58 / 3 / 2023
INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS PRAGUE

Czech Journal of International Relations
Mezinárodní vztahy

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Articles published in the journal are indexed and abstracted in the following databases: Web of Science (ESCI), Scopus, ERIH PLUS, Central and Eastern European Online Library (C.E.E.O.L.), Political Science Complete (EBSCO), CSA Worldwide Political Science Abstracts (ProQuest), the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (ProQuest), International Political Science Abstracts / Documentation Politique Internationale (SAGE), the Czech National Bibliography (National Library of the Czech Republic), World Affairs Online (Fachinformationsverbund Internationale Beziehungen und Länderkunde) and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).

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Sales department telephone number: +420 251 108 107, email: eshop@iir.cz

Printed by Petr Dvořák – Tiskárna, Dobříš.
The journal is published three times a year. The annual subscription price is 450 CZK / € 19 or 180 CZK / 8 EUR per issue.
Published by the Institute of International Relations Prague (IIR), www.iir.cz

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32422/cjir.58.3

Research Articles

Discussion Article

Book Forum on Ivan Kalmar's White but Not Quite: Central Europe's Illiberal Revolt

Research Articles

Alliance Complements or Substitutes? Explaining Bilateral Intergovernmental Strategic Partnership Ties

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ABSTRACT	Since the end of the Cold War, informal security cooperation has been on the rise. Besides formal alliances, states are increasingly establishing so-called "strategic partnerships". This new form of security cooperation is currently under-researched, although governments consider it an important foreign policy tool. We do not yet know whether security interests are the basis of these arrangements or whether strategic partnerships function as substitutes for or complements to formal alliances. This article addresses both issues by analyzing a new dataset on strategic partnerships with the involvement of G20 countries. I find that two or more states are most likely to be tied by partnerships when the presence of a common threat coincides with the absence of their joint membership in a formal alliance. However, states parties to a formal alliance with a lower commitment, such as a consultation, neutrality, or non-aggression pact, are also likely to be tied to each other by partnerships when they face a common threat.

KEYWORDS	strategic partnership, alliance, alignment, informal institution, soft balancing, reassurance
DOI	https://doi.org/10.32422/cjir.59
PUBLISHED ONLINE	22 June, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, scholars have observed the changing nature of international security cooperation (SEE CHIDLEY 2014; LOCOMAN – PAPA 2021; TERTRAIS 2004; WILKINS 2012). According to many, there has been a shift in the emerging multipolar world from formal alliances as the preferred instrument for strengthening national security to new forms of "alignment," with so-called "strategic partnerships" at the forefront (SEE BLANCO 2016; DENG 2007; ENVALL – HALL 2016; FERGUSSON 2012; KAY 2000; NADKARNI 2010; PARAMESWARAN 2014; STRÜVER 2017; WILKINS 2008). These arrangements provide a flexible framework *"to take joint advantage of economic opportunities, or to respond to security challenges"* (WILKINS 2008: 363). The nature of strategic partnerships differs from that of other forms of security cooperation, such as formal alliances, in that strategic partnerships are informal and have a general (security) purpose. Precisely this informality, which entails inherently low commitment costs, constitutes one of their most distinctive features. In this regard, the proliferation of such partnerships[1] reflects a broader trend of proliferation of informal institutions (SEE ROGER – ROWAN 2022; VABULAS – SNIDAL 2021) and the emergence of "hybrid institutional complexes" (ABBOTT – FAUDE 2022).

Whether strategic partnerships are an authentic category of alignment remains a subject of scholarly debate. Similarly perplexing is the ambiguous role of these arrangements vis-à-vis other forms of security cooperation, including formal alliances. The existing literature does not provide a clear answer as to whether security concerns are, indeed, one of the main drivers behind their rapid proliferation and, if so, whether their primary function is to complement or substitute for formal military alliances. The answers to these questions have potentially significant implications because our knowledge of how formal and informal institutions interact is currently limited (CF. ABBOTT – FAUDE 2022). As informal institutions, strategic partnerships could potentially serve as building blocks or stumbling blocks for a more formalized cooperation (VABULAS – SNIDAL 2013: 212–213). Addressing the issue of complementarity/substitution is therefore pertinent with respect to improving our understanding of the changing nature of the international institutional order.

To fill these gaps, this article presents the first large-*N* cross-country analysis of the factors affecting the incidence of strategic partnership ties,

drawing on a new "Bilateral Intergovernmental Strategic Partnerships" dataset of strategic partnerships with the involvement of G20 states as one of the members for the period of 1993–2020. The article contributes to three strands of scholarly literature. First, it contributes to the small but growing literature on strategic partnerships (SEE BLANCO 2016; ENVALL – HALL 2016; STRÜVER 2017; WILKINS 2008) by providing the most comprehensive empirical account to date of the extent to which such partnerships have proliferated over time and across states. Second, it contributes to the literature on informal institutions (SEE ABBOT – FAUDE 2020; ROGER 2020; VABULAS – SNIDAL 2013) by testing an argument about the complementary/substitutive role of these *informal* partnerships vis-à-vis *formal* alliances. Lastly, it contributes to the alignment literature (SEE LOCOMAN – PAPA 2021; SNYDER 1997; WILKINS 2012) by improving our understanding of the drivers of lesser-known forms of alignments.

The results of the analysis provide mixed evidence in support of the proposition that security concerns – or more specifically, the presence of common threats – constitute(s) one of the primary factors behind the incidence of strategic partnership ties. Other factors, such as inequality of power, economic interests or a history of military conflict, clearly play a role as well. Perhaps most importantly, the results suggest that states are much more likely to be tied by strategic partnerships when their security interests coalesce with an absence of their joint membership in a formal alliance, which supports the idea that the primary role of these arrangements tends to be substitutive, rather than complementary, vis-à-vis the more traditional forms of alignment. One important caveat to this finding concerns the *level* of alliance commitment. Parties to the same alliance involving a relatively lower level of commitment – such as a consultation or neutrality/non-aggression pact – are also likely to be tied by a strategic partnership if they face a common threat. This finding suggests that partnerships can play both a complementary and a substitutive role, but this is contingent on the *level* of alliance commitment.

Given that strategic partnerships have received only limited attention in the International Relations literature so far, it is perhaps important to establish why they matter in the first place. First, strategic partnerships have become a staple of the "21st-century alignment" (WILKINS 2012: 68), and their proliferation reflects the international system as it is in transition (KUCHINS 2001: 2). Major and rising powers must navigate the unfolding

international environment under unprecedented levels of uncertainty about others' intentions and the future distribution of capabilities. The flexible nature of informal institutions, such as partnerships, provides one way for states to manage the related power shifts (VABULAS – SNIDAL 2020). It is no coincidence that states such as China and Russia, which have seen major changes in their status since the end of the Cold War, are among the most prolific originators of these arrangements. Both countries now favor strategic partnerships over formal alliances (SEE LOCOMAN – PAPA 2021; STRÜVER 2017; WILKINS 2008).

Second, strategic partnerships are durable. For example, China and Russia have maintained and continuously updated their strategic partnership from its establishment in 1996 to the present. Under it, the two parties meet regularly to address security, trade and other challenges. The meetings are held at the highest executive level, often with the presidents in attendance (STRÜVER 2017: 36; WILKINS 2008: 360). The recent elevation of the partnership to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for a New Era," demonstrates that Beijing and Moscow continue to benefit from their bilateral cooperation (MAULL 2022), which is ultimately driven by a common interest in promoting multipolarity and an anti-hegemonic (anti-United States) world order (LOCOMAN – PAPA 2021: 19). The enduring nature of this partnership is further evident from the fact that it has so far remained unaffected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Some analysts go so far as to describe the Sino-Russian partnership as "alliance-like" (YE 2022), although it does not entail any binding commitments to provide military support.

Lastly, governments attach a special importance to strategic partnerships. For example, in an op-ed for the Chinese news agency Xinhua, Russian President Putin praised the current Sino-Russian relations as a *"comprehensive strategic partnership"* and stated that they had reached *"an unprecedented level"* (PUTIN 2022). Chinese President Xi Jinping later said that the partnership with Russia is *"superior to any Cold War-era alliance"* (MUNROE ET AL. 2022). The two sides also signed a joint statement emphasizing that the partnership has *"no limits"* and that there are *"no forbidden areas of cooperation"* in it (KAPETAS 2022). In summary, since the end of the Cold War, strategic partnerships have become an increasingly common form of international cooperation that has proved enduring and is seen by governments as an important foreign policy tool. Therefore, it is pertinent to

explore what could explain the proliferation of strategic partnerships and what their role is vis-à-vis other forms of security cooperation, including formal military alliances.

The structure of the article is as follows. First, I provide a brief overview of the distinction between strategic partnerships and other forms of alignment, including alliances, coalitions, and security communities. Second, I formulate several hypotheses related to security concerns – namely, interstate threats – and the function of strategic partnerships vis-à-vis formal alliances – whether it is complementary or substitutive. Next, I describe the data and methods of analysis. In the following section, I present the results of the analysis and follow up with a discussion of my findings. Finally, I conclude with a summary of the findings and point to some avenues for future research.

VARIETIES OF ALIGNMENT

According to many scholars, the collapse of the bipolar system has led to a significant change in the nature of international security cooperation. This change has sparked an academic debate about one of the key concepts in our field – military alliances (CHIDLEY 2014; LOCOMAN – PAPA 2021; TERTRAIS 2004; WILKINS 2012). The problem at the outset was that the existing literature on this topic focused almost exclusively on *formal* military alliances as a tool for enhancing national security through which states could prevent and manage wars (RYNNING – SCHMITT 2018: 1). The leading contributions to this literature were largely written and developed during the Cold War (SEE WALTZ 1979; WALT 1987), and the sorts of arrangements that the authors observed and theorized, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact, were products of that time. Yet, this predominant focus on *formal* military alliances has effectively limited the field of research to a very specific form of security cooperation (CHIDLEY 2014; WILKINS 2012), and this entailed moving away from the broader concept of alignment, which Snyder (1997: 6) defined as *"[…] expectations of states about whether they will be supported or opposed by other states in future interactions."*

However, traditional conceptualizations of military alliances no longer necessarily reflect the new security environment and the full range of security cooperation in the nascent multipolar world. Increasingly,

countries are resorting to more *informal* arrangements (CHIDLEY 2014; LOCOMAN – PAPA 2021). Wilkins (2012) thus argued for a return to the concept of alignment as an umbrella term for different forms of security cooperation, including military alliances, coalitions, security communities, and strategic partnerships, which can be defined as *"[...] structured collaboration[s] between states (or other actors) to take joint advantage of economic opportunities, or to respond to security challenges [...]"* (WILKINS 2008: 383). Whereas alliances are based on *formal* agreements that bind their members to cooperate militarily in the face of a common threat (LEEDS 2020: 6), strategic partnerships are based on *informal* agreements organized around a general (security) purpose, or a "system principle," such as championship of a multipolar world (WILKINS 2008: 360–361). In addition, unlike security communities, partnerships are based on shared interests rather than values, and unlike coalitions, they are *"open-ended and evolving"* rather than *ad hoc* solutions to specific problems (ENVALL – HALL 2016: 91). Strategic partnerships thus arguably represent a distinct category of alignment.

The most characteristic feature of strategic partnerships, in comparison to military alliances in particular, is precisely their general (security) purpose and informality. Security is not the only, and sometimes not even the most prominent, area of cooperation under strategic partnerships. Rather, these partnerships tend to be multidimensional, often spanning a wide range of functional areas, including diplomacy, defense, trade, and culture (SEE KAY 2000: 15–16; MICHALSKI 2019: 4–5; ŠIMEČKA – TALLIS 2016: 3–5; WILKINS 2008: 360–361). The *general* security purpose of partnerships lies in their ability to combat uncertainty about the international environment by creating stable expectations about future interactions between states, regardless of the specific issue area (WILKINS 2008: 363–364). Military alliances limited to defense cooperation, on the other hand, are considered by many to be ineffective in addressing today's security challenges (LOCOMAN – PAPA 2021: 275) as they often require a more complex and multidimensional approach.

While during the Cold War formal security cooperation allowed states to formulate clear and long-term commitments, security cooperations today tend to be rather short-term and are often laden with uncertainty about future developments (VABULAS – SNIDAL 2021: 854). The informal nature of strategic partnerships brings some advantages, including the flexibility to modify the agreement as circumstances change, faster decision-making

and confidentiality, which can help states overcome the uncertainty. Most importantly, as informal institutions, they entail *low* commitment costs (ABBOTT – FAUDE 2020; ROGER 2020; VABULAS – SNIDAL 2013). Partnerships thus stand in contrast to traditional military alliances, which are based on formal agreements, and entail *high* commitment costs due to legally binding obligations (SEE LEEDS 2020: 6). However, precisely because of their low costs, strategic partnerships are poorly-suited for addressing cooperation problems that require credible commitments (SEE ABBOTT – FAUDE 2020: 10), as is the case with coordinated military action.

The recent proliferation of strategic partnerships is part of a broader trend of proliferation of informal institutions, including informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGOs), with which they share some common features (SEE ROGER – ROWAN 2022; VABULAS – SNIDAL 2021). These include: (1) explicitly shared expectations, but no formal treaty, (2) explicitly associated members, but no formal membership, and (3) regular meetings, but no independent secretariat (VABULAS – SNIDAL 2013: 201). Partnerships are established on the basis of joint declarations or memoranda of understanding that specify shared expectations but do not constitute a legally binding commitment (HOLSLAG 2011: 295–296; PARAMESWARAN 2014: 264). The countries in the partnership are explicitly associated by its recognition, and they often develop mechanisms for regular interaction, such as so-called "strategic dialogues" (STRÜVER 2017: 37–38; PARAMESWARAN 2014: 264–265). What sets partnerships apart from IIGOs is their general purpose, which is normally associated with delegation to an independent authority (HAWKINS ET AL. 2006; HOOGHE – MARKS 2014) and the fact that they are typically bilateral.

ALLIANCE COMPLEMENTS OR SUBSTITUTES?

The conventional wisdom of realism in International Relations says that states form military alliances to balance against the most powerful or threatening state (SEE SNYDER 1997; WALT 1987; WALTZ 1979). While most authors agree that one of the main reasons why states establish strategic partnerships is to strengthen national and regional security (ENVALL – HALL 2016: 87; PARAMESWARAN 2014: 264; WILKINS 2008: 360), there is some disagreement as to whether their formation is motivated by the presence of external threats, as is the case with military alliances. Strategic partnerships tend to be "goal-driven" rather than "threat-driven." They are useful for policy coordination because

they allow states to share information, resources, and risks (WILKINS 2008: 361), but not for the aggregation of power to counter threats militarily since they lack mechanisms to make commitments credible. Even still, this property does not detract from their utility in addressing threats indirectly, such as through "soft balancing" (FERGUSSON 2012; KAY 2000; PAUL 2018). States resort to such strategies to achieve more modest goals by frustrating or undermining an adversary's foreign policy ambitions with non-military means, such as diplomacy, international institutions, and economic statecraft, while avoiding the risk of military confrontation (PAPE 2005: 7; PAUL 2018: 20).

Strategic partnerships are arguably an ideal tool for soft balancing, not least because of their informality. The absence of legally-binding obligations in them avoids some of the problems inherent to military alliances, such as entrapment or abandonment (PAUL 2018: 187). To be sure, countries may resort to soft balancing through other means, such as formal intergovernmental organizations (FIGOs), to achieve the same goals (WIVEL – PAUL 2020). Yet, formal rules and diverse memberships in FIGOs complicate reaching an agreement, while partnerships do not have to suffer from these limitations. The multidimensional nature of strategic partnerships can also aid in soft balancing as it seeks to reduce the influence of a hostile outside power not only in the military, but also in the economic, cultural and normative sphere (FERGUSSON 2012: 200). These benefits are likely to make partnerships an attractive option for states in terms of their addressing common security challenges. Therefore, states facing a common threat should be more likely to be tied by strategic partnerships.

Hypothesis 1: Two states that face a common threat are more likely to be tied by a strategic partnership.

Insofar as strategic partnerships serve a similar purpose as military alliances – i.e. to enhance national and regional security – the question arises whether they function as complements to or substitutes for each other. This conundrum goes even beyond the alignment debate since the recent proliferation of informal institutions has led to increasing complexity in global governance, with overlapping memberships in formal and informal arrangements that often focus on solving similar substantive issues (SEE ABBOTT – FAUDE 2022). These patterns are all the more difficult to decipher given that some countries, such as China, have established tens

of partnerships while maintaining only a limited portfolio of military alliances, whereas other countries, such as the United States, have pursued the establishment of both simultaneously (SEE STRÜVER 2017; PARAMESWARAN 2014). By the mid-2000s, virtually all the major powers had established strategic partnerships with their counterparts at the regional and global levels (SEE TALLIS – ŠIMEČKA 2017: 4; ENVALL – HALL 2016: 90), but the number of military alliances appears to be stagnating. In principle, both the logic of complementarity and that of substitution could apply here.

However, the literature on informal institutions addresses this question only marginally. For example, Abbott and Faude (2020: 26) argue that "low-cost institutions" can complement FIGOs in addressing specific aspects of cooperation, such as accelerated policy coordination, for which they are well-suited. But the same institutions can also exist in place of FIGOs in areas where it would otherwise be difficult to reach a formal agreement. As such, informal institutions can potentially act as "building blocks" for or "stumbling blocks" to a more formal cooperation (VABULAS – SNIDAL 2013: 195, 212)[2] These assumptions apply equally to strategic partnerships. When they serve as substitutes, they can be created as *"[...] new (less-demanding) types of alliance [...] with the specific purpose of bolstering a particular world view or the international positions of like-minded powers"* (MICHALSKI 2019: 7). The primary purpose of these arrangements would likely be soft balancing. The low commitment costs should also make it relatively easy for states to achieve some level of cooperation while avoiding the pitfalls of abandonment and entrapment associated with military alliances.

Strategic partnerships as complements can be created *"[...] to broaden the social interaction of the alliance partners, to widen the scope of cooperation to non-military areas/sectors or to broaden the alliance to a wider set of participants/stakeholders"* (MICHALSKI 2019: 7). The main purpose of these arrangements would likely be reassurance – that is, to increase the allies' feeling of security or discourage them from seeking outside options (SEE BLANKENSHIP 2020; BLANKENSHIP – LIN-GREENBERG 2022). While authors such as T. V. Paul (2018: 26) recognize the value of strategic partnerships in signaling reassurance, it is likely that such a complementary function would depend on the *level* of (pre-)existing alliance commitment. Some military alliances only oblige their members to take part in consultations or uphold principles of neutrality and non-aggression, whereas others include a more

serious commitment to active military assistance (SEE LEEDS 2020). The low commitment costs of partnerships would prove detrimental to reassurance in cases where the countries involved already share membership in *high* commitment alliances because the establishment of such arrangements could be seen as scaling back the alignment (SEE LIM – COOPER 2015). This leads us to two competing hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2a: A pair of states without joint membership in a formal alliance are more likely to be tied by a strategic partnership.

Hypothesis 2b: A pair of states with joint membership in a formal alliance are more likely to be tied by a strategic partnership.

Ultimately, the results of a test of these two hypotheses may lead to a misinterpretation of the function of strategic partnerships in relation to military alliances – whether complementary or substitutive – if we fail to account for the underlying rationale of enhancing national and regional security. The conceptualization of partnerships as alliance complements or substitutes arguably makes sense to the extent that they allow states to achieve similar – albeit more modest – goals as alliances. Therefore, the mere presence or absence of existing alliance commitments may prove to be a poor indicator of the hypothesized complementary/substitutive role. If the function is complementary, we should see partnership ties especially between countries that share membership in the same alliance and face a common threat. Alternatively, if the function is substitutive, we should see partnership ties especially between countries that do *not* share membership in the same alliance but face a common threat. The relationship between partnership ties and existing alliance commitments (or lack thereof) could thus be conditional on the presence of a common threat. I therefore amend the previous two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3a: Two states without joint membership in a formal alliance are more likely to be tied by a strategic partnership when they face a common threat.

