests; for example, there is a well-developed literature on the fair allocation of costs and burdens between developed and developing countries (E.G., PAGE 2008). Yet, we assert here that IR can further mobilize research from social psychology and SIT to develop more in-depth understandings of identity-driven variabilities in perceptions of climate fairness across scales and the success (or failure) of intergroup climate coalitions.

SOCIAL IDENTITY, PERCEIVED FAIRNESS, AND INTERGROUP CLIMATE COOPERATION

Social psychology has a long history of examining the relationship between group identities and social inequalities in influencing individual attitudes and intergroup behaviors (DOISE 1978). Within this field, the literature on social identity theory (SIT) is one of the most well-developed literatures. SIT describes how memberships in social groups, like a religion or social class, inform one's self-concept and affect perceptions and behaviors (TAJFEL – TURNER 1979; HOGG 2016). SIT, and the closely associated social categorization theory (TURNER ET AL. 1987), argue that people use social identities to make social categorizations that then situate the self relative to others; for example, by sorting people into ingroups ("us") and outgroups ("them"). This process of identification and categorization accentuates perceived differences (and similarities), which then influence judgments of the self and others as well as behaviors toward ingroup and outgroup members (MASSON – FRITSCHE 2021; DOVIDIO – BANFIELD 2015). In general, SIT research finds that people are motivated to see their ingroups (i.e., people with whom they share an identity) as distinct and superior to other groups (i.e., "positive

distinctiveness"); (TURNER–TAJFEL 1979) and to behave in a manner that is consistent with ingroup norms and values (HOGG – REID 2006).

This has clear implications for how international actors relate to each other, as parties who see themselves as sharing an identity are more likely to share perceptions and behaviors, and to cooperate (and by the same token, actors are less likely to align or cooperate with outsiders). Indeed, SIT has been used to examine variables of interest in IR such as status and respect (E.G., LARSON 2017), securitization (E.G., HAYES 2012; MERCER 2010), and the influence of supranational identity, notably in the development of European identity and European Union integration (CURLEY 2009). Past research has also demonstrated the significance of social identities in models predicting participation in collective action in general (VAN ZOMEREN – SPEARS 2008) and intergroup climate action in particular (MASSON – FRITSCHE 2021).

SIT also has important implications for how inequality affects intergroup climate cooperation. Inequality increases the salience of social identities, as well as awareness of identity differences (E.G., KRAUS – PARK – TAN 2017), status anxiety (WILKINSON – PICKETT 2024), and polarization (E.G., ANDERSEN – CURTIS 2012). IRI differences have also been shown to undermine intergroup coalitions (WILKINSON – PICKETT 2024), threaten cooperation in public goods studies (MARTINANGELI – MARTINSSON 2020), erode social cohesion (BUTTRICK – OISHI 2017), and increase intergroup competition and prejudice, especially with groups that are viewed as resource threats (LISNEK ET AL. 2024; FIELDING – HORNSEY 2016). Thus, social identities have significant implications for how a climate policy is seen across different IRIs. As shown in Figure 1, we focus here on how social identity affects climate policy adoption and implementation via its influence on perceived fairness. Social identity and its accompanying psychological processes are vital to understanding how climate policies are likely to be interpreted across inequality-related groups and thus for developing collective climate actions that are more likely to be broadly adopted and implemented (HASLAM 2012; MACKAY ET AL. 2021).

FIGURE 1: EFFECT OF SOCIAL IDENTITY ON THE PERCEPTION OF FAIRNESS AND CLIMATE POLICY

SOCIAL IDENTITY → PERCEIVED FAIRNESS → ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION SUCCESS

SECTION III − ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, we conceptually define each criterion in our framework and lay out what the SIT literature predicts will lead to higher levels of perceived fairness and intergroup cooperation in a broad policy setting. We draw from Gordon Allport's intergroup contact theory (1954), as well as the broader social psychological literature. Intergroup contact theory states that contact between groups can facilitate cooperation, but only under certain circumstances, those being equal status between groups, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and the support of institutions and authorities (PETTIGREW − TROPP 2005). Allport's criteria are well-validated (PETTIGREW ET AL. 2011); however, over time research has found additional conditions that increase cooperation. Our framework thus includes three additional criteria: perceived trustworthiness, procedural justice, and recategorization. These criteria account for additional sources of variability in intergroup cooperation, and their cooperation-enhancing potential is also well supported across the social psychological literature (TROPP 2008; DE CREMER − TYLER 2005; FIELDING − HORNSEY 2016).

TABLE 1: ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Criteria	Definitions
Equal Status	The perception that group members are afforded equal status in a given interaction or contact situation.
Perceived Trustworthiness	The perception that the outgroup is trustworthy.
Procedural Justice	Belief in the fairness of the processes regarding how decisions and allocations are (or will be) made as well as in how disputes are (or will be) resolved.
Common Goals	A common purpose or superordinate goal.
Intergroup Cooperation	The outgroup having a positive reputation for reciprocity and cooperation either directly with the ingroup or with similar others.
Support of Institutions and Authorities	The support of authorities and institutions that are relevant to both groups, endorsing and evidencing the existence of shared norms and guidelines.
Recategorization	The shifting, or recontextualization, of social conceptions about the self and others into a superordinate category.

EQUAL STATUS

The importance of status to collective beliefs regarding identity and its influence on international engagement has been explored in the IR literature (E.G., LARSON − SHEVCHENKO 2014; VOLGY ET AL. 2014). In the context of our framework, equal status refers to the perception that groups are being afforded equivalent consideration in a given interaction or contact situation

(PETTIGREW – TROPP 2005). Importantly, research indicates that this condition can be satisfied within a specific context, even if the groups are not seen as equal in status outside of this interaction (e.g., a climate meeting structured to prioritize affording equal status to participating groups that might otherwise, and in other contexts, be considered unequal). Similarly, this can be analyzed using both objective measures (e.g., GDP) and subjective status. Based on past research (E.G., VAN PROOIJEN – WILKE 2002), if the parties view their statuses in general, or within a given setting, to be equal, this will increase perceived fairness and thus intergroup cooperation. By the same token, if the parties do not feel that they are afforded equal status, policies are less likely to be perceived as fair, and therefore cooperation toward implementation will be less successful.

PERCEIVED TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trust is a feeling characterized by *"security and confidence in others' good intentions and goodwill"* and *"implies an absence of perceived threat"* (TROPP 2008: 93–94). Greater perceptions of outgroup trustworthiness have been demonstrated to facilitate cooperation (DE CREMER – TYLER 2005); however, rates of intergroup trust are often low, especially in situations involving competition, resource scarcity, or past histories of conflict (DOVIDIO – BANFIELD 2015). Outgroup trustworthiness can be enhanced by cross-group relationships, including both direct contact (e.g., a friendship between an ingroup and an outgroup member; (TROPP 2008) and indirect contact (e.g., knowledge of an ingroup member who is friends with an outgroup member) (DOVIDIO – HEWSTONE 2011). Thus, if an outgroup is viewed as trustworthy, based on past experience or reputation, this will increase perceived fairness, and thus intergroup cooperation; however, if an outgroup is not seen as trustworthy, this is a negative predictor of intergroup collaboration.

PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

Procedural justice, that is, the fairness of formal and/or informal processes, is associated with prosocial behaviors and stronger feelings of trust and commitment (TYLER – BLADER 2003). In the same vein, intergroup cooperation is more likely when there is mutual trust in the procedural justice of how decisions and allocations are made, as well as in how disputes are resolved across identity groups (DE CREMER –TYLER 2005). Just procedures

indicate that one is a valued partner, and according to Urbanska et al.
$\overline{\text{(2019: 2)}}$, *"authorities who use principles of procedural justice are more likely to be seen as legitimate, increasing compliance and cooperation from the public."* However, social identities influence whether procedures are believed to be fair and, thus, are likely to be accepted. Therefore, if an identity group believes that the procedural aspects of a policy are justly applied across all parties, this will increase the perception of the policy's fairness, and thus intergroup cooperation toward its adoption and implementation. If the procedures are not perceived as just by one or many identity groups, then a policy is unlikely to succeed.

COMMON GOALS

Intergroup cooperation is more likely in circumstances when social groups are working toward a common purpose or superordinate goal $\overline{\text{(ALLPORT 1954)}}$. Cooperation is most likely when these shared goals involve interdependent, non-competitive outcomes that *"no one group could accomplish on its own"* $\overline{\text{(DOVIDIO – BANFIELD 2015: 14)}}$. Even between groups that hold negative beliefs about each other or that have competed in the past, the activation of a common goal can act to reduce stereotyping and antagonism $\overline{\text{(SHERIF 1961)}}$. If the groups feel they are working toward a shared goal, with shared outcomes, they will be more likely to view a policy relevant to the common goal as fair, and thus cooperate on its adoption and implementation. Absent this shared understanding and purpose, groups will be less likely to perceive a policy as fair, and thus will be less likely to cooperate on its adoption and implementation. Important here, is that two parties agreeing to a common solution (e.g., emissions reduction) is not the same as, nor is it sufficient evidence of, holding a common goal.

INTERGROUP COOPERATION

In its original use by Allport $\overline{\text{(1954)}}$, this category reflected findings that cooperation with an outgroup member can act to reduce prejudice (e.g., White United States soldiers who fought in racially integrated units during World War II were more likely to show reduced racial prejudice than those who did not) $\overline{\text{(DOVIDIO – BANFIELD 2015)}}$. However, its use here also accounts for ensuing research demonstrating that, in addition to prejudice reduction, cooperation begets cooperation. Past research using game

theory models, like the prisoner's dilemma, indicated that a group-level positive reputation for reciprocity acts to enhance intergroup cooperation (MILINSKI – KRAMBECK 2002; OSTROM 2010). There is also evidence for "cooperation spirals" in intergroup interactions (FERRIN – KOHLES 2008), meaning that cooperation from one group (Group A) with another (Group B) predicts whether Group B will subsequently cooperate with Group A; this then "leaps" between the two parties into an iterative spiral of continued mutual cooperation. Thus, a policy that implicates multiple groups is more likely to be perceived as fair, and thus to be more successfully implemented if the outgroup actors involved are viewed as reliable partners in intergroup cooperation. If the involved groups have not successfully cooperated in the past, or one group is known to have been a bad actor in a past intergroup agreement, this would make it less likely that a policy would be perceived as fair, and therefore successfully implemented.

SUPPORT OF INSTITUTIONS AND AUTHORITIES

The support of institutions and authorities can also act to increase the likelihood of intergroup cooperation (PETTIGREW – TROPP 2005). First, institutional involvement or support enables intergroup cooperation by backing the application of shared norms (e.g., UN support for a policy suggests it upholds the norms of the UN). Second, authorities serve an important role in endorsing guidelines for intergroup interactions that increase trust in their fairness (IBID.). Finally, the "explicit social sanction" of important authorities promotes "norms of acceptance" for intergroup interactions (PETTIGREW 1998: 70). Hence, if an institution or authority voices support for a specific policy, and they are viewed as a legitimate or just actor by a given group, then the policy is more likely to be perceived as fair and thus acted upon. However, if that institution is not understood as legitimate, or if its validity varies across identities, then the policy is more likely to be perceived as unfair, and therefore to fail.

RECATEGORIZATION

The final item in our framework, recategorization, builds on insights from contact theory, SIT, and social categorization theory. Recategorization is a process by which social conceptions of the self and others are shifted, or recontextualized, into a superordinate category (DOVIDIO – BANFIELD

2015), meaning the shift of *"people's representations of others from 'us' versus 'them' to a more inclusive 'we'"* (DOVIDIO ET AL. 2008: 4). Recategorization can take the form of a shift toward holding *dual identities*, in which the original "us" group is preserved within a new "we," or in the creation of a new superordinate category, meaning the relevance of the original "us" group is subsumed into the new and more pertinent "we" (IBID.). Although pre-existing histories, conflicts, or inequalities between social identity groups can present an obstacle to recategorization, when successful, these identity shifts foster more cooperative outcomes. For example, the common ingroup identity model has demonstrated across broad identity contexts (i.e., education, business, family, race/ethnicity, nations) that *"inducing members of different groups to see themselves within a common ingroup identity promotes more positive attitudes toward members of other groups"* as well as increasing outgroup cooperation (DOVIDIO – BANFIELD 2015: 9). Thus, if one identity group has recontextualized its identity relative to another group (e.g., placing itself and the other group into a new shared identity or an overarching superordinate identity), they will be more likely to perceive an agreement with this group as fair, and thus cooperate on its adoption and implementation. However, if one or more groups do not shift their identities toward each other, they are less likely to perceive an outcome as fair and cooperate toward its implementation.

ACTIVATING THE FRAMEWORK

We view our analytical framework as providing a lens that can be used to locate identity-related areas of contestation. Instrumentalizing this in IR means utilizing it as a starting point from which to generate research questions and hypotheses about the likely outcomes of climate summits and policies across identities and at different scales. Our discussion will give a primary focus to the use of the framework in IR research and therefore to the international scale; however, for each criterion we will also discuss applications to state- and individual-level research. Finally, in keeping with the cautions offered previously about the appropriate scope for translations of social psychology, the application of SIT to IR (and political science) suggested here is as a foundation for complementary inquiry and analysis, rather than as a direct test of SIT itself.

EQUAL STATUS

As discussed, in the psychological literature equal status refers to the perceptions that identity groups are being afforded level standing in an intergroup interaction. Applying this to an IR setting, this may mean, for example, examining how beliefs about one party's sovereignty being over- or undervalued relative to another (e.g., countries in the Global North having more influence over climate agendas) may influence climate outcomes. Status considerations could be used as a lens with which to examine views of agenda-setting or policies known to be up for debate in an upcoming climate meeting; for example, by looking at who wrote these items, who was consulted, who is expected to act upon these items, or what implicit (or explicit) power dynamics are present in these materials. Status threats are also relevant to analyses of shifting power dynamics between established and rising powers; for example, they were relevant in conflicts between the United States and China over fairness in emissions reduction obligations that led to the US rejection of the Kyoto Protocol (OKEREKE – COVENTRY 2016).

As the IR literature already represents (E.G., LARSON – SHEVCHENKO 2014), the relative status of states is constantly being shifted, reinterpreted, and negotiated, and thus analyses of climate policy successes and failures would greatly benefit from a social-psychological perspective on status. In this, IRIs are particularly relevant as they directly bear on judgments of standing. For example, if an IR researcher wanted to determine how IRIs like the "Global North" and the "Global South" facilitate or undermine perceptions of fairness and cooperation in a climate meeting, their analyses could center on status differences between the actors involved. Likewise, the power dynamics that both played and play a major role in creating status could be examined. To give a concrete example, one could examine how status threats underpin the manner in which different IRIs interpret climate dialogues about CBDR. Frequently, developing countries have foregrounded the historical responsibility of developed countries for emissions and hardships in the Global South as an important determinant for allocations of the climate burden; this can be interpreted as a threat to the prestige of developed countries. Developed countries, on the other hand, tend to present their responsibility as a duty to lead and assist because of their *"superior economic and technological capabilities,"* which is both status-enhancing for the Global North and a threat to the status of

the developing world (OKEREKE – COVENTRY 2016: 837). Moving forward, research could also explore what structures may be put in place to address these dynamics and facilitate the perception of a level playing field in climate negotiations.

At other scales of analysis, researchers could look at how IRIs influence status at the domestic or individual levels. For example, those working at the national scale may examine domestic narratives about the state's status relative to other parties in an international agreement, or how different political parties within a state are being afforded status in actions to implement internationally negotiated agreements at the state level. They might also examine how a group currently in power domestically may be utilizing a positive framing of status to facilitate climate policy adoption or, alternatively, how rival parties are using status in the context of climate to undermine competitors (e.g., in the United States, Republicans deploying narratives that Democrats' climate policies weaken the USA's international standing). At the individual scale, researchers could examine the relationship between a person's view of the status afforded to "people like them" in the context of climate policy and their perceptions of policy fairness (e.g., what status members of the working class view their group being afforded relative to the wealthy in the design of climate regulations). These variables could then be used to study the likelihood of individual-level behavioral changes to comply with these policies.

PERCEIVED TRUSTWORTHINESS

Addressing climate change will require sacrifices from all actors, and trust in climate partners is essential for motivations to adopt and faithfully enforce climate policies (MARION SUISEEYA – PAUL 2021; VOGLER 2010). However, intergroup trust is especially challenging in the context of international climate policy because of salient concerns about existing inequalities, competition for scarce resources, and histories of conflict. Thus, a state that agrees to a costly climate policy would be less likely to perceive the agreement as fair and to follow through on its commitment in the absence of trust in the other parties to the agreement. Building on this, research in IR (or other disciplines) could analyze the historical and present ties between states, including their actions in past agreements, to determine if they have a reputation for trustworthiness. In addition, one could examine how climate

actors integrate cases of indirect or direct contact with relevant outgroups into their perceptions of trustworthiness (e.g., how a developed country's evaluation of the trustworthiness of a developing country considers either their direct contact or relationships with similar developed countries). In the domain of climate financing, for instance, past actions have led to low trust in commitments made by developed countries to provide significant and predictable investments to meet the needs of developing countries in addressing the climate crisis, considerably affecting the implementation of climate policy (ROBERTS ET AL. 2021). A recent study of representatives of sub-Saharan African countries found that these violations of trust between low- and high-income countries have resulted in negative opinions of climate finance actors beyond just these countries (e.g., the Green Climate Fund) (DEBEUF 2024). IR researchers could expand upon data like these on the effect of trust (or the lack thereof) to examine the mechanisms that might be put into place based on past negotiations to increase faith or past actions that states have taken to repair their reputation.

At the domestic scale, one might examine how the trustworthiness of international agreements is framed in national dialogues or how different IRI groups perceive the trustworthiness of state-level political actors who enact and enforce climate policies. For instance, since the early 2000s, many inter- and intra-national actors have implemented climate-smart fishing policies, yet these policies were developed without adequate attention to the perceptions of the fisherfolk upon whose compliance the policies rely (MATIĆ-SKOKO – STAGLIČIĆ 2020). Recent data indicate that compliance among fishers was undermined by a lack of trust regarding the fairness of the allocations of costs and benefits between the local fishers and wealthy fisheries and that policies would reflect the actual proportion of responsibility for resource degradation (FABINYI – MACINTYRE 2013). In contrast, their compliance was increased by participation in decision-making and strong feelings of solidarity (HAUZER – MURRAY 2013; NOGUÉ-ALGUERÓ – ORTEGA 2023).

Finally, at the individual level, trust across social groups, in governments, and in policy fairness has been consistently found to influence support for climate change policies (DREWS – VAN DEN BERGH 2016). Future studies could expand on these findings to test whether judgments about the trustworthiness of inequality-related outgroups, both in the context of climate and in completely different attitudinal settings, influence climate

beliefs and behaviors (e.g., do outgroup freeloading concerns vary between people who identify as high, middle, and low class, and does this affect the perceived fairness of and support for costly climate policies?).

PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

The social psychological literature indicates that intergroup cooperation in the context of climate governance can be increased by perceptions that procedures are just. Similarly, past research in IR examining procedural legitimacy (E.G., FRANCK 2001; BÄCKSTRAND – NASIRITOUSI 2021) has found that the perceptions different actors hold about a rule in general, or those involved in climate engagements in particular, can act to increase conflict or cooperation. Here too IRIs play a role in determining how decision-making processes are viewed. As stated by Grasso and Sacchi (2011: 6), *"climate negotiations are characterized by the inequality among the political, economic, scientific and diplomatic power, capacities and possibilities of countries: poorer and smaller states, typically from the South of the world, are manifestly much less able to express their interests, and to have them ultimately recognized and accepted. It is, in fact, usually only richer countries that can afford platoons of skilled negotiators, while poor parties can field only a few negotiators"*. Given this unequal access to knowledge and diplomatic resources, IRIs are highly relevant to actors' fairness perceptions about the procedures used in climate meetings and agreements, as well as of the mechanisms in place for addressing disputes. Past research indicates that access to accurate, complete, transparent, and reliable information is essential to judgments of procedural fairness in international climate negotiations (IBID.; NEWELL ET AL. 2021). IR research could use these facets to examine procedural justice considerations of climate negotiations, policies, and outcomes. This criterion could also be used to examine the procedures that were used in past international negotiations involving actors from different IRIs to determine which were most frequently perceived as just across groups and thus may be used in the future to enhance the likelihood of successful climate cooperation. For example, the "one country one vote" structure has been described as a mitigator for developing countries' *"inability to participate on an equal footing with developed countries"* (OKEREKE – COVENTRY 2016: 838).

At other scales, researchers could examine how domestic political procedures related to the adoption of climate policies are viewed across

IRIs within a state. Finally, at the individual scale, one might examine how social identities can be experimentally manipulated to influence judgments of procedural justice in the domain of climate policy.

COMMON GOALS

Cooperation is more likely if climate actors feel they are joined by a common goal, but the reality of the climate crisis is that inequality-related factors often result in different actors responding to different climate-related problems. Hence, IR studies about climate policy success rates could focus research questions on common understandings of goals across climate actors. One could examine whether official statements about goals, including their content and who is implicated (i.e., expected to bear some cost or change), differ across IRIs. Consider, for example, the relevance of IRIs in the context of UNFCC COP meetings. Every year, news stories emerge about how the conference betrayed the Global South, the youth, and the poor in favor of business-friendly climate policy (e.g., *"Indigenous people and climate justice groups say COP28 was 'business as usual'"*) (LAKHANI 2023; GROSSE – MARK 2020). Similarly, much of the writing on these meetings concedes that for some parties the most relevant and immediate threat is climate change itself, and for others, it is the economic threat of addressing climate change (FALKNER 2016). The goals of island nations facing the immediate threats of sea-level rise, for instance, are different from those of states with oil-dependent economies. It is also understood that the former are typically the less powerful, less wealthy parties (IBID.; OURBAK – MAGNAN 2017). Future research could examine how IRIs influence or even undermine perceptions of common goals at COP meetings and how this bears on perceived fairness and implementation. If one were to find, for example, that going into a COP meeting, the Global South presented the primary goal as being addressing the immediate material effects of the climate crisis, whereas the Global North stated their goal was finding a path for climate-friendly economic growth or a more long-term climate solution, this would lead to a prediction that this climate meeting will not succeed. Similarly, one could look at the role of common goals in cases of successful international collaborations to address climate, like the Montreal Protocol, the success of which has been attributed to the clear, targeted goals of the agreement (GONZALEZ – SHERMAN 2015).

Once again, looking to other scales, researchers could use this criterion to analyze the perception of common goals across IRIs that are relevant to the domestic politics of climate cooperation (e.g., the goals of rural identity groups in developing national climate policies relative to urban communities) or study how IRIs affect the likelihood of perceiving an outgroup as sharing a common climate goal or stakes in a climate outcome (e.g., cross-social class variability in climate goals).

INTERGROUP COOPERATION

Past histories of intergroup cooperation influence present likelihoods of climate collaboration. Here again, IRIs are particularly relevant because histories of exploitation or partnership play into the judgment and implementation of climate policies across groups (SULTANA 2022). A similar perspective, that cooperation (vs. conflict) in foreign policy is, at least in part, influenced by *"long- and short-term institutional memory,"* is represented in IR literature (WARD 1982: 87). Therefore, an IR analysis could look at the past actions of the parties to an agreement or attendees of an upcoming summit to determine whether they have engaged in intergroup cooperation in the past. To return to the example of the Montreal Protocol, one might look into why the success of that policy has not manifested into a "cooperative spiral" in climate policy development and implementation. What has changed in the relations between countries since that agreement was made? Was it too narrow an issue space to serve as the basis for intergroup cooperation in broader, more costly policies? Were the costs undertaken by high-income and low-income countries perceived differently in terms of their fairness, leading to a lack of motivation to replicate that effort? In this and other climate domains, research could look at whether there is variability in states' cooperation across IRIs – for example, whether powerful states are more likely to cooperate and follow agreements between themselves, and similarly, whether less powerful states are more or less faithful to agreements with similar parties.