Hypothesis 3b: Two states with joint membership in a formal alliance are more likely to be tied by a strategic partnership when they face a common threat.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA

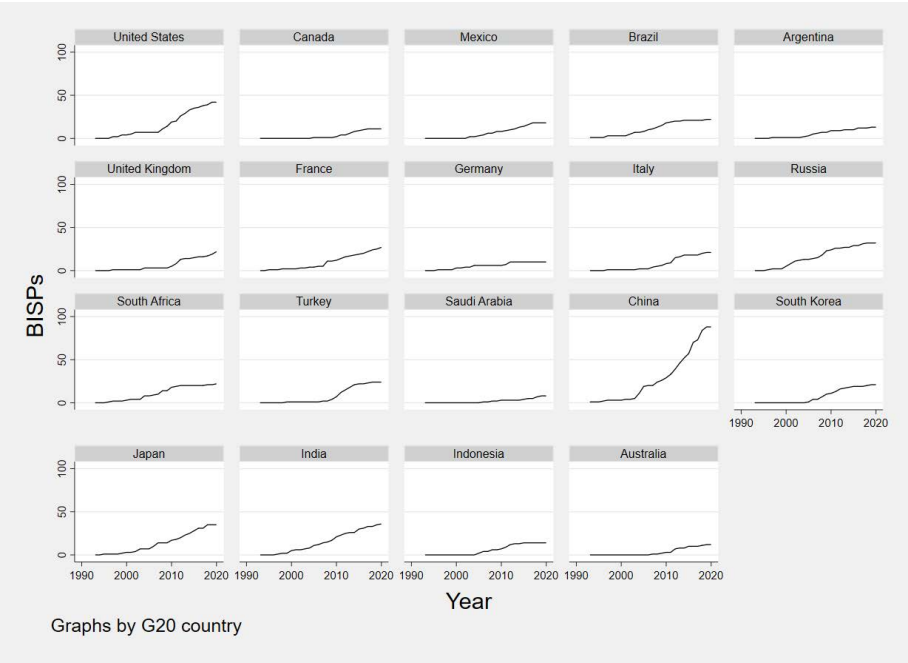
The BISP dataset and the dependent variable

To find out whether strategic partnerships function primarily as alliance complements or substitutes, I have created a new "Bilateral Intergovernmental Strategic Partnerships (BISP) Dataset" covering the universe of cases of *bilateral* partnerships – hereinafter BISPs – with the involvement of G20 members established between 1993 and 2020. Although limited in coverage, the new dataset provides the first cross-country account of BISPs to date. One notable previous attempt to document the proliferation of strategic partnerships is an article by Strüver (2017), which surveys Chinese partnerships formed between 1993 and 2016. Several other articles and policy papers provide partial coverage of countries such as the United States, Brazil, and India in this regard (SEE COSTA VAZ 2014; HALL 2016; HAMILTON 2014). Our understanding of the extent to which BISPs have proliferated across countries and over time is still limited. The new dataset at least partially fills this empirical gap. Given their influence on the international system, the G20 members are a good starting point for the data collection.

First, to collect the data, I surveyed the official websites of all the relevant political bodies – the chief of state, the head of government, the cabinet or government, the ministry of foreign affairs or its equivalent, and the parliament, as appropriate – in all the G20 countries. At this initial stage, I obtained the root domains of the official websites. Second, I looked up the term strategic partnership for each G20 member along with the name of one of the remaining 194 countries using the relevant root domains. Third, after obtaining the first ten results for all 3,686 search combinations, I conducted a full-text search for evidence of a BISP tie. I coded the dependent variable, *BISP tie*, as "1" if it met one of the following criteria: (1) the webpage explicitly mentions the year of the establishment of the partnership; (2) the webpage explicitly mentions the founding document;[3] (3) multiple webpages mention the existence of a BISP. If the year of the establishment of the partnership was missing, I recorded the year of the earliest mention of it that was found. If none of the above criteria were met, I coded the variable as "0."[4] Figure 1 shows the cumulative count of BISPs for all the G20 countries for the period between 1993 and 2020.

The data show that China and the United States had by far the highest number of BISPs by 2020, and it accounts for about a third of all the cases in the dataset. On balance, rising powers – the BRICS in particular – had more BISPs than the G7, which reflects the disproportionate attention the literature has paid to actors like China (SEE DENG 2007; STRÜVER 2017), Russia (SEE FERGUSON 2012; WILKINS 2008), or India (SEE HALL 2016). The mid-2000s have seen a rapid increase in the number of BISPs, which eventually reached 381 by the end of the year 2020 in the universe of cases of G20 partnerships. For the purposes of this analysis, I transformed the dataset into a cross-sectional format with undirected dyads as the unit of observation, where one dyad member is always a G20 country and the other is any other country. This transformation yielded a total of 3,515 observations. Since the data for some variables are available only up to 2014, the year of observation is also 2014. There were 275 BISPs in existence in that year.

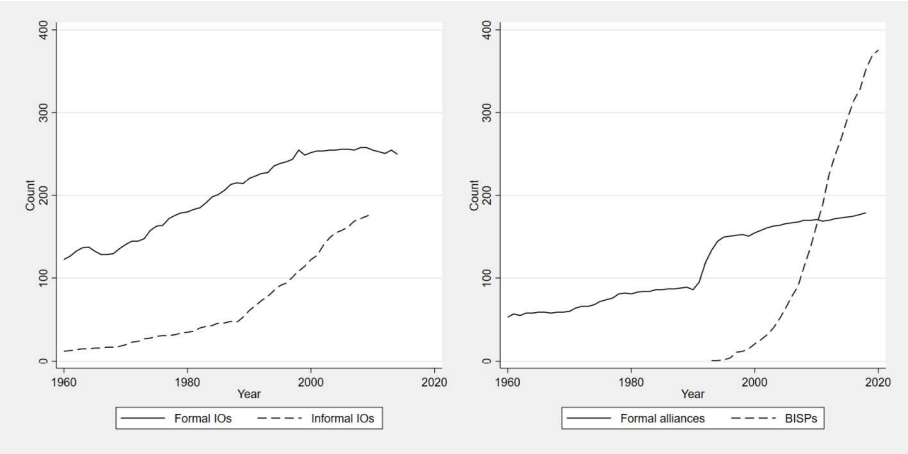
FIGURE 1: THE BISP COUNT OVER TIME FOR EACH G20 MEMBER, 1993–2020



Note: The data on BISPs were collected by the author of this article. Unit of observation: G20 member-year.

One of the challenges in constructing the dataset concerns the uncertainty about the status of individual BISPs – whether in force or defunct. Official sources do not provide information on BISP terminations, which means that some BISPs in the dataset may already be defunct. This issue is partly due to the informal nature of BISPs, which makes partnership-related activities inherently less transparent. To identify those BISPs that were most likely defunct by the end of 2014, I took a fairly conservative approach based on the following criteria: (1) the collapse of the state authority on the part of one member; and (2) the use of military force by one member against another. I recoded cases meeting one of these criteria as "0" unless official sources reaffirmed the existence of the partnership by the end of 2014. This final adjustment yielded a total of 269 BISPs as of 2014.

FIGURE 2: THE COUNT OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL FORMS OF COOPERATION AT THE G20 LEVEL, 1960–2020



Note: The data on FIGOs comes from the "Intergovernmental Organizations (v3)" dataset (Pevehouse et al. 2020). The data on IIGOs comes from Roger and Rowan (2022). The data on formal alliances comes from the "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (v5)" dataset (Leeds et al. 2002). Unit of observation: G20-year.

In order to understand the significance of this number, let us now compare the proliferation of BISPs to that of other forms of institutionalized cooperation. The two line plots in Figure 2 above depict the increases in the numbers of FIGOs and IIGOs, on the one hand, and formal military alliances and BISPs, on the other hand, at the G20 level over the period from 1960 to 2020. As argued elsewhere (SEE ROGER – ROWAN 2022; VABULAS – SNIDAL 2020), especially since the end of the Cold War, states have increasingly preferred to establish informal forms of cooperation. This is evident from the plot on the left, which indicates that the increase in the number of IIGOs was more rapid than that of FIGOs. As shown in the plot on the right, this trend is likely even more pronounced in the area of agreements on security cooperation. By the end of 2020, there were roughly twice as many BISPs as there were formal alliances in the subset of G20 countries. Though the number of BISPs has risen exponentially since the mid-1990s, the number of formal alliances has remained fairly constant.[5]

Independent variables

To test H1, I use the *common threat* variable. This binary measure captures the presence or absence of the same third-party adversary in each dyad between 2005 and 2014. The data for this variable comes from

the dyadic "Militarized Interstate Disputes (v4)" dataset (MAOZ ET AL. 2018). I follow Lai and Reiter (2000: 214) and code the *common threat* variable as "1" if both dyad members participated in a militarized interstate dispute against the same third party sometime in the previous ten years, and "0" otherwise. Previous studies on military alliances have found that the presence of a common threat is a significant predictor of both alliance formation and duration (SEE GIBLER – RIDER 2004; GIBLER – WOLFORD 2006; LAI – REITER 2000; LEEDS ET AL. 2002). While recognizing that BISPs are not necessarily threat-driven arrangements (WILKINS 2008: 361), their general security purpose and utility for policy coordination make them a viable tool for addressing threats indirectly, such as through soft balancing (SEE PAPE 2005; PAUL 2018). If **H1** holds, there will be a positive association between the *common threat* variable and the dependent variable.

To test **H2a** and **H2b**, I use the *alliance* and *alliance commitment* variables. First, *alliance* is a binary measure that captures the presence or absence of a joint membership in a formal alliance as of 2014. The data for this variable come from the "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (v5)" (ATOP) dataset (LEEDS ET AL. 2002). I code the *alliance* variable as "1" if the two states were parties to the same alliance, regardless of the types of obligations or provisions, and "0" otherwise. An alliance is *"[...] a formal agreement among independent states to cooperate militarily in the face of [a] potential or realized military conflict"* (LEEDS 2020: 6). Thus, for an alliance to qualify as such according to the ATOP coding scheme, it has to be based on a formal agreement. This is one of the main differences between alliances and BISPs, which are informal. If **H2a** holds, states with a shared alliance membership should be less likely to be tied by a BISP. Alternatively, if **H2b** holds, they should be more likely to have a BISP.

Scholars have long recognized that different types of alliances – whether defense, consultation, or neutrality/non-aggression pacts – entail different levels of commitment. Alliances that oblige their members to take part in consultations, or uphold principles of neutrality or non-aggression, represent lower commitment than alliances with provisions for active military support in the event of an attack (SEE LEEDS ET AL. 2002: 240–242; SMALL – SINGER 1969: 280). To capture different levels of commitment, I created an alternative variable which disaggregates alliance membership into two categories. I code the *alliance commitment* variable as "0" for "no alliance

commitment," which corresponds to the absence of a formal alliance, "1" for "low alliance commitment," which corresponds to alliances that do not oblige their members to maintain an active military support, and "2" for "high alliance commitment," which corresponds to the "defense pact" category.[6] If **H2a** holds, states with "no alliance commitment" should be more likely to be tied by a BISP. If **H2b** holds, the presence of a "low" or "high alliance commitment" should increase the likelihood of a BISP tie.

Other than the above independent variables, I use several controls to minimize the omitted-variable bias. These include *trade value (log)*, *polity difference*, *foreign policy difference*, *power differential*, and *conflict relations*. First, *trade value (log)* is a continuous measure of the total value of the merchandise trade between two dyad members in 2014. The data for this variable comes from the "Trade IV" dataset (BARBIERI ET AL. 2009). To account for the skewed distribution of values, I use a logarithmic transformation. Since many authors point to economic cooperation as one of the prominent features of BISPs (SEE NADKARNI 2010; STRÜVER 2017; WILKINS 2008), we would expect a positive association between *trade value (log10)* and *BISP tie*. As with formal military alliances, states may also form BISPs to reduce trade volatility by developing stable political expectations (SEE FORDHAM 2010; BAGOZZI – LANDIS 2015).

Second, *polity difference* is a continuous measure of the difference between the domestic-political institutions of the two states in a dyad as of 2014. The data for this variable comes from the "Polity V" dataset (MARSHALL – GURR 2020). This dataset includes the item "polity2," a spectrum ranging from -10 to 10, where higher values indicate the presence of more democratic institutions. To obtain the scores for *polity difference*, I follow Lai and Reiter (2000: 213–214) and calculate the absolute difference in the two countries' "polity2" scores. Previous research has shown that pairs of states with similar political regimes are more likely to engage in and maintain a cooperation, including within formal alliances (SEE LEEDS 1999; CRESCENZI ET AL. 2012; LAI – REITER 2000; LEEDS 2003). Cooperation is least likely among mixed-regime dyads because autocracies are less likely to have incentives to abide by the agreement, and democracies are less likely to allow the possibility of defection (LEEDS 1999). Thus, we would expect higher values of *polity difference* to be negatively associated with the *BISP tie* variable.

Third, the *foreign policy difference* variable is a continuous measure of the difference of the foreign policy preferences of the two states in a dyad as of 2014. The data for it comes from an updated version of the "United Nations General Assembly Voting Data" dataset compiled by Voeten, Strezhnev, and Bailey (2009). This dataset includes the item "ideal point," a single-dimension spectrum that captures states' positions toward the US-led liberal order based on their voting in the United Nations General Assembly. To obtain the values, I calculate the absolute difference in the two countries' "ideal point" scores. Previous research has shown that states with similar foreign policies are more likely to form alliances (CRESCENZI ET AL. 2012; GIBLER – RIDER 2004; FORDHAM 2010). If BISPs serve a similar role, we would expect a positive association between *foreign policy difference* and the *BISP tie* variable. In addition, when state preferences are in harmony, countries arguably only need a limited, or less formal, institutional framework to facilitate their cooperation (SEE EILSTRUP-SANGIOVANNI 2009; WHYTOCK 2005).[7]

Fourth, *power differential* is a continuous measure of the difference in material power between the two states in a dyad as of 2014. The data for it comes from the "National Material Capabilities (v6.0)" dataset (SINGER ET AL. 1972). I use the "Composite Indicator of National Capability" (CINC) item, which indicates a country's share of material capabilities in the international system, and calculate the absolute difference between the two states' CINC scores. The literature on informal institutions theorizes that informal institutions are more likely to emerge under conditions of power inequality since powerful states favor safeguarding their autonomy and have the ability to coerce weaker states to comply with specific policies without the help of formal procedures (SEE REINSBERG – WESTERWINTER 2021; ROGER 2020; VABULAS – SNIDAL 2013). Similarly to a(n) (asymmetric) formal alliance, the decision to establish a BISP could also be driven by the security-autonomy trade-off, where the weaker state offers concessions that bolster the more powerful state's freedom of action in return for security benefits (SEE MORROW 1991). We would, therefore, expect a positive association between the *power differential* and *BISP tie* variables.

Fifth, *conflict relations* is a dichotomous measure that captures the occurrence/non-occurrence of militarized interstate disputes between the two states in a dyad between 2005 and 2014. The data for it comes from the dyadic "Militarized Interstate Disputes (v4)" dataset (MAOZ ET AL.

2018). I follow Lai and Reiter (2000: 214) and code *conflict relations* as "1" if the two members of a dyad were on the opposite sides of a militarized interstate dispute during the previous ten years, and "0" otherwise. Enemies, by definition, are less cooperative and rarely maintain alliances with each other (SEE LAI – REITER 2000; GIBLER – RIDER 2004). In a similar vein, we would expect pairs of states with a history of conflict to be less likely to be tied by a BISP.

Estimation strategy

To investigate the plausibility of the previously described hypotheses, I use two statistical techniques: the chi-squared test and the logistic regression method. The former is suitable for bivariate analysis, and the latter for multivariable analysis. The more straightforward bivariate analysis is beneficial because it can reveal patterns in the data that can provide initial empirical support for **H1** through **H3b**. The latter analysis will further allow us to test the hypotheses while controlling for the influence of other confounding variables, and to model the interaction between the *common threat* and *alliance* or *alliance commitment* variables. For these purposes, I use multiplicative interaction models (SEE BRAMBOR ET AL. 2006) accompanied by plots of predictive margins (SEE BERRY ET AL. 2012). The analysis draws on the original dataset in a cross-sectional format with observations for all the variables as of 2014. The unit of observation is an undirected state-to-state dyad, where one of the members is always a G20 country. In line with the convention in quantitative political science, I use dyad clustered standard errors (SEE ARONOW ET AL. 2015: 565). In the online supplemental materials, I show that the results are robust to the use of alternative estimation techniques that account for the possibility of "dyadic clustering."

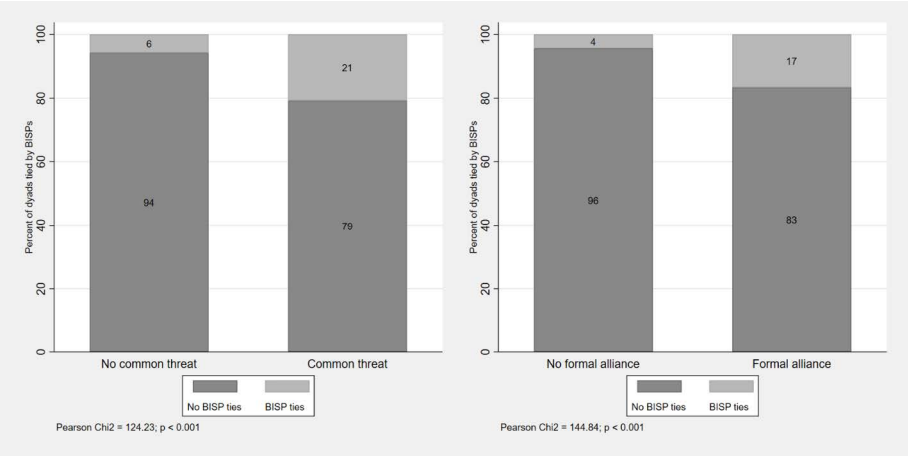
EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

A Straightforward Test

What patterns can we observe from the data? To explore the plausibility of **H1** through **H3b**, I first created contingency tables and performed chi-squared tests. For convenience, I provide only a visual representation in this section (SEE FIGURE 3 AND 4). The bar chart on the left of Figure 3 shows that the share of dyads tied by a BISP was more than three times higher in the "common threat" group (21%) than in the "no common threat" group

(6%). Moreover, the results of a Pearson's chi-squared test indicate that the likelihood of *common threat* and *BISP tie* being independent of each other is close to zero ($p< 0.001$). Thus, we obtain some initial evidence in support of **H1**. Crucially, the presence of a common threat also reflects the substance of the cooperation within specific BISPs. For instance, the 2021 "U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership" explicitly identifies the Russian Federation as a threat and lays out specific steps to counter it. Among other things, the Charter says that the United States *"[…] intends to support Ukraine's efforts to counter armed aggression, economic and energy disruptions, and malicious cyber activity by Russia, including by maintaining sanctions against or related to Russia and applying other relevant measures […]"* (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE 2021).

FIGURE 3: BISP TIES ACROSS THE COMMON THREAT AND ALLIANCE MEMBERSHIP VARIABLES

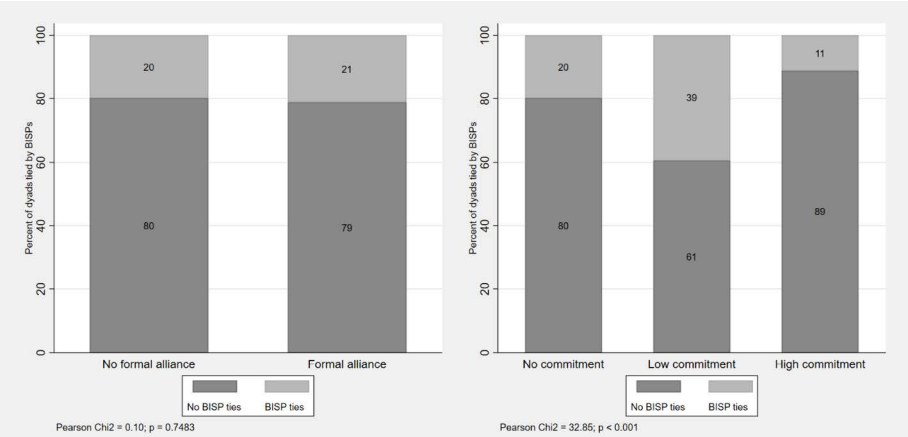


Note: The numbers in the bars correspond to the percent share of dyads tied by a BISP. N = 3,515. Unit of observation: State-to-state dyad as of 2014. For a table with the results of cross-tabulations, see the online supplemental materials in Appendix 1.

Next, the bar chart on the right of Figure 3 shows that the share of dyads tied by a BISP was approximately four times higher in the "formal alliance" group (17%) than in the "no formal alliance" group (4%). The results of a Pearson's chi-squared test show that the likelihood of *alliance* and *BISP tie* being independent of each other is close to zero ($p<0.001$). Thus, we obtain some initial evidence for **H2b**. Indeed, a number of G20 countries have BISP ties with their formal allies. For example, China and India maintain a strategic partnership (MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF INDIA 2005), and they are also members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which

qualifies as a formal alliance due to its provisions for consultations and non-aggression. Similarly, the United States maintains strategic partnerships with countries such as North Macedonia (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE 2008) and Georgia (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE 2009), with whom it shares membership in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which qualifies as a non-aggression pact according to ATOP. Notably, the founding documents of all of the mentioned BISPs focus on cooperation in security and defense areas.

FIGURE 4: BISP TIES ACROSS ALLIANCE MEMBERSHIP AND COMMITMENTS, COMMON THREAT SUBSET



Note: The numbers in the bars correspond to the percent share of dyads tied by a BISP. N = 449. Unit of observation: State-to-state dyad as of 2014. For a table with the results of cross-tabulations, see the online supplemental materials in Appendix 1.