At the domestic scale, researchers could examine past histories of intra-state cooperation between IRIs to analyze the likelihood of domestic intergroup climate cooperation. Others could employ this criterion to examine how social identities related to inequality influence perceptions

of an outgroup's past actions and how this affects behavioral intentions related to compliance with climate policies.

SUPPORT OF INSTITUTIONS AND AUTHORITIES

An examination of the likelihood of climate policy buy-in would benefit from an analysis of the institutions and authorities used to validate a policy, as well as whether there are systematic variations within or between scales in terms of their legitimacy (E.G., DELLMUTH – TALLBERG 2014). For example, the legitimacy of the UNFCCC has been undermined among developing countries as a result of its favoritism of market-based policies *"at the behest of capitalist countries, especially the United States"* (OKEREKE – COVENTRY 2016: 838). IR research could determine how IRIs influence these types of negative perceptions of authorities and also find the actors that do have broad support across identity groups and thus could be powerful voices in aiding climate policy implementation. For example, Walker and Biedenkopf (2020) used confidence in the chairs of UN negotiations to explain the failures of the 2009 Copenhagen meeting and the 2015 adoption of the Paris Agreement. According to the authors, *"[w]hen negotiators trust the chair, they allow her to go beyond her formal procedural role by acting as a mediator, fostering the reaching of agreement. [...] They cede parts of their control over the process to the chair when they are confident that the chair is competent and acts in good faith and everyone's interest"* (IBID.: 440). An IR analysis building upon this type of work and centering this criterion could further examine how trust in authorities, like UN meeting chairs, varies across IRIs and influences perceptions of climate policy fairness and outcomes.

This category could be used in a similar manner at the intra-national scale to study variations in the views of domestically relevant institutions and authorities across IRIs and how this informs the perception of policy fairness and the likelihood of successful state-level adoption and implementation. Studies about individual beliefs and behaviors could use this part of the framework to develop and test hypotheses about the influence of different authorities on attitudes and fairness beliefs about a given climate policy and how this shifts behavioral outcomes like consumption or voting choices.

RECATEGORIZATION

Recategorization into a superordinate identity can lead to successful climate cooperation across inequality-related identity groups (BATALHA – REYNOLDS 2012). An IR perspective might examine whether and how recategorization narratives are deployed by different actors to determine the conditions under which an attempted identity shift is successful – for example, how different IRI groups formulate and/or receive recategorization narratives that attempt to shift outgroups into a "we" in the context of the climate crisis. Climate narratives often make appeals to our common identity as "humanity" or "mankind" (e.g., *"So let's fight together – and let's win. For the 8 billion members of our human family [...]"*) (GUTERRES 2022), which can be studied as an attempt at recategorization, as it raises the salience of common identities among the negotiating parties. Past research has demonstrated a growth in the importance of international social identities, that is, identities tied to global culture and cosmopolitanism (ARNETT 2002; MAKRI –SCHLEGELMILCH 2021). Further, studies across diverse samples have shown that identification with the superordinate category of "humanity" relative to more parochial identities is associated with broader intergroup cooperation, pro-sociality, and public goods contributions (BUCHAN ET AL. 2011; GRIMALDA – BREWER 2023). IR researchers could examine how these types of identity recategorizations come into play in international climate policy to determine the conditions under which it enhances a policy's perceived fairness and implementation across IRIs. IR researchers could also look into where these narratives originate or which states are more likely to use them; for example, whether recategorization frames tend to come from, or be deployed more by, powerful states or if they are used by less powerful countries to bring them into closer proximity to power.

Here again, researchers studying regional or intra-state climate politics could use this section of the framework in a similar fashion to examine how different IRIs employ or interpret recategorization narratives relevant to climate policy. For example, past research has found that the endorsement of a supranational European identity influences support for EU expansion and support for "European" values and norms (CURLEY 2009; ZAPRYANOVA – SURZHKO-HARNED 2015). Similar analyses of supraordinate European identity could be used to examine the likelihood of EU climate policy implementation.

At the individual level, others could use this category to test the types of recategorizations that are effective (or not) in shifting identification with inequality-related outgroups and their effect on climate beliefs and intergroup behaviors.

SUMMARY

The seven criteria in our analytical framework represent insights from the SIT literature that can be integrated with IR concepts to evaluate factors that affect the perceived fairness of climate policies and the success (or failure) of climate governance. Each criterion may be employed on its own or in combination with the other facets to inform research questions and cross-scalar analyses. For example, analyses of common goals held across climate actors may benefit from complementary research on perceptions of the proposed procedures to achieve the said goals. Similarly, analyses of recategorization narratives may include research on how perceived status acts to undermine or encourage attachment to superordinate identities. We have further argued here that analyses of the influence of IRIs on perceived fairness represent a key direction for future research on climate policy implementation. As agreements that are viewed as fair are more likely to be adopted and implemented (KLINSKY ET AL. 2017), frameworks like ours, which offer an avenue through which to analyze those very views, are essential to addressing the climate crisis.

CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to mobilize and translate concepts from SIT to the discipline of IR and cross-scalar analyses of climate policy. Focusing on IRIs, which we consider central elements that must be accounted for to adequately mitigate the climate crisis, we have developed a framework of 7 factors (equal status, perceived trustworthiness, procedural justice, common goals, intergroup cooperation, support of institutions and authorities, and recategorization) that can be used to determine why certain initiatives or actions either gain or lose support. In essence, the framework organizes the findings on intergroup cooperation from social psychology that we view as having the greatest bearing on climate negotiations and explains their unique and interactive utility in explaining climate policy successes and failures. We contend that this framework is cross-scalar in character;

that is, given the social basis of all climate change politics, the dynamics can be understood as social processes regardless of whether they are being undertaken by states, international organizations, or individuals. We have sought, particularly in section 4, to outline the ways in which these factors can be used in future research, as well as to provide examples of where we see their influence in extant climate agreements – for example, how clear, shared goals contributed to the success of the Montreal Protocol or how the absence of intergroup trust across developed and developing countries has undermined climate finance initiatives. However, we have also advised caution with respect to the appropriate translation of SIT outside of psychology. Although our framework can be used as an analytical or interpretive tool, and psychological theories more broadly provide useful points of departure for research question and hypothesis generation in IR, there would be significant limitations inherent to any attempt to directly test psychological theory outside its appropriate context (i.e., the individual).

We consider this paper as responding to recent calls for research on climate governance that is inclusive of perspectives on equity, as well as calls for interdisciplinary applications of social psychology to climate research and policy (E.G., FERGUSON – MCDONALD – BRANSCOMBE 2016). As highlighted in this special issue, the complexity of the climate crisis requires an interdisciplinary effort to understand the motives and narratives that influence how multi-scalar actors make sense of the climate crisis and their actions (or inaction) toward meaningful solutions. We offer this framework as a tool for translating insights from social psychology into new and impactful research toward this end so that we may understand and intervene when social identities act to hinder collective climate action.

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"For Generations, Farmers Have Preserved the Environment, Now You Are Endangering It": Affective-Discursive Practices in European Farmers' Reaction to Climate Policy

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ABSTRACT The farming sector is one of the sectors most affected by climate change while simultaneously contributing to around 20% of global greenhouse emissions. To alleviate the pressures of agricultural production on nature and climate, the European Union (EU) established a new set of agri-environmental regulations positioning farmers as crucial actors in providing sustainable food and safeguarding the environment. However, farmers are increasingly contesting these regulations and mobilizing through EU-wide protests. Despite the obvious potency of the farmers' actions, scholarly studies problematizing their manifestation in the context of climate governance are scarce. This paper addresses this gap by analyzing the 2023–2024 farmers' protests in Slovenia to examine the interplay of affects and discourse in meaning-making among the farmers, which shows a mobilization driven by anger and fear as well as self-importance. The paper thus contributes to the knowledge on agrarian populism and farmers' mobilizations in the European context, uncovering complexities and nuances of the articulated affective-discursive canon.

INTRODUCTION

Since the adoption of the European Green Deal (EGD) in 2019, the European Union (EU) has increasingly supported a comprehensive transition to a more sustainable way of food production aiming to reduce the environmental and climate footprint of its food system (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2020). For these purposes, the EU has introduced the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy, which aims to shift farming practices towards more sustainable ones. The goals defined in the F2F strategy are to be achieved as part of the broader reforms within existing policies, particularly the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) (BAZZAN ET AL. 2023). This implies that significant changes in farmers' practices will be necessary to meet EU requirements, presuming an active engagement of rural communities and farmers in addressing adaptation and mitigation challenges. However, since the introduction of the EGD, but especially since 2023, we have witnessed an upsurge in farmers' protests spreading across the EU in response to the proposed changes, with some protesters employing a populist rhetoric to amplify their grievances and garner broader public support. The 2023 wave of protests did not bypass Slovenia – where the last major protests before then occurred in the early 1990s as the country was transitioning into neoliberal markets.

During the protests, farmers expressed their opposition to additional agri-environmental requirements and additional tax burdens (DNEVNIK 2023A; PETROVČIČ 2023; RTV SLOVENIJA 2023A). As the Slovenian farmers were disappointed by the government's reaction to their demands, and in line with the EU protests, Slovenia experienced a resurgence of protests in February and March 2024. The farmers once again voiced their disagreement with the government regarding the then current and additional legislation, expanding their demands to include solutions regarding the exemption from taxation for areas with limited agricultural activity and compensation in the event of a ban on agricultural cultivation in riparian areas, among other issues (RTV SLOVENIJA 2024A). These two waves of farmers' protests in Slovenia were *"undoubtedly historic"* (LOVENJAK 2023), drawing several thousands of farmers and their supporters. Their significance is further amplified by the diversity of farmers that were involved in these protests: young and old farmers, organic and conventional ones, and small-scale and large-scale

operators. This broad participation has led to the characterization of the protests as truly "all-Slovenian."

Considering the crucial role farmers play in achieving the goals of the EGD and the growing expressions of resentment and frustration from farmers across the EU, a deeper assessment of farmers' concerns and perceptions about heightened environmental and climate rules and regulations becomes imperative. This is especially true in the context of International Relations (IR) scholarship – while research started assessing the role of non-state and private actors in global climate governance (STRECK 2020; SUISEEYA ET AL. 2021), farmers are perennially missing from these investigations. Hence, this paper focuses on farmers' reactions and concerns regarding the prospect of stricter agri-environmental standards, as expressed during the recent EU-wide protests. The tension between the positions farmers assume has been escalating into protests with more intensity than before while holding a distinctly transnational character, thus raising concerns about the future of sustainable food production and the viability of new agri-environmental rules. Early analyses and reporting also point to this concern, albeit following two main issue areas.

On the one hand, the analyses imply that the farmers' protests risk eroding the climate agenda as the business interests of farmers trump the need for the implementation of sustainable agri-environmental rules. The authors talk of 'special interests' which are seemingly prioritized as *"every time there is a demonstration, there is more money coming [in subsidies]"* (MALMSTRÖM 2024), and the EU is bowing down to the business interests of farmers and therefore *"taking marching orders from a parasite of its own creation"* (DUTKIEWICZ 2024). On the other hand, the farmers' protests are increasingly related to right-wing populism in association with climate change denialism and anti-science rhetoric. Miller (2024) writes that by their proximity to right-wing populism, the farmers *"are damaging the profession they claim to represent"*, while Schatzschneider (2024) claims that *"giving into [sic] the farmers on climate is now effectively giving ground to the far right"*. Such reporting found grounds in earlier studies that explored support for and receptiveness to right-wing populism in rural areas (HAJDU – MAMONOVA 2020; MAMONOVA – FRANQUESA 2020; STRIJKER ET AL. 2015).

However, we find that the root question of the farmers' relation to the environment and environmental policy is missing from the current discussion, and it is arguably crucial to understanding how farmers may navigate their complex position in the agri-environmental discourse. As Magdin (2024) argues, beyond scrutinizing the protest tactics as an *"aesthetic exercise"*, we should use this opportunity to have an honest discussion and a genuine engagement with what is expressed by the farmers. Overemphasizing false claims related to the protests does not *"just obscure the protesters' real demands, but also amplifies existing scepticism and suspicion of the EU's climate policies"* (DE LA FELD 2024). Taking into consideration the pressing nature of the successful implementation of agri-environmental rules, we thus turn the lens to grievances expressed by the farmers regarding their complex and interdependent relation with the environment and climate-action policies.

To do so, we analyze the farmers' protests under the banner of agrarian populism, which we find to be a fruitful springboard for investigating contemporary farmers' protests and their relevance to world politics. With this, we are focused on how agrarian populism shapes the farmers' mobilization strategies and the discourses which the farmers draw upon and which are infused with different affective dimensions. In discursively analyzing how the farmers issue claims about the new regulation, their role in protecting the environment and their resentment over the way agri-environmental policies are made, we thus center the role of affects at the core of our inquiry. Accordingly, in the analysis, we introduce Margaret Wetherell's (2012, 2015) concept of affective-discursive practice as a heuristic device for analyzing the farmers' protests. With this, we are concerned with assessing how affects are intertwined with discourse and how this plays out in practice. Therefore, this study addresses the following research question: How do the discursive-affective practices that have emerged during the 2023–2024 farmers' protests in Slovenia reflect the farmers' grievances around their role within environmental and climate governance? With this question, we aim to unveil the underlying motivations and concerns driving the farmers' reactions, as well as to analyze the implications of these responses for the implementation of environmental policies in agriculture. By answering this question, we contribute to the

literature on farmers and farming action amidst the increased agri-environmental regulation and in the context of recent farmer mobilizations in the EU and beyond.

The article is structured as follows. In the first chapter, we contextualize farmers' protests in the EU and beyond, assessing our comprehension and evaluating their relevance regarding the successes of agri-environmental regulation. In the second chapter, we establish our conceptual and analytical framework through a discussion of agrarian populism studies and the affective-discursive approach. In the third chapter, we establish our methodology, and in the fourth, we move to the empirical analysis of the Slovenian farmers' affective-discursive canon. The two final chapters offer a discussion of our findings and draw conclusions as to their implications for future agri-environmental policy and governance.

UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVERS BEHIND THE FARMERS' DECISION TO ENGAGE IN PROTESTS

The imposition of additional rules under EU and national agri-environmental policies rooted in the EGD and operationalized through the new CAP has been one of the main triggers behind the farmers' protests across the EU. The first wave of protests began in 2019 when Dutch farmers staged extensive traffic disruptions, utilizing their tractors to orchestrate the nation's largest-ever protest. These protests were ignited by the government's announcement of plans to buy out and shutter livestock farms as part of a concerted effort to significantly reduce nitrogen emissions (VAN DER PLOEG 2020). In 2023, a similar policy announcement led Belgian farmers to block the traffic across the streets of Brussels, while German farmers protested proposed cuts to diesel subsidies and a surge in taxes (DW 2023; EURONEWS 2024). By early 2024, farmers from Spain, Italy, Germany, France, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, and other EU countries joined the protests, voicing their opposition to the introduced changes in agri-environmental policies. They particularly criticized certain provisions of the F2F and the CAP, such as the mandatory reduction of pesticide and fertilizer use, the increased support for organic farming, and the efforts to rewild landscapes (GILL 2024). The farmers argued that these policies are unattainable and are driving up their costs, making their products more expensive and less competitive than non-EU imports (FRANCE 24 2024).

Beyond the EU, farmers' protests have emerged across the world, resonating especially with farmers from the main food-producing countries. In Brazil and Argentina, farmers protested the demands for identical environmental protection standards as those in the EU, while in India, farmers have been regularly protesting since 2020 against the liberalization and corporatization of the country's agricultural markets (BAVISKAR – LEVIEN 2021; SIEGFRIED 2024). The latest wave of protests in India and the EU was said to be politically timed, with both Indian and European Parliament elections occurring in 2024, which further points to the relevance of farmers' mobilizations in shaping the political agenda (ROGIN – MUFSON 2024). As protests were rolling out ahead of the EU elections, Politico (VINOCUR – BRZEZIŃSKI 2024) reported of far-right parties in Europe "piggybacking on farmers' noisy outrage", while a report of the European Fact-Checking Standards Network revealed a weaponization of the farmers' protests by various far-right groups, which led to a situation where *"the representations of these protests have now converged towards a single meta-narrative, advocating for a substantial redirection or termination of European climate policies"* (LARRAZ 2024).

While it is not claimed that farmers are necessarily the originators of anti-climate narratives, the spread of such rhetoric with the ongoing protests created a strong depiction of farmers' interests as being incompatible with the EDG, the F2F or the green transition (HILMI – FRISON 2024). This opened up a broader discussion about farmers, the environment, and climate change, which inevitably rests on the question of farmers' support for various adaptation and mitigation strategies (VAN DER PLOEG 2020). Filtering the phenomenon of farmers' protests through the lens of climate change and its possible denialism brings up a situation where, as Matthews (2024: 84) explains, *"instead of being seen as heroic producers of a vital commodity, they [farmers] are increasingly described as environmental villains and climate destroyers"*. This tension proves to be the essential element of farmers' grievances; as Hilmi and Frison (2024) note, farmers aren't necessarily *"asking for handouts but for recognition of their essential role in society"*. This conundrum is then related to the farmers' motivation and willingness to comply with new agri-environmental rules.

A growing body of research on the increasing adoption of agri-environmental policies analyzes European farmers' perceptions, attitudes and behavior, assessing which factors influence farmers' decisions as to whether they will adopt sustainable farming practices. The key influences include pro-environmental attitudes, goodness of fit and past experiences as well as openness to new experiences and the role of interpersonal relationships (BARTKOWSKI – BARTKE 2018). Brown et al. (2021) caution against the simplicity of some explanations for farmers' decisions as to whether they will implement sustainability measures, since such explanations result in skewed political perspectives, especially when they concern a productivist ethos being imposed on farmers. Studies done by Rust et al. (2022) and Polge and Pagès (2022) show how farmers rely on their knowledge networks and interpersonal relationships as they navigate mitigation and adaptation strategies. Farmers filter new information *"through a fine mesh of perceived credibility and trust"* (SLIGO – MASSEY 2007), where they rely more on peer networks than traditional 'experts,' who are seen as not being empathetic towards farmers or aware of the realities they face (RUST ET AL. 2022).

The key takeaway from these discussions is that the farmers' engagement with new agri-environmental rules hinges on trust in and support for the farmers, while the exclusion of farmers from such discussions may lead to their alienation and refusal to participate. These insights implicitly tap into the emotional or affective dimension of farmers' behavior related to adoption and mitigation strategies. However, while it has been established that emotions influence farmers' behavior (LEBEL – LEBEL 2018; O'KANE ET AL. 2017; RIEPLE – SNIJDERS 2018; STEVENS ET AL. 2020), the role of emotions in farmers' decisions to protest against new agri-environmental rules is yet to be assessed. In this sense, a failure to explain the full extent of motivations behind farmers' decisions to adopt or reject new agri-environmental rules could result in poorly formed incentives, decreased participation from farmers and even a distortion of their motivations in the long term, thus causing a reduction in the effectiveness of policy implementation (BROWN ET AL. 2021). To truly assess and understand the farmers' meaning making, we cannot separate it from the affective component of their messaging. The latter allows us to contextualize the farmers' mobilization in historical, social, and ideological environments conducive to meaning making. While studies have shown the impact of the politics of resentment in the USA in matters of rural consciousness (CRAMER 2016), and relatedly in the lack of

support for environmental regulation (HOCHSCHILD 2018), these insights are yet to be properly assessed within the European context. Drawing on an analysis of the affects employed by the protesting farmers, we thus offer a new perspective for farmers' protest studies, explaining the affective potency of farmers' discursive messaging.

POPULISM AND THE PROTESTING FARMERS' AFFECTIVE CANON

We approach farmers' movements and mobilizations through the concept of 'agrarian populism', understood as *"the political bundling of various rural-based or rural-oriented social groups and class interests and issues into a homogenised category 'the people of the land'"* (BORRAS 2019: 5). Some notable historical examples of agrarian populism are the Russian *Narodniki* movement and United States *People's Party*, while the most visible modern manifestation of it can be found in the food sovereignty movement *La Via Campesina* (IBID.). While there are varieties of agrarian populism, the broadly shared features of such mobilizations include the use of an 'us' vs. 'them' rhetoric, an anti-capitalist stance, advocacy of small production as a sustainable path and an emphasis on collaboration and diversity (HAJDU – MAMONOVA 2020). In our analysis, we embrace the discursive approach to populism as developed by Laclau (2005) to suggest that populism represents a political logic which can be employed with varying degrees of frequency, intensity, and consistency. This means that we understand agrarian populism as a special form of populist discourse available in farmers' toolkits, which is combined in diverse ways with the grievances they seek to communicate by protesting environmental regulation.

With the rise of populism across the world, even those scholars who are otherwise sceptical of agrarian movements and their emancipatory potential, are becoming more open to assessing this phenomenon. Bernstein (2018: 1146) points out this shift, arguing that *"for a variety of reasons agrarian populism appears a more vital ideological and political force"*. This was proven especially true in the case of the upsurge of the Farmer-Citizen Movement (BoerBurgerBeweging, BBB) in the Netherlands, which gained traction during the first farmers' protests in 2019. The BBB has since successfully galvanized the protesting farmers' political discontent while broadening its electorate to people in the countryside in general

(ROODUIJN – DE LANGE 2023). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the farmers' protests point to different underlying tensions and grievances related to agrarian populism in the context of the effects of environmental governance, new climate action policies and the rural condition in general. The canon of populist studies has long acknowledged the role of emotions, especially as the 'discursive force' implicated in building and organizing communities (SOLOMON 2012), which complements the growing scholarship in IR exploring emotions and affects in world politics (ÄHÄLL 2018; HOMOLAR – LÖFFLMANN 2021; HUTCHISON – BLEIKER 2014; KOSCHUT 2018).

As Kinvall (2018: 10) explains, it is important to recognize how discourses and emotions overlap as emotional investment is tied to the institutionalization of shared collective identities where our emotional pattern in regard to particular circumstances is always *"intertwined with social, cultural, and political contexts"*. In general, populism has been labelled as an 'emotional' phenomenon, and typically described in pejorative terms – but what we can gather from the so-called emotional or affective turn in IR is that decision-making *"relies conjunctly on emotions and cognition"*, the two being intimately related and interdependent (BONANSINGA 2020: 98–99). This highlights the importance of illustrating *"how affects, emotions and discourse are produced together in multiple ways in actual practice"* (KINNVALL 2018: 10).

With this in mind, we turn to Wetherell's (2012) insistence on assessing these links as complex puzzles which operate in everyday life, thereby producing different consequences and entailments. In this sense, affect is never independent of language, but is constructed through the process of signification, showing how the affective element of the discourse produces meaning and confers legitimacy and power (KOSCHUT ET AL. 2017). For Wetherell (2012), affect speaks of both traditional psychological notions focused on emotions and the broader concept which highlights difference, process, and force. Turning to affect allows for an exploration of how subjects make sense of and communicate affect, while also uncovering and emphasizing relationality, articulation, and entanglement (WETHERELL 2013). Wetherell's approach to affective-discursive practices builds on practice theory through its application in social psychology. If social practice is understood as *"a nexus of doings and sayings"* (SCHATZKI 1996), affective-discursive practice further assembles or articulates different

patterns of activity that articulate emotion, discourse, and meaning (WETHERELL ET AL. 2015). Assessing the patterns of affective-discursive practices thus emerges as a fruitful avenue for the analysis of affect and emotion, as such assessments explore how exactly the domains of semiosis and affect are intertwined (IBID.).

Exploring the 'affective canon' of the protesting farmers thus allows us to identify which affective-discursive practices become relevant in this case and how they manifest in variation of frequency and content (WETHERELL 2012). To do so, we utilize the analytical tools of the affective-discursive approach – discourse, affect and the subject positions employed by the farmers. We pay attention to discourses about agri-environmental regulation, focusing on both the themes raised by the farmers and the affective charge of their rhetoric, and assessing them as patterns through which affective-discursive practices are constructed. Furthermore, we try to establish the subject positions in which the farmers appear in these practices but also the subject positions afforded to policymakers and other actors and made available in the practices. By distinguishing affective-discursive practices, we thus observe their discursive functions, and the affects and subject positions established by them (SAKKI – MARTIKAINEN 2022).

All in all, the affective-discursive approach gives (agrarian) populism scholarship an entryway into a comprehensive understanding of how the farmers make sense of the new agri-environmental regulation and, more broadly, their position within the climate change discourse. The patterning of affective-discursive practices in this way acts as an avenue for investigating the way the farmers respond to the agri-environmental regulation through the realms of semiosis and affect working together (WETHERELL ET AL. 2015). This further enables a closer explanation of how the farmers develop distinctive affective-discursive practices embedded in specific social, spatial, and temporal contexts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this research, we analyzed 54 articles that shed light on the farmers' protests in Slovenia during 2023 and 2024, and were published by five primary informative media sources in Slovenia: RTV Slovenija,

24ur, Delo, N1, and Dnevnik. From these sources, we extracted the claims, demands, and comments articulated by the farmers during and in relation to the protests, particularly those concerning the stricter EU and national agri-environmental regulations. In addition to these materials, we conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with Slovene farmers from November 2023 to January 2024. During these interviews, the farmers were asked to provide insights into the EU-wide protests, though the focus was on the developments specific to Slovenia. They were also prompted to share their emotions evoked by the protests and their perspectives on the significance and repercussions of the policy changes prompting the farmers' protests. To ensure a heterogeneous sample, we selected farmers from various regions across Slovenia for the interviews, and the sample was to represent diverse farming methods and practices, as well as a range of ages and genders. For anonymity purposes, pseudonyms are employed in the paper instead of the real names of the farmers.

The limitations of this study regarding the selection of materials and data-gathering methods arise from the fact that the data primarily reflect the views, understandings, and positions of a specific group of farmers – those who were present and actively engaged in the protests. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to represent the views of all Slovene farmers. Moreover, a significant limitation is the absence of detailed demographic and socio-economic data on the farmers who delivered speeches or provided statements to the media during the protests. This lack of information hinders our ability to draw broader conclusions about the diversity of perspectives within the protesting farmer population and attribute specific affective-discursive practices to particular subgroups of the protesting farmers. Therefore, while this paper addresses the perspectives of (protesting) farmers, it does not explore which specific types of farmers may be more or less represented in these protests. Consequently, our analysis is centered on the affective-discursive practices that were most commonly implemented during the protests.

We initiated our analysis by extracting vital data from both the media articles and the interviews, and coding them to discern patterns in the construction of the reasoning and demands articulated by the farmers. Subsequent rounds of coding enabled us to not only structure these patterns based on their wording but also consider the context in

which they were invoked and the emotional nuances accompanying them. Through these iterative examinations, and by employing analytical tools from affective-discursive scholarship (WETHERELL 2012; WETHERELL ET AL. 2015; SAKKI – MARTIKAINEN 2021, 2022), we identified various discourses, affects, and subject positions that emerged among the farmers amidst these protests. Ultimately, by systematically pinpointing and categorizing their analytical functions, we consolidated them into four distinct affective-discursive practices. This concept speaks to *"articulating, mobilising and organising affect and discourse as a central part of the practice"* (WETHERELL 2015: 57). By drawing on affective-discursive practices, we can capture how the farmers' advance privileged discourses, signal their importance and therefore marginalize opposing discourses and their advocates and place them into obscurity. In the analysis guided by Wetherell et al. (2015: 59) and Sakki and Martikainen's (2021) studies, we use the terms 'affect' and 'emotion' interchangeably, acknowledging that making epistemological and ontological distinctions between the two may be difficult to preserve. However, we also acknowledge that some forms of being affected can be more organized than others – here, 'affect' may refer to more generic and 'emotion' to more specific articulations (IBID.).

ANALYSIS

The analysis of our data regarding the farmers' protests against the new agri-environmental policymaking in Slovenia from 2023 to 2024 reveals the emergence of four interconnected affective-discursive practices: farmers as innate protectors of nature, environmental protection as a peril to the farmers, suffocating farmerdom, and farmers as guardians of the (home)land. The identified affective-discursive practices, along with the discourses, affects, and subject positions they entail, are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1: INTERPLAY OF DISCOURSES, AFFECTS AND SUBJECT POSITIONS

Affective-discursive practices	Farmers as innate protectors of nature	Environmental protection as a peril to the farmer	Suffocating farmerdom	Farmers as guardians of the (home)land
Discourses	Knowledgeable about nature protection due to experience and expertise.	Political decision-making without farmers.	Increasing demands on top of the farmers' already unstable standing.	Importance of farmers in safeguarding nature, people, and the nation.
Affects	Humiliation, Resentment, Horridness	Anger, Resentment, Disillusionment	Fear, Self-pity, Anxiety	Assurance, Self-importance, Empowerment
Subject positions	Environmental savants (us), The Ignoramuses (them)	Discounted outsiders (us), Elite insiders (them)	Victims (us), Unruly imposers (them)	Patriots, Heroes (us)

FARMERS AS INNATE PROTECTORS OF NATURE

The affective-discursive practice of farmers as innate protectors of nature constructs an image of farmers as actors inherently destined to safeguard nature. This discourse is rooted in farmers' perceived deep connection to the land and animals, which is forged through the farmers' dedicated labour and long-term engagement with farming practices. Through the constructed subject position of "environmental savants", the protesting farmers are portraying themselves as uniquely qualified to critique policymakers and environmentalists, whom they perceive as the main culprits for the formulation of the new environmental regulations. By challenging their expertise and knowledge, farmers portray them as "Ignoramuses", mobilizing a range of affects, including horridness, humiliation, and resentment.

FIGURE 1: PROTEST BANNER: "WHO HAS BEEN SAFEGUARDING BARJE UNTIL NOW?"

Source: Dnevnik 2023c. Photo taken by Tatjana Pihlar.

One of the proposed policy changes that has faced strong opposition from the farmers is aimed at addressing the declining condition of grassland butterfly species, birds, and habitats within Natura 2000 areas. Among other measures, this includes bans on grazing, fertilization, and grass mowing before 1st August in Ljubljansko Barje, which is an area under Natura 2000 protection. These measures are viewed as horrifying by the protesting farmers as they see them as detrimental to Slovenian agriculture, and as potentially leading to the closure of numerous farms operating on these lands. Feeling unjustly targeted in the pursuit of higher nature conservation standards, the farmers raise a rhetorical question on a banner attached to a tractor: *"Who has been safeguarding Barje until now?"* (DNEVNIK 2023C).

This example highlights the affect of resentment as the protesting farmers emphasize that their expertise in caring for nature and animals has been disregarded and undervalued by the proposed policy changes. As one farmer claims: *"We respect all forms of life, which is why we treat our animals and plants responsibly,"* but *"the countryside should not and must not become an open-air museum"* (RTV SLOVENIJA 2023C).

The farmers argue that they are the primary stewards of nature, sustaining its vitality, and assert that the government should leave them to farm as they see fit rather than imposing frequent new regulations on them (Marko, personal interview 2023[1] and Vid, personal interview 2024[2]). As Anton Medved, the leader of the Farmers' Union of Slovenia, expressed at the protest: *"For a thousand years, we have farmed these lands and preserved nature, but now we only face restrictions. Farmers are horrified by these demands"* (N1 2023A).

The affectiveness of these claims depends on their factualization. However, unlike a study by Venäläinen (2022), where arguments are substantiated by references to scientific research findings, the farmers support their claims by relying on their traditional and inherent knowledge of nature preservation acquired through their long-term daily interactions with the land and animals. Thus, their positioning themselves as environmental savants due to their traditional knowledge and farming expertise allows them to dictate the "correct" social and political approaches towards nature conservation and justifies their continued utilization of natural resources (KURZ ET AL. 2005) or, in this case, the land for farming.

Furthermore, this affective discursive entanglement depicts the constructed irrationality and ridicule surrounding the proposed conservation and other environmental measures, and this discourse is employed with simplified language and rhetorical questions to diminish the credibility of these measures and their proponents (TORMIS ET AL. 2024). Government officials and environmentalists advocating for stricter environmental legislation are having their knowledge and expertise devalued through the chosen lexical style. They are accused of implementing *"irrational and unsustainable environmental measures"* (RTV SLOVENIJA 2023A), with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food (MAFF) being a *"mere courier for European directives"* (RTV SLOVENIJA 2023B).

This raises questions about the necessity of such a ministry if all the restrictions are proposed by environmentalists (DELO 2023B). These discursive and affective processes are positioning government officials and environmentalists as environmental "others" (LOCKWOOD 2018; TORMIS ET AL. 2024) in relation to the farmers, as irrational "ignoramuses" contrasted with rational "environmental savants". Their perceived lack of knowledge

and expertise is further disparaged with derogatory labels such as *"so-called activists," "armchair environmentalists"*, or simply *"idiots,"* and they are accused of engaging in "environmentalist experiments" that are *"at odds with farmers' wisdom"* (24UR 2023A; DELO 2023B) (Alen, personal interview 2023[3]). These terms serve to amplify the negative emotional reaction and exaggerate the irrationality of their actions by invoking mockery and ridicule, which is a common strategy to make one's position more acceptable to a wider audience (SAKKI – MARTIKAINEN 2021, 2022)

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AS A PERIL TO THE FARMER

The affective-discursive practice titled "Environmental protection as a peril to the farmer" highlights the farmers' critique that political decision-making, including the new environmental rules and regulations, constitutes an exclusive arena where policymakers act without the farmers' input and without consideration of their best interests. *"Why protest? Because Slovenian officials, with their non-transparent and arbitrary decision-making, and blind compliance with demands from Brussels offices, are taking away the Slovenian farmers' place, their families' future, the caretakers from Slovenian nature, and our domestic food from Slovenian citizens"* (RTV SLOVENIJA 2024A).

By invoking the discourse of "political decision-making without farmers", the protesting farmers express their discontent with the government's exclusionary approach and channel the affects of anger, resentment and disillusionment through protests. As depicted in the extract above, the protesting farmers are angry and resentful towards politicians for operating in a non-transparent manner and making arbitrary decisions without taking into consideration what the protesting farmers refer to as the "farmers' position". Additionally, the farmers believe it is unjust for the focus of the blame for climate change and environmental issues to rest on them rather than on the industries that degrade and pollute agricultural land, or on consumers who contribute to the problem through their food waste (RTV SLOVENIJA 2023C); Lovro, personal interview 2024[4]). This perceived inequity fosters a perception that policymakers prioritize certain actors and their own agendas over the interests of the farming community, thereby producing distrust among the farmers vis-à-vis the policymakers.

The protesting farmers view the policymakers' decisions as irrational and disconnected from established farming practices, which further alienates them from their elected representatives. This combined effort of the employed discourse and affect constructs two opposing subject positions (DAVIES – HARRÉ 1990; WETHERELL 2013), where the politicians are represented as the "elite insiders" having the power to make decisions for the farmers, but their actions further erode trust in their ability to advocate for the interests of the "common people" (BUZOGÁNY – MOHAMAD – KLOTZBACH 2021; SCOTT 2022). Along these lines, the farmers claim that *"[t]he ministry has no connection with the reality of farmers in Slovenia"* (Ema and Rok, personal interview 2023[5]), and that *"[t]hey are the ones setting the rules without even understanding what they entail, what kind of lives farmers live"* (Klemen, personal interview 2023[6]).

On the other hand, the protesting farmers perceive themselves as marginalized "discounted outsiders", a subject position characterized by deep frustration and disillusionment with policies that fail to address their needs and additional environmental demands imposed by "elite outsiders." They also assert that the government consistently dismisses their concerns and suggestions, exacerbating their sense of exclusion. Despite reaching out to the MAFF and participating in public forums, the protesting farmers lament that their input has been consistently disregarded (Alen, personal interview 2023; Lukas, personal interview 2024[7]). They claim that even when they were involved in the decision-making process, such as in the preparation of Slovenia's CAP strategic plan, the result came to be a completely different story from what they were advocating for (DNEVNIK 2023B), which continuously reaffirmed their position as outsiders: *"It is a repeating pattern; we have never been heard. They never consider us, ask for our opinion, or invite us when decisions are made regarding laws and common land policies as if we do not exist"* (24UR 2023A).

This positioning of the farmers as "discounted outsiders" or "neglected others" emphasizes their feeling of being unheard and unnoticed, as outlined in the previous excerpt. This perception validates the pervasive affects of disillusionment and anger they hold towards the government and its policy-making procedures, given their precarious position (VENÄLÄINEN 2022). Consequently, the protesting farmers argue that their

precarious circumstances compel them to take to the streets and participate in protests, seeing it as necessary for asserting their visibility and amplify their voices.

SUFFOCATING FARMERDOM

Invoking the affects of fear, anxiety, and self-pity circulating within the farming community due to the ongoing imposition of new regulations and increasing environmental requirements – conditions that the protesting farmers claim are particularly burdensome amidst the already challenging and difficult conditions in which they operate – constitutes the core of the affective-discursive practice of pointing to suffocating farming conditions: *"I have been living on the farm for sixty years now, but it has never been like this before. Just paperwork and restrictions. You cannot do this, you cannot do that. How are we supposed to work?"* (RTV SLOVENIJA 2023A).

As this description resembles the situation in the Netherlands (VAN DER PLOEG 2020), the above excerpt illustrates that the protesting farmers assert that they are driven to protests by the overwhelming pressure of constantly escalating rules and regulations, which positions those who enforce them as "unruly imposers". When asked about his thoughts on the Natura 2000 proposal, Vid (personal interview 2024) expressed his bewilderment, stating that he cannot comprehend *"what kind of person you (government officials) have to be to lead your own people into misery"*.

These examples illustrate the discourse in which the protesting farmers not only feel suffocated by the multitude of rules and regulations they must adhere to but are anxious as they fear the negative impact of these policies on their farming practices and their lives (SIEBERT ET AL. 2006; KURZ ET AL. 2010). The constant imposition of rules by the EU and the Slovene government has positioned them as "unruly imposers", with the protesting farmers blaming them and their disorderly and illogical policymaking for the farmers' revolt. However, what really exacerbates the magnitude of the affective distribution of fear, anxiety, and self-pity among the protesting farmers is the claim that the introduction of these new regulations and more stringent environmental standards would add to the existing daily obligations and struggles farmers face in sustaining their livelihoods from agriculture.

The interviewed farmers express that they constantly sacrifice their time, energy, and even small luxuries like beach holidays or new clothes and cars to invest in their farms, simply to survive in the farming business. In the agricultural arena, they are subjected to price fluctuations for their products, unfair purchase prices, constant rises in the costs of agricultural inputs such as pesticides or fertilizers, both conventional and organic, and ever-increasing prices of agricultural land. On top of that, the farmers express their increasing anxiety about grappling with the repercussions of the changing climate, and contending with severe droughts, floods, emerging diseases, and pests, which are further compounding the difficulties they face in their daily agricultural activities and intensifying their overall struggles. These challenges introduce a new frontier for them in times of the changing climate, one they are uncertain about how to navigate within their current agricultural practices. Therefore, the expressed resistance to changes in farming practices and regulations, as demonstrated during the protests, also stems from their fear of self-preservation and anxiety about the potential impacts of additional environmental legislation on their livelihoods (KOTTER – SCHLESINGER 2008). The protesting farmers emphasize their fear of being unable to manage both regulatory shifts and the day-to-day operations of their farms.

The entanglement of affect and discourse here both determines and reinforces the subject positioning of the farmers as victims – victims of the *"EU Green Deal"* (RTV SLOVENIJA 2024B), *"victims of undemocratic decision-making"* (DELO 2023B), and victims of unruly imposers. As seen in other protests, like the Gilets Jaunes protests in France and the farmers' protests in the Netherlands (VAN DER PLOEG 2020; BUZOGÁNY – MOHAMAD-KLOTZBACH 2021), the protesting Slovenian farmers' complaints stem from a sense of social injustice resulting from years of neglect by the governing officials that is now exacerbated by the agri-environmental policy shifts. Thus, the affective-discursive position of the victim, embodying the necessity of self-pity, has been regularly persistent among farmers around the globe, resulting in their defensive attitude towards those whom they perceive as culpable for this injustice (SIEBERT ET AL. 2006).

FARMERS AS GUARDIANS OF THE (HOME)LAND

We observe the emergence of the fourth affective-discursive practice, "farmers as guardians of the (home)land", through the discursive portrayal of farmers as essential caretakers who nourish the Slovene people, feed them, and provide a clean and orderly environment. Here, farmers are no longer victims but construct their subject positionings as heroes and patriots indispensable for the nation's existence.

FIGURE 2: A PROTEST BANNER STATING "NO FARMER, NO FOOD, NO HOMELAND"

Source: Regionalni 2024. Photo by: Farmers' Union of Slovenia.

The protesting farmers emphasize their crucial role in supplying food for their customers and catering to the Slovene population's needs. Additionally, they stressed their pivotal function in environmental stewardship, preserving the landscape's beauty. As one farmer stated: *"If we don't farm, all of this will overgrow, and the landscape will be completely different; there won't be any butterflies, nothing; it will turn into a primaeval forest"* (24UR 2023B).

In exercising the role of environmental managers, the protesting farmers proclaim that they not only bolster tourism but also help the nation

save on the expenses of hiring additional landscape managers (Niko, personal interview 2023[8]). Thus, through their protests, the farmers assert their self-importance and their subject position as heroes, not only as providers of food and managers of the environment but also as the ones who hold the well-being of the entire country in their hands. With the farmers being driven to protest, they claim the nation is already experiencing negative effects of their absence in the fields; it is already "bleeding" (RTV SLOVENIJA 2023A). Nonetheless, they feel compelled to protest, claiming that: *"[o]ur demands concern the national interest, the interest of all Slovenes, the Slovenian state"* (RTV SLOVENIJA 2023C).

This practice of intertwining affect and discourse serves to construct the specific meaning highlighting the indispensable role of farmers, while it implicitly holds those hindering their efforts accountable for jeopardizing the nation's prosperity and welfare (WETHERELL 2013; SAKKI – MARTIKAINEN 2022). However, what truly amplifies the affective force of their protesting stance and reinforces their subject positioning as heroes is the assertion that they are acting for the benefit of the Slovenes, positioning themselves not only as indispensable but also as inherent patriots, as members of the people (OFSTEHAGE ET AL. 2022). When they unite as a collective sharing a profound love for their homeland and facing common challenges, this positioning fosters a sense of assurance and a responsibility to support farmers (SAKKI – PETTERSSON 2016). On the other hand, they argue that failing to do so implies a lack of desire for serving the country's best interests.

Elevating the farmers' significance and positioning them as heroes and patriots contributes to the social recognition of their pivotal role in safeguarding Slovenia (WETHERELL ET AL. 2015). This fosters a collective consciousness regarding their indispensable contribution to the nation's preservation, thereby effectively mobilizing empowerment (CHAKRABARTI 2022) and prompting the farmers to unite: *"Let's say this together – enough is enough"* (N1 2024). *"Farmers from all over Slovenia are urging us to persist, as it concerns the Slovenian nation and the Slovenian farmer who produces food for the Slovenian consumer"* (N1 2023B). With the protesting farmers on the streets, driven by a "shared" purpose and a deep sense of assurance, their actions aim to symbolize a broader movement towards a stronger, more resilient Slovenia.

DISCUSSION

Examining the four affective-discursive practices that reveal the protesting farmers' grievances regarding the potential intensification of agri-environmental regulations reveals that the farmers feel both threatened and pressured from two sides. On the one hand, these policies explicitly target their farming practices, leading them to perceive themselves as being blamed for Slovenia's climate and environmental challenges. On the other hand, by targeting these same practices, the policies imply that addressing these issues necessitates fundamentally altering farming methods. As a result, the protesting farmers feel caught in a double bind, as they are portrayed as both guilty of environmental degradation and responsible for mitigating it. This duality places them in a challenging and contradictory position, as through protests, they seek to distance themselves from these identities via a complex interplay of social positioning and affective engagement.

The protesting farmers argue that they are being portrayed as guilty of climate change and environmental degradation frames them as 'villains' or 'destroyers' of the environment (MATTHEWS 2024). This characterization fuels the farmers' grievances and prompts an affective-discursive response aimed at reshaping the narrative around their roles (WETHERELL 2013). In this reframing, the protesting farmers demand not to be seen as the perpetrators, but rather as victims who fear for their future as farmers and are striving to manage their farms amidst increasingly frequent extreme weather conditions, which bring new diseases, rising costs, and numerous challenges. Moreover, they argue that they are further burdened by unjust and humiliating additional political requirements, which only exacerbate their already precarious situation.

Through strong emotions such as anger, fear, and injustice, which are frequently associated with populist logic (RICO ET AL. 2017; MAMONOVA – FRANQUESA 2020; SAKKI – MARTIKAINEN 2021), the protesting farmers are invoking the victim position that not only serves to bind them together but also serves to make their claims resonate with most Slovenian citizens. The latter are the ones who will suffer equally from these new environmental regulations, as the consequences extend beyond the availability of local, nutritious food to encompass the loss of vibrant landscapes if the farmers

cease their activities due to the challenging farming conditions imposed by these regulations. Here, populist logic serves to connect "the people" by highlighting how these regulations impede their daily lives, fostering a collective sense of injustice and rallying them around shared grievances (TORMIS ET AL. 2024). Rather than blaming themselves or other farmers for climate change and environmental issues, the protesting farmers suggest looking elsewhere: at industrial emissions and land misuse, the large quantities of food waste, or policymakers making irrational decisions that fail to consider farmers' realities. Critically, the protesting farmers remark that when these factors are not considered, *"nature is being protected in a highly selective manner"* (RTV SLOVENIJA 2023C). Echoing sentiments observed among Dutch farmers (VAN DER PLOEG 2020) and directing the criticism elsewhere, specifically towards the policy-makers, whom they portray as "ignoramuses", absolves the farmers of responsibility for adjusting their practices to align with environmental realities.

Furthermore, the protesting farmers also respond to the portrayal of them as being responsible for addressing climate and environmental damages by invoking affects of resentment and horridness, asserting that they are already protecting the environment. They depict themselves as environmental savants who gained environmental knowledge through their deep dependence on nature and their everyday outdoor labor. The protesting farmers stress that their expertise in and understanding of the environment deserve recognition, but they feel consistently disregarded and undervalued in the decision-making processes. What emerges here is that the farmers emphasize that they are already playing a significant role in protecting the environment. Thus, they dissociate themselves from politicians, whom they see as unfairly placing the blame for environmental degradation on them while lacking an understanding of farming practices and overlooking the contributions of other sectors to climate change and environmental damage.

Consequently, the protesting farmers do not view agri-environmental rules as measures to protect the environment, but as a way to restrict their land use. This ongoing conflict between farmers and policymakers over the perceived right to manage natural resources has historical roots (GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA ET AL. 2009) and can be understood within a broader discourse that frames "too much" climate change mitigation and environmental

protection as a constraint on resource use that ultimately hinders economic growth (VAN DEN BERGH 2023). It is, indeed, this discourse that the protesting farmers are tapping into as they argue that they are already fulfilling their share of environmental protection and that additional burdens threaten their crucial role as food producers. To amplify their claims, they are invoking a populist logic grounded in ethnonationalism to position themselves as heroes and patriots indispensable to the nation's well-being and the Slovenian people they feed (OFSTEHAGE ET AL. 2022; TORMIS ET AL. 2024). In this narrative, they emphasize their irreplaceable contribution to society, defending their role against perceived political pressures.