As a preliminary test of **H3a** and **H3b**, I repeated the analysis with the *alliance* variable with a subset of dyads faced with a common threat. If the main purpose of BISPs is to complement formal alliances, as previous results suggest, we should see the highest share of BISPs among pairs of states with joint membership in a formal alliance that also face a common threat. Yet, the bar chart on the left of Figure 4 shows that the proportions of dyads tied by a BISP are roughly equal for both the "no formal alliance" and the "formal alliance" group (20% and 21%, respectively). The results of a Pearson's chi-squared test additionally show that there is no statistically distinguishable difference between the two groups (p=0.7483). These findings would suggest that there is no conditional relationship between the variables. Thus, I repeated the analysis using the *alliance commitment*

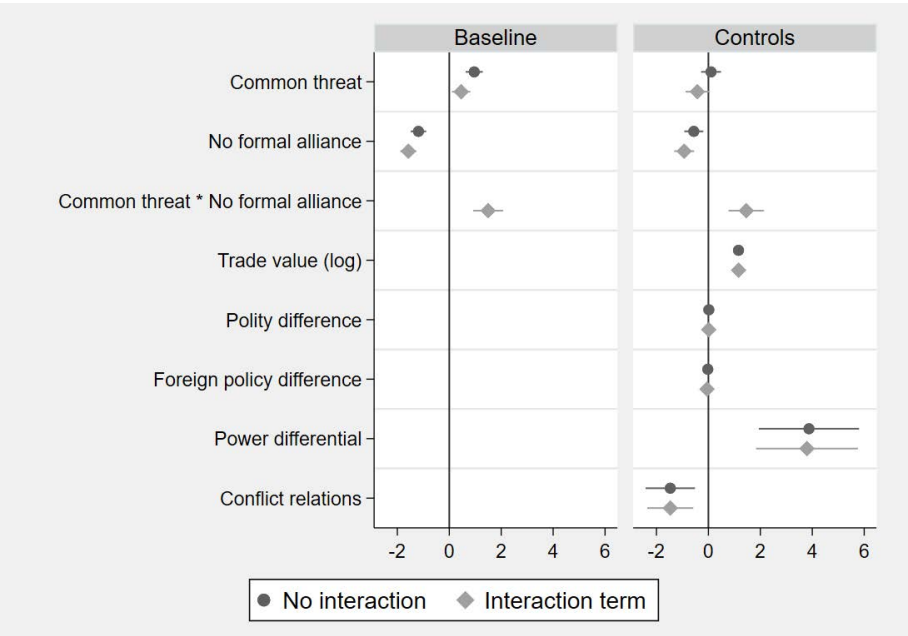
variable to see how the results would differ when disaggregating formal alliance membership by the type of commitment. The bar chart on the right of Figure 4 shows that the highest proportion of dyads tied by a BISP was in the "low commitment" group (39%), followed by the "no commitment" (20%) and "high commitment" group (11%). The difference between the three groups is statistically significant ($p<0.001$).

This latter finding is significant because it suggests that the complementary/substitutive role of BISPs likely depends on the *level* of alliance commitment. It appears that countries are most likely to be tied by a BISP when they are members to a "low commitment" alliance, such as a consultation or non-aggression pact, while also facing a common threat, supporting **H3b**. Ultimately, however, to get a better sense of these findings, we need to account for other potential confounding factors, and model the interaction between *common threat* and *alliance/alliance commitment* directly. I therefore turn to the results of the logistic regression in the following section.

Logistic regression with alliance

Figure 5 below shows regression coefficient plots with the main findings. To test **H1** to **H3b**, I use four models with *BISP tie* as the dependent variable. For a better interpretation, I change the reference level of the *alliance* variable from "1" to "0," from "formal alliance" to "no formal alliance." Model 1 includes *common threat* and *no formal alliance* as independent variables. Model 2 additionally includes the interaction term between the two variables. These models constitute the baseline for the analysis. To ensure the robustness of the results, I create Model 3 and 4 with the control variables *trade value (log)*, *polity difference*, *foreign policy difference*, *power differential*, and *conflict relations*. Model 4 again includes the interaction term. Before turning to the results, I evaluate how the models perform by comparing the values of the Area Under the Curve (AUC) statistic of the Receiver Operating Characteristic. In general, models with controls perform significantly better in distinguishing between classes – whether a BISP tie is present or not. The AUC for baseline models ranges from 0.71 to 0.72, while the AUC for models with controls is 0.86. The models with interaction perform slightly better.

FIGURE 5: LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF BISP TIES

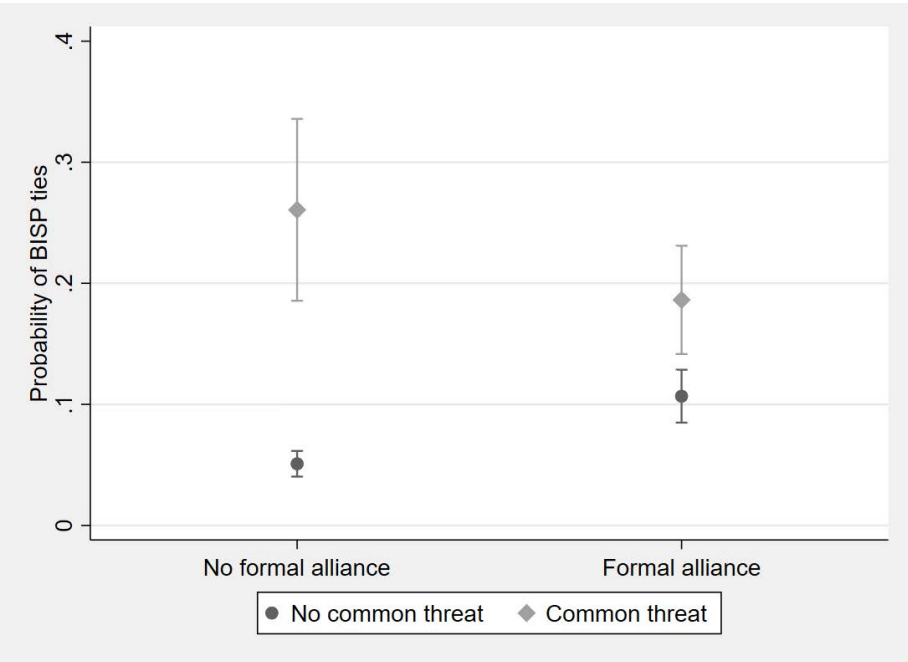


Note: Models 1–4. Logistic regression estimates with 95% confidence intervals. Dyad clustered standard errors. Variables whose intervals overlap with the vertical line are statistically indistinguishable from 0. For a table with the results of the logistic regression, see the online supplemental materials in Appendix 2.

First, I evaluate the plausibility of **H1** through **H2b** by looking at the results of models without interaction. As shown in Figure 5 above, when only the *common threat* and *no formal alliance* variables are present in the model, the former attains a statistically significant (p<0.001) and positive association with the dependent variable, while the latter achieves a statistically significant (p<0.001) and negative association with the dependent variable. These results provide empirical support for **H1** and **H2b**, as opposed to **H2a**, because the presence of a common threat increases the likelihood of a *BISP tie*, while the absence of joint membership in a formal alliance decreases this likelihood. When controlling for other factors, the *no formal alliance* variable retains statistical significance (p<0.01), but the effect of the *common threat* variable becomes statistically indistinguishable from zero. Therefore, overall, we obtain evidence in support of **H2a** and mixed evidence in support of **H1**. However, as noted in the earlier section, the sole fact that two countries are more likely to be tied by a BISP when they are – or are not – members of the same alliance should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence that BISPs play either a complementary or substitutive role, unless the same underlying purpose is taken into account. To assess the plausibility of **H3a** and **H3b**, I turn next to models with interaction.

The interaction between *common threat* and *no formal alliance* is statistically significant ($p<0.001$) and positive in models with and without controls. To correctly interpret the interaction, I follow the recommendation of Berry, Golder, and Milton (2012) and construct a plot of predictive margins for Model 4 (SEE FIGURE 6). As evident from the figure below, the predicted probability of being tied by a BISP is at its highest for pairs of states without joint membership in a formal alliance that also face a common threat. This finding indicates that the primary purpose of BISPs vis-à-vis formal alliances is substitutive rather than complementary, providing empirical evidence in support of **H3a**. Examples of such BISPs include the partnerships between the United States and Israel, Italy and Tunisia, Russia and Venezuela, Saudi Arabia and India, and Japan and Poland. On balance, however, there were only 31 partnerships of a substitutive nature compared to 62 partnerships of a complementary nature. The fact that the predicted probability of being tied by a BISP was second highest for pairs of states with joint membership in a formal alliance that also face a common threat indicates that BISPs could equally play a complementary role. I investigate this possibility further in the next section.

FIGURE 6: PREDICTIVE MARGINS OF *COMMON THREAT* BY *ALLIANCE*



Note: The graph depicts the interaction between the variables *common threat* and *alliance*. 95% confidence intervals. For a table with predictive margins, see the online supplemental materials in Appendix 2.

Besides the main independent variables and the interaction, the models with controls also reveal other significant predictors of BISP ties (SEE FIGURE 5). *Trade value (log)* attains a statistically significant and positive association with the dependent variable ($p<0.001$ in Model 3 and 4). This result reflects the observation in the empirical literature that economic cooperation constitutes an important issue area under strategic partnerships (SEE NADKARNI 2010; STRÜVER 2017; WILKINS 2008). The founding documents of many BISPs, including the Australia-France (DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE OF AUSTRALIA 2017), Japan-U.A.E. (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF JAPAN 2014), and South Korea-India (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF SOUTH KOREA 2010) declarations, include provisions to boost trade and economic relations. These provisions may also have a general security purpose, as they allow states to protect their material interests – similarly to military alliances (SEE LAI – REITER 2000: 210).

The other two statistically significant control variables are *power differential* and *conflict relations* ($p<0.001$ and $p<0.01$, respectively, in both Model 3 and 4). The former attains a positive association with *BISP tie,* suggesting that pairs of states with more unequal material capabilities are more likely to be tied by a BISP. This finding is consistent with the claim that conditions of power inequality lead to the emergence of informal institutions since powerful states disproportionately favor informality as a way of retaining their autonomy (SEE REISENBERG – WESTERWINTER 2021: 65–67). Many BISPs also reflect the rationale of the security-autonomy trade-off, similarly to asymmetric formal alliances (SEE MORROW 1991). For example, the 2021 "U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership" commits the Ukrainian side to trade liberalization and democratization in return for U.S. security assistance (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE 2021). The latter variable, *conflict relations*, attains a negative association with the dependent variable. On balance, there were only a few cases of BISPs between former enemies in the dataset. The prominent examples of this include the Russo-Chinese and Sino-Indian partnerships. This finding highlights that while (formerly) mutually antagonistic states may also be tied by a BISP, the occurrence of such partnerships is generally unlikely (CF. MICHALSKI 2019: 10–11).

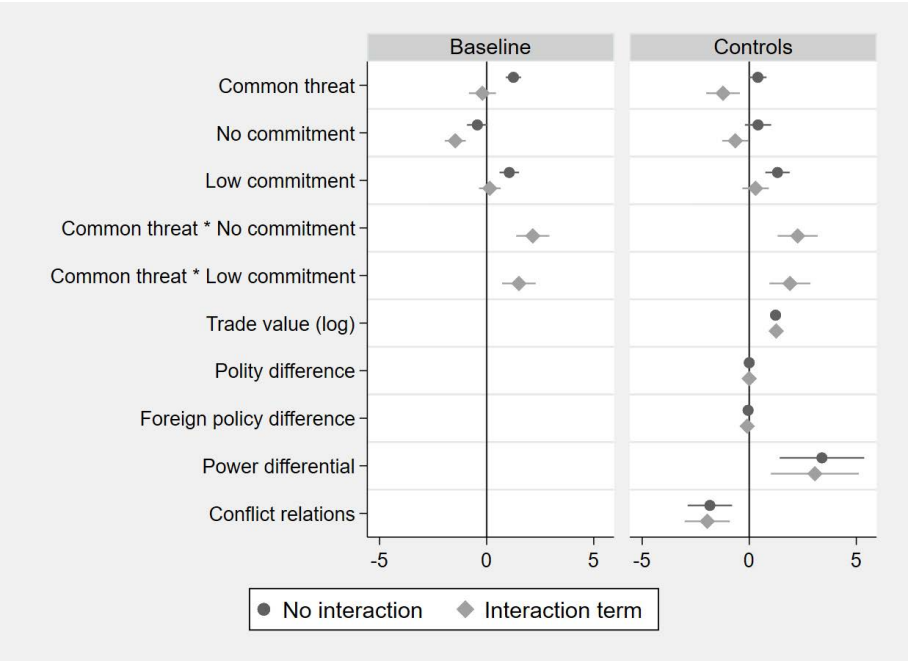
Finally, the control variables *polity difference* and *foreign policy difference* fail to attain a statistically significant association with *BISP tie*. One possible explanation is that the "low-cost" nature of BISPs makes

democracies less concerned about the possibility of defection, allowing for cooperation with even strongly autocratic states. For example, China maintains partnerships with both similar regimes, such as Belarus, Turkmenistan, or the United Arab Emirates, and dissimilar regimes, including Australia, Denmark, and New Zealand. In addition, as argued elsewhere, informal institutions could potentially emerge under the conditions of both preference heterogeneity (SEE ROGER 2020; REINSBERG – WESTERWINTER 2021) and homogeneity (SEE EILSTRUP-SANGIOVANNI 2009; WHYTOCK 2005). States may forge BISPs with partners with similar foreign policies because they do not need formal institutions to facilitate cooperation, and use BISPs as a means to achieve at least some level of cooperation with states with dissimilar foreign policies that would not normally be willing to cooperate with them formally.

Logistic regression with alliance commitment

While the results so far provide some insight into how BISPs relate to formal alliances in general, the fact that there is a substantial number of BISPs between both allied and non-allied pairs of states facing a common threat suggests that BISPs may play a substitutive as well as a complementary role. In order to investigate this possibility further, I repeat the analysis and use the *alliance commitment* variable as an alternative to *alliance*, with "high commitment" as a reference level for the estimation of the effects of the remaining two categories, "no commitment" and "low commitment." Figure 7 below shows regression coefficient plots for models 5–8. The logic behind the construction of each of these models reflects that behind models 1–4. Models 5 and 6 provide the baseline for the hypothesis-testing, whereas models 7 and 8 control for the influence of other potentially confounding factors. In addition, models 6 and 8 include the interaction term. The AUC for baseline models ranges between 0.72 and 0.73, while the AUC for models with controls ranges between 0.86 and 0.87. The inclusion of the interaction term produces slightly better results with regard to the models' capability of distinguishing between classes.

FIGURE 7: LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF BISP TIES

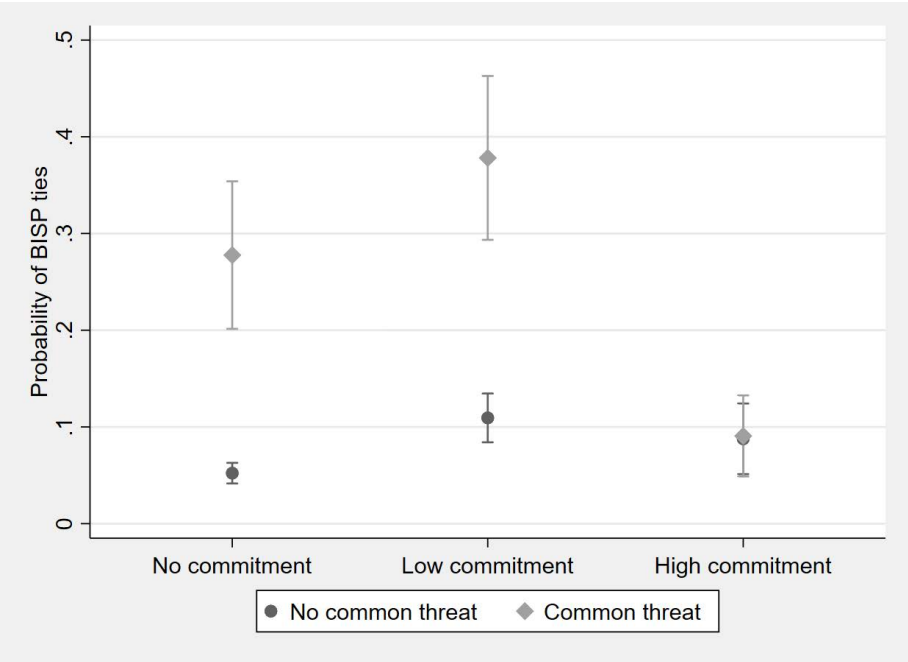


Note: Models 5–8. Logistic regression estimates with 95% confidence intervals. Dyad clustered standard errors. Variables whose intervals overlap with the vertical line are statistically indistinguishable from 0. For a table with the results of the logistic regression, see the online supplemental materials in Appendix 2.

I again evaluate the plausibility of **H1** to **H2b** by looking at the results of models without the interaction. As shown in Figure 7 above, the *common threat* variable is statistically significant (p<0.001) and positive in Model 5, but not in Model 7 with controls, providing mixed evidence in support of **H1**. In addition, the *low commitment* variable is also statistically significant (p<0.001 in Model 5 and 7) and positive, providing further empirical support for **H2b**. More importantly, both interactions between *common threat* and *no commitment*, and *common threat* and *low commitment* attain a statistically significant (p<0.001 in Model 6 and 8) and positive association with *BISP tie*. To gain a better sense of how the variables interact and to assess the plausibility of **H3a** and **H3b**, I again construct a plot of predictive margins (SEE FIGURE 8). The figure below shows that the predicted probability of being tied by a BISP is at its highest for pairs of states with joint membership in a "low commitment" alliance – such as a consultation or neutrality/non-aggression pact – facing a common threat, and second highest for pairs of states without joint membership in a formal alliance

facing a common threat. These results suggest that the complementary/substitutive role of BISPs depends on the *level* of alliance commitment.

FIGURE 8: PREDICTIVE MARGINS OF *COMMON THREAT* BY *ALLIANCE COMMITMENT*



Note: The graph depicts the interaction between the variables *common threat* and *alliance commitment*. 95% confidence intervals. For a table with predictive margins, see the online supplemental materials in Appendix 2.

Although the results of the previous analysis indicate that states are more likely to be tied by a BISP if they do not have mutual alliance commitments while facing a common enemy, supporting **H3a** and the idea of a substitutive purpose vis-à-vis formal alliances, the results of the analysis using the *alliance commitment* variable suggest that this finding comes with an important caveat – BISPs can serve as complements to formal alliances that do not entail high commitment. A possible explanation is that forming and maintaining strategic partnership ties with a country with whom another shares a defense obligation – the highest level of commitment – could signal scaling back the alignment (SEE LIM – COOPER 2015). This arguably presents less of an issue when alliance commitment is relatively low, such as in the case of consultation or neutrality/non-aggression pacts, where the act of forming a BISP could reasonably serve as a tool of reassurance.

As of 2014, there were 41 BISPs between countries that faced a common threat while being members of a formal alliance without active military support provision. For example, the United States is a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe – a non-aggression pact within the ATOP classification – together with several countries with whom it maintains BISPs, such as Georgia, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, and Ukraine. In the case of Georgia and Ukraine, the rationale of reassurance is perhaps the most convincing. The "United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership" concluded in 2009 contains an entire section dedicated to defense and security cooperation (U.S. Department of State 2009). The updated version of the Charter includes a pledge by the United States to assist the junior partner in combating Russian propaganda (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE 2019). The 2021 "U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership" contains similar promises. For example, it states that the two sides have a shared interest in *"[...] bolstering Ukraine's ability to defend itself against threats to its territorial integrity and deepening Ukraine's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions [...]"* (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE 2021) and expands on measures against Russian aggression. In both of these cases, the partnership signaled a commitment, albeit limited, on the part of the United States to upholding the security of its junior partners.

The results for the remaining control variables do not differ substantially from the previous analysis (SEE FIGURE 7). The variables *trade value (log)* and *power differential* attain a statistically significant ($p<0.001$ for both variables in Model 7, and $p<0.001$ and $p<0.01$, respectively, in Model 8) and positive association with *BISP tie*, while the *conflict relations* variable attains a statistically significant ($p<0.001$ in Model 7 and 8) and negative association with it. These results suggest that in addition to common threats or alliance commitments, other factors, such as economic interests, power inequality, and rivalries, play an important role in the incidence of BISP ties.

CONCLUSIONS

This article examined the proliferation of strategic partnerships as a new form of international alignment emerging after the Cold War. The two aims were to determine whether security concerns constitute one of the main drivers behind their proliferation, and to determine whether partnerships function as complements to or substitutes for traditional military alliances.

The results of the analysis provide mixed evidence in support of the proposition that security interests – specifically, common threats – are the basis of these arrangements. Other factors, such as trade, power inequality, and a history of conflict, clearly play a role. Most importantly, I find that two countries are most likely to be tied by a strategic partnership when their security interests coalesce with the absence of joint membership in a formal alliance. However, this finding comes with an important caveat – states parties to formal alliances with a relatively low commitment, such as consultation, neutrality, and non-aggression pacts, are also likely to be tied by partnerships when they face a common threat. The complementary/substitutive role of these arrangements vis-à-vis formal alliances is thus contingent on the level of existing alliance commitment.

These findings challenge our thinking about modern-day "alliances." The increasing trend of proliferation of informal forms of security cooperation points to the need to study the full spectrum of possible institutional arrangements to arrive at a better understanding of security dynamics in the emerging multipolar world. The original BISP dataset reveals that the extent of the proliferation of these arrangements is much greater than previously estimated, similarly to other informal institutions, such as IIGOs. The finding about the complementary/substitutive nature of strategic partnerships vis-à-vis formal alliances could arguably extend to the interplay between formal and informal institutions more broadly. It would seem that informal institutions are a poor fit for cooperation in areas where states are already highly committed by formal institutions. Though the analysis presented here offers some initial insights into these dynamics, there are also some important limitations. Future studies on this topic could address them by expanding the scope of the case selection, examining the *onset* rather than *incidence* of partnership ties, and using different operationalizations of security interests.