Overall, the analysis of the four affective-discursive practices reveals that farmers are actively negotiating their position in relation to agri-environmental regulations. Despite their differing frustrations, the farmers collectively express a sense of being "discounted outsiders" neglected by policymakers and unjustly targeted by agri-environmental rules. In articulating their grievances, the protesting farmers consistently distance themselves from elected officials, creating a pronounced "us" versus "them" dichotomy underscored by an anti-elitist stance. This aligns with populist logic, which portrays elites negatively as oppressors indifferent to the needs and desires of the people (LOCKWOOD 2018; SAKKI – PETTERSSON 2016; TORMIS ET AL. 2024). Consequently, the protesting farmers perceive policymakers as oppressive, uninformed, and unreasonable, and as pursuing environmentally questionable objectives that jeopardize farming and diverge from not just their interests, but the interests of the entire nation. Thus, the agri-environmental regulations proposed by "them" are perceived as unjust and burdensome, with the farmers believing that these additional demands exacerbate their already precarious situation. Despite their expertise in food production and land stewardship in Slovenia, they stress that they feel consistently disregarded and undervalued in the agri-environmental decision-making process.

Thus, it can be inferred that similarly as in the case of the protests in France and Spain, the Slovenian farmers' positioning and affective-discursive practices are centered on frustrations regarding agri-environmental policies, the perceived injustices surrounding the development of these policies and the policymakers responsible for them rather than on rejecting environmental concerns or the importance of nature protection

altogether (BUZOGÁNY – MOHAMAD-KLOTZBACH 2021; BUJDEI-TEBEICA 2024). The analysis reveals a multifaceted distrust of government officials that perpetuates a sense of alienation from the perceived elite "others" among the farmers and erodes their sense of being represented by the elected officials. This has further fueled widespread opposition, which has materialized as extensive EU-wide protests.

It is important to note, however, that their protesting against agri-environmental measures in this case does not necessarily imply that the farmers are opposed to all forms of environmental protection or that they are climate sceptics, as has sometimes been suggested in media and scholarly research (BRUNNER 2024; DAVIDSON ET AL. 2019; HESS ET AL. 2024). The Slovene farmers have expressed their commitment to the environment and nature and recognize the burdens that a changing climate imposes on the operation of their farms. This indicates that whether their motivations are altruistic or opportunistic, they do acknowledge the necessity of sustainable practices. However, the question remains whether this recognition translates into meaningful action. In line with Knežević Hočevar (2018), our interviews revealed that Slovene farmers, regardless of their operation size or method, be it organic or intensive, view their practices as environmentally sustainable. Nonetheless, scientific evidence indicates that agriculture remains the second-largest emitting sector in Slovenia and that significant improvements can still be made to reduce agriculture's environmental impact (CLIMATE MIRROR SLOVENIA 2022). Currently, however, farmers are distrusting policymakers and feel that opportunities for dialogue and compromise are limited, which makes it increasingly challenging to find a constructive path forward.

CONCLUSION

This paper examines how affects and discourses cooperate to construct the meaning-making around farmers' protests against the intensification of sustainability demands in agri-environmental policies at both the Slovenian and the EU levels. The analysis of the four affective-discursive practices employed by the farmers shows us that the farmers feel angered and horrified by what they perceive to be an unjust culpability and an unjust responsibility that are placed on them in matters of environmental issues, while policies are decided on without them despite their extensive

practical expertise in farming and environmental stewardship. We identify a prevalent utilization of populist logic by the protesting farmers with the aim to amplify their sense of injustice and voice their claims, whereby they distance themselves from the perceived "elite others" or government officials, portraying them as irrational, ignorant, and disconnected from the realities of farming. In contrast, the protesting farmers position themselves as victims whose invaluable knowledge and expertise are disregarded in policymaking. Moreover, through an ethno-nationalist rhetoric, the protesting farmers emphasize their vital role in preserving Slovenia's land and nation, framing farming not just as a profession that sustains the Slovene population but as an embodiment of patriotic values.

By examining the interplay between affects, discourses and subject positions, we underscore the necessity of understanding the complex rationale behind the protests. We illustrate that the farmers' resistance to the increased agri-environmental measures does not necessarily stem from a lack of concern for the environment or disbelief in climate change. Rather, it is a response to specific policies and the policymakers behind them. This resistance is rooted in a sense of exclusion compounded by feelings of being unjustly labelled as primary polluters, a lack of recognition for their contributions, and the overwhelming burdens imposed by political decisions. Moreover, through their protests, the farmers position themselves as allies of the general populace, who similarly feel victimized by the oppressive policies of the "elites". This framing effectively distances the farmers from government officials while aligning them with "the people", thus strongly evoking the logic of agrarian populism.

The analysis of the farmers' protests in Slovenia offers two crucial insights that are essential for understanding the significant implications of farmers' protests for international relations and the global development of climate change and environmental policy. Firstly, the dissemination of populist logic during farmers' protests may lead to broader shifts in the EU's political landscape that would impact governance, agri-environmental policy-making, and the overall cohesion of the EU. As demonstrated in the case of the Netherlands, the far-right BBB party achieved notable success in the 2023 provincial elections by aligning its platform with farmers' grievances and employing a similar populist logic, thereby raising doubts about the increased regulation of nitrogen reduction in the Netherlands.

Additionally, at the EU level, the European People's Party has chosen to realign itself as more sympathetic to farmers, partly in response to various national and regional election outcomes indicating a growing support for populist far-right parties in rural areas, which has led to the relaxation of EU agri-environmental targets (EURONEWS 2023; MATTHEWS 2024). By making these concessions, primarily aimed at alleviating the unrest among farmers and preventing further alignment with far-right parties, the EU is temporarily appeasing the growing discontent within the agricultural community. However, this approach ultimately undermines its climate and environmental initiatives and allows far-right groups to exploit farmers' grievances and feelings of disenfranchisement.

Secondly, through the interplay of affect and discourse, farmers are re-negotiating their role in global governance, seeking to communicate an alternative meaning and focus of agri-environmental policies. As the analysis has shown, the potential and abilities of farmers as relevant actors in IR should not be underestimated, nor should their mobilizing power be overlooked as irrational or reactive. Since 2023 farmers' protests have spread to over 65 countries worldwide, illustrating that while reasons for discontent vary from country to country, farmers are increasingly *"feeling under political attack"* (HADAVAS 2024). While farmers are not typically a part of studies of non-state or transnational actors in IR, the increasingly transnational character of farmers' mobilizations shows that the conception of the 'rural' as an arena of political contention does not only concern national or subnational levels. The illustrated dynamics of farmers' protests expand beyond national boundaries, in many ways aligning with different polycentric collective struggles emerging around the issues of climate change and agriculture. Grappling with those therefore requires new kinds of discussions and the inclusion of non-state actors such as farmers in scholarly analyses of climate policy and the green transition in IR.

ENDNOTES

1   Interview with Marko, Slovenia, 15 November 2023.

2   Interview with Vid, Slovenia, 5 January 2024.

3   Interview with Alen, Slovenia, 28 November 2023.

4   Interview with Lovro, Slovenia, 30 January 2024.

5   Interview with Ema and Rok, Slovenia, 19 December 2023.

6   Interview with Klemen, Slovenia, 30 November 2023.

7   Interview with Lukas, Slovenia, 31 January 2023.

8   Interview with Niko, Slovenia, 17 November 2023.

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Crafting Utopias through Environmental Denial: The Far-Right Populism of Bolsonaro and Milei

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ABSTRACT

Existing studies of radical right-wing populism have primarily analysed populist leaders like Milei and Bolsonaro through their retrotopian appeals to past authoritarianism, often overlooking their forward-looking utopian projections. This gap in the literature obscures how their rejection of the status quo frames the climate crisis as a manufactured dystopia – one they counter by dismissing its very existence. Drawing on insights from utopian studies, this research seeks to fill this gap by providing tools for deconstructing the covert utopias envisioned by these leaders. Specifically, it examines how Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022) and Javier Milei (2024 – present) craft their utopian imaginaries and the role that environmental denial plays within them.

INTRODUCTION

In the current scenario, the growing demand for transition minerals is exacerbating the conflict between economic growth and environmental sustainability in the Global South (CRESCENTINO – CABALLERO 2025). While extractivism has long been a cornerstone of economic development in countries like Brazil and Argentina, such prevailing global dynamics have intensified this clash. Under the leadership of the radical right-wing populist presidents Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022) and Javier Milei (2024–present), both of these States have reinforced deregulated resource extraction as the basis for export-led development strategies, dismissing environmental concerns as obstacles to economic revitalization. Thus, while much has been written about both leaders' reactionary economic and social policies, the environmental consequences of their agendas remain significantly under-researched. In this context, climate change denial is deeply intertwined with broader political and ideological agendas, which is consistent with a global reactionary movement that rejects the multilateral order in favour of economic freedom and reduces complex issues – such as climate change – to ideological tools in a binary struggle between liberalism and communism.

Despite the extensive literature on radical right-wing populism, existing studies tend to overlook how leaders like Milei and Bolsonaro not only invoke a nostalgic return to an imagined past – what Bauman (2017) refers to as 'retrotopia' – but also articulate a utopian future centred on individual freedom and entrepreneurship. This gap in the literature obscures the ways in which their rejection of the present frames the climate crisis as a *manufactured dystopia* – an *establishment* strategy for increasing control, where denial becomes resistance, and liberation an imperative. In this process, Bolsonaro and Milei present climate change as part of a *status quo* constructed through the lens of a *dystopian Other*, using it as a foil to define their visions of social and economic order. Yet, they frame their narratives with a pragmatic, technocratic veneer, rejecting any ideological or utopian underpinning. In doing so, they dismiss alternative political visions as ideological and utopian, while shielding their own expansionist agendas from critical scrutiny, thus embodying the 'anti-utopian utopianism' described by Levitas (2007: 300).

Drawing on insights from utopian studies, this research aims to fill the existing gap by exploring how Bolsonaro and Milei embed environmental denial within their broader political visions. I examine how they craft their utopian imaginaries and the role that environmental denial plays within them. The identification of these hidden utopias sheds light not only on the strategies of these leaders, but also on a broader phenomenon: the growing alignment between right-wing populism and climate scepticism. By portraying environmental concerns as dystopian constructs imposed by globalist elites, leaders like Bolsonaro and Milei legitimize extractivist policies, cast climate action as a threat to national sovereignty and economic growth, and rally support around narratives of liberation and self-sufficiency.

Following this introduction, the article is structured as follows: first, a theoretical analysis of the role of climate change denial within radical right-wing populism that also identifies gaps in the existing literature; second, an exploration of how these populist movements engage with utopian visions that introduces utopian studies as a framework to address these gaps and better understand the role of climate change denial in their political strategies; third, an empirical study of Bolsonaro and Milei's utopian frameworks and environmental denial; and finally, a conclusion presenting the findings and recommendations for future research.

RADICAL RIGHT-WING POPULISM AND CLIMATE CHANGE DENIAL

Climate change denial has become a fundamental component of radical right-wing populism's vision for an alternative global order, particularly in the Global South, where it reinforces opposition to global governance, cosmopolitan elites, and environmental and economic constraints. Despite the differences between right-wing movements, their proposals for an alternative global future share some common features: a commitment to unilateral sovereignty, radical neoliberalism and an identity rooted in traditional values. Advocating a world free of 'globalist' impositions, they prioritize bilateralism and unregulated markets, echoing Hayekian notions of a self-regulating natural order (DE ORELLANA – MICHELSEN 2019: 766). This worldview also reflects the Schmittian friend-enemy distinction, in which globalization and its cosmopolitan ethos are portrayed as an existential

threat to national cohesion and traditional values. As Sanahuja and López Burian (2020) argue, right-wing populism frames this struggle as a retrotopical return to a lost Arcadia – an idealized past untouched by the forces of modernity and Enlightenment principles.

Domestically, right-wing populists' distrust of the liberal international order and its technocratic elites is reflected in a lack of faith in democratic institutions, which are seen as incapable of addressing societal problems in a timely manner. By intensifying the delegitimization of the system through *guerrilla tactics*, far-right populists mobilize their constituencies in cultural battles, which often leads to protest votes and provides fertile ground for radicalism (BETZ 1994). Once in power, they institutionalize a crisis of representation with anti-elite, anti-pluralist rhetoric and performative strategies, invoking the 'common sense' of ordinary people to advance contentious political actions (OSTIGUY 2020: 39; JANSEN 2011; MÜLLER 2016).

Framing the dismantling of the state and the liberation of the market as the only path to individual freedom (BETZ 2022; KESTLER 2022: 293), they position themselves as defenders of the national interest and direct public anger at the 'other' – those perceived as agents of globalist elites (SANAHUJA – LÓPEZ BURIAN 2020). This 'other' includes the democratic state and the national establishment (political parties, corporate and financial elites, the media and academia), as well as voters who are unwittingly complicit in a system manipulated by elites who obscure the real forces eroding individual freedoms, and marginalized groups, who are portrayed as destabilizing traditional values. While structural factors such as the impact of globalization explain some of their appeal, Lockwood (2018) argues that the ideological content of these movements – authoritarian, socially conservative and nationalist values – provides a more compelling explanation.

In this context, deteriorating socio-economic conditions, coupled with the failure of traditional political parties to integrate a development model compatible with environmental sustainability, have led to a demobilization of environmental consciousness. As an alternative, far-right leaders have adopted authoritarian tactics to manage natural resources, relying on top-down, extractive strategies that are presented as essential as a means to create jobs, economic growth and national sovereignty and prosperity (OFSTEHAGE – WOLFORD – BORRAS 2022: 672). This emphasis on development and

recovery can be seen as part of broader utopian projections of progress where visions of a prosperous national future are constructed to legitimize policies that prioritize immediate economic gains over long-term environmental sustainability.

This crisis of representation highlights the challenges of addressing climate change as a complex and opaque issue. Lockwood (2018) notes that effective solutions require complex transnational cooperation to navigate numerous technical obstacles, trade-offs, intergroup compromises, uncertainties and long-term impacts. Furthermore, climate policy is often shaped by international scientific processes and negotiations that are often delegated to technocratic bodies. These dynamics fuel populist narratives that accuse liberal and cosmopolitan elites, including climate scientists and environmentalists, of prioritizing corrupt special interests over national concerns. Additionally, as Darian-Smith (2022: 287–288) points out, political leaders are often reluctant to prioritize issues such as climate change, partly because of the international cooperation required and partly because of the fact that policy outcomes are long-term, involve numerous variables and do not yield immediate electoral benefits. This reluctance reinforces critiques of liberal democracy by fostering mistrust of climate science and policy because of their complexity, which contradicts populist appeals for more direct and simplified governance.

This scepticism not only propagates distrust of technocratic governance, but also undermines confidence in climate science itself. As Roque (2023: 190) notes, this approach does not target science per se, but serves as a strategy to manage an existing crisis of confidence in the technocratic knowledge and actions of global organizations and their experts. By challenging established scientific claims and asserting their own interpretive authority, populist leaders seek to appeal to audiences that are increasingly skeptical of science and its benefits. In the context of this broader crisis of confidence (IBID.: 189), conspiracy theories become an important part of their communication strategy. These theories act as a 'shield' allowing populist leaders to deflect responsibility for governance failures, and as a 'weapon' positioning epistemic authorities (VON BEHR 2023) as untrustworthy elites with immoral agendas against the people.

Climate skepticism and denial thus become strategic tools within the far right's broader agenda to disrupt the entrenched *status quo*. By framing international climate frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda, and domestic environmental regulations – as well as NGOs and environmental justice movements – as instruments of international elites and their multilateral institutions, they appeal to fears of loss of sovereignty and economic stagnation. Furthermore, this narrative helps to contrast a dystopian present marked by environmental collapse and regulatory overreach with a utopian vision of unregulated market freedoms, national self-determination and individual autonomy where economic development is not to be constrained by foreign agendas. As will be discussed, this vision is particularly important in extractivist economies such as Brazil and Argentina.

Building on these broader themes, it is crucial to examine the specificities of right-wing populism in the Global South, where local histories and structural conditions shape the rise of reactionary ideologies. Avoiding the traditional Orientalist dichotomy that positions the Global North as the source of knowledge and the Global South as a passive recipient, recent approaches call for a more nuanced understanding of political movements in these regions (MASOOD – NISAR 2020; PINHEIRO-MACHADO – VARGAS-MAIA 2023; KESTLER 2022). These perspectives emphasize how neoliberal policies intersect with social precariousness, creating fertile ground for reactionary populism. As Masood and Nisar (2020: 164) argue, studying right-wing movements in these contexts enhances our global understanding, offering a pluralist and decentralized view that better reflects the interconnectedness of right-wing narratives worldwide.

In light of these findings, the following section explores how utopian studies contribute to understanding the ways in which right-wing populist movements craft their narratives, including the role of climate change denial in their visions of an alternative social order.

WHEN DID UTOPIAS TURN RIGHT? THE
FAR RIGHT IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

In 2016, scholars worldwide celebrated the 500th anniversary of Thomas More's *Utopia*, recalling how utopianism can help transform the world by imagining alternative ideal realities. According to Pro (2022),

utopias embody the urge to challenge the established order and imagine its transformation, and criticize the present while looking with hope to what is *yet-to-come*. As Berenskoetter (2011: 657–662) outlines, utopias share three key characteristics: they are rooted in existing perceptions of reality, drawing on past and present experiences to be seen as plausible and connect with the familiar; they offer the potential for transformation, allowing individuals to imagine a future different from their current state; and they present open-ended visions that are adaptable to new experiences and ideas, allowing for broad interpretation and evolution over time.

Ultimately, examining utopias through this lens should facilitate an inquiry into the manner in which societies architecturally manifest these redefined ideals in concrete national and international policies and structures. Utopian impulses influence the horizons of expectations and create a context within which decision-makers can interact with their environment, articulate their interests, and define priorities for action. Berenskoetter (2014: 273) states that visions underpin all planning and investment processes. They engender expectations about the potential outcomes of actions and decisions, thereby influencing the way in which individuals and communities perceive their possibilities for being in the world.

While these authors provide a definition and key characteristics of utopia to operationalize the concept for analysis, many studies have used the term without doing so, as the development of a coherent social theory of utopia is a relatively recent endeavour. Despite its profound influence on Western philosophy, it was not until the 1970s that utopianism was recognized as an academic field in its own right. Indeed, the intellectual advances of the twentieth century intensified scholarly interest in the historical analysis and close examination of utopian constructs, as utopias were now recognized as a subject worthy of study. Since the 1960s, pioneers such as Ernst Bloch were instrumental in broadening the scope of the subject, moving it beyond mere literary analysis and firmly into social theory – thus creating the *concrete utopias* that underpin this research. Bloch's foundational work paved the way for the identification of recurring themes in earlier utopian literature and the development of complex theoretical frameworks for their analysis. In the following decades, utopian studies grew within the broader social sciences, where many theorists, including Bloch himself, approached utopia as a vision of social transformation.

At the end of the 20th century, as the Cold War drew to a close, the socialist alternative entered its final crisis. Eastern European intellectuals bade farewell to the Marxist utopia and embraced market principles and consumerism, while their Western counterparts celebrated the triumph of Western-style capitalism and liberal democracy as the end of history (KUMAR 2010: 558). Moving away from large-scale social movements, some scholars have since focused on the postmodern strategy of small-scale campaigns and micro-utopian imaginaries. These fragmented political expressions, which advocate minor cultural adjustments rather than challenging social structures (EAGLETON 1996: 23), are, as Żuk (2020: 9) points out, confined to a small segment of society that enjoys a degree of ontological security. Isolated from global issues, this minority engages in micro-campaigns that help assuage their guilt and justify their inaction towards systemic injustices. Meanwhile, the lack of progressive visions leaves the majority of society vulnerable to the simplistic narratives of those who promote black-and-white views, deepening political and social crises and fueling right-wing populism.

Certainly, utopias are based on the interpretations that social and political groups make of their reality, including their understanding of the *status quo* and their projections for the future. In this sense, every society is intertwined with utopian narratives, which function as contested spaces where the definition of the *status quo* is challenged and defied while people look with hope to what is *yet-to-come*. As Jameson (1981: 291) argues, even ideologies that support the interests of the ruling class contain utopian elements – not despite their role in preserving privilege, but because they invoke collective solidarity to sustain hegemonic agendas. Consequently, contemporary far-right movements also engage in the battle for public opinion by crafting simple, open-ended utopian visions based on familiar perceptions and presenting their proposals as scenarios of a hopeful future that challenges the established order. However, these visions ultimately help to affirm a collective solidarity around a project that primarily serves to perpetuate existing inequalities.

This perspective may seem at odds with the traditional view of utopias, which is often associated with progressive social movements. Nevertheless, already in the post-war period, Friedrich Hayek (1949) emphasized the need for a liberal utopia to challenge social justice and the visible

hand of the welfare state, which he identified as the *status quo* and the cause of liberalism's failure. His utopia involved the creation of a pluralistic and open Great Society of autonomous individuals by removing obstacles to the spontaneous operation of the market economy. This would facilitate the transition to a global market society in which the free movement of goods and people across open borders would enable the establishment of a new international economic order (BOURDEAU 2023). Such an emerging liberal utopia was soon countered by Milton Friedman (1962), who, while agreeing with Hayek on the dangers of state intervention, rejected the utopian vision of a liberal society. Taking a pragmatic, reality-based approach, he argued that the tendency to see state intervention as a remedy for market failure was ineffective, as it forces individuals to act against their own interests for a supposed 'greater good'. Rather than imposing an unrealistic ideal, Friedman advocated individual freedom and free markets as more effective mechanisms.

Although contemporary capitalism and neoliberal globalization have achieved certain aspects of Hayek's liberal utopia, many ultra-liberals – including Bolsonaro and Milei – continue to criticize the collectivist tendencies they see in the *status quo*, particularly in multilateral organizations. They argue that these tendencies undermine individual freedom and market efficiency, and that dismantling them is key to achieving genuine autonomy. In contrast, other political perspectives contend that the growing dominance of the market has created an ideological hegemony that stifles resistance, necessitating state intervention to counterbalance the monopolistic power of global market actors and protect democratic values. In the South American context, the rise of the 'new' left in the 2000s and the resurgence of the far-right illustrate how these critiques are manifested in political movements responding to the failures of globalization and the tensions between state and market.

However, the extent to which they acknowledge their utopian foresights varies. Since its emergence, the left embraced ideals advocating alternatives to capitalism in order to address its most damaging social consequences. As Pro (2018: 208) notes, the link between socialism and utopia was so strong that both the discourse of utopian socialism (from within the movement) and the concept of socialist utopia (from without) emphasized it. Despite the Marxist view of utopianism as naive and impractical, and

its use by conservatives to discredit projects of social change, the positive revival of utopia in the twentieth century was largely inspired by socialism. It is therefore not surprising that contemporary left-wing politicians sometimes invoke the term to describe the goals of their political projects.

In contrast, contemporary far-right movements often reject utopianism. Murray N. Rothbard (2006: 381), a key influence on Javier Milei, argued that utopian systems disregard individual autonomy and pragmatic realities, which led him to advocate a populist strategy based on paleolibertarian principles.[1] This strategy sought to expose and bypass elite institutions – politicians, bureaucrats, corporate elites, media and academia – to engage directly with the masses. In *Right-Wing Populism: A Strategy for Paleolibertarianism* (1992), he proposed the dismantling of the welfare state, the abolition of central banking and the promotion of punitive measures alongside 'family values' and nationalism, which is embodied in slogans such as 'America First'. While rejecting state power, he advocated for robust social institutions and envisioned the formation of a coalition of Christian conservatives, radical libertarians, and members of the 'old right'. Many of these principles, albeit with different emphases, continue to shape the political platforms of today's right-wing leaders.

The diversity of coalitions informed by similar strategies has led these groups worldwide to adopt different approaches to gaining power, each envisioning distinct ways of 'radically breaking' with the present and shaping future expectations. This strategy of cultural warfare and grassroots mobilization has shaped their utopian anti-utopianism, their focus on challenging elite dominance, and their emphasis on cultural battles, while also fostering their cross-class appeal. Such elements are evident in both Bolsonaro and Milei's political strategies, which involve direct public engagement, sharp criticism of elites, and a rejection of the establishment – including intellectuals. As we will see, this enables them to link climate change denial to their broader opposition to a system they perceive as undermining individual freedoms.