ENDNOTES

1 Please be aware that throughout this manuscript, the term "partnership" specifically refers to "strategic partnership."

2 I address this theoretical possibility in the online supplemental materials, namely in Appendix 9.

3 The founding documents are typically joint declarations, statements, or memoranda of understanding. As a rule, the founding documents do not entail a legally binding commitment. One exception to this concerns so-called "friendship treaties." See the original dataset for more detailed information.

4 For a detailed overview of the coding procedure, see the original dataset.

5 Note that FIGOs and formal alliances are two distinct, but not mutually exclusive, concepts. Both are based on formal agreements, but the latter do not require a permanent secretariat (see Pevehouse et al. 2019; Leeds 2020).

6 Note that the "low alliance commitment" category encompasses all consultation and neutrality/non-aggression pacts. Neutrality and non-aggression pacts involve promises to refrain from a military conflict with an ally. Consultation pacts commit the members to a policy coordination short of active military support (Leeds 2020: 11–12).

7 There is some disagreement in the informal institution literature on whether heterogeneous interests lead to formality or informality. Some evidence suggests that the latter is the case (see Roger 2020; Reinsberg – Westerwinter 2021).

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NOTE

The author thanks the editors of the Czech Journal of International Relations, the three anonymous reviewers, Dr. rer. pol. Michal Parízek, PhD, and the participants of the Karl W. Deutsch Political Seminar at the Institute of Political Science for their helpful comments on and suggestions for this manuscript.

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How do Latin American States Engage with Responsibility to Protect Norms?

A Typology of Positions

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ABSTRACT	Within the discourse surrounding the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), scholars have typically categorized the stakeholders as either proponents or staunch detractors, commonly referring to them as R2P 'champions' and 'anti-preneurs,' respectively. However, there is a significant gap in the existing research devoted to comprehending the nuanced positions adopted by states that fall within the spectrum between these two extremes. This article offers a comprehensive exploration of Latin American states' stances concerning R2P norms and provides a typology based on their level of engagement with and degree of support for R2P norms. While certain states overtly contest the legitimacy of R2P, perceiving it as a pretext for external intervention, others challenge existing perceptions of how R2P should be practically implemented. To understand these diverse perspectives, the article differentiates contestation of the R2P norms themselves from contestation of the implementation mechanisms. Through an empirical analysis, it explores various Latin American countries' perspectives on R2P from 2005 to 2023, highlighting their proposals like the Brazilian Responsibility while Protecting, as well as Costa Rica and Mexico's contributions to the Responsibility Not to Veto initiatives. By unraveling the complexities of R2P contestation in Latin America, this article expands our understanding of how diverse regional perspectives shape and influence the advancement of R2P norms.

KEYWORDS	norms, contestation, R2P, global IR, Latin America
DOI	https://doi.org/10.32422/cjir.748
PUBLISHED ONLINE	9 November, 2023

INTRODUCTION

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) emerged as a transformative concept calling for collective action to prevent and respond to genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. Despite its triumphal formal endorsement during the 2005 World Summit (THAKUR 2016; THAKUR – WEISS 2009; BELLAMY 2015), the third pillar of R2P, which includes a coercive third party intervention if a state manifestly fails to protect its population, has faced enduring contestation on the international stage (REINOLD 2010; HEHIR 2008, 2013, 2019; CUNLIFFE 2011). This ongoing debate has laid bare the complexities surrounding the operationalization of R2P principles and has exposed the divergent interpretations among states regarding its scope and applicability. According to Jennifer Welsh, contestations of the content and scope of R2P lead to its greater resilience, which is indicated by its increasing relevance in the UN debates as well as the extensive number of its proponents among states, including many countries of the "Global South" (2019: 59).

This article aims to illustrate that despite its formal integration into the UN agenda and continued resonance in high-level debates, R2P remains a subject of persistent contestation, especially among non-Western states. The article focuses on Latin America as a compelling case study because it exemplifies the intricate and multifaceted nature of the contestation surrounding the R2P norms. Some states have embraced R2P as a moral imperative, urging robust international responses to protect vulnerable populations. Others, however, have adopted a more cautious approach, emphasizing the importance of preserving state sovereignty and autonomy in addressing internal crises. At the far end of the spectrum, a subset of states has overtly contested the legitimacy of the R2P norm itself, viewing it as a potential instrument for external intervention and manipulation of domestic affairs.

In the existing literature, the exploration of Latin American perspectives on R2P has been predominantly limited to two aspects: firstly, the examination of the concept's relevance within the region (RODRIGUES – SERBIN 2011), and secondly, the assessment of approval levels across different countries (SERRANO 2011; ARREDONO 2014; SERBIN – SERBIN PONT 2015A). The prevailing focus tends to cast the dissenters as an "undemocratic club" and prioritizes

the exploration of domestic conditions that shape individual national perspectives. Furthermore, scholars often linked a state's support or criticism of R2P with its level of adherence to other liberal norms. A pertinent example is found in the *Handbook of Responsibility to Protect*, which features a chapter on Latin America by Mónica Serrano that strongly correlates R2P endorsement with the existing human rights architecture in the region (SERRANO 2016). Serrano's analysis attributes the diverse perspectives among the countries to their respective historiographies of human rights advocacy, effectively creating a sharp dichotomy between those labeled as "victims as human rights architects" (such as Chile and Argentina) and those portrayed as "victims of interventionism as R2P opponents" (these include Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba). Serbin and Serbin Pont view the antagonists as the "undemocratic club" and put more emphasis on explaining the domestic conditions shaping particular national constraints (2015A). This association between R2P support and adherence to liberal norms has contributed to an oversimplification of the complexities underlying Latin American states' contestation of R2P norms.

While academics have been mostly preoccupied with R2P "anti-preneurs" or "spoilers" on one hand and R2P champions on the other, there is a limited understanding of the actual level of engagement with R2P norms among various Latin American states. In fact, the empirical analysis shows that a significant number of countries have very little interest in the R2P debates, which provides a fruitful ground for future research (does this indicate little support or an uncontested acceptance of R2P?). More importantly, since the 2005 World Summit, many countries addressed legitimate concerns once the political debates turned to R2P implementation, and in this regard, these countries do not fit the conventional categories of R2P advocates and antagonists. With the notable exception of Brazil and its Responsibility while Protecting (RWP) proposal (STEFAN 2017; KENKEL – STEFAN 2016; BENNER 2013; LASKARIS – KREUTZ 2015), R2P contestation was mostly neglected or problematically associated with hostility towards R2P as such.

In contrast to the studies referred to above, this article builds on the contemporary literature that understands contestation as a meta-organizing principle of global governance (WIENER 2018, 2014; MÜLLER – WUNDERLICH 2018; IOMMI 2019). Antje Wiener's work, in particular, offers valuable insights into the contextualization of contestation within the broader landscape of

global International Relations (IR) debates. Wiener highlights the significance of contestation performed by non-Western states and raises the critical question of whose practices count within global conflicts over norms (WIENER 2018: 3). Her research underscores the idea that contestation is not merely a disruptive force but an essential element of normative evolution in the diverse and complex social world (IBID.: 1–5). This implies that norms need to be constantly challenged to be both legitimate and effective within the diverse and complex social world. By examining how Latin American states engage in contestation practices related to R2P, the paper aims to contribute to the broader discourse on the dynamics of norm contestation, especially within the context of the perspectives of the 'Global South' and the reconfiguration of global norms.

The first part of the paper explores critical constructivist perspectives on norms, particularly Antje Wiener's notions of reactive and proactive contestation as transformative normative practices. These insights underpin our examination of contestation in two dimensions: contestation of R2P itself, which is aimed at fostering alternative norms, and contestation of the R2P implementation mechanisms, which are intended to enhance R2P's practical application. To provide a comprehensive framework for understanding state responses to R2P, the paper introduces a typology that assesses states' positions based on their (i) level of engagement and (ii) degree of support. This typology enriches our analysis by situating contestation within a broader spectrum of state interactions with R2P norms. The analytical part discusses the results of the comparative analysis and provides a complex overview of various positions adopted by Latin American countries between 2005 (the formal R2P endorsement during the World Summit) and 2023 (the time of writing). The last section zooms in on two different examples of R2P contestation – the Brazilian *Responsibility while Protecting* initiative; and the *Responsibility Not to Veto* that challenged existing rules that hindered an effective R2P implementation. Both cases show persistent contestation practices motivated by different political ambitions yet both provide alternative and potentially norm-constitutive views on R2P implementation and global governance in general.

CONCEPTUALIZING R2P, NORMS AND CONTESTATION

In this article, R2P is understood as an *organizing principle* which constitutes a collective expectation that people should be protected from atrocity crimes (ICISS 2001: 17), namely genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity (WSO 2005: PAR. 138). While fundamental norms are the most abstract and overarching principles that guide behavior in international relations (e.g. protection of human rights), organizing principles are more specific and focused, defining central themes and normative ideas within particular areas of international relations (BASED ON WIENER 2018: 58–62). The general principle was further elaborated into three specific norms corresponding to the so-called pillars of R2P – (i) states as primary carriers of responsibility, (ii) the responsibility of other states to assist, and (iii) the international responsibility to respond if a state manifestly fails to protect its people (UN DOC. A/63/677 2009).

There is an extensive literature elucidating the reasons why R2P should be treated as a globally recognized norm (WELSH 2019; BELLAMY 2015; GLANVILLE 2016). Despite this relatively robust consensus regarding the general principle that people should be protected from the four aforementioned crimes, the means are subject to continuing political deliberations. Especially the questions of who bears responsibility in a given situation and what exactly constitutes a manifest failure to invoke the third pillar are considered very controversial, as they reflect the diverse perspectives among states but also civil society organizations and academics (BLOOMFIELD 2015; QUINTON-BROWN 2023, 2013; CLAES 2012). This was demonstrated already during the negotiations of the 2005 World Summit Outcome through the cautious formulation that states were prepared to take collective action on a 'case-by-case basis,' and the emphasis put on the first two pillars (WELSH 2013). At the same time, both Bloomfield and Quinton-Brown pointed out that this resistance is in fact not really against the whole idea of R2P but rather against the principle of conditional sovereignty within the third pillar (BLOOMFIELD 2015: 325; QUINTON-BROWN 2013: 264). Building on these debates surrounding the diverse perceptions of R2P norms, this article aims to provide an empirical assessment of whether R2P norms are endorsed, contested, or rejected within the Latin American context, while shedding light on the complex landscape of contestation practices and their implications.

Norms play a crucial role in shaping global governance, national politics, and the everyday lives of individuals. They represent embedded normative expectations that constitute how particular situations should be addressed and define shared understandings of legitimacy (CLARK 2005: 207). While norms are not solely derived from moral principles, morality, alongside law and symbolic authority, serves as a potent source of their legitimacy (BUCHANAN 2003: 259). In a social constructivist perspective, the adherence to norms hinges on a shared belief in the appropriateness of certain actions (FINNEMORE – SIKKINK 1998: 891; KATZENSTEIN 1996: 5; KLOTZ 1995: 453). According to this line of thought, states comply with norms because they are convinced of the inherent values within them and seek recognition as credible members within the international community, akin to membership in a club (CLAUDE 1966: 367). Consequently, norms hold significant weight as they are constituted by collective normative expectations within a specific social context (BEN-JOSEPH HIRSCH – DIXON 2021: 4).

Since the late 80s, the constructivist understanding of norm development has advanced enormously. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink's famous study (1998) traced the evolution of norms from norm emergence up to their complete internalization (IBID.: 897). As per Finnemore, Sikkink, and other scholars who adopt their life cycle model, the defining characteristic of norms is their taken-for-granted status. Consequently, the ultimate stage of norm internalization is marked by the minimal presence of contestation of the given norm(s) in public discourse or within practical policy-making. Contemporary research shifted from a narrow understanding of norms' progressive acceptance to acknowledging more complex processes of how norms evolve, transform and even decline (LEGRO 1997; KROOK – TRUE 2010; PANKE – PETERSON 2011, 2016). Scholars have used more precise indicators to measure compliance and have considered discursive- as well as practical- action to assess to what extent particular norms were endorsed (DEITELHOFF – ZIMMERMANN 2019). In contrast to the assumptions made by Finnemore and Sikkink, norms are hardly ever taken for granted – a problem recognized by a wider range of authors who focus on contestations over norms and their effects on norm-robustness (SANDHOLZ 2019; SIMMONS – JO 2019; KEATING 2014, SANDHOLZ – STILES 2009).

The existing scholarship on norm advocacy and legitimization has been recently enriched by studies focusing on discursive and practical

processes leading to norm weakening, norm erosion or even norm decline (KUTZ 2014; PANKE – PETERSON 2011; MCKEOWN 2009). In a recently published special issue on norm robustness, the authors challenged the assumption that contestation initiated by powerful states leads to norm weakening or even norm decay (SANDHOLZ 2019: 140). After examining some practical case-studies, including studies on prohibition of the use of force (BRUNNÉE – TOOPE 2019) and prohibition of torture (SCHMIDT – SIKKINK 2019), they saw that norms are apparently more resilient and do not necessarily erode after being discursively/practically challenged (SANDHOLZ 2019: 140).

In contrast to these studies, Antje Wiener treats contestation as a meta-organizing principle of global governance (2018; 2014). Rather than reducing the analysis to examining the impact of contestation on norm strength, she focused on various modes (arbitration, deliberation, contention and justification) to study the complex constitutive effects on norms. According to Wiener, norms need to be constantly challenged to be both legitimate and effective within the diverse and complex social world (WIENER 2008: 66, 2014: 36–39). Lucrecia Garcia Iommi builds on Wiener's theory and modifies the process of norm development by introducing (i) dynamic norm internationalization and (ii) norm regression as alternatives (2020: 12). The model takes into account that a lack of engagement (including contestation) might, in extreme cases, make norms obsolete due to their irrelevance and longer-term neglect. Alternatively, norms can be modified based on contestation through deviant application, especially if such a pattern occurs repeatedly over time (IOMMI 2020: 14–15). This paper aligns with Wiener and Iommi's perspective on the legitimization effects of contestation on norms, emphasizing the transformative power of contestation within the ever-evolving global governance.

Furthermore, Wiener's differentiation of *reactive* and *proactive* contestation is very useful as it allows for a deeper understanding of the critical engagement of particular agents with the norms as well as constitutive effects of their contestation practices (2018: 38). Reactive contestation occurs when an actor no longer considers a norm appropriate, whether it's regarding the implementation of the norm (referred to as 'contested compliance') or breaches of the norm ('contested norm violation') (WIENER 2020: 1). In the context of the R2P debates, this would correspond with the academic reflections of R2P's antagonists (BLOOMFIELD 2016; QUINTON-BROWN

2013; CLAES 2013; HEHIR 2013; ORCHARD 2015), and in particular with the positions of China, Russia, India and numerous other countries (FUNG 2019; CHEN – YIN 2020; VIRK 2017). They have reservations about the R2P based third party interventions and especially its possible activation in practical cases. Since the 2011 problematic implementation of R2P in the case of Libya, there was even a stronger reluctance to recognize all three pillars as equally important. In particular, the option of military intervention became so disputed that the third pillar of R2P was contested, while the first two pillars were recognized as relatively strong international norms (WELSH 2013, 2019; GARWOOD-GOWERS 2015).

While this type of contestation might have constitutive effects on the robustness of norms, proactive contestation indicates various interpretations among actors engaging with the norms, which in turn might be adapted according to particular normative claims. Wiener stresses that proactive contestation is not so much indicating one's discontent with the norm or its implementation, but rather diverse and competing perspectives among different agents with regard to the distinct meaning or specific means of implementation (2018: 40–41). In other words, proactive contestation occurs when agents with diverse socio-political backgrounds try to clarify specific parameters of the norm. The contestation of R2P indicates deep political divides among states, particularly along the North-South and East-West axes. At the same time, these varying viewpoints underscore the critical role of diverse perspectives in shaping the constitution of the legitimacy surrounding R2P norms on a global scale.

The following section builds on existing critical constructivist research by recognizing the importance of agency and the complexity of practices that might have constitutive effects on existing norms. It proposes a typology that will enable an empirical analysis of existing perceptions of R2P norms based on the level of engagement with R2P norms, on one hand, and specific positions taken regarding these norms, on the other. This typology provides a structured approach to examining how Latin American states have interacted with R2P norms, with a particular focus on the extent to which they have proactively advanced R2P by proposing specific initiatives. This will bridge the gap in the existing research on R2P from the perspective of the "Global South".

PERCEPTIONS OF EXISTING NORMS: A TYPOLOGY

This article analyzes existing perspectives towards the R2P norms across Latin American countries by differentiating between their supporters, antagonists, and contesting actors. The contesting actors neither fully endorse all three R2P pillars and a comprehensive range of implementation measures nor outright reject the R2P commitment or its implementation. Instead, they proactively challenge the interpretation of specific principles – e.g. questioning the necessity for a UN Security Council authorization in R2P-based enforcement interventions, or challenging a particular pillar in favor of alternative options, for instance, agreeing with R2P-based prevention but contesting long-term peace-building measures. Moreover, each position is further divided based on the level of engagement to distinguish between active (norm-making) and passive (norm-taking) stances. The active approach involves promoting R2P through academic or political conferences, sponsoring UN resolutions endorsing R2P, or even implementing its provisions. Conversely, a supportive yet passive position is characterized by a silent approval of an R2P document without any discursive or practical promulgation. Utilizing these criteria, a typology was devised, encompassing six ideal-typical standpoints for understanding the varying perspectives and contestation practices surrounding R2P within the Latin American context.

The first category, that of supportive states, covers R2P *advocates*, who actively promote R2P norms to achieve their greater recognition among other actors, and their more effective implementation, and/or to maintain their status as an influential norm champion. The active support is manifested not only by consistently positive statements presented in the UN debates on R2P but also by engagement within R2P advocacy networks, e.g. the Global Network of R2P Focal Points or the Global Center for R2P. In contrast, the *adherents* can be defined as passive norm-takers. These states exhibit compliance with R2P norms and acknowledge their importance without actively seeking to diffuse or champion them on the global stage. While they may endorse R2P principles and participate in relevant international discussions, their engagement remains relatively low-key compared to the active R2P advocates. Passive norm-takers may express a general support for R2P through periodic statements in UN forums or through their membership in regional organizations that endorse

the norm, but they do not engage extensively in norm-promoting activities or take on prominent roles within R2P advocacy networks. Instead, their focus lies primarily on internalizing the norm within their domestic policies and demonstrating their alignment with the global consensus on R2P, without assuming an overt leadership position in its advancement.

The first type of contesting actor, also referred to as *revisionists*, encompasses actors that challenge specific provisions of the R2P norm while actively presenting their own alternative interpretations (aligning with Wiener's concept of proactive contestation). These actors engage in a deliberate effort to promote their distinct perspectives, seeking to modify certain aspects of R2P or replace them with alternative approaches that align more closely with their interests or values. Revisionists adopt a critical stance towards particular elements of R2P, such as the criteria for intervention, the role of the United Nations Security Council, or the emphasis on military measures. They may advocate for a more stringent threshold for intervention or propose alternative methods of prevention and conflict resolution that prioritize non-coercive measures. Additionally, some revisionist actors may question the Western-centric aspects of R2P, calling for a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to addressing humanitarian crises. In their endeavor to contest and reshape the R2P norm, revisionists actively engage in diplomatic efforts, participate in international forums, and collaborate within advocacy networks. They seek to influence the discourse surrounding R2P by offering alternative R2P interpretations to address mass atrocities and protect vulnerable populations. By challenging specific provisions and presenting their own proposals, revisionist actors contribute to the ongoing evolution of the R2P norm and influence its implementation on the global stage.

The category of *reserved* actors refers to states that express only partial support for or partial compliance with R2P norms. While they acknowledge certain aspects of the norm, they refrain from fully endorsing or implementing all its principles. Unlike revisionist actors, the reserved do not propose any distinct perspectives on or alternative approaches to R2P. Instead, they adopt a cautious or hesitant stance towards the norm without actively seeking to contest or challenge its fundamental principles. The reserved actors may selectively support specific pillars or elements of R2P that align with their immediate interests or regional security concerns.

They may demonstrate a willingness to engage in preventive measures but display reluctance towards more robust intervention options, or vice versa. They occupy an intermediary position between outright support and active contestation. Their partial support for and partial compliance with R2P norms demonstrate a measured engagement with the norm, while their lack of distinct perspectives or active contestation distinguishes them from other contesting actors seeking to reshape or challenge the R2P framework.

The *antagonists* are contesting actors who express a strong disapproval of the R2P norms, which corresponds to Wiener's reactive validity contestation. Unlike the reserved or revisionist actors, the antagonists actively promote competing norms as alternatives to R2P. They are driven by a fundamental rejection of the principles and objectives underlying R2P and seek to challenge and undermine its legitimacy as a normative framework. The antagonists manifest their disapproval of R2P through vocal criticism, diplomatic opposition, and advocacy for alternative approaches to addressing mass atrocities and protecting vulnerable populations. They may propose alternative norms or doctrines that prioritize national sovereignty, arguing against external interference in domestic affairs. For instance, in a situation of armed conflict, they may emphasize a diplomatic resolution of a dispute rather than condemning atrocity crimes. These contesting actors aim to challenge the legitimacy and effectiveness of R2P as such. In short, they soundly disapprove of R2P and actively work to promote competing norms as alternative frameworks for addressing mass atrocities.