Building on these strategies, the relationship between conservatism and utopianism invites further examination. While conservatism is traditionally seen as opposed to radical change (MANNHEIM 1960; GOODWIN – TAYLOR 2009; LEVITAS 2011), and therefore incompatible with utopianism (SCRUTON 1980),

the cases of Bolsonaro and Milei complicate this view. Their adoption of Rothbard's populist strategy combines a conservative rhetoric with transformative aspirations. At the same time, liberalism itself promotes an implicit utopian model, depicting the world as dominated by a statist establishment and envisioning a society in which individuals enjoy absolute control over their bodies and property,[2] free from state interference and, as Milei and Bolsonaro argue, *parasitic politicians*. This vision is consistent with their emphasis on free market principles and a society based on voluntary cooperation and private property rights. In this context, the interaction between social conservatism and paleolibertarian liberalism has given rise to a transnational utopian vision which, in a previous study, I called reactionary utopia (CRESCENTINO 2023).

Such utopianism is consistent with de Orellana and Michelsen's (2019) notion of reactionary internationalism, which, in line with Berenskoetter's characteristics of utopia, encompasses three interrelated dimensions. First, it involves the conscious adoption of a resistant subjectivity within a system perceived as dominated by unaccountable international technocratic decision-makers who serve global elites, while simultaneously advancing a reactionary stance that seeks to capture the state in order to dismantle liberal international norms and institutions. Second, this stance reimagines these structures through a radical vision rooted in individualism and free-market principles, drawing on Hayek's spontaneous order, Friedman's advocacy for limited state intervention, and Rothbard's blend of libertarian economics with conservative values. It presents a hopeful alternative to state control and globalist norms where free trade and the market's invisible hand are seen as guarantors of prosperity and peace. Third, it evokes simple, vague and open-ended visions that appeal to a wide range of social classes and age groups through a deliberately vague political agenda. This includes legitimizing anti-scientific narratives, such as climate change denial, by framing them as *dystopian* constructs of the multilateralist *status quo* aimed at restricting individual freedom.

Thus, by exposing the utopian elements hidden in the anti-utopian rhetoric of right-wing leaders, utopian studies provide a critical framework for deconstructing their discourses, revealing that their proposals are not simply emotional responses to public discontent, but deliberate efforts to

emulate hopeful future utopias. The following section analyzes the case studies of Bolsonaro and Milei, focusing on the role of climate change denial in shaping their visions of social order.

BOLSONARO AND MILEI: ARCHITECTS OF THE SOUTH AMERICAN FAR-RIGHT

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, Argentina and Brazil experienced a significant institutional instability largely shaped by the global dynamics of the Cold War. The period reached its zenith with the rise of violent anti-communist military dictatorships—with the Brazilian one lasting from 1964 to 1985, and the Argentinian one from 1976 to 1983 – followed by complex democratization processes. These transitions resulted in a commitment to liberal democratic principles and the development of competitive party systems, while remaining anchored in neoliberal economic development models. In this context, Brazil's Social Democracy (PSDB) and Democratic Movement and Workers (PT) parties, and Argentina's Justicialist (PJ) and Radical Civic Union (UCR) parties assumed leadership roles in the political landscape, consolidating the social rejection of authoritarianism.

After a decade of neoliberal liberalization in the 1990s, the reformist rhetoric of South America's new left governments became widespread, while the right found an unfavourable narrative in much of Latin America (LUNA – ROVIRA KALTWASSER 2014). In Brazil and Argentina, the PT and the PJ embraced progressive social reforms without dismantling the neoliberal economic framework of their predecessors (ROJAS 2024: 67). This limited transformation, heavily reliant on an economic re-primarization,[3] proved unsustainable in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. As economic instability deepened, internal divisions over governance failures, corruption scandals, and environmental policy fueled discontent, exposing rifts within the ruling coalitions and emboldening opposition forces.

Against this backdrop, reactionary narratives gained traction, portraying left-wing governments as an entrenched socialist *status quo* aligned with 'globalist elites' and hostile to national traditional values (MIRRLEES 2018; STEWART 2020). Drawing on the American alt-right, such discourses exacerbated political polarization by framing moderately reformist social

policies as either 'leftist' or 'communist' (WINK 2021: 39). Initially marginal, these imaginaries gained traction with the rise of the conservative, moderate-right governments of Mauricio Macri in Argentina (2015–2019) and Michel Temer in Brazil (2016–2018), both of whom were heavily criticized by far-right movements for being part of the 'globalist *status quo*'. Ultimately, their inability to provide a stable alternative to the left and address the concerns of disaffected voters reinforced the dominance of intolerant and extreme political narratives.

In 2016, Jair Bolsonaro's incendiary remarks during the impeachment of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, a member of the PT, set the stage for his rise to power, which culminated in his inauguration as president in 2019. Meanwhile, in Argentina, media economist Javier Milei rose to prominence amid the failures of both the PJ governments (2003–2015 and 2019–2023) and the liberal coalition Cambiemos (a partnership between Propuesta Republicana and the UCR, which governed from 2015 to 2019). Milei's rise to the presidency in 2023 coincided with Bolsonaro's defeat in his bid for re-election in Brazil, ensuring the permanence of a particular worldview and approach to politics in the South American political landscape. The two leaders share a populist, anti-establishment rhetoric, with a significant emphasis on state retrenchment.

Academic analyses highlight several key factors behind the electoral success of these leaders. In Brazil, economic downturns, escalating corruption scandals, rising insecurity, and a loss of public trust were crucial in this respect (HUNTER – POWER 2019; PEREYRA DOVAL 2021). In Argentina, these issues were compounded by uncontrolled inflation, declining confidence in the local currency, and a surge in drug-related violence, and these problems were exacerbated by a prolonged COVID-19 quarantine that exposed the challenges of balancing public health and economic stability (ROJAS 2024; SENDRA – MARCOS-MARNE 2024). Together, these concerns fuelled the delegitimization of traditional political parties and convinced voters that drastic change was needed. A common theme in the speeches of Bolsonaro and Milei is their criticism of what they see as an inefficient and overly restrictive state, which reflects a subjectivity resistant to the existing domestic socio-political order. As noted above, such critiques can be understood as a reactionary response to the *status quo* from which the utopian ideals

they espouse arise, with the aim of overturning the prevailing system in favour of a reimagined social model.

Despite subtle differences, both advocate the free market as the primary allocator of resources and promote an ultra-liberal economic model, presenting a vague but compelling utopian vision of a future in which state intervention is minimized and individual freedoms are maximized. Furthermore, while their approach to development mirrors the extractivist policies of previous governments, they differ significantly in their rejection of international norms, particularly the scientific consensus on environmental issues. To gain electoral traction, their political platforms oversimplify such complex issues, framing them as a dichotomy between liberalism and 'cultural Marxism', and creating open-ended narratives that resonate with a wide audience. These narratives not only legitimize continued extractivism as a means of economic revitalization, but, as noted above, also reject climate change as a product of the multilateralist *status quo* that, in their view, restricts individual freedom and national economic progress.

In order to synthesize the analysis of this process, this section is divided into two parts. First, it examines both future-oriented projects, analyzing their critique of the *status quo* and their proposals of a domestic liberal utopia *à la Hayek* that is internationally intertwined with a reactionary utopia. Second, it assesses how the convergence of these ideas employs a mass mobilization scheme that promotes an extractivist development model accompanied by anti-scientific sentiments and climate change denial strategies that help mobilize voters.

CULTURE WAR: INTELLECTUAL ENDEAVOURS, THE *STATUS QUO* AND THE REACTIONARY UTOPIA

The rise of Bolsonaro and Milei was not just a political shift, but the manifestation of a new reactionary intellectual space that disrupted the established order. Positioned at the crossroads of the dominant parties, this alternative space fused Hayekian ideals with alt-right rhetoric, led by a wave of liberal activists who used social media to mainstream their agenda. Their discourse fused an instrumentally authoritarian, morally conservative, and economically ultra-liberal agenda (WINK 2021), transcending

traditional right-wing divisions in Argentina and Brazil while reshaping the historical tensions between liberal-conservatives and nationalist-reactionaries (VICENTE – GRINCHPUN 2024).

In pursuit of this goal, leading intellectuals within these political circles – such as Olavo de Carvalho in Brazil and Nicolás Márquez and Agustín Laje in Argentina – advocated an *anti-progressive culture war*. They argued that despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, communism had entrenched itself in the cultural sphere and established a dominant *status quo*. According to their narrative, this dominance was achieved through the lobbying efforts of economic (transnational corporations), political (multilateral organizations and states) and ideological (academia, media and entertainment) actors. They claimed that having failed to abolish private property – the cornerstone of liberalism – this 'communist' agenda had shifted its focus to promoting *political correctness*, *multiculturalism* and *gender ideology*. These efforts, they claimed, were designed to undermine Western Christian values and institutions, particularly the family, in order to weaken capitalism from within. Thus, unlike the historical tendency of the far right towards economic segregation, this new movement seeks to unite liberal-conservative and nationalist-reactionary forces through *cultural guerrilla tactics* to form a radical opposition to progressivism.

Building on this ideological foundation, their strategy to consolidate power and influence involves a distinctive approach to appealing to 'real people', bypassing traditional media controlled by the *establishment* and instead using social media to communicate directly and freely. Their adoption of symbols (such as firearms in Brazil or chainsaws in Argentina, often alongside national and Gadsden flags) and their use of provocative rhetoric aim to attract media and public attention, defy 'political correctness' and assert their authenticity as the voice of the people, while emphasizing a reluctance to conform to elite norms (KIDRON – ISH-SHALOM 2024). This search for new communication mechanisms implicitly critiques not only traditional media but also conventional institutional spaces for political dialogue. In this context, the 'anti-woke' backlash consistently targets democracy and the political party system, advocating for reform while simultaneously invoking nostalgia for the authoritarian era and its associated values (SANTOS – TANSCHEIT 2019: 157), such as state control over social behaviour and the repression of activists and social movements. This

analysis creates fertile ground for retrotopian ideals that promise a return to an imagined past of order and tradition, positioning it as a counterpoint to the perceived chaos of contemporary liberal democracies.

In Brazil, the rationale for the political cleansing was based on the conviction that the PT was establishing connections with other regional authoritarian regimes through the São Paulo Forum, with the objective of promoting a communist Bolivarian dictatorship. Bolsonaro's political slogan 'Brazil above everything, God above all' appealed to the oligarchic elites, the armed forces and the church as a symbol of security and morality (PEREYRA DOVAL 2021). His strategy also encompassed executive intervention in other branches of government, particularly the judiciary and the legislature. He frequently advocated military intervention and threatened to close Congress and the Supreme Court. Moreover, through discursive allusions to biblical fragments or the use of the integralist slogan 'God, Homeland and Family' at his party's rallies, he encouraged the revival of conservative values from Brazil's authoritarian experience.

Reflecting a convergence of anti-PT sentiment and Brazil's tradition of anti-communist ideology, right-wing blogs and social media popularized alternative interpretations of the 1964–1985 civil-military dictatorship, presenting it as a safeguard against leftist dominance (BIVAR 2020). As a former military officer himself, Bolsonaro also leveraged the social capital of the military as an impartial, technocratic enforcer of order to consolidate his authoritarian rule. With this in mind, he appointed military personnel to ministerial and bureaucratic positions with the intention of protecting politics from a truly neutral and national standpoint (WINK 2021: 241). This strategy enabled him to exploit both the favorable public perception of the armed forces and the anti-PT sentiment within the military, particularly following the establishment of a National Truth Commission (2011–2014) to investigate human rights abuses during the dictatorship (PIROTTA 2023).

A similar phenomenon occurred in Argentina, where the PJ government was accused of supporting the communist Bolivarian ideals associated with the São Paulo Forum. For years, the nationalist right has argued that the current PJ is a continuation of the subversive armed groups of the 1970s, which they claim made the dictatorship (1976–1983) necessary (VICENTE – GRINCHPUN 2024: 188). This narrative suggests that the same left-wing

groups have remained in power since the return of democracy, and that the human rights policies implemented since then have been used to justify subversive terrorism, the targeting of the military, and the profiting from corrupt business practices. In response, right-wing groups have promoted historical revisionism to offer a different account of the dictatorship, arguing that the official version of events was shaped by those who, despite their military defeat, managed to secure a political and cultural victory. In this context, they stress the need to engage in a cultural struggle to reshape this history.

However, Milei's retrotopian project allows him to present a vision of a utopian society that is both deeply rooted in the past and forward-looking. This is evident not only in his revolutionary aesthetic, which recalls the Argentine liberators of the 19th century, but also in his political discourse, where his critique of mass democracy goes beyond mere nostalgia for the dictatorship. Much like Trump's MAGA, Milei's rhetoric reflects a desire to restore Argentina's 'greatness' of the late 19th and early 20th century, while framing this vision in the context of contemporary challenges. To achieve this, he advocates the systematic dismantling of the state development since 1916, when the first mass party came to power. However, as previously discussed, this stance is not driven by conservatism alone. As he is a paleolibertarian, Milei's critique of the state extends beyond its collective organization, which he argues fails to unite diverse interests into a common will and imposes the allegedly dangerous rule of the majority over minorities (REYNARES – VIVAS 2023). Accordingly, he advocates its complete dissolution, envisioning a utopian system in which individuals have full control over their bodies and property, and are free from state and political intervention.

In this context, while the political ascent of Milei and Bolsonaro is grounded in a retrotopian authoritarian agenda, their success also reflects their projection of a liberal utopia influenced by Hayek. As outlined in their speeches, both leaders share the ideal of an ultra-liberal society free from state corruption and inefficiency (WINK 2021). In opposition to the current social protection system, which they argue perpetuates a stagnant, state-dependent class lacking the motivation to innovate, they envision a system where the free market becomes the ultimate mechanism for social inclusion. This system would be driven by competition (the organizing

principle of a dynamic society) and inequality (the essence of freedom and self-regulation) (GIAVEDONI 2023). This position was articulated in their early presidential speeches:

> "I stand before the whole nation on this day as the day when the people began to free themselves from socialism, from the inversion of values, from state gigantism and political correctness. […] Brazilians can and should dream, dream of a better life with better conditions to enjoy the fruits of their labour through meritocracy" (BOLSONARO 2019A).

> "In the economy we will bring the sign of confidence, national interest, the free market and efficiency. […] We must create a virtuous cycle for the economy that will provide the necessary confidence to open our markets to international trade, while stimulating competition, productivity and efficiency without ideological bias" (BOLSONARO 2019B).

> "Today a new era begins in Argentina, an era of peace and prosperity, of growth and development, of freedom and progress. […] The only possible solution is adjustment, an orderly adjustment that falls squarely on the state and not on the private sector. […] The situation in Argentina is critical and urgent. We have no alternatives and no time […]. The political class is leaving a country on the brink of the deepest crisis in our history […] Today we begin to leave the path of decadence and take the path of prosperity; we have everything to become the country we have always dreamed of" (MILEI 2023C).

> "Libertarianism is full respect for the life project of others based on the principle of non-aggression, [and] in defense of the life, liberty and property of the individual. Its basic institutions are private property, markets free from state intervention, free competition, division of labour and social cooperation. […] This is the model we propose for the future of Argentina. A model based on the fundamental principles of libertarianism: the defense of life, liberty and property" (MILEI 2024A).

By positioning inequality as the engine of economic dynamism and social progress, the application of this liberal utopia allows for intellectual continuity with the extractivist approach of previous progressive governments, while avoiding the contradictions of their social commitments, including environmental concerns. In this context, climate change denial

becomes a key element in the intellectual articulation of these movements in line with their broader rejection of global governance and progressive environmental policies.

MOBILIZING THE MASSES: EXTRACTIVISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL DENIAL

As noted above, the 2008 financial crisis left a lasting legacy of deteriorating socio-economic conditions in Brazil and Argentina, which was exacerbated by the inability of traditional political parties to devise a development model that could reconcile economic growth with environmental sustainability. In this context, far-right leaders in power adopt authoritarian tactics to manage natural resources, relying on top-down extractive strategies that were framed as essential for job creation, economic growth and the safeguarding of national sovereignty and prosperity (OFSTEHAGE – WOLFORD – BORRAS 2022: 672).

However, in Brazil and Argentina, authoritarianism alone is not enough to quell civil opposition, resistance or the growing environmental awareness of extractive activities, as leaders must also secure the support of their constituencies to win elections and maintain the backing of their political allies to ensure the advancement of their initiatives. As a result, from the outset, the development model became an important arena for political polarization. As Moffitt (2015: 189–190) argues, populism not only emerges from crises but also seeks to provoke them by exposing failures that contribute to a crisis atmosphere, while polarizing public opinion through the media and simplifying political discourse. In this sense, the strategy of manufacturing opposition on environmental issues not only strengthened the traditional populist framework of opposition on which to construct 'otherness' and legitimize one's own position by generating alternative knowledge 'outside the mainstream', but also provided legitimacy for the liberal utopian policies of state retrenchment and deregulation.

By framing both the global and domestic environmental protection framework and civil society environmental organizations as elements of the *status quo* to be challenged, the populist leaders legitimized environmental degradation through sovereign and economic discourses that were

often accompanied by alternative scientific explanations that downplayed the significance of climate change. This perspective is consistent with evidence suggesting that right-wing populism is often accompanied by a rejection of the scientific consensus on climate issues (LOCKWOOD 2018; JYLHÄ - HELLMER 2020; DARIAN-SMITH 2022; ROQUE 2023; VON BEHR 2023), as it is consistent with anti-establishment sentiments.

When examining Jair Bolsonaro's environmental rhetoric, one can see that structural factors play an important role in shaping his approach. As Mendes Motta and Hauber (2022) argue, he capitalized on Brazil's economic crisis by framing environmental policies as obstacles to growth and portraying them as constraints imposed by international elites. This narrative sought to delegitimize environmental regulations and institutions while advancing an agenda that prioritized market-driven development, paving the way for the consolidation of his liberal utopia. Such a strategy was particularly beneficial to the extractive sector and global agribusiness, which were key allies for Bolsonaro that he portrayed as 'unfairly constrained' by existing environmental laws (MENEZES – BARBOSA 2021: 232; MENDES MOTTA – HAUBER 2022: 643).

Nevertheless, Bolsonaro's liberal utopia was limited by the conservatism inherent in the nationalist geopolitical vision of the armed forces, which were his key allies during his administration. Central to this vision was the concept of sovereignty, which the military saw as contingent on the occupation and exploitation of natural resources to assert territorial control and counter the perceived foreign encroachment in the Amazon. This perspective directly informed Bolsonaro's environmental agenda:

"It's about national sovereignty [...]. I will leave the Paris Agreement if this continues to be an issue. If our part is to hand over 136 million hectares of the Amazon, then I'm out" (BOLSONARO 2018).

"It is a fallacy to say that the Amazon is the patrimony of humanity, and a mistake, as scientists attest, to say that our forest is the lungs of the world. Taking advantage of these fallacies, some countries, instead of helping, have bought into the lies of the media and behaved in a disrespectful, colonialist manner. They have questioned what is most sacred to us: our sovereignty! [...] I would like to reiterate my position that any initiative to help or support the conservation of the

Amazon rainforest or other biomes must be treated with full respect for Brazilian sovereignty. We also reject attempts to instrumentalize the environmental issue [...] for the benefit of external political and economic interests, especially those disguised as good intentions" (BOLSONARO 2019C).

As Toni and Chaves (2022) note, Bolsonaro strategically manipulated environmental and climate issues by framing international concerns as a threat to Brazil's sovereignty, particularly in relation to the Amazon rainforest. In this context, deforestation in the Amazon was trivialized and scientific evidence was dismissed as biased and manipulated by international interests, which further legitimized the anti-science narrative that underpinned his policies. This tactic stoked nationalist sentiments within the government and motivated the armed forces to defend Brazil's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In parallel, the president and his ministers – notably Ernesto Araújo (Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2019–2021) – simultaneously promoted two interrelated narratives based on climate scepticism: a) the historical argument that environmental concerns have been used by wealthy nations to hide their own responsibility for environmental degradation and to justify protectionist measures in agribusiness and carbon markets; and b) the post-1990s conservative claim that global warming is a construct driven by left-wing ideologies, and designed to centralize global power, undermine Western democracies, and weaken national sovereignty and interests:

"Nationalism has emerged as the main convergence of forces opposing globalism [...]. One [of the instruments of globalism] is the ideology of climate change, or 'climatism' [...]. So is there climate change? Yes, of course, there has always been. Is it caused by humans? A lot of people say yes, but we don't know for sure. [...] Is this change so catastrophic that it requires the worst sacrifices, as is often said today? No [...] The purpose of climatism is to put an end to normal democratic political debate. The propagators of this ideology want to create a 'moral equivalent of war', to impose policies and restrictions that run counter to fundamental freedoms" (ARAÚJO 2018).

This narrative portrayed international institutions, scientific consensus and environmentalists as tools of a global elite intent on curtailing

Brazil's autonomy. Like Araújo, Bolsonaro frequently cited alternative conspiratorial studies to justify his anti-science stance (VON BEHR 2023), particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also in relation to climate change. In the long run, even though it was based on conservatism, such an approach facilitated the extension of the liberal utopia by paving the way for justifying and legitimizing the deregulation and defunding of environmental protection, the reduction of state control in this regard and the opening up of indigenous reserves to exploitation, among other measures (ROQUE 2023).

Eventually, this strategy backfired and affected Bolsonaro's governance (especially in relation to the 2019 Amazon fires and the COVID-19 pandemic), damaged Brazil's international reputation, affected its development model and trade agreements (including EU-MERCOSUR), and led to a decline in his popularity. As noted by Toni and Chaves (2022: 476), although Bolsonaro then softened his rhetoric and replaced key ministers with more moderate figures, these changes did not result in significant domestic policy shifts. In this respect, despite his losing the 2022 election to his opponent Lula da Silva (2023–present), being charged with an attempted coup in early 2023, and being banned from holding public office until 2030, Bolsonaro's role as an opposition figure has become increasingly radicalized. This suggests that despite his electoral defeat, he remains committed to consolidating a future liberal agenda.

Indeed, the Brazilian liberal utopia finds its hopes confirmed by the transnationalization of the networks of the reactionary utopia in its neighbour. In the case of Argentina it remains difficult to draw definitive conclusions, as Javier Milei has only been in office for a year. However, certain trends have emerged since his rise as a media figure and his time in Congress. Drawing lessons from Bolsonaro's failures, Milei continues to dismiss warnings of anthropogenic climate change as a socialist invention. Throughout his career as a media figure, a parliamentarian and now the president, Milei has consistently criticized the state's involvement in scientific research institutions and the scientists themselves, portraying them as defenders of the *status quo*. This criticism has been central to his political rhetoric and is reflected in his strategy of defunding universities and research institutes, including those focused on climate change. While his libertarian stance allows him to oppose state interventionism, it does

not extend to outright climate change denial. Instead, he offers his own interpretation of scientific facts. He summarized this view during a presidential debate:

"I am not denying climate change; I am saying that there is a temperature cycle in the history of the earth and this is the fifth point in the cycle. The difference from the previous four is that [in those,] humans were not involved. Therefore, all the policies that blame humans for climate change are bogus and just designed to raise money to fund socialist bums who write rubbish papers" (MILEI 2023B).