Bystanders are characterized by their disengagement from R2P-related initiatives and their decision not to take part in discussions or debates on the norm. They may denounce R2P initiatives or proposals without offering alternative perspectives or actively challenging the norm's principles. Their lack of involvement in R2P-related discourse suggests a lack of commitment to shaping the global governance mechanism but it can be also explained by a pragmatic cautiousness to engage with potentially controversial issues. In other words, the bystanding of these actors can be motivated by various factors. It may result from a belief that R2P does not directly concern their national interests or regional security considerations. Alternatively, it may reflect a broader skepticism or lack

of priority regarding humanitarian issues on the global agenda. However, it remains challenging to ascertain the underlying causes definitively, as available data may not provide sufficient insights. Conducting further research through personal interviews with high-level political representatives would be necessary to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their motivations. Such an in-depth investigation, however, lies beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it is crucial to identify and acknowledge the existence of these actors to highlight the complexity of perspectives surrounding R2P norms. This inclusivity goes beyond merely recognizing active champions, antagonists, or revisionists; it encompasses states with varying levels of engagement, including those with limited involvement in R2P-related matters. The following table sums up the typology, including the indicators of each approach.

TABLE 1: PERCEPTIONS OF EXISTING NORMS

	Active	**Passive**
Support	*advocates* promoting norms in discourse and practice	*adherents* approval and compliance but no promulgation
Contestation	*revisionists* challenging specific provisions promoting alternatives	*reserved* declaring only partial support abstention in voting
Rejection	*antagonists* sound disapproval promoting competing norms	*bystanders* abstention from debates denouncing initiatives

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Having established the typology as a structured approach to assess Latin American states' interactions with R2P norms, it is crucial to underscore its significance in advancing our understanding of norm contestation. This typology not only offers a framework for categorizing states' positions but also serves as a tool to analyze the complexities of norm contestation practices. Countries' positions were studied through the documents from important high-level meetings on R2P between 2005 and June 2023; the annual debates of the UN General Assembly on R2P (E.G. FROM UN DOC A/63/PV.96, 2009 UP TO UN DOC A/73/PV.93, 2019, AND ITEM 132: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL A/77/910, GA/12513 – DEBATE ON THE ITEM, 2023). The UNGA debates were complemented by meeting records of the UN Security Council, especially those produced during the selected crises, which evoked strong controversies and contestations over R2P, including the first activation of the third pillar measures in Libya and the regionally highly relevant humanitarian crisis in Venezuela (E.G. ON LIBYA, UN DOC S/PV.6498, 2011, AND ON VENEZUELA, UN DOC S/PV.8452,

2019; UN DOC S/PV.8476, 2019; UN DOC S/PV.8506, 2019). In the past years, relevant debates took place within the Organization of American States (OAS), especially in the context of the crisis in Venezuela (e.g. the Conference on "The Responsibility to Protect in the Americas", 21 March 2019). These events are very useful for a comparison of the dynamics of the debate within a regional high-level platform and a global one, represented by the main UN bodies.[1]

LATIN AMERICAN POSITIONS TOWARDS R2P

When the R2P concept was negotiated and finally endorsed during the 2005 World Summit, the text of the two paragraphs was modified so as to be acceptable to the widest possible audience (BANNON 2006). The scope of the just cause was narrowed down to four specific situations (genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity); the option of military intervention within the third pillar of R2P remained strictly limited, according to the existing UN Charter-based regime (UN DOC A/RES/60/1 2001: 30). Some experts were disappointed by the lack of actual innovation, especially when compared to the original ambition of the ICISS (O'CONNELL 2010; HEHIR 2008, 76–96; HAACKE 2009). However, the final endorsement of the Outcome has been mostly considered a key milestone in the R2P normative trajectory, especially due to the fact that it was recognized worldwide, including in all countries of Latin America (SERRANO 2011: 425–426). As the following section will demonstrate, however, there was a greater diversity of country perspectives that were manifested after the 2005 World Summit.

In the following decade, several countries of Latin America consistently advocated for R2P and very much appreciated the activities of the UN Secretary General in that regard. Chile, Costa Rica and Guatemala were outspoken active supporters of R2P since the first regional consultations back in 2001, and in the following annual Interactive Dialogues of the UN General Assembly, they promoted the appropriate three pillar structure as well as the scope that was limited to the worst atrocity crimes (UN DOC. A.63/PV.97; UN DOC A.63/PV.98 2009; GCR2P 2010). Chile, the host country of the 2001 R2P regional conference, proposed the integration of R2P into the 2005 outcome (STATEMENT BY H.E. MR IGNACIO WALKER MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHILE 2005) and can be qualified as the leading norm entrepreneur in the region (JULIO 2015). As for Guatemala, it presented its mild concerns

with regard to the potential interventionism and different standards for qualifying a just cause; however, these were balanced by its strong advocacy for the general R2P mission (UN DOC. A.63/PV.97 2009: 14).

All three countries have emerged as active and committed members of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, demonstrating their strong dedication to promoting and advancing the principles of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). As focal points, these countries play crucial roles in coordinating efforts and facilitating communication between various stakeholders on matters related to R2P. Their active involvement in the network allows them to engage with other like-minded states, international organizations, and civil society actors, such as the Global Center for R2P (GCR2P) or the Canadian Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS). Moreover, Costa Rica, together with other R2P proponents, actively participates in the UN-based Group of Friends of R2P, an informal group that convenes regular diplomatic meetings to advance the R2P agenda within the UN context. In recent years, Costa Rica has played a prominent role within the Group. In 2022 and 2023, the country co-chaired the Group alongside Botswana and Croatia, and delivered statements on its behalf during UN debates.

While champions of R2P like Chile, Costa Rica, and Guatemala actively and explicitly advocated for its advancement, Colombia, Argentina, and Peru took a more tacit approach by reaffirming their approval of the 2005 Outcome. These countries consistently stressed their commitments on the national level and their compliance with atrocity crime prevention; therefore, they indicated that their position is one of norm acceptance but not much active engagement. In 2021, these countries joined the group of 85 countries which co-sponsored Resolution 75/277, which reaffirmed the international commitment to R2P.

The radically opposite club of active antagonists, who consistently and loudly rejected different principles of R2P, includes Venezuela and Nicaragua (UN DOC. A.63/PV.99, 2009 AND GCR2P 2010). During the 2009 Interactive Dialogue, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of Nicaragua was in the position of the president, and therefore, his statement there was merely rather skeptical but in the upcoming debates, the country's position shifted closer to that of the vocal antagonists. Both countries see the framework as a tool

for interference in sovereign matters of targeted countries and do not support even the other two pillars. They frequently used the debates on R2P to criticize the UNSC's functioning, especially the prevailing politics of double standards and the hegemonic position of the veto powers (UN DOC. A.63/PV.97, UN DOC. A.63/PV.98, 2009). Meanwhile, Cuba is a difficult border case between the categories of opposers and disputers. It raised quite serious objections to the "right of humanitarian intervention" and ambiguous terms which could lead to fundamental violations of international law. But its representatives kept stressing development assistance as the best tool to prevent humanitarian crises. In 2016, Cuba delivered a statement and argued that R2P remained a matter of great concern for many countries, particularly small and developing nations, due to the potential for manipulation for political purposes. The country emphasized that the current lack of consensus about the scope and implications of R2P hindered any meaningful discussion about its implementation. Cuba's strong reservations regarding R2P's possible misuse led to significant disputes over the entire R2P concept, aligning its position closer to that of the antagonists, who fundamentally question and challenge the framework.

By 2009, many countries in the region were complete bystanders regarding R2P (Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago) and did not take part in the GA Dialogue or any other deliberation platform. Some of these countries recently shifted closer to a tacit support for it, however. For instance, Haiti contributed to the 2017 interactive dialogue by declaring its commitment to broaden human rights norms, as well as R2P. Based on its recent statement, it is the only country in the region which can be categorized among the supporters (as complete silence could be hardly interpreted as an implicit approval). This is actually quite a difficult analytical question: how to approach the absence of any standpoint on the part of a country but in the context of the existing advocacy towards the "undecided" states, which is especially exercised by the GCR2P. It is highly likely that those countries would be pushed to take a position by such advocacy unless they were literally disinterested.

Finally, a numerous group of countries repeatedly challenged R2P by either stressing problematic aspects and proposing modifications or just

endorsing a particular pillar at the expense of another. The most visible of these was, not surprisingly, Brazil, a country with serious aspirations to become a regional standard setter. Prior to the intervention in Libya, the Brazilian representatives to the UN stressed the exceptionality of the third pillar, use of force only as a last resort and potential extensions of the just cause beyond the situations agreed in 2005 (UN DOC. A.63/PV.97). According to the then Brazilian ambassador, the right to development is an important principle which should be emphasized as the best preventive tool to fulfill the R2P promises. In 2011, Brazil held the position of a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and, together with China, Germany, India, and the Russian Federation, abstained during the voting on resolution 1973, which authorized an unprecedentedly wide range of punitive measures to protect civilians in Libya. The Brazilian representative justified this reserved position by declaring the measures of the resolution overly extensive, as they went far beyond the calls for a no-fly zone (UN DOC. S/PV.6498, 17 MARCH 2011: 6).

Later, in September 2011, when the early optimism of R2P advocates was replaced by a sober criticism of the NATO military campaign in Libya, the Brazilian foreign minister Antonio Patriota (2011) introduced the Responsibility while Protecting (RWP) as a complementary norm to the UN mandate for the first time. During the 66th Regular Session of the General Assembly, the Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff repeated the appeal and argued: *"Much is said about the responsibility to protect, yet we hear little about responsibility while protecting. These are concepts that we must develop together"* (STATEMENT BY BRAZIL, 12 JULY 2011). The greatest attempt to elaborate and come up with a more detailed conceptual framework of RWP was the presentation by the Permanent Representative to the UN, María Luisa Viotti, during the UN Security Council meeting in November 2011. The Brazilian proposal included principles of last resort, proportionality and likelihood of success; additionally, it called for the UNSC to systematically monitor how its resolutions are being implemented in practice (UN DOC A/66/551, 9 NOVEMBER 2011). Between 2012 and 2019, Brazilian representatives repeatedly stressed the need to systematize principles of accountability within military interventions, e.g. by reporting to and briefing delegations or by establishing expert panels which would monitor compliance with existing international norms regulating use of force (STATEMENT BY BRAZIL, 5 SEPTEMBER 2012, 8 SEPTEMBER 2014, 6 SEPTEMBER 2017; UN DOC A/73/PV.93 2019). Beyond the

flagship RWP initiative, Brazil consistently addressed the need to strengthen structural prevention and invest more in development assistance (while criticizing developed states for spending their budgets on militarization instead of reducing poverty and inequality). Finally, it strongly challenged the principle of authorization and the role of the UNSC in general to urge for an extension of membership to developing countries, thereby calling for more representativeness in the major UN decision making body. In addition to these larger and longer pressures for UNSC reform, Brazilian representatives repeatedly challenged the working mechanisms of the R2P Interactive Dialogue, including the three-minute limit on statements, which allegedly did not allow for adequate discussions of controversial issues (IBID.).

There was a larger group of countries that advocated for revisionism with regard to the role played by the UNSC in R2P decision making. Since 2009 Mexico, Argentina, and Bolivia have disputed the exclusive position of the Security Council in the implementation of R2P and stressed the need for an effective reform in this regard. The representatives of Bolivia and Mexico originally argued for a complete elimination of the veto power (UN DOC. A.63/PV.97; UN DOC. A.63/PV.98 2009). In the context of the crisis in Syria, those countries accused the Council of responding to it inadequately and revitalized the debate on the veto through the self-restraint principle. In 2015, Mexico, together with France, proposed an initiative to suspend the use of the veto in the Security Council in cases of serious atrocity crimes (Political statement on the suspension of the veto in case of mass atrocities 2015). Although the proposal challenged existing norms of R2P implementation, it gained support even among R2P advocates. In 2018, Mexico together with Finland hosted a meeting of R2P Focal Points, which indicated a shift towards constructive participation in R2P advancement. In contrast, Bolivia was more skeptical towards any possible progress in R2P and its representatives consistently stressed the vagueness of the concept, which could be easily abused for both interventionism and inaction (STATEMENT OF BOLIVIA, 11 SEPTEMBER 2013). In 2014, a Bolivian representative briefly stated: *"the international relations are in crisis, the values of this society are in crisis, its institutions are in crisis, the development model is in crisis, even the dialogue is in crisis, so, we believe that some countries want to resolve those crises with war, with intervention and without dialogue"* (STATEMENT OF BOLIVIA, 8 SEPTEMBER 2014). Bolivia also suggested strengthening the peaceful dialogue on the

conditions of R2P implementation to prevent policies of regime change and other destabilizing actions (STATEMENT OF BOLIVIA, 6 SEPTEMBER 2017).

The concept has been frequently challenged by requests for more clarification and continuing discussions on the operationalization mechanisms. Ecuador and Uruguay warned against any attempts to redefine the four crimes and extend the scope to other situations (UN DOC. A.63/PV.97). Ecuador also had reservations due to potential violations of the pillar based sequencing, for instance by skipping peaceful options and underestimating the role of regional organizations or the UN GA when calling for R2P based actions (STATEMENT OF ECUADOR, 6 SEPTEMBER 2016). These critical arguments clearly indicated a significant level of skepticism, especially with regard to practical applications. However, they typically did not lead to specific proposals or initiatives which would go beyond "warning" and "expressing concern". In the 2019 Interactive Dialogue, Ecuador did not deliver any statement, although Espinosa Garcés from Ecuador was the serving president of the UNGA's 73rd session.

Overall, there is no doubt that numerous Latin American countries have disputed R2P by presenting their reservations about the methods of operationalization or potential misinterpretations leading to abuses. Despite a clear diversity of specific positions, fear of interventionism was a common denominator of the advocates, the challengers and, to a great extent, the antagonists. It is a relevant factor and a significant counter-argument widely spread among countries in the South, which might have a legitimate concern in this respect, not necessarily due to their problematic domestic human rights standards. In most cases of R2P contestation, the countries raised their concerns in a constructive manner to facilitate a debate on existing provisions, and often simultaneously proposed possible modifications or additional principles. The following summarizing table (however simplifying it may still be) aims to demonstrate (i) the heterogeneity of positions in the region and (ii) the prevalence of contestation, which is far from limited to counter-interventionism. The final section then discusses the two most significant and elaborate cases of R2P contestation – the Brazilian RWP initiative and the Responsibility Not to Veto (RN2V) initiatives.

TABLE 2: LATIN AMERICAN APPROACHES TO R2P

	Active	Passive
Support	*advocates* Costa Rica, Chile, Guatemala	*adherents* Argentina, Peru, Paraguay, Haiti
Contestation	*revisionists* Brazil, Mexico, Bolivia	*reserved* Ecuador, Uruguay, Colombia
Rejection	*antagonists* Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba	*bystanders* Grenada, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago

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THE RESPONSIBILITY WHILE PROTECTING

Brazil presented the most elaborated form of the RWP proposal in a letter addressed to the Secretary General (UN DOC A/66/551, 9 NOVEMBER 2011). It clarified the ambition to introduce a concept that would be complementary to rather than substituting for R2P and introduced nine principles that defined the initiative – (a) an emphasis on preventive diplomacy, (b) rigorous implementation of all peaceful means, c) UN authorization of any use of military force, d) respect for international law, e) elimination of harm when using force, f) proportionality of means to the ends, g) assessment of these principles throughout the whole implementation phase, h) enhanced monitoring of how UN Security Council resolutions are implemented, and i) greater accountability of those authorized to take action. The proposal was subject to extensive scholarly reflection that aimed to evaluate the content and scope but also the originality of the RWP (SEE STEFAN 2017; STUENKEL 2016; KENKEL – STEFAN 2016; TOURINHO – STUENKEL – BROCKMEIER 2015; BENNER 2013; HERZ 2014).

In 2012, the permanent mission of Brazil to the UN hosted a UN General Assembly informal interactive dialogue on RWP (GCR2P 2012B), which indicated Brazil's serious effort to gain wider support for its proposal. The draft was debated in a hot political climate – still shortly after the 2011 intervention in Libya and at the dusk of the quickly escalating crisis in Syria, which did not provide very favorable conditions. The Brazilian representatives together with China, India and Russia criticized the Western countries for their failed humanitarian mission in Libya and, at the same time, distanced themselves from the EU pressure put on Assad's regime. In the end, Western representatives (namely those of Australia, Germany, and the Netherlands) together with the UN Special Advisor on R2P, Edward Luck,

did not support the core ideas of RWP, mostly due to the lack of conceptual clarity and the overly tight rules on the use of force, which could allegedly jeopardize the general mission of protection (UN DOC S/PV.6650 2012; GCR2P 2012).

The Brazilian initiative has been viewed as having the potential to influence and possibly modify existing global norms. On one hand, some viewed it as an emerging norm revisionism by one of the BRICS countries, which indicated more assertive voices in the South (STEFAN 2017; KENKEL – STEFAN 2016; EVANS 2012, 2014; GARWOOD-GOWERS 2013; BENNER 2013). On the other hand, Serbin and Serbin Pont stressed the ephemeral life of the concept, which was dropped as soon as Brazil completed its mandate in the UN Security Council (2015A: 178). Despite not formalizing the RwP initiative, Brazil's ongoing engagement in the UN debates underscores its commitment to contesting and refining the R2P framework. Brazil consistently stresses the need to prioritize prevention and emphasizes the importance of operationalizing preventive measures to reduce the risk of mass atrocities. Moreover, the country has been a vocal advocate for greater accountability in the implementation of R2P, urging for enhanced procedures for monitoring and assessing actions taken under the norm. Additionally, Brazil consistently highlights the principle of last resort when discussing the activation of the third pillar of R2P, advocating for a cautious and strict approach to the use of military force. For instance, in the 2023 UN debate on R2P (83rd meeting of the 77th Regular Session), Norberto Moretti, representing Brazil, emphasized the importance of establishing a consensus on fundamental principles and procedures before undertaking any collective action. He highlighted the necessity of exhausting all diplomatic, humanitarian, and peaceful means before considering any intervention.

Some commentators also disputed both domestic and wider regional support and argued that RWP was proposed by the highest state representatives of Brazil (the president and the foreign minister), but lacked the fundamental support of other Latin American countries (SERBIN – SERBIN PONT 2015A: 178). In reality, there were other countries which explicitly sympathized with the Brazilian initiative (e.g. Costa Rica, Uruguay, Ecuador) and most of the active representatives who participated in the debates stressed accountability and transparency when implementing R2P policies (S/PV.6650 2012; GCR2P 2012). While the RWP proposal has not been established as an amendment of the R2P norms, and the diplomatic efforts have been

therefore considered a failed attempt (SERBIN – SERBIN PONT 2015B) or a missed opportunity (STEFAN 2017; KENKEL – STEFAN 2016), the specific provisions corresponded with the reservations of many Latin American states and countries of the "Global South" in general.

Hence, the RwP initiative emerges as a substantial contribution to the continuing discussions on R2P within the Latin American context, aligning closely with the perspectives highlighted by Wiener and Iommi, who have consistently emphasized the pivotal significance of contestation in shaping the legitimacy and structuring influence of global norms. The RwP proposal reiterates the belief in the crucial role of prevention and preventive diplomacy in reducing the risk of mass atrocities, advocating for a stronger emphasis on the non-coercive aspects of R2P's implementation. This perspective aligns with the broader Latin American contestation of R2P, which has often emphasized the need to prioritize peaceful measures in addressing conflicts and human rights crises. Moreover, the RwP proposal highlights the importance of a prudent and judicious use of military force, emphasizing the principles of last resort and proportionality. Within the Latin American context, the cautious approach to military intervention is consistent with the region's historical emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. By calling for careful consideration of the objectives and mandates established by the UN Security Council, Brazil's RwP initiative reflects the concerns of Latin American states regarding potential misuse or abuse of military force in the name of R2P. The RwP proposal addresses issues of accountability and monitoring, seeking to enhance transparency and responsibility among those granted the authority to resort to force. This again resonates with the broader Latin American critiques of the UN Security Council's actions and the need for more inclusive decision-making processes. Ultimately, the RwP initiative adds to the ongoing discourse on R2P contestation in Latin America by acknowledging the limitations of the collective security system. These limitations include concerns about potential selectivity and lack of consistency in the actions of the UN Security Council. Such considerations align with the broader Latin American discussions on the need for a more equitable and inclusive international order.

THE RESPONSIBILITY NOT TO VETO

Another notable example of contestation practices within the Latin American context is related to initiatives advocating for the Responsibility Not to Veto (RN2V) within the UN Security Council. Several Latin American states have actively supported campaigns and proposals aimed at limiting or suspending the veto power in cases of mass atrocities. In 2006, the Small Five (S5) group of states, comprising Costa Rica, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Singapore, and Switzerland, proposed to the General Assembly that the use of the veto in decisions pertaining to mass atrocity situations be curtailed. The S5, including Costa Rica, persistently advocated for the notion of veto-restraint, and as a result, it became a recurring and prominent topic of discussion during the UN's Informal Interactive Dialogues on R2P. However, the proposal of the S5 faced a strong push back by other countries, especially the permanent members of the UN SC, but also Brazil, which aspired to be recognized as another great power.