Milei's environmental discourse is also situated in the context of a prolonged economic crisis that has promoted narratives that prioritize economic growth over all other considerations. His rhetoric thus mirrors that of Bolsonaro, as both leaders employ populist strategies that reject scientific consensus in favor of appealing to the fears and economic concerns of their bases. Like his Brazilian counterpart, Milei argues that environmental regulation, like other forms of state intervention, hinders development and should be subordinated to the imperative of economic growth. Beyond this, he also frames environmental regulation as a tool imposed by international actors to undermine national sovereignty. But his critique also extends to the domestic political class, which he accuses of promoting these regulations in order to serve the interests of the elite, thereby prioritizing them over the needs of ordinary citizens:

"God has blessed our country with an enormous wealth of natural resources. […] But politicians have listened more to the demands of noisy minorities and environmental organizations funded by foreign millionaires than to [assertions of] the prosperity needs of Argentines. […] Nature should serve man and his well-being, not the other way around. Environmental problems must put people at the centre, which is why the main environmental problem we have is extreme poverty. And the only way to solve it is to use our resources" (MILEI 2024B).

"You will never see our administration advocate […] sustainable development proposals that prioritize the whims of pot-bellied politicians in rich countries when poor countries need to exploit their resources to lift themselves out of poverty" (MILEI 2024C).

"Let me take this opportunity to clarify this administration's position on some of the slogans of the misnamed 'global governance'. [...] When it comes to restricting the right of countries to freely exploit their natural resources, we're out. [...] In the coming decades we will see another race, a fiscal and deregulatory race in which the countries that protect individual freedom will prosper. [These countries will be t]hose that unleash their productive forces" (MILEI 2024D).

Incorporating climate change into the conspiratorial perception of a globalist agenda and the dominance of a transnational elite provides populist leaders like Bolsonaro and Milei with a platform to critique both climate decision-making and the scientific theories that inform it. In contrast to bureaucrats from distant transnational institutions imposing top-down directives, the populist leaders' approach simulates a decision-making process in which the masses are directly involved. Similarly, against the cautious and dubious understandings of the scientific community, far-right leaders offer their own 'scientific' truth. As Bolsonaro and Milei themselves stated:

"On climate issues [...], all we need is to contemplate the truth following John 8:32: 'And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'" (BOLSONARO 2019C).

"Global warming is another socialist lie. Ten or fifteen years ago, they argued that the planet was freezing. Those who know how these simulations are made will see that the functions are deliberately oversaturated in certain parameters to create fear" (MILEI 2021).

"Another conflict raised by socialists is that of man versus nature. They argue that humans are damaging the planet and that it must be protected at all costs, even going so far as to advocate population control mechanisms or the tragedy of abortion. The cruelest part of the environmental agenda is that rich countries, which became rich by legitimately exploiting their natural resources, now seek to atone for their guilt by punishing poorer countries and preventing them from developing their economies for an alleged crime they did not commit" (MILEI 2024A).

In addition, Milei's lack of a sovereignist component leads him to target what he sees as a statist, communist international elite that he claims is

undermining Argentines' economic freedom. However, this perspective also draws on his liberal utopia, as his support for the privatization of natural resources and the freedom to pollute becomes central to his arguments based on the belief that market forces, driven by consumer demand, will naturally limit corporate damage to the environment:

> *"If we have a problem with externalities, it is because we have a problem with poorly defined property rights. […] If a company pollutes a river, […] this is a society where they have a lot of water and the price of water is zero. So who is going to apply property rights to that river? Nobody, because they can't make any money. […] What do you think will happen when the water runs out? It stops being worth anything and then I have a business; someone will take over that river and then there will be property rights and they will see how the pollution ends"* (MILEI 2023A).

Such a belief has shaped his executive and legislative agenda since his taking office, as he has prioritized state reduction, economic deregulation, and resource management. In practice, this was reflected in the initial draft of the *Law of Foundations and Starting Points for the Freedom of Argentines* (2024), which proposed reforms to environmental laws to attract investment. Although it was ultimately rejected by Congress,[4] this reform bill perfectly encapsulated Milei's desire to advance the much-promised liberal utopia for Argentina.

With three years left in his term, there is little sign of a change in direction beyond strategies aimed at consolidating his ruling alliance. Notably, he is the Argentine president who has travelled abroad the most relative to the length of his term, often participating in ultra-liberal and reactionary transnational forums. This pattern suggests, in line with Hayek's aspirations, that despite the slow realization of his liberal utopia in Argentina, Milei seeks to position himself as a global intellectual leader of libertarian ideals and reactionary right-wing thought.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has examined the nexus between utopian studies and right-wing populism, with a particular focus on the environmental denial in Brazil under Bolsonaro (2019–2022) and that in Argentina under

Milei (2024–present). Drawing upon a contemporary interpretation of Hayek's liberal utopia – based on an intellectual framework that combines instrumental authoritarianism, moral conservatism and economic ultraliberalism (WINK 2021) – the paper analyzes Bolsonaro and Milei as key South American architects of radical right-wing populism. Both leaders advanced narratives deeply embedded in their respective national histories to promote domestic liberal utopias while simultaneously contributing to the global dissemination of a reactionary utopia.

The study illustrates how the far-right discourse in Brazil and Argentina extends the traditional populist dichotomy between 'the people' and 'the elite' to the environmental sphere. The related movements conceptualize global climate frameworks and scientific knowledge as instruments of an elite seeking to maintain the *status quo*, using climate denial and conspiracy theories to undermine the scientific consensus on climate change. By framing the climate crisis as a *manufactured dystopia*, they reinforce their own liberal utopian visions of a social order in which unregulated market freedoms, national self-determination and individual autonomy take precedence over environmental concerns. In practice, this narrative serves to delegitimize environmental regulation, justify the expansion of extractive industries and mobilize far-right constituencies.

This research agenda remains open for further exploration, particularly in the context of right-wing populism, both in government and in opposition, and the role of environmental policies and utopian imaginaries in legitimizing such regimes. Future research could also explore the different societal responses to climate change in Argentina and Brazil, where increasing insecurity, economic hardship and political polarization have led certain segments of the population to prioritize issues other than environmental concerns, with some individuals resorting to climate change denial as a coping mechanism. Such research would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between populism, environmental discourse and public perceptions of climate challenges in these countries.

Finally, the long-term impact of these environmental policies remains to be seen. In his third term, Brazilian President Lula da Silva has acknowledged these complexities by incorporating environmental concerns into his

agenda. However, tensions within his administration —such as recurring conflicts over environmental regulations and resource extraction— underscore how the global demand for strategic minerals remains a structural constraint on any government's ability to change established neo-extractivist models. With Milei's administration still in its early stages, both the economic success of his policies and the reactions of civil society and Argentina's political landscape remain uncertain.

ENDNOTES

1 Paleolibertarianism, as defined by Rothbard, merges libertarian economics with cultural conservatism, promoting minimal state intervention and traditional values. This explains why paleolibertarians are neither simply libertarians – given their emphasis on cultural conservatism – nor at all anarchists – as they are minarchists, supporting a minimal state to protect property rights.

2 Nevertheless, as noted above, the concept of bodily autonomy and property control in paleolibertarianism is framed within a context of conservative moral values that grant such rights primarily to white, heterosexual males. In this view, these rights are both racialized and gendered, extending unequally across different social groups.

3 An increasing reliance on extractivism that undermines industrial and technological development.

4 The final version focused exclusively on the Hydrocarbons Law, giving the national executive authority to regulate the environmental management of hydrocarbon activities with the approval of provincial governments. This was followed by the May Pact, which committed provincial governments to promoting the exploitation of natural resources.

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Rethinking the Climate Crisis Here and Now: Mahāyāna Buddhism, *Engi* Relationality, and the Familiar Pitfalls in Japanese and Taiwanese

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ABSTRACT

Climate inaction occurs partly because the 'problem' is often perceived as spatially and temporally distant. Contemporary Japanese and Taiwanese pro-nuclear energy narratives stress the necessity of nuclear energy for solving carbon emissions and energy security issues (here) and the urgency to retain and/or modernize nuclear power generation capabilities (now), despite its known vulnerability. This article deconstructs nuclear energy as a here-and-now solution to the climate crisis, and it proposes Mahāyāna Buddhism as a means to go beyond the modernist beliefs that gave rise to both the climate crisis and the nuclear energy solution. Drawing on Mahāyāna Buddhist thought where subjects are seen as being generated through relations with others (*engi*) and all beings are inseparable from and *intra*dependent with nature (*eshō-funi*), we argue that the aforementioned narratives offer a false promise to solve the climate crisis. This is because they ignore the relations between current and future generations, and their techno-national, modernist assumptions reproduce human/nature dichotomies.

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Europe found itself grappling with a deep energy crisis due to the disruption of Russian gas supplies. In the midst of public discussions, nuclear energy made its way back onto the agenda in countries like Germany and Sweden, which had previously worked to close down nuclear power plants (SOLOMON 2022). This process reached its culmination when the EU Parliament moved to back the re-labeling of gas and nuclear energy as green despite internal disagreements (ABNETT 2022).[1] This energy crisis and the ensuing debates reveal two fundamental but potentially contradictory questions in climate change and energy debates: (1) How do we (particularly individuals) minimize our carbon footprint by decreasing energy usage? And (2) how can society protect itself from future energy shortages? The underlying concern here revolves around the fear of scarcity; in other words, it is a concern for ensuring access to energy.

The fear of doing without energy lies at the heart of climate change discourse, particularly in the context of energy security, but rarely have the implications been explored (KESTER 2022). The fear of scarcity in public debates typically takes the form of a concern about a stable supply while the environmental, social, and economic impacts are minimized. While green energy options have gained prominence, public debates reflect a concern that their current capacity falls short of meeting global energy demands. Meanwhile, traditional fossil fuels, despite their association with authoritarian regimes and climate consequences, remain a significant part of the energy mix. It is within this 'energy security dilemma' that nuclear energy made a return to the public debate, as its low carbon footprint was emphasized as the most important characteristic despite other problems such as nuclear waste storage (HIBBS 2022). This is accompanied by a discourse emphasizing individual responsibility in mitigating climate impact, where individuals are increasingly urged to make behavioral changes – namely reduce energy consumption, adopt greener lifestyles, and support renewable energy initiatives (APPELGREN – JÖNSSON 2021: 13; KESSLER – RAU 2022: 59).

Other concerns associated with nuclear energy and climate change appear to become side-lined in the debate. This does not only concern risks involved with storage and disposal of high-level radioactive waste,

but also nuclear power plants' own vulnerability to climate-change-related risks such as typhoons, floods and other extreme weather events (JORDAAN ET AL. 2019). Moreover, operating nuclear power plants might pose harm to other environmental objectives such as *"sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources, pollution prevention and control and the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems"* (LÜNENBÜRGER ET AL. 2021: 6). In any case, nuclear power plants' vulnerability to climate change should logically raise questions about nuclear energy's purported ability to secure future energy supplies. Yet despite apparent contradictions, nuclear energy sailed up in the debate as the obvious solution to both climate change and energy security. The rise of pro-nuclear energy narratives is discernible not only in Europe, but also in Japan and Taiwan. This is puzzling if we recall that the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster was described by Prime Minister Kan Naoto[2] as *"the most severe crisis"* that Japan had faced in the postwar era (JOONGANG ILBO 2011). For people in Taiwan, the island's frequent earthquakes and similar geological conditions mean that what caused the nuclear power plant in Fukushima to release radioactive materials could occur again in relation to any of their operating units. Both countries attempted to significantly reduce their dependence on or gradually phase out nuclear power, as it is vulnerable to devastating catastrophes like that in Fukushima. However, pro-nuclear energy narratives have similarly found their way to the public debate and recently gained political influence in Japan and Taiwan. To what extent does nuclear energy offer a feasible solution to climate and energy crises here and now, as the corresponding Japanese and Taiwanese narratives advocated?

This article investigates what makes it possible to turn a blind eye to the contradictions of nuclear energy in attempts to solve climate and security issues by deconstructing common narratives in nuclear energy debates. We argue that tensions between individual responsibility and anxiety, and the underlying fear of scarcity in energy debates reflect deeper Anthropocene assumptions about humanity's relationship with nature. Essentially, these assumptions perpetuate a binary view where humans are conceived of as pre-existing and separate from nature. This perspective sustains the misconception that nature exists solely as a resource for human consumption. Furthermore, by the ontological separation of humans and nature, an inherent distance is naturalized, which ultimately reinforces common perceptions of climate issues as temporally and spatially

distant, hindering the sense of urgency concerning climate action. Thus, this article joins other research which seeks to highlight the need to reconsider the human/nature binary as part of the modernist episteme in the climate and energy literature (FAGAN 2017; PEREIRA 2017).

In order to face this conundrum and re-imagine how human beings can/should relate to extra-human nature, we turn to Mahāyāna Buddhist cosmology. Mahāyāna Buddhism is informed by the notion of *engi* (縁起), wherein a subject is seen as temporarily generated by a relationship with others mediated by an action. Since relationships are spontaneous and contingent, this means all things cannot but be impermanent. This relational ontology in turn assumes discontinuity in its temporality and focuses on the present. This is so to the extent that the past and future are considered to take the form of the 'past in the present' and the 'future in the present'; changes in the present thus appear directly as changes in the past and future. Moreover, *engi* relationality enables the monist idea of *eshō-funi* (依正不二), in which all beings are inseparable from and *intra*dependent with nature. Following the Mahāyāna Buddhist insights, we argue that Japanese and Taiwanese pro-nuclear energy narratives continue to subscribe to anthropocentric and modernist assumptions claiming that 'we' (humans) are capable of dealing with 'external' environmental issues and 'we' (the present generation) are the only stakeholders able to grapple with such issues by resorting to purportedly reliable technological solutions.

The remainder of this article begins by situating the topic in recent Western scholarly and public debates on climate concerns and energy security, which have led to the (renewed) popularity of nuclear energy as a one-stone-two-birds solution. The third section introduces Japan and Taiwan as examples of countries which have (re)embraced nuclear energy. The fourth section identifies some modernist beliefs informing the two countries' policies, explaining why these beliefs are problematic. The fifth section shows how Mahāyāna Buddhist insights enable different conceptions of relationality and temporality, challenging the assessment of nuclear energy as a climate-cum-security solution. The sixth and final section will consider the theoretical and policy implications of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought for re-imagining the climate crisis.

TWO BIRDS, ONE STONE: 'SOLVING' ENERGY SECURITY AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Current discourses on climate and energy, which on one hand emphasize the urgent need for decarbonization in energy production (MUNCK AF ROSENSCHÖLD ET AL. 2014: 639) and on the other hand struggle to fill the need for securing present and future energy supplies, fuel both scholarly and public debates on climate change in Western societies. This section will dig deeper into debates on energy security and climate change, and how they relate to one another.

While energy has always played a crucial role in society's life and development, it seems fair to say that energy dependence is currently greater than ever before. Energy shortages, it is said, threaten both individuals and society as a whole, which means that ensuring access to energy becomes an essential determinant for safety (STROJNY ET AL. 2023: 3). In other words, *"energy security in the traditional sense can be seen as a national or transnational security problem because securing steady supplies of fossil fuels, in particular, is crucial for the functioning of the economy and defense of the country or organization"* (IBID.: 11). This perspective on energy, and energy security in particular, is evident in the International Relations (IR) and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) literature, whose analyses tend to be informed by geopolitics. Goldthau (2011), for instance, identifies some debates that focus on a revival of energy mercantilism, which suggests that the world is ultimately engaged in struggles for resources (HERBERG – LIEBERTHAL 2006; TAYLOR 2006; ZWEIG – BI 2005); on energy as a foreign policy tool, which is an idea that assumes that energy is a means of state power projection exercises (ORBAN 2008; STULBERG 2007); or on potential future conflicts over energy reserves, where the analysis is anchored in classic realist assumptions (BORGERSON 2008). Essentially, the debates in this earlier literature tended to focus on access to energy supply with an additional focus on states as units of analysis.

A similar observation has been made by Kester (2022), who identifies four more recent strands of energy security research. In addition to realist and liberal policy reflections, the second strand of research attempts to describe, identify, categorize, and quantify a multitude of energy security threats (ANG ET AL. 2015; COX 2016; KISEL ET AL. 2016; KRUYT ET AL. 2009; SOVACOOL – MUKHERJEE 2011). This is followed by a strand of literature on how particular

perceived threats are securitized as an energy security concern (CHRISTOU –
ADAMIDES 2013; NYMAN 2014; SZULECKI 2018). The final two types of energy security
literature are small but deserve more attention as they are respectively
concerned with trying to understand the underlying logics that structure
how actors, policymakers, and scholars think, talk, and practice energy
security (CIUTĂ 2010; CHERP – JEWELL 2011), and the performativity of energy
security (KESTER 2017; NYMAN 2018). However, despite the rapid expansion of
energy security definitions and metrics, and the literature's focus on the
various problematizations and expressions of scarce energy supplies, lit-
tle research has engaged with the underlying fear of scarcity itself or its
implications (KESTER 2022: 32). Indeed, the fear that we are running out of
(and thus competing for) scarce resources does not emerge out of a cos-
mological vacuum. It presupposes an environment external to humanity
to control and dominate, as an entity out there to exploit for resources
and commodities. Consequently, fertile ecologies are reduced to resourc-
es, and land to a commodity to be exploited/competed for for short-term
commercial gain (DALBY 2022).

As illustrated, energy security is difficult to define, yet energy secu-
rity, in terms of safe-guarding affordable future energy supplies, remains
a central aspect of national security and energy policies. Moreover, as
pointed out by Nyman (2018: 118), constructing energy security as a national
security issue enables certain policy choices and often prioritizes these over
other climate concerns. Meanwhile, the current debate on energy policy is
becoming increasingly influenced by calls for decarbonization (STROJNY ET
AL. 2023: 25), urging societies to explicitly acknowledge that any viable solu-
tion to climate change necessitates reconsidering *how* we use energy (NYMAN,
2018: 119). It is in this debate that a potential marriage between energy and
climate discourse emerges. The current discourses are attentive to what
individuals can do to reduce their own impact on climate change, specifi-
cally their carbon footprint. The United Nations' Sustainable Development
Goals (SDGs), for instance, outline how individuals, as part of a collective
effort to mitigate climate impacts, can change their behavior by consider-
ing their electricity use, travel habits, and consumption patterns (United
Nations 2024). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) also
emphasizes the need for individuals to alter consumption habits and ex-
ert pressure on representatives, employers, and politicians to transition
to a low-carbon world (UNEP 2021).

However, a 2019 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report also emphasizes that the capacity to engage in climate action is closely tied to an individual's sense of capability. When people feel empowered, they are more likely to adopt behaviors that support adaptation and mitigation. Motivation, often driven by values, ideology, and worldviews, plays a crucial role in climate action. Additionally, the report states that actions that offer personal benefits outweighing the costs tend to be favored, such as adopting energy-efficient appliances rather than reducing one's energy consumption in total (MASSON-DELMOTTE ET AL. 2019: 379). There are numerous hindrances to climate adaptation efforts, including limited resources, insufficient engagement from the private sector and citizens, and low climate literacy, in combination with a lack of political commitment (CALVIN ET AL. 2023: 9). Scholars have also identified various discourses of climate delay which pervade current debates on climate action. Climate delay discourses encompass various strategies that contribute to inaction, including individualism (MANIATES 2001), technological optimism (PEETERS ET AL. 2016), fossil fuel greenwashing (SHEEHAN 2018), and concerns over social justice and economic costs (BOHR 2016; JACQUES – KNOX 2016). Arndt's (2023) observation that energy security and climate change are often perceived as a question of trade-off is of particular importance as well. His study on perceptions about energy security and climate protection among Europeans shows that people more concerned with energy security tend to prefer coal, gas, and nuclear power over greener options, while people more concerned with climate change tend to prefer solar and wind energy. This is not a particularly surprising observation, but it does reveal the appeal of being able to successfully re-label nuclear power as a green.

In a nutshell, humans are central to these climate and energy narratives revolving around scarcity, geopolitics, the exploitation of nature, and individual responsibility, both as contributors to anthropogenic climate change and as agents of the social change that is necessary for an effective response (MASSON-DELMOTTE ET AL. 2019: 377). This does not have to be problematic in and of itself, but it implies an underlying logic assuming that humans and nature are separate entities, which presupposes the notion of an autonomous self 'right here' facing an external environment 'out there' (CHEN – KRICKEL-CHOI 2024: 15). This imagined separation is not new to the critical scholarship; what has been less noticed is the spatiotemporal distance between them, which in turn dampens the sense of urgency needed

for climate action. Being re-labeled as green, nuclear energy emerges as an apparently 'get-real' solution to both worries about a stable supply (energy security) and carbon reductions (climate change) here and now. In one fell swoop, it proposes to cut the proverbial Gordian knot and eliminate the need for a trade-off between energy security and climate change without having to challenge any of our preconceived notions about how we as humans interact with nature. The next section will turn to Japan and Taiwan as paradigmatic examples of states where nuclear power has been increasingly seen as the best available solution for the problems of both carbon emissions and a stable supply.

PROMOTING NUCLEAR ENERGY, ADDRESSING THE CLIMATE CRISIS

This section primarily examines how relevant actors in post-Fukushima Japan and Taiwan discursively present nuclear energy as a one-stone-two-birds solution. It does not seek to evaluate whether pro-nuclear energy narratives there carry more (or less) weight than their counter-narratives.

THE CASE OF JAPAN

Japan's traumatic experiences as the only country that experienced a direct attack of atomic bombs did not prevent its government from exploring the use of nuclear energy for non-military purposes as early as the 1950s. The Atomic Energy Basic Act (GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN 1955) already stipulated that its purpose is to *"secure energy resources in the future, achieve scientific and technological progress, and promote industry[...]thereby contributing to the improvement of the welfare of human society and of the national living standard"* (Article 1).[3] Not unlike the aforementioned energy discussions in Europe, this law justifies the research, development, and utilization of nuclear energy by invoking the fear of scarcity. Although Article 2 indicates that nuclear energy in Japan is limited to "peaceful purposes" and its operation should be "democratic," "autonomous," and "open" (the so-called "three principles of atomic energy"), safety and accountability issues have periodically recurred in the country's history of nuclear energy. From the outset, the Japanese government constructed a linguistic dichotomy in its nuclear energy narratives: *"genshi"* (原子 atomic) refers to commercial applications and is peaceful; *"kaku"* (核 nuclear) refers to

the military ones, and is stigmatized. This helps us to understand why there has been no apparent contradiction between stigmatizing North Korea's nuclear and missile programs (MASON – MASLOW 2021) on the one hand and glorifying Japan's utilization of nuclear energy on the other. Indeed, securitizing the former's *"kaku,"* among other matters such as the abduction issue, has been central to the construction of North Korea as Japan's Other (HAGSTRÖM – HANSSEN 2015).

Several accidents and the long-serving, pro-nuclear energy Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) loss of ruling power in 2009–12 notwithstanding, Japan's nuclear energy policy has arguably remained unchanged since its reactors started generating electricity in the 1960s (HASEGAWA 2021: 175). Notably, this policy derives from a hierarchical, one-party political system dominated by the LDP almost uninterruptedly since its founding in 1955 (VAN WOLFEREN 1990), which has been detrimental to the responsiveness and accountability enshrined in the "three principles of atomic energy" (HASEGAWA 2021: 176). Under the infamous 1955 system, in which the interests of the bureaucracy, politics, and the private sector became entangled and "harmonized" (COLIGNON – USUI 2001), utilities similarly maintained a long-term regional monopoly over the Japanese energy markets. Moreover, the policy builds on a perceived sense of vulnerability in the sense that Japan highly depends on overseas energy imports, which reinforces and is reinforced by the aforementioned scarcity mindset. This, in turn, is met with a strong modernist faith in technological solutions (HASEGAWA 2021: 176).