Confronted with resistance, the S5 took a strategic approach and, by May 2013, transformed itself into a more inclusive UN coalition of states known as the 'Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group' (ACT). This reconstitution allowed the group to expand its membership and strengthen its position by collaborating with a wider range of like-minded states. While Costa Rica continued to be one of the most active champions of the initiative, the reconstituted ACT included several other Latin American states, including Chile, Peru and Uruguay. In 2015, the ACT proposed a *Code of Conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes* (UN DOC A/70/621-S/2015/978 2015). This significant proposal urges all members of the United Nations Security Council (both elected and permanent) not to vote against any credible draft resolution aimed at preventing or halting mass atrocities. Over the years, the Code of Conduct has gained considerable support, with 121 member states and 2 observers signing onto it as of 2022.

In August 2015, France and Mexico initiated the 'Political Declaration on Suspension of Veto Powers in Cases of Mass Atrocity' as a complementary yet separate initiative to the Code of Conduct. The declaration's primary objective was to encourage voluntary restraint among the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council when confronted with situations

involving mass atrocities. While France had a longer-term commitment to the veto self-restraint principle (VILMER 2018), the Mexican contribution has not been subject to deeper analysis and it was generally commented on as a "backing" of France (MORRIS – WHEELER 2016: 236). In the follow up debates on R2P, France frequently delivered a statement on behalf of Mexico, which indicates the long-term and consistent alignment of the two countries with regard to R2P norms. This showcased not only Mexico's commitment to the principles of multilateralism and collective action but also its strategic partnership with France, a Western state championing the RN2V initiative. In a broader sense, the contestation related to R2P norms extends beyond a mere push-back of the Global South against Western interventionism. However the Mexican engagement might be instrumental and politically motivated beyond the advancement of R2P, its commitment to the RN2V remains a significant contribution to the debate on multifaceted and diverse contestation practices.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this analysis, it has become evident that regional perspectives play a pivotal role in determining the dynamics of norm contestation. As Wiener highlights, enduring regional differences can both challenge and enrich the legitimacy of global norms. The Latin American experience with R2P serves as a powerful illustration of how regional actors, with their unique histories and perspectives, contribute to the ongoing evolution of international norms.

Among the R2P champions in the region, Costa Rica, Chile, and Guatemala have emerged as active advocates of it, engaging in various initiatives such as the Global Network of R2P Focal Points. These states have demonstrated strong commitments to R2P and have actively promoted its implementation, providing many examples of their dedication to protecting populations from mass atrocities. On the other hand, there are the passive adherents, including Colombia and Argentina, which comply with R2P norms without actively advancing or contesting them. These countries emphasize their commitment to atrocity prevention, but their engagement with R2P does not expand beyond a formal endorsement of the R2P principles. Among the opponents, states like Venezuela and Cuba have expressed strong disapproval of R2P, disputing the concept

and questioning its scope and implications. Their reservations have led to significant contestation of the whole R2P framework, reflecting deeper political divides among states, particularly due to the legacy of interventionism practices and the prevailing distrust towards "Western" norms.

One significant contribution of this article is the focus on proactive contestation, which goes beyond merely highlighting the rejection of R2P norms. By exploring the intricacies of contestation, including resistance to specific provisions and alternative interpretations, the study demonstrates that contestation is a highly political act driven by various considerations, including deeply embedded local norms but also the state's positions within global governance. The research has also shed light on the Brazilian RWP initiative, which proposed alternative perspectives on R2P implementation, emphasizing preventive diplomacy and non-coercive measures. Although the initiative did not become formalized, Brazil's continuous contestation of R2P norms has added valuable insights to the ongoing debates on R2P's implementation, especially its third pillar. Moreover, the study has highlighted Latin American states' contributions to the RN2V initiatives. Costa Rica's activities within the S5 and Mexico's support for the 'Political Declaration on Suspension of Veto Powers in Cases of Mass Atrocity' reflect a commitment to multilateralism and a desire to reform the UN Security Council's decision-making structures to enhance accountability and responsiveness. At the same time, they can be viewed as an instrumental support of France with the aim to strengthen the countries' strategic partnership with a powerful Western state.

In conclusion, this research emphasizes the significance of understanding the role of contestation in shaping global governance, while moving beyond the simplistic categorization of states as supporters or opponents of R2P. By acknowledging the diverse positions and practices within Latin America, we gain valuable insights into the complexities of R2P implementation and its potential for meaningful reform. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand contestation not only in relation to R2P norms as such but rather as a political struggle of individual actors to push their perspectives vis-a-vis other agents. In this broader context, contestation emerges as a dynamic process shaped by competing interests, historical legacies, and geopolitical considerations, further underscoring the multifaceted nature of R2P contestation. Ultimately, engaging with diverse

regional perspectives will be essential in future debates on R2P norms and their legitimacy in the context of the existing global order.

ENDNOTES

1 The presented analytical results are based on a careful examination of more than 100 official UN meeting records; therefore, the references provided in the text reflect only a fragment of the empirical material.

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NOTE

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the reviewers of this article for their insightful and constructive feedback. Their comments and suggestions significantly improved the quality and clarity of my work. I would also like to extend my thanks to the editor Jan Daniel, for his patient guidance and support throughout the publication process. Last but not least, I would like to thank Arlene B. Tickner for reading the first draft of the paper and providing initial comments.

This paper is a result of Metropolitan University Prague research project no. 100-04 "Center for Security Studies" (2023) based on a grant from the Institutional Fund for the Long-term Strategic Development of Research Organizations.

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On Current Armed Insurgencies in the Sahel and the Role of Climate Change: Merging Political Ecology and Environmental Security

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ABSTRACT	The Sahel region currently faces various social, political, security, and environmental issues. However, the scientific and media discourse tends to oversimplify the underlying causes of these issues. While some authors attribute them to the heavy impact of climate change-induced scarcity, others focus on political factors such as bad governance. This article aims to merge the perspectives of Environmental Security and Political Ecology into one framework to provide a more holistic explanation of the problems in the Sahel. It shows how local political inequalities, marginalization, economic problems, military coups, corruption, and climate change mutually intersect in a mechanism that creates conflicts and insecurity. This is exacerbated by the geographical character of the Sahel states and their type of governance, which provides an operational space for many armed groups. By understanding the intersection of these conditions, the article contributes to the empirical understanding of the mechanism of conflicts in the Sahel and better conceptualizes the relationship between scarcity, climate change, and conflict.

KEYWORDS	climate change, Sahel, conflicts, security, marginalization
DOI	https://doi.org/10.32422/cjir-mv.116
PUBLISHED ONLINE	15 May, 2023

INTRODUCTION

The topic of climate change and its related resource scarcity and security implications are well established in the environmental literature but also in conflict and security studies. One of the most discussed regions that are influenced by climate change is Africa, particularly the Sahel.[1] Currently, the topic is becoming even more influential as arguments about the impacts of climate change spread through the media landscape. It is indisputable that extensive human-induced climate and environmental change is taking place all over the world. On the other hand, the support for the thesis that climate and environmental change directly causes conflicts is not strong in the current empirical literature. Indeed, it was not easy to find agreement between work such as that of the team around Marshall Burke (BURKE ET AL. 2009), which heavily supports the idea of climate change-induced conflicts, and other scholars that understand climate change and its influence on conflicts differently and focus on arguments around institutions, marginalization or infrastructure (CF. RALEIGH 2010; DETGES 2016; FJELDE – VON UEXKULL 2012; VON UEXKULL 2014; BUHAUG 2010; BENJAMINSEN ET AL. 2012).

However, quite recently, some of those scholars agreed that *"the role of climate is judged to be small compared to other drivers of conflict, and the mechanisms by which climate affects conflict are uncertain"* (MACH ET AL. 2019: 196). The goal of this article is to bring different sectors of the conflict vulnerabilities into one framework and take a closer look at the mechanism of climate influence. With the focus on the Sahel after 2012, the paper uses diverse data on conflicts, politics, economics and climate change, and weather extremes derived from reports of non-governmental organizations, newspaper reports, and various databases, such as Varieties of Democracy (COPPEDGE ET AL. 2022; PEMSTEIN ET AL. 2022), EM-DAT (2022) or Worldwide Governance Indicators (KAUFMANN – KRAAY – MASTRUZZI 2010). In the quest to answer the question of in what way political, social, economic, and climatic variables relate to and influence each other, the article makes two contributions. The first is a contribution to the theoretical understanding of the position of climate change as a source of conflict through the mutual complementarity of Environmental Security and Political Ecology. The second targets the empirical complexity of G5 Sahel's security, where all the factors under study create a vicious spiral which connects local and regional but also international conditions. I argue that while Environmental Security and resource

scarcity perspectives (CF. HOMER-DIXON 1999; KAHL 2006) are heavily criticised from the positions of Political Ecology (CF. PELUSO – WATTS 2001; TURNER 2004; THEISEN 2008; RALEIGH 2010) they can find much in common. The two perspectives are, hence, complementary in the explanation of the current situation of the climate-conflict nexus in the Sahel. The article proceeds with a section on a review of the theoretical relations between climate and environmental change and security and some empirical findings of previous studies. After this section, the framework is briefly discussed and this is followed by a discussion of the diverse climate, environmental, political, social, and economic conditions of the Sahel.

CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AND CONFLICTS: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

The literature on the climate change-conflict nexus is heavily influenced by the *Environmental Security* perspective, the resource scarcity[2] thesis, and the works of Thomas Homer-Dixon (1999), who, in his famous book *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*, shows how resource scarcity causes conflicts and violence. Although it is often argued that the primary variables are changes in the physical environment followed by scarcities as the source of tension (RALEIGH 2010: 71–72; THEISEN 2008: 803–804), it is important to note that Homer-Dixon (1999: 16) aptly notes that *"scarcity is never a sole or sufficient cause."* In his view, the mutual relationship between violence and eco-scarcity is influenced by various intervening factors, and it is heavily contextual and not deterministic (HOMER-DIXON – BLITT 1998: 224; HOMER-DIXON 1999: 16–18). Even though he clearly highlights the mutual influence of politics, history, and economy (HOMER-DIXON 1999: 178) his work attracted heavy criticism. This criticism was provided mainly by Nancy Peluso and Michael Watts (2001) in book *Violent Environments*. The criticism resulted in a mutual exchange between Homer-Dixon and Peluso and Watts in the *Environmental Change & Security Project Report* over misinterpretations and their criticism (HOMER-DIXON 2003; PELUSO – WATTS 2003). Peluso and Watts (2001: 18–19) criticised Homer-Dixon on several levels. However, they criticised him mainly for his overly Malthusian and simplistic focus on environmental scarcity and his rather atheoretical approach to "structural scarcity". This criticism from the position of Political Ecology was later more generalised so as to be aimed towards the whole field of Environmental Security, which point of view was reduced to a *"resource-related conflict (violent or*

nonviolent)[that] stems from a physical or socially-produced scarcity of natural resources" (TURNER 2004: 865).

Political Ecology could be seen as a broad range of theoretical positions or an epistemological position that is *"an explicit alternative to* '*apolitical*' *ecology"* (ROBBINS 2012: 14). As such, it brings politics back to the research of this phenomenon (LE BILLON 2001: 563). It focusses on *"the importance of hierarchical relationships, local land/water access issues, relative resource use, and ethnic group membership"*, which are rather marginalized in the Environmental Security literature, according to Raleigh (2010: 72). Therefore, it highlights pre-existing structural problems that cause conflictual situations. These variables make some societies more vulnerable and consequently worsen the influence of climate and environmental change and resource scarcity (IBID.: 73). In this regard, Political Ecology prioritises socio-political variables and it dismisses the influence of scarcity (THEISEN 2008: 803–804). Both positions provide important insights into the climate change-conflict nexus. Although the two positions could be seen as opponents, the opposite is true. We can agree with Simon Dalby (2010) that the *Political Ecology* position could actually find a common ground with some *Environmental Security* works in the study of the influence of environmental change on conflicts.[3] This mutual complementarity could also provide more contextual understandings of the climate-conflict nexus.

In recent years, there has been a growing amount of research focussing on the influence of climate change on conflicts and security (FOR REVIEW, E.G., THEISEN ET AL. 2013; KOUBI 2019). This led to various different perspectives and study fields of environment/climate relations pertaining to conflict, which, however, have a huge possible space for mutual benefit (IDE ET AL. 2023). Today, we can argue that there is a *"consensus that it [climate change] is a 'threat multiplier'"* (BARNETT 2018: 190). Indeed, in the case of the current research, it is clear that the climate change, climate variability and scarcity argument works (if it works) only in the context of specific political conditions. Some authors point to the important roles of political exclusion (FJELDE – VON UEXKULL 2012), infrastructure (DETGES 2016) and "state presence" (DÖRING 2020). Others rather highlight political marginalization and structural factors instead of resource scarcities (BENJAMINSEN 2008; BENJAMINSEN ET AL. 2012). Some authors even argue that in hard times people rather cooperate with each other (WITSENBURG – ADANO 2009).

Therefore, the relations between climate change and conflicts have to be understood contextually. Despite the above-mentioned debates between *Environmental Security* and *Political Ecology* perspectives this article prioritizes neither position while arguing that they are rather complementary and have a common ground in their analyses. Furthermore, this article is not arguing that climate change does not have any linkage to conflicts now or in the future. However, here it is important to use a rather complex view that combines different factors into a mechanism of the influence.

FRAMEWORK

It is clear that climate change has a strong impact on various sectors of human livelihood in Africa (NIANG – RUPPEL 2014). However, the mechanism of influence is often very problematic. Violent conflicts themselves have to be seen through *"local histories and social relations yet connected to larger processes of material transformation and power relations"*, as Peluso and Watts (2001: 5) aptly note. Therefore, the influence of climate change on conflicts has to be analysed in a similar manner. I agree with Barnett (2018) and Scheffran, Ide and Schilling (2014) that climate change further enhances pre-existing problems that come from the history of the given country or bad governance. As aptly noted by Scheffran, Ide and Schilling (2014: 373), *"[c]limate risks could multiply other societal problems that together could overwhelm the problem-solving capacity of societies, disrupt governments and trigger societal instability events, including a smaller number of large-scale events (such as civil wars) and a larger number of small-scale events (protests, riots, intergroup and individual violence)."*

This makes instability and conflicts heavily contextual. In this framework, the article builds on the argument that the vulnerability to conflicts is, therefore, a product of exposure to climate change impacts, social pressures, economic problems, bad governance, a prior conflict and the history of the community or state (BUSBY ET AL. 2014: 718–720; SCHEFFRAN – IDE – SCHILLING 2014: 372).

Keeping this in mind, the article follows the logic of the case study and discusses the above-mentioned conditions and mechanisms in the case of the conflicts in the Sahel. The studied case is the region of the Sahel between 2012 (the start of the conflict in Mali) and 2022. Under

the term the Sahel, the article means the so-called G5 Sahel countries Mali, Mauritania, Chad, Niger and Burkina Faso, all of which are covered here. Even though each of these countries could serve as a single case, the conflicts and physical character of the region allow us to analyse them together. In the quest to show the role of the mechanism of climate change in the conflict dynamics, the analytical part is divided into four sections. The first part focuses rather on physical changes in the Sahel and climate change. In the next section, this is further connected to the economy, which is heavily influenced by the impacts of climate change and creates insecurity through poverty and food insecurity. In the third section, this is even more highlighted by the corruption and marginalization that creates distrust in the society, which is later more vulnerable to an armed mobilization. Finally, in the last section, it is explained that the history of conflicts or coups that by itself prevents governments from solving problems, both environmental-economic and political ones, causes another kind of insecurity. The example of the Sahel countries shows that while social, political, and other problems solely serve to ignite conflicts, climate change exacerbates the situation even more. The data in this study are derived from quantitative databases like Varieties of Democracy (COPPEDGE ET AL. 2022; PEMSTEIN ET AL. 2022) or Worldwide Governance Indicators (KAUFMANN – KRAAY – MASTRUZZI 2010; WORLDWIDE GOVERNANCE INDICATORS PROJECT 2022) and supported by rather qualitative testimonies by local people or members of self-defence groups that are drawn from newspapers or NGO reports.

CLIMATE CHANGE, EXTREME WEATHER AND THE SAHEL

Africa is suffering from heavy climate change, albeit with rather different outcomes across the continent. This is confirmed by various authors who show that there are visible changes in temperature or precipitation in Africa (NIANG – RUPPEL 2014: 1206–1211). The Sahel is a prime example of this phenomenon, and it has been widely discussed. In the case of temperature, we can clearly see how it historically (1901–2020) rose throughout the entire Sahel according to data from the Climate Change Knowledge Portal (WORLD BANK GROUP 2022A, 2022B, 2022C, 2022D, 2022E). Most of the future projections do not look any better. The projections depend on future approaches of governments and different scenarios (CCKP 2021). However, even in the most favourable scenario, we observe heavy changes in temperatures. For example, the Mopti region in Mali, in case of the most favourable scenario

(SSP1-1.19), will experience a change of 0.71°C by 2040–2059 in comparison with the 1995–2014 period (WORLD BANK GROUP 2022F). Similarly, the Tahoua region in Niger will experience a change of 0.69°C (WORLD BANK GROUP 2022H), Centre-Nord in Burkina Faso will go through a change of 0.66°C (WORLD BANK GROUP 2022J), Kanem in Chad will experience a rise by 0.74°C (WORLD BANK GROUP 2022I) and Trarza in Mauritania will experience an increase of 0.72°C (WORLD BANK GROUP 2022G). This situations around the whole Sahel are roughly the same in this respect.

In the case of precipitation, it is hard to reach a clear conclusion as we have to look at changing patterns or the absolute amount of precipitation. According to the Climate Change Knowledge Portal (WORLD BANK GROUP 2022F, 2022G, 2022H, 2022I, 2022J), the precipitation projections show a greater amount of inter-regional variability, and some regions in the Sahel can even experience positive changes in precipitation. For example, in the case of Mali, we can clearly see that the south should have a higher annual precipitation in 2040–2059 than in 1995–2014, while the north should be drier (WORLD BANK GROUP 2022F). However, the IPCC report, with a rather reserved conclusion, finds that the Sahel will be drier (NIANG – RUPPEL 2014: 1209). This is partially supported by some recent studies (GAETANI ET AL. 2020; KENDON ET AL. 2019).

TABLE 1: DROUGHTS AND FLOODS IN THE SAHEL 2012–2022

Country	Total number of people affected by droughts and floods 2012–2022	Drought occurrence 2012–2022	Flood occurrence 2012–2022
Mali	6,880,831	1	8
Mauritania	5,733,412	3	5
Niger	14,583,826	4	16
Chad	7,508,968	3	7
Burkina Faso	7,127,548	2	8

Sources: EM-DAT, CRED / UCLOUVAIN 2022.

Climate change is also observed through often repeated occurrences of or exposure to extreme weather disasters like droughts and floods. As we can see in Table 1, each Sahelian country suffered from droughts and floods in the last 10 years. This had a substantial economic impact as both floods and droughts affected the lives of more than 41 million people in the region (EM-DAT, CRED / UCLOUVAIN 2022). Such events had a great impact on agriculture, the livelihood of people, and the whole economy of the region.

Some impacts of climate change took years to be visible. However, it is Lake Chad that is an important spot where we can clearly witness the impacts of climate change. Even though the fluctuation of the water level is normal, nowadays, it does not reach its past greatness by any means (HANSEN 2017).

There is a clear and visible climate change in the Sahel. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are ways through which countries can overcome and mitigate immediate catastrophes or slow down the impacts of climate change. Resilience is essential. A stable and well-governed country with enough money will overcome a catastrophe with ease. Simply said, one drought is a smaller problem for a country like Germany, which has a great budget and resources to provide aid, than for rather poor countries like Niger or conflictual countries like Mali. This is even worse in the event that climatic catastrophes, and changes in precipitation and temperature will be more frequent and far stronger in the future.

Therefore, we could easily argue that even though the influence of, for example, Lake Chad's shrinkage is important, the actions of governments of surrounding states to mitigate its influence on agriculture, livelihoods, and the economy is what makes it important from the point of view of vulnerability to conflicts.

ECONOMY AND FOOD PRODUCTION

The countries in the Sahel are among the poorest and most fragile in the world in terms of almost all macroeconomic indicators. This is important since poverty is often considered as one of the main factors leading to violence (COLLIER – HOEFFLER 2009; HEGRE – SAMBANIS 2006), while it is also important from the point of view of mitigation of climate change. However, in the case of Africa, and the Sahel is not different from the rest of the continent; its economy is also heavily influenced by long-time but also immediate impacts of climate change (BROWN ET AL. 2011; BAARSCH ET AL. 2020). This is the case mainly because of the heavy dependence of sub-Saharan Africa on rainfed agriculture and herding. This is aptly noted in a study of the team around Casey Brown (2011: 635): *"Rural populations dependent on rainfed agriculture, who make up 93% of the population of SSA, remain immensely vulnerable to*

drought. The cumulative negative effects of drought and other traps lead to a poverty trap of highly vulnerable, low productivity subsistence level agriculture."

In another recent study, it was also proven that *"the majority of African countries has average annual losses, induced by climate variability, ranging on average from –15 to –10 percent in GDP per capita growth over the 1986–2015 period"* (BAARSCH ET AL. 2020: 7). For obvious reasons, this is also true for the countries of the Sahel. In the case of the impacts of climate change on the economy, it is clear that each change in rainfall and temperature worsens an already bad situation as we know that the G5 Sahel countries are already ranked among the poorest in the world. This is confirmed also by the Human Development Index, which, in its multidimensional understanding of poverty and development, proves that the G5 Sahel countries are ranked among the most underdeveloped globally (UNDP 2022A).