Although the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) presented itself as a viable alternative to the LDP and they appeared to differ over nuclear energy policy, DPJ politicians and allies did not speak in one voice regarding their purportedly anti-nuclear energy stance. A good example is Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio's declaration of his commitment to the reduction of Japan's greenhouse gas emissions at the 2009 UN Climate Change Conference, which was based on the assumption that nuclear energy was conducive to the committed reduction while meeting Japan's electricity needs. The move to treat nuclear energy as green triggered an inter-ministerial strife within the cabinet (WALL STREET JOURNAL 2010).[4] The Federation of Electric Power Related Industry Workers' Unions of Japan (aka 電力総連 *"Denryoku-soren"*), a major DPJ supporter which nominated its members as DPJ Senators under the proportional representation system, was

openly hostile to the party manifesto's plan to phase out nuclear energy by 2030 (MAINICHI SHIMBUN 2013).

In the aftermath of the Fukushima Incident, a new regulatory agency (the Nuclear Regulation Authority, NRA) was established in 2012 to strengthen the safety requirements for nuclear power units and reactors. The majority of them either stopped operation permanently or took years to pass the NRA's review, which was a condition for their restart. In 2018, nuclear energy only accounted for 4.7% of Japan's electricity supply (compared to 31% in 2010), which was a figure lower than those for hydrogen and renewables (HASEGAWA 2021: N. 29). However, the second Abe administration's proclamation to gradually reduce Japan's dependency on nuclear energy should not be read as an end to the one-stone-two-birds narrative. The long processes of preparing for the restart of Japan's nuclear power units might have more to do with local governments' hesitation to approve their operation than with the NRA's regulatory hurdle being at *"the most stringent level in the world"* (MINISTRY OF ECONOMY, TRADE, AND INDUSTRY 2018: 23). Moreover, the LDP government's 2018 Strategic Energy Plan contained no roadmap to reduce Japan's nuclear power dependency, which was contingent on the state of energy saving and renewable energy availability (IBID.). Instead, the official narrative categorized (and sanitized) nuclear energy (alongside geothermal energy, hydropower, and coal) as the most stable and cost-effective *"base-load power source,"* and the government assigned itself the task of striking *"a proper balance"* between the available energy sources in Japan's *"multilayered and diversified flexible energy supply-demand structure [sic]"* (IBID.: 20). The 2021 Strategic Energy Plan reaffirmed the pledge to reduce dependency on nuclear energy, while pointing to Japan's decarbonization targets for 2030 and 2050 as well as its "global competitiveness" to justify its pursuit of energy and technological options such as small modular reactors (SMRs) and R & D in nuclear fusion (MINISTRY OF ECONOMY, TRADE, AND INDUSTRY 2021). Accordingly, the LDP government sought to achieve a power generation mix in which nuclear energy would bounce back to 20–22% in 2030 (IBID.).

In short, the recent pro-nuclear energy narratives in Japan have further tapped into the country's commitment to decarbonization (SASAKI 2020) and the call for an industrial-societal 'GX' (Green Transformation) in terms of 'S+3E' (safety, energy security, economic efficiency, and the

environment). Another move to securitize nuclear energy took place following the start of Russia's war in Ukraine. This can be seen in the recent call by some LDP Diet members, who formed a policy group to promote the replacement of existing nuclear reactors with the latest ones. The members invoked a sense of crisis in a techno-nationalistic tone: *"Nuclear energy's technology, human resources, and supply chains are in danger of decline. China and Russia are aggressively building nuclear power plants at home and abroad, and our country's relative advantage is diminishing by minutes"* (SANKEI SHIMBUN 2022). The Senior Network Section of the Atomic Energy Society of Japan similarly used "Energy Security Resilience is the Lifeline of Our Nation" as the theme of its 2023 symposium. The keynote speaker stressed the importance of energy self-sufficiency for Japan and considered renewable energy too pricy. Furthermore, because China holds a large portion of the markets in electric vehicles, offshore wind equipment, and solar panels, the argument goes, *"large-scale adoption of renewable energy will increase the risk of dependence on China"* (YAMAMOTO 2023).

THE CASE OF TAIWAN

Besides the fact that nuclear technology had been introduced to Taiwan for not-so-peaceful purposes (MENTON – REDDIE 2024) and the birth of anti-nuclear energy movements there intersected with the island republic's democratization in the 1980s (HADDAD 2023: 21), discussions about nuclear energy there have revolved around narratives similar to the Japanese ones, even if they are more partisan. On the surface, Taiwan's Atomic Energy Law (GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA 1968) was not driven by concerns over energy security. It was simply justified by a Kantian categorical imperative-like purpose: to *"promote the research and development of nuclear science and technology,"* along with the *"exploitation of nuclear resources, and the peaceful utilization of nuclear energy"* (Article 1). Ironically, Taiwan's nuclear policy under the authoritarian Kuomintang (KMT, the Chinese Nationalist Party) in the Cold War era was neither democratic nor open. Having lost the Chinese Civil War, the KMT remained determined to compete with its communist archenemy over who could represent China, and the former used its civilian programs to cover nuclear proliferation-sensitive activities following the latter's successful nuclear test in 1964 (MENTON – REDDIE 2024).[5] To sustain its ruling legitimacy when the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan was losing diplomatic ground to the People's Republic of China

(PRC) on the mainland, the KMT sought to boost the resource-lacking island's economic growth, among other measures (KRICKEL-CHOI – CHEN 2024). Nuclear power began to feature prominently in Taiwan's energy mix; at its peak in the mid-1980s, six units at three nuclear power plants accounted for 52.4% of all the electricity generated (GORSKA 2024). However, these power plants' site selection and construction processes failed to respect the respective local communities' will. In fact, the indigenous people living on Lanyu (Orchid Island), where a low-level radioactive waste storage facility is operated by the Taiwan Power Company, were not even informed about the purpose of the facility (OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT 2017).

As the KMT's authoritarian rule was increasingly difficult to maintain amid calls for democratization in the 1980s, so was its pro-nuclear energy policy. The KMT government had to suspend its plan to construct the fourth nuclear power plant at Lungmen due to public opposition in 1985. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was founded in 1986, which coincided with the occurrence of the Chernobyl accident. The newborn opposition party shared the anti-nuclear sentiment at home and abroad and embraced a policy stance critical toward nuclear energy. This stance was reinforced by the 2011 triple disaster in Japan and nationwide calls for "no more Fukushima," which was conducive to the DPP's subsequent (re)gaining of political power.[6] Led by Taiwan's first woman president Tsai Ying-wen (2016–2024), the DPP government promised to pursue a "nuclear-free homeland" by phasing out nuclear energy by July 2025, the license expiration date of the island's last operable reactor (WORLD NUCLEAR ASSOCIATION 2024). Critics of Tsai's phasing out policy argued that this decision had left Taiwan more dependent on imported (and dirty) fossil fuels since renewables (the 2023 share of renewables in the total power generation: 9.5%) were unlikely to be sufficient anytime soon (MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS 2024).

That the politicization of nuclear energy in Taiwan was a "byproduct" of its democratization (MENTON – REDDIE 2024) should not obscure the fact that within the DPP there are emerging voices different from its traditional anti-nuclear line. Speaking at a National Climate Change Committee meeting, President Lai Ching-te stressed his government's commitment to a stable energy supply and the development of diverse sources conducive to net-zero emissions by 2050, including the latest nuclear technology, if social consensus can be reached on the issues of safety and nuclear waste.

Specifically, Lai referred to Japan's NRA to explain that decisions about whether to (re)operate nuclear power plants should be based on scientific safety regulations (LIBERTY TIMES 2024). After this introduction of the Japanese and Taiwanese pro-nuclear energy narratives and their shared logic, the next section will examine some metatheoretical assumptions underlying these narratives.

PROBLEMATIZING THE JAPANESE AND TAIWANESE PRO-NUCLEAR ENERGY NARRATIVES

Although the nuclear programs in Japan and Taiwan appear to have different initial orientations and nuclear energy has been a more partisan issue in the latter's democratization process, several similarities between the Japanese and Taiwanese pro-nuclear energy narratives can be recapped here. First, both refer to their respective government's commitment to the reduction of carbon emissions and the importance of achieving net-zero. The pursuit of carbon neutrality was unexpected when the nuclear energy law was promulgated in Japan and Taiwan, but it has been employed as a powerful discursive device for making nuclear power appear desirable and even necessary. As seen earlier, Japan's Energy Strategic Plan (MINISTRY OF ECONOMY, TRADE, AND INDUSTRY 2021) intends to reduce the country's dependency on nuclear energy *"as much as possible"* on the one hand and raise its percentage in the overall energy mix (from 6% in 2019 to 20–22% in 2030) on the other hand. This apparent contradiction can only be reconciled when one accepts that unabated carbon emissions amount to a "clear and present danger" whose mitigation cannot be left to non-nuclear energy sources alone. Challenging the DPP's "nuclear-free homeland" policy, the now oppositional KMT similarly invokes such terms as decarbonization and energy efficiency, and the pressing necessity of re-boosting nuclear energy in Taiwan is reinforced by its critique of non-nuclear energy sources, which argues that they either produce health hazards (coal-fired power generation) or might undermine environmental sustainability (e.g. solar PV power generation) (KUOMINTANG 2021).[7]

Second, while a stable power supply is considered essential for maintaining Japan and Taiwan's economic growth and people's well-being, pro-nuclear energy actors in Japan and Taiwan narrate its provision as being more stable and reliable than that of the existing green energy. It is

possible to narrate Russia's war in Ukraine as an "energy crisis" (YAMAMOTO 2023), for this narrative speaks to a modernist mindset that views (inter)dependence as something that causes vulnerability, and autonomy/self-sufficiency as desirable – in the Japanese context, the danger of dependence on imported energy before and during WWII was an example of this. As Japan faces this "existential threat," the securitization of Japan's energy enables the (re)use of nuclear power as an "extraordinary measure" (BUZAN ET AL. 1998) without which it would have been more difficult, if not impossible, to reverse the trend of reducing nuclear power in post-Fukushima Japan's energy mix. A corollary of this securitization is that Japan's nuclear energy technology must stay more advanced than that of its geopolitical rivals (recalling LDP Diet members' concerns over China and Russia), which in turn reproduces a competitive "culture of anarchy" in international politics (WENDT 1999). In the same vein, pro-nuclear energy actors have pointed to power shortages as a major issue for Taiwan's economy. Following a large-scale, five-hours-long blackout in August 2017, for instance, the National Association of Industry and Commerce called on the DPP government to reconsider its reliance on natural gas and *"entertain the possibility"* of completing the Lungmen nuclear power plant (WORLD NUCLEAR ASSOCIATION 2024). As Taiwan is the production base of the world's leading (and highly electricity-consuming) microchip makers such as the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), the island's energy supply has been similarly securitized in the context of the US–PRC rivalry across various fields, from artificial intelligence development to military operations, which require the microchips (CHAUSOVSKY 2023). This need for a stable supply notwithstanding, Taiwan's energy supply chains are said to be vulnerable to a blockade by the Chinese navy partly due to the inadequate storage facilities for liquefied natural gas (RICE 2023).[8] Supply vulnerabilities, in turn, have been invoked by the Lai administration as an argument for considering the possibility of keeping nuclear reactors on standby in case of emergency (BLOOMBERG 2023).

Third, pro-nuclear energy actors in Japan and Taiwan share a modernist belief in nuclear technology as an effective solution for the problems of decarbonization and a stable supply. Despite the recognition of the 'myth of safety' that contributed to the disaster in Fukushima and beyond, the LDP government has been repeating the mantra that the NRA has the scientific authority to judge/approve matters such as the

discharge of the ALPS-treated water into the sea or the (re)operation of nuclear power plants (ministry of economy, trade, and industry 2021).[9] In other words, Japan's energy supply has been securitized through an apparently apolitical, technical justification of the extraordinary measure for the fulfillment of 'GX' and 'S+3E.' Likewise, on an island with low levels of energy self-sufficiency (3.8% in 2023) (ministry of economic affairs 2024), Taiwanese pro-nuclear energy actors maintain that this and carbon emission issues are challenges that are manageable with advanced technology. A 2018 national referendum topic was based on the assumption that nuclear energy and renewable energy are complementary, and promoting the former helps to buy time for developing the latter (以核養綠 *yǐ hé yǎng lǜ*). Tung Tzu-hsien, the vice convenor of the National Climate Change Committee and the CEO of an electronics manufacturing company, went further to assert that nuclear energy not only helps to contain rises in electricity bills (and thus mitigate inflation), but it is also not carbon-emitting and could lower the likely carbon taxes levied on Taiwanese exports by the EU or other developed countries (central news agency 2024).[10] Acknowledging that nuclear energy is no silver bullet, some policy analysts concluded that despite their higher cost per unit or high initial costs, adopting the latest technology for operating SMRs and molten salt reactors (MSRs, which convert thorium to U-233 to produce nuclear power and are cooled down by liquid salt or carbon dioxide instead of water) could enhance Taiwan's nuclear safety and energy security (gorska 2024). A failure to retain the nuclear option now would only make it more difficult to revive nuclear power programs, as *"inherently technical endeavors,"* if the government allows *"experience, expertise, and infrastructure to atrophy"* (menton – reddie 2024).

The similarities between the Japanese and Taiwanese pro-nuclear energy narratives are perhaps unsurprising as they can also be seen in the recent European debates discussed earlier. Notably, they point to three inter-related metatheoretical assumptions: (1) the human/nature divide; (2) veneration of autonomous individuals; and (3) linear progression of time. To be sure, this observation is not entirely novel. The relevant literature has recognized that the climate crisis is fueled by expanding human desires (Yamamoto 2006: 149). Against anthropocentrism, for instance, research in environmental ethics alerts us that nature has been used and commodified as an 'external resource' to realize human desires for prosperity. The object of desire also includes human beings, who are positioned

as 'external Others' to the subject. The exploited human being can be understood as parallel to the exploited nature in that: he or she is external to the exploiter's market; an element essential for the economy to work; and the object of desire. Through this process of 'modernization,' people (are supposed to) become autonomous individuals pursuing their own self-interests as subjects of desire in the industrial society. What underlies human desire is an anthropocentric structure in which the exclusive domination by humans as subjects over nature as a set of objects, and humans' domination over other humans overlap and reinforce each other (KIOKA 2014: 81). The "subject of desire" model and its assumption of a modern self have long been part of IR's metatheoretical foundations.

Logos-dualism, recalling Descartes's division of human existence into 'spirit' and 'object,' is central to the ontological assumptions of the aforementioned anthropocentric model; the process of industrial development separated humans from nature, positioning the latter as a mere 'external resource' for the former (KIOKA 2014: 65–67; LATOUR 2017). This self-centered dualistic ontology is discernible in not only the Japanese and Taiwanese cases but also various SDG projects. This is because these projects seek to cope with such crises as climate change and environmental degradation while preserving the capitalist system, which has arguably contributed to the very crises they attempt to tackle. To put it differently, the SDGs are at best a project for the survival of a sustainable society in an anthropocentric sense (SAITO 2020). On the other hand, research in environmental ethics has not resolved the subject–object separation between humans and nature (KIOKA 2014: 83–85), while taking a prevailing conception of time (in which the autonomous individual's existence stays constant as the linear time progresses) for granted. Unless we consider a non-logos-dualistic, temporality-sensitive approach, the climate crisis cannot be reimagined outside of the anthropocentric framework, and nature will continue to be a separate object for human beings. In other words, without the perspective that humanity *becomes* human by living with and through various human and non-human others, nature will remain a means to fulfill human desires (MAEDA 2023: 250). The next section will turn to Mahāyāna Buddhist thought to rethink the examined metatheoretical assumptions that make both the climate crisis and the nuclear energy solution possible.

MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM AS A COSMO-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH

The term Mahāyāna Buddhism, literally meaning "great vehicle," refers to a group of diverse Buddhist philosophies and practices in which a person seeks to become an awakened Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings through the path of the bodhisattva. From a Mahāyāna Buddhist perspective, phenomena arise through *engi*: in contrast to the modern, logos-dualistic conception of the self as autonomous, self-interested, and stable, in this view, no being exists independently but each being is generated by constantly changing conditions and relationships. Accordingly, human suffering arises from the illusion of permanence, and pursuing health, wealth, or status in an ever-changing stream (YAMAMOTO 2006: 149–150).

Engi relationality includes spatial and temporal aspects, and the two are closely connected. In the spatial aspect, subjects are temporally generated by relationships with others mediated by an action. In logos-dualism, for instance, 'I swim in the ocean' assumes that 'I' and the 'ocean' pre-exist before the encounter. *Engi* relationality views 'I' and the 'ocean' as *becoming* I (the swimmer) and the ocean, respectively, through the action of swimming. Without swimming, neither would exist. When the action of using ocean water to generate electricity occurs, it no longer *becomes* the 'ocean' but an external resource, and simultaneously, the 'I' *becomes* I (the worker). Thus, relationships generate subjects, not the other way around.

Mahāyāna Buddhism rejects any pre-existing or fixed relational structures, for *engi* relationality is grounded in *ku* (空 emptiness), a concept that unravels the ever-changing nature of all phenomena. Unlike linear temporality, which assumes a continuity based on a notion of fixed subjectivity, the *ku*-informed temporality assumes discontinuity. If relationality and the subjects generated by it are impermanent, then neither the past nor the future, which these impermanent subjects are supposed to perceive, can exist. Just like a flower that blooms and decays through *engi* (relationships) with the earth, water, and sunlight, the subject cannot exist permanently and universally. Temporality in Mahāyāna Buddhism focuses on *nikon* (而今 the present), where relationships arise. Seen from *nikon*, the past and future take the form of the 'past in the present' and the 'future in the present,' which means that changes in the present simultaneously manifest themselves as changes in the past and future (SHIMIZU – NORO

2023, 2024: 1039). Accordingly, *nikon* is open to unpredictability, as it is not bound by a fixed historical past or predetermined future. Herein lies the spatial aspect of *engi*, which recognizes the emergence of spontaneous and contingent relationships (SHIMIZU 2020: 105–106); space (here) and time (now) are closely connected and inseparable in engi relationality (SHIMIZU – NORO 2023: 383).

For Mahāyāna Buddhism, subjectivity is constituted through language, which simultaneously defines and differentiates the self from the other by establishing clear boundaries. As Shimizu notes, the word 'I' defines 'I' as distinct from 'you,' while under 'we,' both are grouped together but distinguished from 'them': *"So long as one retains a particular word to refer to the self, subjectivity would become relatively stable. This stabilised subjectivity is a prerequisite for the contemplation of the past and future"* (SHIMIZU 2022: 145). Moreover, the process of stabilization through language is not limited to subjectivity but extends to the categorization of the 'external' world. Just as language fixes and differentiates fluid subjects, it also imposes conceptual boundaries on natural phenomena. For instance, while nature itself is in constant flux, the act of naming and categorizing it under the term 'nature' leads to a perception of it as a stable entity. Such categorization helps simplify and stabilize the fluctuating reality of nature (MAEDA 2023: 259).

Although linguistic intervention creates the cognitive illusion of an independent self, Mahāyāna Buddhism maintains that the self and the other are spatially and temporally inseparable because they are generated by *engi*. On this basis, everything can be understood as *fuitsufui* (不一不異　neither unity nor diversity): the self and the other are both identical and different by being neither identical nor different (KIOKA 2017: 257). When applied to the environmental context, a conceptual corollary of *fuitsufui* is *eshō-funi* (oneness of life and its environment): life and its environment are inseparably interconnected, with neither being separate from or identical with the other, but both existing in a dynamic relational whole. *Eshō-funi* resonates with the life theory developed by the biologist Fukuoka Shinichi (2018). According to Fukuoka, life is a relational flow that barely balances itself through the complementary process of generation in a spatial sense and disappearance in a temporal sense; it never stays in the same state for a moment. For example, the metabolism of animals achieves a dynamic equilibrium by obtaining energy from external resources such

as food, water, and oxygen, while expelling 'old' cells and waste products. This flow, or life, is only possible through *engi* relationships with its environment. The function of language gives us the illusion of a fixed and autonomous self by concealing the dynamic nature of life and its inseparability from others.

Furthermore, Fukuoka suggests, the complementary process of generation and disappearance means the creation of time. For instance, we can understand environmental transitions by observing the annual rings of trees; this implies that the annual rings generate time (i.e. the flux of nature). Even at this very moment when the authors are writing this article, the annual ring is constantly weaving through time; it is being generated by the environment while simultaneously generating the environment (ɪʙɪᴅ.). Thus, time in the notion of *eshō-funi*, is not spatialized linear time in logos-dualism, which is geometrically represented as a point,[11] but the *flow* of life itself. Crucially, each moment (*nikon*) of that flow contains what can be called eternity. As with the case of the annual ring, each moment contains the *transition* of the environment, namely, the past and the future. This insight suggests that the 'past in the present' is not merely an accumulation of events but is constituted through the process of meaning-making in the present. Likewise, the 'future in the present' is not fixed but rather an open possibility shaped by our present actions and perceptions. In short, *nikon*, in which we live, struggle, and make choices, is a 'lived' time interwoven through countless *engi* relationships. By acknowledging and respecting this 'lived' present, we do not merely experience time as a mechanical progression; rather, we cultivate ethical responsiveness to both the past and the future within the web of our relationships with others.

What does it mean, then, to consider climate and energy issues 'here and now' in a Mahāyāna Buddhist sense? The 'here and now' assumption in the aforementioned pro-nuclear energy narratives, namely that there is a 'Japan' or 'Taiwan' right here with a pressing carbon neutrality commitment and an energy security need, is fundamentally different from that of Mahāyāna Buddhism, as the former presupposes the existence of an already formed, autonomous, and stable state self which knows what 'it' needs. The ontological existence of such a pre-social 'Japan/Taiwan,' in turn, is made possible by a linear, continuous temporality underlying a coherent 'Japan/Taiwan' in the past, present, and future.

The notions of *engi* and *nikon* deconstruct these ontological and temporal foundations of the climate-cum-energy crisis, since 'Japan/Taiwan' only *becomes* a civil nuclear power state through ever-changing relations with others (humans and extra-human nature, which are co-produced by their relations with 'Japan/Taiwan') in each *nikon*. *Engi's* relational ontology does not imply that all such *intra*actions are equally desirable. Rather, it points to the need to cultivate our ability to reflect on whether certain intraactions are more violent than others (e.g. locating nuclear power plants or radioactive waste storage facilities in less populated areas such as Fukushima or Lanyu in exchange for a 'subsidy') and how such violence could occur.[12] Taking discontinuity in its temporality seriously, the *engi* notion shows that nuclear waste storage is not a one-time, 'long-term' issue that belongs to our indefinitely distant future. When recognizing 'the future in the present,' it becomes clear that storing or disposing of nuclear waste involves constant negotiations with future stakeholders in each *nikon*, since decisions in the present appear directly as changes in the future.

The failure to imagine the climate crisis beyond modernity is endemic to pro-nuclear energy narratives in not only Japan and Taiwan but also Europe. From a *nikon* perspective, it is helpful to reflect on a period of profound change in (Western) Europe that was similarly categorized by contemporaries as a time of enduring crisis – the 1970s – in light of the 'past in the present.' European nuclear power proponents then also presented it as a *"technological solution for economic ills, capable of providing the knowledge-based economy with fuel and jobs for decades to come; it was […] the pinnacle of high modern aspirations towards 'progress', with even its more problematic aspects to be kept in check by rational, scientific and technological management"* (TOMPKINS 2021: 508). The pro-nuclear energy narratives in contemporary Japan and Taiwan can thus be made sense of as a past in the present, as if it was their 1970s European counterparts' failure of imagination repeated in the 2020s. Both allowed premature or even risky technology (used for MSRs or nuclear fusion in today's case) to be rushed to commercial use for reasons of national competitiveness and economic profit.

This leads to our final point. If time can be understood as the flow of life, as the idea of *eshō-funi* suggested, the modernist conception of time is inherently violent. By fixing time as a point in a given place (e.g. 2030

as the target year to make Japan a country with 20–22% of its electricity generated by nuclear power), it does not allow for the transformation of subjects or formation of open-ended relationships. It also reproduces the persistent logos-dualism of humanity/nature: humanity makes a harmful footprint on the earth (i.e. carbon emissions), and proponents of nuclear energy maintain that it can significantly reduce this footprint. While the critical scholarship has recognized humanity-in-nature and called for re-orienting our security referents to ecosystems when thinking about the climate crisis (MCDONALD 2021; DALBY 2022), this laudable move is potentially totalizing as humans and human organizations can be subsumed under nature. The idea of *fuitsufui* provides an alternative way to think about how humans relate to themselves and to extra-human nature by going beyond the other logos-dualism of substances/relations. Japan/Taiwan and nature are not two discrete, interacting substances. Rather, 'they' are neither identical nor different, as they are co-produced by a complex web of relationships that brings about historical change (climate change in this case). As Moore (2015: 7) put it, *"the species-specificity of humans is already co-produced within the web of life. Everything that humans do is a flow of flows, in which the rest of nature is always moving through us."* From a Mahāyāna Buddhist perspective, this research has analyzed how the generation of nuclear power in Japan and Taiwan can be understood as a case of carboniferous capitalism's historical geographies premised on specific configurations of humanity-in-nature.

CONCLUSION

In contemporary Japanese and Taiwanese pro-nuclear energy narratives, the advocates emphasize the necessity of solving carbon emissions and energy security issues (here) and the urgency to retain and/or modernize nuclear power generation capabilities (now). This article has shown that nuclear energy does not offer a 'deep' solution to climate and energy crises here and now. This is in part because the geometrically linear conception of time which underpins the aforementioned narratives, sets the future as a pre-fixed goal, foreclosing the room for a flexible reconsideration of the lessons of the past and our responsibility to future generations. Furthermore, it is useful to recall that measures premised on the modern belief that nature is an external resource for the pursuit of human interests, may instead accelerate climate change in the future (SUZUKI 2020).

Possible victims of that belief include not only plants and animals but also human beings, who are posited as the modern subjects. As revealed, the one-stone-two-birds solution proposed by Japanese and Taiwanese pro-nuclear energy narratives relies on an anthropocentrism that simultaneously downplays our responsibility for future generations and regards nature as a means to human ends. A fundamental reconsideration of such a perspective is essential in combating climate change. To this end, it is all the more important to reexamine the modernist framework itself and develop a more equitable, less violent, and non-dichotomous perspective on the human/nature relationship.

We have drawn on Mahāyāna Buddhist thought to reinterpret the present (*nikon*, now) as a moment in which the subject is temporarily generated through its relations with others (*engi*, here), understanding it as a dynamic process where the 'past' and 'future' intersect. Things are not long-lasting but merely temporary phenomena generated by relationships with others and given a name by language (NAKAZAWA 2019: 46). In this sense, 'nature' is a verbal expression of the way 'we' relate to 'them,' and there is no pre-existing 'nature' outside of 'us'. Nature does not exist as a resource outside of humans, but is constructed and understood as such because we narrate and relate to it as if it did. From this insight, the first question we should rethink in response to climate change is how to relate to 'nature'. After all, how we face 'nature' will determine whether it is simply an external resource to be used (a means) or an interlocutor (an end) with which we work to address climate change. The web of *engi* suggests that no beings exist independently but all are relationally generated as a dynamic whole (*eshō-funi*); the *engi* way of relating-becoming indicates that 'we' bear the ultimate responsibility to others, including future generations. In addressing climate change, then, the issue is not merely about technical solutions, but about how 'we' weave our web-relationship as nature.

Finally, we recognize that further research is needed to re-imagine climate change practices in light of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought. As noted, Mahāyāna Buddhism does not (pre-)determine what action would be 'good' for climate change mitigation because of its assumptions of emptiness and discontinuity. What is 'good' for the global ecology must be considered in each concrete context and in relation to 'nature'. In this regard, the case of Bhutan is worthy of study because its government applies Mahāyāna

Buddhist values to environmental policy and defines the country's relationship with 'nature' as coexistence rather than exploitation of resources (JEFFREE 2013). In fact, Bhutan has already achieved carbon negative status without resorting to nuclear power. Although its geographical feature of forests, a natural sink for carbon dioxide, covering 70% of the country, should be taken into account, it would be helpful to learn how Mahāyāna Buddhist thought has been digested and practiced in the environmental efforts of relevant actors in Bhutan in order to reconsider how 'we' might relate to 'nature'. Meanwhile, the fact that Bhutan's hydroelectric power plants, its key source of electricity production, could be severely damaged by the melting of glaciers in the age of global warming (TUTTON – SCOTT 2018) serves as a constant reminder that the *engi* relationships might unfold adversely. But if this is the case, even more so, it is all the more urgent to study and foster climate change measures informed by an *eshō-funi* worldview.

ENDNOTES

1   For instance, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology countered that nuclear power cannot be considered a *"sustainable activity within the meaning of the TR [EU Taxonomy Regulations]"* (Lünenbürger et al. 2020: 60).

2   The surname precedes the given name in the names of all East Asian individuals in this article, except in cases where they are listed as the authors of published works in English. The transliteration of Chinese terms follows the Pinyin system; that of Japanese terms, the modified Hepburn system. Wades-Giles transliteration is used for the names of individuals and places in Taiwan.

3   The English translation is from <https://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/en/laws/view/3759>.

4   This article is not concerned with whether and how far non-carbon-emitting nuclear energy is green. To the extent that the pro-nuclear energy narratives in question are grounded on narrow, modernist assumptions of relationality and temporality, the present authors are normatively motivated by an anti-nuclear stance.

5   The KMT government's covert program only came to an end in the late 1980s after the US twice intervened in it (Albright – Gay 1998).

6   This solidarity reinforced existing anti-nuclear sentiments, pushing the KMT government to halt the construction of the nuclear power plant at Lungmen in 2014. While the results of a 2018 national referendum were in favor of maintaining Taiwan's nuclear power sector beyond 2025, a 2021 referendum rejected the possibility of resuming the Lungmen plan (World Nuclear Association 2024).

7   By questioning the environmental impacts of both fossil fuels and renewables, the KMT implies that there is no alternative to nuclear power without mentioning the term nuclear in its manifesto (Kuomintang 2021).

8   To be sure, nuclear energy is not immune to the impact of blockades because Taiwan's reactor fuel, too, is imported. The example of the Zaporizhzhia power plant after Russia's invasion of Ukraine suggests that nuclear plants can also be made the objects of attacks (Rossi 2023).

9   The term ALPS (Advanced Liquid Processing System) refers to the system used to purify water from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, which contains radioactive substances (Ministry of Foreign Affairs n.d.).

10   Nuclear energy cannot be green in the EU taxonomy if the storage of highly radioactive waste material is not operational by 2050, among other conditions. Although nuclear power may be a non-carbon-emitting "clean energy" (Citizen of the Earth, Taiwan 2024), many of the Taiwanese benchmark companies pledged to start utilizing renewable energy only by 2040 (Climate Group n.d.).

11   In logos-dualistic modern science, the researcher freezes time as a point, e.g. t=0, t=1, etc. By 'pausing' the world, they observe and understand the world as if it were animated by connecting a series of snapshots. From the perspective of *eshō-funi*, modern subjects stop the dynamics of life at their convenience, "killing life," and observing it (Fukuoka 2018: 269–270).

12   Some might think nuclear energy's key problem is that it naturalizes more energy production for national security and capitalism, as opposed to lower energy consumption. While radioactive waste storage is not necessarily the biggest downside of nuclear energy, our point here is to illustrate the prevailing pro-nuclear energy narratives' failure to take the present seriously in light of *nikon*.

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Book Reviews

Stefan Auer: European Disunion: Democracy, Sovereignty and the Politics of Emergency

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DOI	https://10.32422/cjir.1857
PUBLISHED ONLINE	25 February 2025

In *European Disunion: Democracy, Sovereignty and the Politics of Emergency*, Stefan Auer (2022), a Professor of European Studies at the University of Hong Kong, assesses the EU's performance in fulfilling its promises over the course of more than a decade marked by crises, from the economic crisis of 2008 to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The author invites the readers to *"be more open and honest about the EU's limitations"* (p. 108). He contends that such *"crises reveal the extent of the dysfunction"* (p. xxi) which is an outcome of concentrating sovereignty at the EU level due to the need to manage the accelerated series of these crises. This politics of emergency has put democracy under strain at the national level with no compensation at the EU level.

According to Auer, the crises reveal that whether it is coming in too weakly (e.g. the policy towards Russia), too late (e.g. the Covid pandemic) or too strongly at the cost of democratic legitimacy (e.g. the eurozone crisis), the EU *"is failing"* (p. 183). The movement towards more supranational authority weakens the EU's democratic credentials that the very supranational authority claims to be protecting, be it via the rule of law conditionality or the ECJ rulings. This thesis of failure inspires the author to propose a way out of the impasse, namely by recognizing "popular sovereignty" and the community of values expressed at national levels as irreplaceable. Put simply, the nation-state must be brought back in as the most realistic level for achieving democratic legitimacy.

Such a proposal for a Europe of nations might seem trivial and frequent in today's political climate. Yet, European Disunion is still distinct from the more academic work on the conflicts of sovereignty in the EU (RONE ET AL. 2023), other essays critical of the strong role of executive and judicial bodies of the EU (GRIMM 2017), and more concrete proposals for change in the name of democracy (HENNETTE ET AL. 2019). Auer's essay skillfully integrates political theory, especially Carl Schmitt's critique of liberal supranational projects, with a political analysis of recent events (based on public sources). It is a work intended for a broader audience and an ambitious endeavor that draws on both Auer's academic work and his interventions in the public debate as a commentator writing for *Politico* and other outlets.

Auer's account of the capability and legitimacy gap between the EU's stated goals and the reality of its actions then considers more

particularly the stress-test of Russia's invasions of Ukraine and the lessons of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) post-1989 experience. Once again, the critique of technocratic limits of the law-centered European integration evokes earlier debates that emerged during the early 2000s, another pivotal era in the history of the Union. Taking Russia as a stress-test of the EU's power recalls a much earlier essay by Zaki Laïdi (2003), who contrasted the normative power of the EU based on regulations and soft power to the more traditional power of Russia, which is based on military force, energy and realpolitik. Auer's call to take seriously national identities as well as the attitudes of disaffection towards supranational elites, reminds one of, among many others, René Cuperus's (2006) text on the *"vulnerability of the European project"*. The novelty of Auer's piece thus comes not only thanks to his style but also by bringing this kind of critique to the context of today's disorder.

The book is elegantly written and clear in its argument even though the hybrid genre of an academic essay for wider audiences makes the exercise of a review in a scholarly journal challenging. Auer's appeal for a more "modest" EU building on the sovereignty of nation states covers a broader palette of cases and perspectives, however, and is deployed in five chapters, including the introduction. They address the lessons of the euro crisis and the migration crisis (chapter 2), of Brexit (chapter 3), and of Russia's invasion of Ukraine since 2014 (chapter 4), ending with the lessons from "anti-EU rebellions" in CEE (chapter 5), a conclusion and an author's note reflecting on the first month of Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022. Rather than engaging in a comprehensive debate with Auer's perspective on EU integration, which would necessitate a book-length discussion, I address several ambiguities that undermine the book's persuasiveness, concentrating primarily on the utilization of the post-1989 CEE experience. Before that, however, I will briefly address a more general point related to the architecture of the argument. I will then conclude with a questioning of the relevance of the sovereignty prism for a CEE-centered assessment of the EU's governance.

IS THE EU A SUPRANATIONAL TECHNOCRATIC BEHEMOTH?

Though not novel, the criticism of a technocratic Union resonates well in times of a general demise of technocracy's appeal that is concomitant to the revived ideological polarization. The domestic political isolation of the French President Emmanuel Macron, once an incarnation of the centrist promise of expert rule, and the radicalization of CEE's once champion of "technopopulism" (BICKERTON – ACCETTI 2021) Andrej Babiš do indeed testify that the technocratic aspirations to bypass ideology and agonistic politics are becoming increasingly out of vogue. Auer is clear about where he stands in this trend.

However, one can take issue with his method leading to criticism of the EU's governance. Auer reduces the EU studies literatures to those focusing on a law-based supranational integration while conflating the narratives originating in the neofunctionalist theory with the supposedly actually shared aspirations of the different actors of EU integration (as if they all pursued the ideal of a "superstate"). Using this caricature, he then proceeds to argue that the already fragile liberal democracy can best be pursued in the framework of a nation state. Referring to Böckenförde's dilemma (p. 82–83), he can then stress that democracy requires a homogeneity of shared values, pointing to the communitarian strand of democratic theory.

Such a simplification of how the EU works provides an all too easy target, even though a tension between supranational authority and national governments is one of the defining features of the "really existing EU". As much as there has been a plurality of competing projects for the EU among transnationalists, as historians of integration show (WARLOUZET 2022), there have also been areas where the "supranational" and "intergovernmental" dimensions have each been more or less important. From another standpoint, political sociology has described EU politics not so much as a supranational haven of technocrats, but rather as a specific "field of power" centered around the work of public policy production, where a variety of actors, including myriads of national officials, experts, and politicians, compete for power and positions (GEORGAKAKIS – ROWELL 2013). Put simply, the EU is a more conflictual beast than Auer is ready to admit.

PLACING THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN
EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE CENTER STAGE

One of the refreshing aspects of Auer's book is its exploration of the complex relationship between EU membership and the rise of illiberal leaders in Central Europe. Born in the region himself, Auer draws a causal link between them as he claims that the *"historic irony is that illiberal leaders have flourished in the countries of Central Europe, not despite their membership in the EU, but to some extent because of it"* (p. 27). According to Auer, *"populism found fertile soil in a number of new member states […] owing to the sense of powerlessness induced by the previous governments' reliance on the rhetoric of necessity"* because populists promise to "reclaim agency" for the people (p. 28). Here, again, Auer might be painting a simplified picture that fits his own argument and intellectual conviction.

In looking at what EU membership has brought to the post-communist democracies, Auer makes at least two interesting points. First, when analyzing the emergence of radical national conservative governments that have openly turned their backs on liberal democracy, Auer rightly takes a step back from narratives on "democratic backsliding". He points out that this framing of Poland and Hungary's radical conservative governments in terms of transgressing the principles of liberal democracy, although perfectly understandable considering the expectations of stabilization through integration, reproduces the biases of transitology. This is done by presupposing a linear development from authoritarianism to liberal democracy and a "golden age" of democratization preceding that of "backsliding". Instead, he invites a critical look at the 1990s, which is indeed a research agenda with great potential thanks to today's 30 years of hindsight and the availability of new sources with which to study this period. What is more, Auer stresses that *"the superficial adaptation of Western institutions and practices"* (p. 149) helped the former communists convert themselves into democrats and capitalists (a process that Auer disparages), fueling in turn the criticism of the transformation. One can indeed agree that the very peculiar appropriations and realizations of "democratic capitalism" in CEE added to the disillusionment with both the architects of the transformation and the metanarrative of westernization.

The second interesting point of Auer's take on the CEE experience that I want to stress is the assertion that the *"anti-EU rebellions"* also result from the failure of other political actors to articulate a discourse on the national community – from liberal, left or other positions – and thus their leaving it to nationalists alone. It can be said, indeed, that when post-communist voters were long presented with a choice between political offers articulated around neoliberalism and those articulated around nationalism, after an initial period of consensus on belt tightening and "catching up", nationalist and sovereigntist agendas started recording success. Auer portrays the Polish PiS and the Hungarian Fidesz governments, for instance, as showcasing the inevitable fallback on nationalism where political power seems to shift towards more distant elites with no guarantees of accountability. The absence of a "social contract" with those more distant elites (be they political, administrative or economic) can then feed the support for a "return" of power, even to corrupt local elites. Auer's call to rediscover the tradition of 19th century liberal nationalism does sound appealing in this context and builds on his previous work (AUER 2004). Other ways out of the neoliberalism vs. nationalism predicament are also possible, such as a renewal of a liberal socialist tradition.

However, Auer's synthesis of the CEE experience and EU membership relativizes the autocratic transgressions against political and media pluralism, the separation of powers, independent control of the state and non-discrimination a little too much. In other words, he offers a selective reading of the post-1989 history that fits his main argument in support of an EU integration that would be more respectful of national sovereignty and gives an ambiguous account of CEE's radical conservative leaders. The very labeling of Viktor Orbán's governments as well as the PiS governments as *"anti-EU rebellions"* and as *"provocative"* is questionable insofar as it espouses their own self-representation as forerunners of a resistance to "Brussels". Furthermore, the book presents their opposition to liberalism as entrenched in a different *"prioritization of values"* as reflected by the different value hierarchies in these societies. Auer is of course right to argue that there is a substantial or thick ideology behind "populist" leaders, which is why the adjective is increasingly criticized as imprecise (see SZELENYI – CSILLAG 2015; ZALEWSKI 2016). He also acknowledges that the "methods" employed by Orbán or Kaczyński were "unsavoury" (p. 152). Yet, at times implicitly, at times explicitly, Auer's discussion of these differences in value

hierarchies simply means a discussion of culture war themes, such as sexual and gender minority rights, themes politicized by the very national conservatives as symbols of the alleged imposition of foreign norms on national communities, usually in combination with memory and identity politics (BARŠA – HESOVÁ – SLAČÁLEK 2021). The presupposed equivalence between culture, nation and value hierarchies would itself require a separate analysis, not to speak of the missing recognition of the historically deep-seated and still vivid cultural and political pluralism within CEE societies.

Auer shares the reading of the recent disputes about "values" that sees the issue as the EU's supranational bodies imposing their definition of democracy, freedom and equality on member states without political legitimacy and in a manner akin to imperialism (p. 161). In his analysis, Auer agrees with Glyn Morgan's criticism of the EU's normative power in terms of *"'the Centre forcing the abolition of all cultural practices incompatible with freedom and equality as the Centre understands those terms'"*, where Morgan adds that *"'the Periphery finds that it can no longer ban gay marriage, discriminate against local minorities, or refuse to accept refugees'* (MORGAN 2020: 1428)*"* (quoted p. 161). Auer goes on to say that such an approach *"undermines (the EU's) democratic credentials and erodes the basis for liberal nationalism in Europe.[…] What legitimacy does 'the Centre' have to decide how those basic values – freedom and equality - are to be understood? And who is to be 'the Centre' anyway, France, and/or Germany? Or, moving away from nations, should it fall to the European Commission and European Courts to define what constitute the basic values underpinning a 'European Superstate'?"* (p. 136). The defense of liberal nationalism thus turns into Auer's own provocative reflection about the EU's legitimacy in sanctioning the Polish or Hungarian radical conservative governments, for discrimination or anything else, which suggests that disputes about democracy, rule of law or equality should be settled at national level.

When it comes to detailing what values of CEE societies might be in danger, the argument mostly boils down to culture war issues. According to the author, the protection of minority rights risks going too far, becoming *"another version of TINA"* – *"'there is no alternative' to progressive liberal values on a number of issues, such as nationalism, religion or LGBT rights"* (p. 169). However, the analytical frame of "value conflicts" prevents Auer from seeing that the politicization of gender and sexuality in CEE contexts gains salience to a great extent as a fill-in critical narrative of neoliberal

transformation (GRAFF – KOROLCZUK 2022) and gains traction in the absence of a more important plurality of critical narratives of transformation and westernization. As such, then, its success represents one of the effects of the reduced ideological offer in CEE politics that the author himself laments. In addition, such a narrow focus on minority rights as a new "TINA" draws a distorted portrait of the reality of minority rights in CEE. In other words, it may appear as if in countries where sexual and gender minorities are still moving targets of verbal and physical violence (see the terrorist attack in a bar in Bratislava known as a safe haven for LGBTI+ people on 22 October 2022, where two people died and one was left heavily injured), liberal policies were going too far and were being imposed from the outside. Yet the equality of rights and freedoms is entrenched in the countries' very own constitutions and as the author surely knows, the EU did not interfere in Poland's de facto ban on abortion of 2021 (actually dating back to the 1990s, when a lighter version appeared), or in Slovakia's constitutional exclusion of the principle of same-sex marriage (back in 2014). He nevertheless shares Frank Furedi's criticism of "illiberal anti-populism", a term that can refer to "cancel culture" as well as to the EU's rule of law policies, and suggests that *"authoritarian liberalism"* (p. 160) is as important a threat to democracy as *"populist transgressions against judicial independence"* (IBID.).

In the end, Auer's book thus skillfully deconstructs the anti-democratic tendencies of EU technocracy while simultaneously risking being an apologetics for conservative authoritarian tendencies in CEE. First, his claim that matters such as the rule of law should be dealt with by national politicians at home instead of by technocrats in Brussels fails to acknowledge that the very same politicians in Budapest, Warsaw, or elsewhere that would deal with these matters at home, variously manipulated the related judicial reforms, politicized intelligence services, captured public media or distorted the electoral system in their favour (see the OSCE's report on the 2014 Hungarian elections, for instance (OSCE 2014)). Moreover, the discarding of court decisions as technocratic also includes the labeling of the work of the constitutional and high courts at national level as too technocratic to decide on what kind of democracy the people demand. Such a delegitimization of the judicial branch of power calls for forms of plebiscitary democracy rather than liberal democracy in the sense of a constitutional democracy based on a separation of powers and the protection of individual rights and freedoms.

THE SOVEREIGNTY PREMISE

Finally, a question that the book raises is one about the heuristic potential of the focus on sovereignty in the assessment of European integration. The organization of the book's argument around sovereignty undoubtedly gives it coherence, yet steers the argument in ways perhaps too narrow even in the author's own judgment – when analyzing Brexit, for instance, Auer indeed concludes by saying that *"if we are serious about our commitment to democracy, we must remain open to the idea that there is not one correct answer to the question of an appropriate location of sovereignty, or whether sovereignty as a term is relevant in the first place"* (p. 98). At the same time, the concentration on sovereignty is justified in the book precisely by the premise that "popular sovereignty", which is indispensable for democratic governance, travels to Brussels in national governments' suitcases.

Auer smooths away the ambiguity about the primacy of national sovereignty or of democracy in his argument at the cost of a series of omissions and simplifications. For instance, the book does not mention the massive importance of bottom-up calls for the EU to safeguard the rule of law that were explicit in CEE in parallel to the "anti-EU rebellions" (e.g. the EU flags in mass demonstrations critical of government leaders and/or policies in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary). Relatedly, Auer's assertion that the 1989 revolutions were about retrieving national independence more than about democratization is imprecise – they were both, and large parts of CEE indeed viewed accession to the EU precisely as an additional layer of protection against the arbitrariness of political power. Moreover, by disregarding the public opinions and mass mobilizations in CEE over the past decade (e.g. the *Czarny protest, Strajk kobiet*), Auer also reproduces the opposition between "liberal values" on cultural issues as supranational impositions amounting to imperialism, and CEE societies' traditionalism and conservatism on these issues.

In a way, the sovereignty perspective closes the analysis off from a more dynamic view, isolating it in a rather static and generic opposition between the nation state as the main point of return of democratic aspirations, and the EU as an actor taking sovereignty away from the states. Auer does allude to this on the margins, but the role of Europeanization in

the weakening of national sovereignty cannot be separated from the much wider impacts of the globalization and financialization of economy that, as Wolfgang Streeck and others have argued, put Western democracies under strain already in the 1970s (FOURCADE-GOURINCHAS – BABB 2002; STREECK 2014). When reading *European Disunion*, then, this focus on conflicts of sovereignty prompts a reflection on alternative angles for a critical appraisal of EU politics. Among the options, the questioning of the distribution of power among the diversity of actors producing EU public policy, built on a conception of the EU institutions as arenas of competition between these various national, international and supranational actors, public and private, appears to me as a more fruitful entry point, especially from a CEE perspective. In other words, what would a more balanced distribution of power and a more accountable exercise of power in the EU look like from the perspective of "member states" in the strong sense of the term situated on the economic semi-periphery (with the EU or without it), where – eminently in Slovakia, Poland or Romania – families are at least as transnational as they are "traditional", stitching their life trajectories under multiple skies and across territories of national sovereignty?

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