However, it is not only the macro-economy of the states which is influenced by climate change. It is mainly the system of livelihood and food production – fishing, farming, herding – that is affected by climate change in all stages of production (POTSDAM INSTITUTE FOR CLIMATE IMPACT RESEARCH AND CLIMATE ANALYTICS 2016: 22–23, 37–45). Desertification, even though in the last years it was targeted by the campaign Great Green Wall, is problematic from the point of view of the expansion of the Sahara and land degradation, which endangers traditional places and all ways of livelihood in the area. This is well-documented in the story of Sidi Fadoua from Mauritania in the report by BBC News *Life at 50°C – Mauritania: Shifting Sands*. According to his story, climate change pushed him to look for a different line of work: *"Working in the mine is getting worse year after year; because of climate change sometimes the weather is hot. Other times it's windy or rainy.[…] I have no choice but to look for work elsewhere"* (BBC NEWS 2021).

Similarly, people engaged in farming and herding practices are struggling today. The majority of the Sahel population fights irregularities, climatic catastrophes, or extreme weather. In the case of the Sahel, farming or herding provides livelihood for the majority of the population, depending on the state (IFRC 2012). Both farmers and herders have to face problems with floods, droughts, and shrinking water levels (DOUCET 2019; PRENTICE 2020). Historically, such extreme weather events as droughts have already proven to be a great burden for food production and the economy

– for example, in Mali in the 1970s (DERRICK 1977: 537). Recently, we spoke not only about droughts but also floods, as unexpected heavy rains and subsequent floods in Mali are also problematic as they similarly destroy crops. As one respondent highlighted in an interview by the BBC, *"[f]irst, armed groups attacked nearby.[...] Then the rains came and did the rest"* (DOUCET 2019). This example aptly depicts how climate change could be an added stressor and helps to sustain the cycle of poverty and suffering. Extreme weather in this respect further deepens problems with livelihood.

In this hardship, desperate people sometimes look for help in the arms of armed groups. Even though terrorist groups often attack civilians, it seems to be clear that for some people the provision of money and help in an uneasy situation is a motivation to join them (INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP 2021: 6–7). This strategy is not in any way unique. A similar situation was reported in northern Mali before the disruption in 2012, when radical groups first gained people's trust through diverse forms of social and economic help before inviting them to join them (BØÅS – TORHEIM 2013: 419–420). A similar situation is happening today as food crises and malnutrition are often reported in the Sahel and placed in connection with conflicts. For example, according to Action Against Hunger (2022A; 2022B), food security is an issue for numerous groups of people in Niger and Mali. Radical and terrorist groups could easily take advantage of this situation. Offers to help individuals out of poverty and the provision of food security serve as a motivational factor for recruiting people as fighters or gaining support. Therefore, gifts and help are a way in which these groups get closer to people. Similarly, the armed and terrorist groups take advantage of the situation in the Lake Chad basin, where the shrinking water surface drives poverty and food insecurity, and armed groups promise a better life or *"business support"* (MERCY CORPS 2016: 13). As aptly noted by one interviewee (refugee) in Burkina Faso in an interview by UNDP (2022B), *"the problem we are confronted with in our population is that the majority are youths and they have no work. If youth have nothing to do, it is easy to disorient them and recruit them."* The uneasy situation in the region prepares the ground for radical groups.

The uneasy situation of agriculture and more general livelihood is even more underlined by the social and political structure, which will be discussed in the following section. To conclude this section, the impacts

of climate change and poverty easily mutually strengthen each other and further facilitate conflicts. This leads to a shortage of crops and therefore also to food insecurity. Furthermore all this diminishes economic effectiveness even more, again fuels conflicts through potential recruitment to radical groups and is the key ingredient of a spiral of conflicts.

SOCIETY AND MARGINALIZATION

Marginalization is one of the most important contextual conditions, if not the most important, in the understanding of the influence of climate change on conflicts. This part discusses the problems of communal and group inequality and the different levels of access to power and sources that the various groups living in the states have.

Ethnicity and marginalization are always a topic of conflict and security studies, particularly when dealing with Africa. That is the reason why the studies often focus on ethnicity in conflicts. However, it seems that the political inequality of groups is what makes it influential (WIMMER – CEDERMAN – MIN 2009). From the point of view of climate change, this is even more highlighted by *Political Ecology*. In recent years, the problematic relations between the Fulani pastoralists and other communities, and further inter-communal conflict escalation have received a lot of attention from scholars (NSAIBIA – DUHAMEL 2021; BENJAMINSEN – BA 2021) and media (SANDNER 2018; BBC NEWS 2019). This problem is aptly noted also by Héni Nsaibia and Jules Duhamel (2021) in the case of Burkina Faso: *"[…]after the launch of the VDP program, the fear of many observers that arming civilians would escalate the conflict and deepen cleavages along ethnic fault lines – between mainly Fulani pastoralists and sedentary communities such as the Mossi, Foulse, and Gourmantche – has become a self-fulfilling prophecy."*

Inter-communal conflicts are a great burden in the Sahel countries, and are often allegedly connected with ethnicity. However, the problem is not ethnicity *per se* in this case, but it is rather, first, the framing of conflicts and, second, power relations and access to resources. The first problem is connected to the media discourse that sometimes misinterprets the stories, as it was heavily criticised in this regard by Mirjam de Bruijn, Boukary Sangare and Han van Dijk (2019) and Mark Moritz and Mamediarra Mbacke

(2022). Similarly, Benjaminsen and Ba (2021: 21) criticise the labelling of *"the enemy as 'terrorists' or 'jihadists'."*

The second problem is based on the monopolization of power which is often present in the Sahel. While we can say, with the use of data from Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), that Burkina Faso is the most equal society in the region, in recent years the other states have been rather unequal in terms of access to power, with Niger and Mali deteriorating in this respect in recent years and Chad having the most monopolized power (COPPEDGE ET AL. 2022; PEMSTEIN ET AL. 2022).

The problem is reflected also in the case of access to resources, which is also strikingly unequal in the Sahel countries, according to V-Dem data. After the eruption of the conflict in Mali in 2012, the situation in each of the G5 Sahel countries even further deteriorated and the inequality of access to resources further grew (IBID.; SIGMAN – LINDBERG 2015).

This is a considerable problem for all the countries in the Sahel, and it is further complicated by problematic land tenure systems (COTTULA – SYLLA 2006: 18–19; THÉBAUD – VOGT – VOGT 2016: 32–35). It is, hence, far from surprising that various groups across the Sahel claim that they are marginalized, forgotten, or neglected. Indeed, different governments historically preferred different groups or different ways of development due to political or economic reasons or simply due to patrimonial patterns of governance. Marginalization was historically the root cause of the Tuareg rebellions in Mali, as the Tuareg found themselves in an unpreferred position in the Malian quest for *"modernization and development"* (BENJAMINSEN 2008: 828–833). The Tuareg were heavily marginalized and placed in a position where a *"nomadic way of life"* was seen as *"backward and undesirable"* (LECOCQ 2004: 89). Furthermore, Baz Lecocq (2004: 89–90) aptly highlights the following: *"a generation of Tuareg, born in the 1950s, grew up with forced sedentarization and education, social economic destruction by drought and state agents, and social economic marginality in the nation-states ruling their land. This led to strong resentment."*

Such dissatisfaction and resentments breed conflicts. In this regard, the marginalization and unequal approach of the government were problematic from the economic but also the cultural point of view. However, not

only the Tuareg found themselves in a position where a different style of livelihood was preferred. We can find similar patterns of exclusion and feelings of marginalization today among the Fulani across the Sahel. Similarly to the above-mentioned policy towards the Tuareg, the policy which was in favour of the sedentary Dogon led to the economic marginalization of Fulani pastoralists in Mali, who in the end lost space to move and pastures to the growing demand for farmlands, as documented by Benjaminsen and Ba (2021: 10–12, 14). Clearly, such an unequal solution again led to grievances that were even more strengthened by a situation in which one side was supported by a state institution – in the case of Mali, the army (IBID.). This problem became even worse because of the usage of simplified and one-sided stories that labelled and still label the Fulani as the main cause of the insecurity (MORITZ – MBACKE 2022). Such a discourse places the Fulani in a very unfavourable position, which very often leads to a situation in which they are attacked by self-defence groups, and further builds up the mutual hostility, as will be shown below.

To sum up, we can see power relations shape the ground on which some parts of society are much more easily affected by climate change than others. With the already existing environmental pressure on pastures and farmlands, the disputes are further strengthened. However, the main issue is structural inequality and marginalization. In case the state accepts an unequal approach and prefers one group, or one way of livelihood over another, or some segments of society are excluded from power, this will lead to other grievances and disputes. This is further accentuated by problems in governance and corruption.

GOVERNANCE, CORRUPTION, VIOLENCE AND THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

Effective governance is the cornerstone of resilience and mitigation of environmental and climate change but also of development and security since a good institutional framework can solve inter- and intra-communal disputes and other problems. However, the countries of the Sahel belong to the weakest and the most non-effective countries in terms of governance from the state-centric point of view. Additionally, they suffer from the presence of terrorist groups, the recent occurrences of military coups, and heavy international interest. This further strengthens the damage climate

change could directly or indirectly cause to them. The Sahel is also a specific region mainly due to its physical environment and specific forms of political orders. This phenomenon was recently studied by authors like Georg Klute (2013) or Morten Bøås and Francesco Strazzari (2020). These authors look at how the Sahel and the Sahara form specific areas from the point of view of politics, particularly security.

Mismanagement and bad governance on the part of the central governments in the Sahel are evident from the Worldwide Governance Indicators. The Sahel countries are steadily on the negative side of the index, which corresponds to their heavily ineffective governments (KAUFMANN – KRAAY – MASTRUZZI 2010). This means that the governments fail in providing public goods and services and are not able to effectively implement good policies. Beyond this, the above-mentioned spatial features of the Sahel states and other actors operating inside them even further problematize the situation. The central governments are not able to control some parts of their respective countries. However, this does not mean that these regions are "ungoverned". As Bøås and Strazzari (2020: 3) point out, states have *"functions of a state-like character, along with different types of patrimonial and 'Big Man' politics"*, which leads to their *"hybrid character."* Therefore, many other actors parallel to the state operate inside it and could possibly challenge it. Indeed, to some extent, in such environments *"armed insurgencies are but one articulation of emerging and competing systems of governance"* (BØÅS – DUNN 2017: 5).[4] As we will see below, various insurgent groups or self-defence groups even provide security, for example.

Due to the existence of those actors and the character of borders, this means that a conflict in one state is hardly separable from others (SCHMIEDL 2019; BØÅS – STRAZZARI 2020: 3). This is clearly visible in the current situation in the Sahel as the chain of spill-overs could be traced back to the conflict in Libya, which spilled-over to northern Mali through the Sahara in 2012 (HÜSKEN – KLUTE 2015). In this regard, it is clear how the conflict in Mali later influenced the whole region as this instability provided an opportunity that destabilized its neighbours. For that reason, the situation in Mali was, from the beginning, impatiently observed by Niger, which had to think about a possible spill-over of the Tuareg rebellion (SCHMIEDL 2019). However, as Bøås and Strazzari (2020: 7) show, the actors in the Sahara-Sahel region are not the result of this space; rather it is a battlefield for them. Indeed,

its peripheral areas and artificial borders are not under the control of central governments. The vast space offered by the Sahara-Sahel region grants possibilities for mobility. It is, hence, no surprise that motorbikes became the main vehicle for armed groups. This kind of mobility is hard to control, and permeable borders make it very easy for these groups to move around the desert while being hard to catch. In case some insurgent group challenges a central government it is very easy to manoeuvre from one country to another. Therefore, while some would consider borders as obstacles, the opposite is true (HÜSKEN – KLUTE 2015; SCHEELE – MCDOUGALL 2012).

High mobility and a vast space are two of the many reasons why armies are unsuccessful in their quest to defeat insurgents and terrorist groups in the region. It is often claimed that states and armies absolutely fail in providing protection in the region. This is noted, for example, by a respondent from Gao in a *Vice News* report: *"Our soldiers can't protect us well"* (VICE NEWS 2021). This is very often the reason why people form self-defence groups. *"As the state has resigned, we've organized to defend ourselves"*, as was highlighted by the leader of one of the many self-defence groups in Mali in the same report by *Vice News* (IBID.). The proliferation of weapons in the Sahel is enormous. And even if groups claim that they only want to protect themselves against terrorists, it rather escalates conflicts and leads to inter-communal violence because weapons are used against other communities. This is typical in the case of the Fulani, Dogon, and Bambara in Mali, as the Dogon and Bambara often accuse the Fulani of being supporters of terrorist groups (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH 2018). The problem is that the self-defence groups further fuel violence and one revenge follows another. For some Fulani people, it is even the reason why they join terrorist groups as, interestingly, some point to these groups' provision of security and protection from other self-defence groups (IBID.: 16).[5] We can see how grievances and insecurities fuel each other as some people join self-defence groups in fear of terrorism and other self-defence groups while others join terrorist groups due to the existence of self-defence groups. This signals a problematic negligence on the part of the government, the army, and local authorities.

This negligence is used by the terrorist groups, which include the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nusrat Al Islam Wal Muslimin (JNIM), which are active along the tri-borders of Niger, Mali

and Burkina Faso, and Boko Haram, which operates around Lake Chad. All these terrorist groups and their factions pose a significant challenge to governments and international forces that operate in the Sahel. However, the local armies which form the G5 Sahel forces are far from effective and this is also used by these groups to get support. Apart from the already mentioned redistribution of money and economic help that is provided by JNIM in some areas in Mali, JNIM also tries to replace state authorities as it offers *"protection from crime"* (INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP 2021: 6–7). An important part of the mobilization is the framing these groups use. This is aptly noted by Akali Omeni (2022: 188), who, regarding Boko Haram, shows how it *"carefully framed and approximates lies and half-truths"* to gain support.

National armies are rather unsuccessful in the fight with the groups mentioned above. The reason is that they are heavily corrupt. The prime example is the Malian army. According to some interviews for a documentary in the BBC's *Africa Eye*, it is clear that corruption in the army is a substantial problem which even impedes the military in fighting terrorist insurgencies. In the same documentary, the opposition leader in Mali, Clément Dembélé, highlights the acquisition of *"bulletproof vests"* filled with *"cardboard boxes."* This is further confirmed by a soldier who talks about the ill-equipment of the army (BBC NEWS AFRICA 2021). According to the *Political Corruption Index* published by V-Dem, the G5 Sahel are far from being without corruption (COPPEDGE ET AL. 2022; PEMSTEIN ET AL. 2022; MCMANN ET AL. 2016). It is important to say that the dissatisfaction with the general corruption is also one of the reasons that pull the Fulani into the arms of terrorist groups in Mali, according to HRW interviews (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH 2018: 16).

The corruption and inability to defeat terrorist groups are also often claimed to be the reasons for many military coups in the region (WING 2021). In the last two years, each of the countries in the Sahel faced an attempted, successful military coup or military takeover. Mali itself faced two successful coups in 2020 and 2021. The military junta also reported another attempt in May 2022, which they even called *"western-backed"* (DIALLO – CHRISTENSEN 2022). The Sahel countries, like many other African countries, have a strong history of military coups and several of their presidents have been ousted by coups – for example, Sangoulé Lamizana in 1980 and Thomas Sankara in 1987 in Burkina Faso, Modibo Keita in 1968 and Moussa Traore in 1991 in Mali, Moktar Daddah in 1978 in Mauritania, Hamani

Diori in 1974 in Niger and Hissène Habré in Chad. It is far from surprising that in recent years there were several successful and unsuccessful coup attempts that claimed to aim to solve the problems of the regimes.

However, the coups have never been able to solve the problems, as the corruption and inefficiency of the armies apparently prevail, as is clear from the examples mentioned above. With the high level of corruption and military coups, it is far from surprising that the G5 military alliance is not functional and effective in the stabilization of the region. This was especially made clear when Chad decided to withdraw a part of its soldiers to solve its home problems that were further highlighted after the death of Idriss Déby (MELLY 2021). Furthermore, France originally decided to reduce its military mission in Mali, but after some disagreements with the military junta there, it, unsurprisingly, even decided to withdraw from the country. However, France is not the only state which left Mali (KÖPP – HAIRSINE 2022). One of the reasons is that the regime in Mali now prefers the Russian Wagner Group, which is, however, a perpetrator of massacres of civilians and causes further insecurity in the region (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH 2022). The preference for Russia is heavily connected with the Russian support for the military junta, which, through the Wagner Group, secures its survival even though it sacrifices the security of the population. However, the junta gained the support of the general public by a discourse that aimed at the French unsuccessful strategy and neo-colonialism.[6] As *The New York Times* reported, Malian Prime Minister Choguel Maiga even claimed that *"[t]hey [France] want to humiliate us"* (MACLEAN 2022). In return for the Russian engagement, Mali often shows support for Russian interests in the UN General Assembly, as we have seen recently.

Currently, the Sahel countries suffer from a high intensity of violent events. The whole region now suffers from the long-standing instability which started roughly in 2012 in Mali with the Tuareg rebellion. In this regard, it seems that the permeable borders are clearly important. Areas that are not controlled by the central government are the reason why the countries in the Sahel always must take care of what is happening in their neighbourhoods and suffer from trans-border violence. Currently, most of the political violence is concentrated in the border areas of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger (NSAIBIA – DUHAMEL 2021). In this respect, the conflicts in all the countries are heavily connected and influence each other, as the states

cannot be viewed as divided by borders. The stabilization of such a vast region requires a cooperation between the G5 Sahel, which is, however, hardly functional, and the international forces. The conflicts fuel poverty, food insecurity, and military coups that in the end lead to other conflicts or their prolongation. This is a fertile ground for corruption, which again fuels discontent and impedes armies in providing security. All the conditions mentioned in this part put stress on societies and states, which makes it harder for them to cope with the impacts of climate change or poverty.

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE FOR THE SAHEL?

The goal of this article is to show the complexity of the conflict vulnerability in the Sahel and the role climate change plays in it. As is clear from the previous parts, the vulnerability of the region is the result of various regional and local conditions but also geopolitical plays of great powers. Even though some might argue that the main cause is the climate change impact and the following resource scarcity, it has become clear that it is not the only cause of the insecurity in the Sahel; however, it is part of the problem. The political, social, and economic problems of the G5 Sahel together with the region's history of coups and conflicts, led to a self-sustaining spiral of economic hardship, inequality, and conflicts that gave rise to insurgent groups. This devil's spiral is further strengthened by environmental problems caused by climate change.

Due to bad governance, poverty, and the impacts of climate change, the societies in the Sahel are under constant insecurity. This is further highlighted by marginalization and the public discourse. The vast space in the Sahel that is not controlled by central governments then offers an operational space for the involvement of various armed groups.

Currently, the situation is even more uncertain with the French withdrawal from Mali and the announced change of the French policy towards Africa, the Malian departure from the G5 Sahel Forces, the involvement of the Russian Wagner Group in the region, and the recent withdrawal of several countries from MINUSMA.[7] It is mainly the operation of the Wagner Group and the weakening of the UN mission that will have an immense influence on the security of the whole region. While the conflicts in the region will continue, it will be hard to solve any consequences of climate

change and help people in hardships caused by changes in climate, which will even further strengthen the conflicts. However, framing the Sahel conflicts with only resource scarcity and climate change would be misleading. The problem lies in institutional and structural problems. The inequality, corruption, problematic land management, and ineffectiveness of governments together with the existing underdevelopment are by themselves strong enough to cause conflicts and insecurity.

The ground is set for various groups to exploit this situation. On these bases, since such groups offer money, social provisions and security, being recruited to join such a group could seem like an easy way out for many people in the region whose livelihoods are endangered or destroyed. Government malfunction is very problematic in this regard as malfunctioning governments hardly mitigate any damage caused by conflicts or climate change. It is clear that while the resource scarcity caused by climate change is a problem, the mechanism of conflict dynamics is heavily influenced by political, social, and international conditions, while none of them are separable from the rest. Therefore, it is clearly important to use the theoretical standpoints of both Political Ecology and Environmental Security to understand what place climate change has in conflict dynamics.

The conflicts in the Sahel already cause immense human suffering. In 2022, the UNHCR reported about 2.6 million IDPs and 930,000 refugees in the Sahel (UNHCR 2022B). Most of the refugees left for Chad and Niger while the UNHCR reports the absolute majority of IDPs in the region are in Burkina Faso (as of 30 April 2022 it was more than 1.8 million) (UNHCR 2022A). However, without a joint approach of effective and non-corrupt governments and armies and the inclusion of all social groups in such efforts, it will be hard to stop the conflicts and the activity of terrorist groups.

ENDNOTES

1 By the Sahel author means the G5 Sahel, namely Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Chad.

2 Theisen (2008) uses also term eco-scarcity.

3 Dalby (2010) mentions, for example, the research of Colin Kahl (2006) in this regard.

4 This is what Georg Klute (2013) conceptualizes as a "heterarchy".

5 HRW (2018) mention also profiting from fighting, corruption, etc. as another reason.

6 According to Nathaniel Powell (2017) the French interventionist politics towards Africa was unsuccessful due to its contradictory pattern. He aptly notes that the French strategy was based on *"cooperation with those African states whose elites have helped generate regional instability and, consequently, threats to French and European security"* (Powell 2017: 66–67). In sum, France very often undermined its own efforts.

7 Just in the last year several countries announced that they would withdraw their soldiers, or already did so – for example, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Sweden, and Ivory Coast (Köpp – Hairsine 2022).

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NOTE

I am very grateful to the two anonymous reviewers and the Editor-In-Chief Michal Kolmaš for their careful reading of and valuable commenting on earlier versions of this manuscript. All remaining shortfalls are my own.

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Discussion Article

From Donbas Conflict to the Russian-Ukrainian War. A Review of Literature

DAVID R. MARPLES (ED.): THE WAR IN UKRAINE'S DONBAS: ORIGINS, CONTEXTS, AND THE FUTURE. BUDAPEST: CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY (CEU) PRESS, 2022.

DARIA PLATONOVA: THE DONBAS CONFLICT IN UKRAINE: ELITE, PROTEST AND PARTITION. LONDON–NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, 2022.

JAKOB HAUTER (ED.): CIVIL WAR? INTERSTATE WAR? HYBRID WAR? DIMENSIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE DONBAS CONFLICT IN 2014–2020. STUTTGART: IBIDEM VERLAG, 2021.

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ABSTRACT	Using the conflict studies literature, the article classifies the latest scholarly writings on the origins of the Donbas conflict into three general groupings: on the role of the history and identity of the region's inhabitants, on the interference by "third" actors and on so-called contentious politics. The analysis suggests that the initial support of the uprising by Russia is usually greatly overestimated, and the level of social discontent and protest movements is underestimated. The study of contentious politics appears to be the most appropriate tool regarding the origins of the conflict. After 2015, the conflict took on, at least in part, the contours of an interstate clash, but the Donbas insurgency has continued to retain its authenticity. The failure of the 2015 settlement and the path to war after 2018 cannot be understood without considering the actions of Russia and those of Ukraine and leading Western states.

KEYWORDS	conflict, Donbas, clash of interpretations, origins, evolution, Russia, Ukraine, contentious politics
DOI	https://doi.org/10.32422/cjir.777
PUBLISHED ONLINE	15 November, 2023

INTRODUCTION

This period of international conflict, with the conflict in Donbas and the current Russian-Ukrainian war being no exception to it, is not a favorable time even for researchers in the social sciences and humanities. They, too, face political pressures and find it difficult to escape representations of international realities by the political elites and the predominant pro-Russian (in the case of Russian media space), pro-Ukrainian and pro-Western framing and narratives of the conflict in the case of Euro-Atlantic mainstream media. Policy proposals on how to proceed vis-à-vis Russia were far from uniform within the Euro-Atlantic world in the years leading up to the Russian invasion in February 2022. Yet the mainstream view of the origins of the conflict in eastern Ukraine had long before acquired a dominant pro-Western frame there. The Russian attack further reinforced and sharply strengthened it. However, it seems that at least in some other parts of the world, the pressure of the "official" interpretation of the major media is not so pervasive as in the case of Russia and the Western world.

With the continuation of the war, even critical authors opposing the dominant frames will undoubtedly focus mainly on the period of the last few months before the Russian invasion, at most on the period after Volodymyr Zelensky's ascension to the presidency in April 2019 (CF. ROBERTS 2022; KRICKOVIC – SAKWA 2022). From this point of view, the studies pursuing the beginnings of the Ukrainian conflict can become an important supplement or even corrective to this orientation. *The War in Ukraine's Donbas*, edited by David R. Marples, a well-established and prolific Canadian-British writer and connoisseur of the history of Ukraine and Belarus,[1] the volume *Civil War? Interstate War? Hybrid War? Dimensions and Interpretations of the Donbas Conflict in 2014–2020*, edited by Jakob Hauter, a young PhD candidate at University College London (UCL), and the published version of the PhD thesis of Daria Platonova, a former doctoral student at King's College London, all belong to that category.

All three, but each in a different way, thematize the issue of the beginnings and transformation of the Donbas conflict, or some of its aspects during 2014–2015, in some cases, even up to 2018. Unlike Platonova's monograph, which focuses exclusively on the elucidation of the emergence of the conflict, the two edited volumes, and Marples' in particular, cover

a truly diverse set of topics concerning the social characteristics of the conflict, possibilities of its solution, Russia's strategy, etc. While the information-rich collection of Marples, originating from a conference held at the University of Alberta in November 2018, includes ten texts, either from the field of contemporary history or that of social sciences, most of the authors of Hauter's volume offer primarily political science-oriented studies, especially from the subfield of conflict studies. The dividing line between the two volumes is not a crude dichotomy of theory and empirical research, although theory appears more often in the latter. I cannot discuss all the thematically and methodologically disparate essays in Marples' volume here. Therefore I want to at least point out the papers contained therein based on field research, especially the ethnographic kind, of social groups involved in the conflict: this topic is mainly covered by the text of Nataliia Stepaniuk on the role and perception of volunteer soldiers in the conflict (STEPANIUK 2022), the chapter by William J. Risch on how the residents of Donbas perceived the events of the Kyiv Maidan (RISCH 2022), and the texts by Oksana Mikheieva and Kamitaka Matsuzato about the motivations for the involvement of pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian fighters, and the metamorphoses of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) respectively (MIKHEIEVA 2022; MATSUZATO 2022).

This discussion article is divided into three parts. It focuses primarily on two areas of the origins and evolution of the conflict that form the core, or at least part of it, of the volumes under discussion and several dozen related writings. In the first section, I will probe into the different approaches to the study of conflict in the fields of modern history and social science during the recent decades in order to apply them to the Donbas conflict in the next two.

THREE GENERAL APPROACHES TO THE CONFLICT

The study of conflict, not just international and violent conflict, usually includes various approaches that differ from each other; for example, these approaches differ in terms of their conceptual sources and the disciplines they make use of (RAPOPORT 1995) or in terms of the levels of the analysis; for a pioneering text in this regard (SEE SINGER 1960). Some of these approaches receded into the background of interest or became downright anachronistic

over time. Others remained in the domain of disciplines not primarily engaged in the field of regional or international studies.

The conflict studies in the post-Soviet space and elsewhere in the European-Asian and African space during the previous decades built mainly upon the renewal of ethnopolitical or ethnonational conflicts in the early 1990s. Part of this research could tend towards a rather mechanical interpretation which pitted states against "ethnic groups" on the one hand, or "people" on the other: it was built on the opposition of majoritarian policies of nation-states and minorities' policies on their territory (GURR 1993; BRUBAKER 1996). However, many supporters of these approaches reflected that the "Russian minority" in Ukraine does not have to understand itself as a "minority" and that the very phrase "Russian speakers" is "itself an ambiguous term". Moreover, in the first decade after the collapse of the USSR, it became clear that neither Ukraine nor Russia pursued anything like nationalization policies and they did not even perceive problems from an ethnic point of view (RECKTENWALD 2000: 57, NOTE 1 ON P. 63; KULYK 2001: 217–221; THE ESSAYS OF GURR 2000).

Given this outline, one can guess that the three volumes under review do not offer a complete variety of perspectives on the study of conflict, its sources and the direction of conflicts, but they do offer their most significant part. Approaches to the Donbas conflict can most often be broken down along the line between internal and external factors and only secondarily according to disciplinary divides; for an overview (SEE KATCHANOVSKI 2016: 476–477; PLATONOVA 2022: 2–3; WILSON 2016: 631–633; KUZIO 2017: 8–17). At least three broad perspectives can be distinguished. They are not uniform and do not reach identical conclusions, and sometimes even diametrically opposed ones.

The first, anchored in the research of internal factors, connects the conflict with the history and identity of the inhabitants of the area. It is by no means new in post-Soviet and regional studies. It came into general awareness in its probably most famous version at the end of the 1990s at the latest with the well-known study of the Japanese-American historian Hiroaki Kuromiya. Using Benedict Anderson's concept,[2] Kuromiya characterized Donbas as an imagined community whose features *"embod[y] the characteristics of the wild field – freedom ['freedom from'], militancy, violence, terror, independence"*. It was a place where diverse ethnic groups gathered,

and where people did not necessarily identify with Russia or Ukraine, but rather with a variety of real or imagined communities. Nevertheless, Donbas *"has always functioned as an 'exit', or refuge, an alternative to political conformity or protest"*, thus affecting the behavior and identity of its inhabitants (KUROMIYA 1998: 12, 41–42, 48, 64, QUOTE ON P. 4). Kuromiya does not draw so much from the theory of ethnicity as from the "historicist" and "modernist" schools of nationalism. However, by accepting some elements of social constructivism and cultural history (SMITH 1998: 5–6, 117), he goes beyond the original contours of these approaches.

The adherents of the identity approaches find certain reasons for the support for separatism or political loyalty to Russia in the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, but they deny that these reasons are one-dimensional or static. Their separatism was shaped by ethnic, linguistic and political aspects, as well as various forms of material interest or a sense of betrayal by the central government (GIULIANO 2015A: 2; CF. ALSO IDEM 2015B; IDEM 2018). Another author who recently did research at King's College London argues that different sections of Ukraine's population *"developed conflicting perspectives of the past, the role of Russia in Ukraine's history, and of how relations with the West should evolve"*. Frankly speaking, in her view, the clash in Donbas is an *"identity conflict"*, while identity cannot be considered a fixed category and is *"affiliated more with region than ethnicity"* (MATVEEVA 2018). After all, Kuromiya himself recently stated that even if the thesis about Donbas as a *"stronghold of Russian separatism"* is a *"popular misconception"*, it cannot be doubted that at least in the early stages of the conflict, the separatists had considerable support there (KUROMIYA 2019: 245, 259–260; CF. ALSO KUROMIJA 2015).

The second broad stream discussing the conflict, usually contrasting with the first, continues the tradition of research in the field of international relations and foreign policy emphasizing the role of foreign actors or "third parties" – most often neighboring states – in the emergence of conflict. This approach usually draws more heavily on ethnicity theory when it links the foreign actors' cross-border intervention with two aims. These two aims include the protection of ethnic kinship abroad through either the direct establishment of the "protector" state or the indirect mobilization of a "protector" state by an ethnically related minority in a neighboring state threatened by that state's central government (SEE SOME OF THE PAPERS IN CARMENT – JAMES 1997; LAKE – ROTHCHILD 1998; LOBELL – MAUCERI, 2004).

While in the West this belief is perhaps best exemplified by the works of the UCL historian Andrew Wilson, in the East numerous Ukrainian academics share it (see part three): one of its most prominent adherents is the British-Ukrainian political scientist Taras Kuzio (ESP. KUZIO 2017). Wilson does not deny the role of historical and identity factors or fears of the inhabitants of the Donbas; in contrast to Kuromiya, he finds them rather in the Khrushchev period of consolidation of the society of the area (WILSON 2016: 631), but nevertheless, he pluralizes them. The alienation of the region's inhabitants from Kyiv was a sufficient starting point for localizing the civil conflict, but *"all the key triggers that produced all-out war were provided by Russia and by local elites in the Donbas"* (IBID.). Think tanks that help Western governments push their political agendas attribute the war to Russia even more directly. A study published under the umbrella of the Washington, D.C.-based *Atlantic Council* speaks without scruple about a *"Kremlin-directed war"* in which *"Russian leadership was evident from the beginning"* (CZUPERSKI – HERBST ET AL. 2015: PREFACE, 4). Within this group of interpretations, however, we also find, especially among followers of some streams of IR realism, an entirely opposite normative tendency attributing the main responsibility for the conflict to NATO expansion to the Russian borders and Western support for the regime change in Kyiv (CF. MEARSHEIMER 2014). Yet it overstates the NATO factor as a motive for Russian policy, while at the same time making the West an overly homogeneous actor with unified political interests and goals. However, Mearsheimer's interpretation of this sort is not as simplistic as his numerous critics now suggest.[3]

The third grouping of interpretations regarding the Donbas events focuses on the dynamics of popular attitudes in relation to the developments in the center (Kyiv) and the region itself. They draw mainly, although not exclusively, from the historical-sociological or historical-social scientific research, as it was developed by the American sociologist and historian Charles Tilly in his shift from structuralist Marxism. During the 1980s and early 1990s, Tilly laid the foundations of what he refers to as "relational realism", an approach stressing the role of interactions, transactions, conversations, and social ties as pivotal agents of social life – in opposition to behavior and ideas (TILLY 2008: 7–8; 2003: 5–9). The core of this kind of research consists of the study of so-called contentious politics, i.e., the use of diverse disruptive techniques, usually by opponents of the government against it or its agents, with the aim of asserting their demands. Social movements

play a significant but not exclusive role as the instigators of contentious politics (MCADAM – TARROW – TILLY 2001: 4–7; TILLY – TARROW 2015: 7–14, XII; LICHBACH 1998: 406–407). In the case of Ukraine, the Russian-speaking population groups in the east of the country took advantage of the situation after the fall of the Yanukovych regime and seized the territory and its leadership.

From the overview, it seems that the intellectual positions within these perspectives – though with some exceptions – appear to be nuanced and even complex and thus potentially compatible. However, the academic debate about the conflict, not just in the early stages, was similarly heated as the political and media debates at that time. A sharp clash took place between the supporters of the thesis about domestic (identity) sources of the uprising and those pointing to Russia's central role in it (HAUTER 2021A: 12; KATCHANOVSKI 2016: 476–77; MELNYK 2020: 4).

ORIGINS

In this part, I will focus on the problem of the sources and causes of the Donbas conflict, as mirrored in the reviewed volumes. The exposition takes into consideration that the issue is not always addressed to the same extent in all the books: while in Hauter's volume, only a significant minority of the text focuses on it, Platonova's book is devoted entirely to it. The central question here is aptly summarized by Hauter in the "Conclusion" of his volume: at the heart of the academic divide is the question of whether Russia merely supported the key actors involved in the outbreak of violence and thus the local aspect of the conflict escaped external control, or whether Moscow controlled these actors and the Russian intervention in the conflict became the defining moment (HAUTER 2021B: 216–217).

When in Marples' collection, the Ukrainian-born political scientist Serhiy Kudelia expresses one of the strongest supportive views for the proposition of an authentic domestic origin of the protests,[4] this is certainly not a surprise. He was the leading proponent of this thesis since the first round of this academic debate in 2014 (CF. KUDELIA 2014), for a short summary (HAUTER 2021: 11–12), for the later version of his argument (KUDELIA 2016). According to him, there is almost a consensus that the regional identity of the people of Donbas is unique, and its strength is persistently proven by empirical research. Unlike many other secessionist attempts, the

non-ethnic nature of Donbas's *"urban melting pot"* can satisfy *"everyone who settles there"*. Accordingly, Kudelia argues that the conflict preceded the wave of protest mobilization in many cities of the Donetsk and Luhansk region which was supported by some local regional councils, which, inter alia, led to the formation of the local self-defense units (IBID.: 206–207).

William J. Risch expresses a substantially different opinion in a paper devoted to the perception of the events of the Kyiv Maidan by the residents of Donbas. He acknowledges that the Euromaidan protests in Donetsk were "small" and that only 13% of the respondents in the eastern regions supported the Kyiv events, but believes that a number of rumors and stereotypes about the Kyiv events *"did not appear spontaneously"* and that the Kremlin aides Vladislav Surkov and Sergei Glazyev *"had directed efforts to coordinate and organize these protests at the beginning of March 2014, turning them into a pro-Russian separatist movement"* (RISCH 2022: 9, 11, 20–26, QUOTE ON P. 26; CF. ALSO RISCH 2020).[5] Oleksandr Melnyk, in his otherwise careful essay on Ukrainian military casualties and "inter-communal ethics," takes – apparently due to his dissimilar subject – a rather agnostic position on the beginnings of the conflict (MELNYK 2022: ESP. 139–155, 126–128).[6] His point is much clearer in another text devoted to the operation of the protest movement in the southeastern Ukraine cities in March and April 2014. Yet, despite the author's initial support for multi-causality, his admission that there was *"a lot of spontaneity"* in the anti-Maidan movement and his declaration that the armed uprising was *"hardly a predetermined outcome of the Russian government strategy"*, he argues for the prominent involvement of Russian state actors in the pursuit of a *"constitutional reformatting of a rump Ukrainian state"* (MELNYK 2020: 4, 16–28, QUOTES ON PP. 25, 18). Melnyk's claims about the links of Russian policies to the Donbas events are based largely on reports from Russian press agencies and information about the activities of Russian non-governmental groups and, therefore, largely unsubstantiated. Thus, if he introduces his text as an empirically based attempt to fill a gap in the research of the *"activities and interrelationship between different indigenous and external state and non-state actors"* (IBID.: 4–5), then his attempt is unsuccessful.[7]

Perhaps the only text in the two edited volumes that is close in nature to "relational realism" and the study of intergroup politics, is the text by the Japanese lawyer Kimitaka Matsuzato. It primarily deals with the

transformation of the DPR organization as a de facto state throughout its first four years. Matsuzato's proposition, based on repeated field research in Donbas at least in 2014 and 2017 and expressed in his previous studies, is that until the spring of 2014, no one really expected the pro-Russian organizations to achieve anything important in the Donbas. Until the summer of 2014, Russia did not want to get more involved there and intended to leave Donbas for Ukraine (MATSUZATO 2022: 48, 52–53). Matsuzato's previous texts are even more indispensable for understanding the origin and dynamics of the events. In the most crucial essay (MATSUZATO 2017), he clarifies the future role of Donbas from the point of view of the present social discontent and the collapse of the patronal regime: the local elites wanted to use the so-called Novorussian movement to negotiate with Kyiv, but the situation got out of their control and the local revolutionary romantics seized power. The Russian intervention took place only at critical moments of the revolutionary movement and its condition was the cleansing the movement of its "founding fathers" such as Igor Girkin (CF. ESP. IBID.: 176–177, 188–196; MATSUZATO 2022: 52–56).

The book of Daria Platonova, which basically develops Matsuzato's theme, is a straightforward epitome of sociological research on the area's social movements and contentious politics. In her view, the protests during the "Russian Spring", the period from the end of 2013 to the end of March 2014, arose from local anti-Maidan contentions. Contrary to the identity approach she asks the crucial question of how political opportunities for specific types of activism in the Donbas emerged. To answer this, she compares the seemingly identical situations in the Donetsk and Kharkiv Oblasts, which, however, had completely different outcomes (PLATONOVA 2022: 2–3). Using a catalogue of protest events in the period of 2002–2013 and the numbers of their participants deduced from the reports in online newspapers, she concludes in the third chapter that the city of Kharkiv itself had a greater potential for destabilization and eventual conflict than the entire Donetsk Oblast; however, this capacity persisted in both areas during the "Russian Spring" (IBID.: 80–94, 94–105).

However, it follows from the violent outcome in the Donetsk Oblast that the capacity for protest alone does not explain the occurrence of war. To clarify it, Platonova connects the political opportunities and capacities with the action of local elites in the fourth and fifth chapters of her book.

The factor that, according to the patronage and clientelism literature, illuminates the different outcomes is the different types of patronage. While the Kharkiv Oblast developed into areas of (in Hale's terminology) "diffused patronage" which was never linked by the center in Kyiv through a single patron, the Donetsk Oblast, mainly due to its strong economic position and the presence of key industries, developed a system of "concentrated patronage" where elites rely on their preferred client network, never switching to other networks (IBID.: 111–112, 117–126).[8] In by far the most comprehensive analysis of the events of the "Russian Spring" up to today, Platonova proves that just for that reason were the political outcomes in the two areas since the key moments after the collapse of the Kyiv (Yanukovych) regime at the end of February 2014 so different. While in Kharkiv the activities of elites led to the suppression of radical protest (activism), regional elites in Donetsk were not able to establish effective control over the radicals and, on the contrary, converged with their demands. Platonova's final verdict is sharp: *"(W)hen [Igor] Strelkov [Girkin] arrived in Donetsk and the Anti-Terrorist Operation began, it was too late to bargain"* (IBID.: 180–218, QUOTE ON P. 242).

No matter the intellectual backing of Platonova's research, similar arguments regarding the pivotal role of elites can be found in some previous essays, even if they do not employ sociological theories. Andriy Portnov, a critical Ukrainian lawyer, repeatedly indicated, using the example of Dnepropetrovsk during the crisis, that *"the sudden 'conversion to patriotism' [...] resulted from a combination of different, often situational, factors"*: besides the resolute stance of the pro-Ukrainian minority and the relative weakness of pro-Russian activists, it was mainly the action of a group of people around the billionaire Ihor Kolomoisky (E.G., PORTNOV 2015: 65–66; CF., ALSO, BUCKHOLZ 2019).

Ulrich Schneckener and Maximilian Kranich are the only contributors to Hauter's collection who acknowledge local actors' central or significant role at the beginning of the conflict. The former, an IR researcher from the University of Osnabrück, deftly challenges two frequent interpretations of the conflict in academic and journalistic writings: "hybrid war" and the geopolitical narrative. In addition to its unclear or contradictory definitions, the dubiousness of the first consists in its integrated design, an orchestrated sequence of moves. The latter fails mainly because of its uniform hegemonic top-down logic, which does not consider the agency

and motivation of local actors (SCHNECKENER 2021: 42–53). Kranich discusses the role of the myth of the Great Patriotic War in the violence in Donbas while acknowledging that in the case of the period from November 2013 to May 2014, *"it is by no means possible to speak of an interstate war in the Donbas"* (KRANICH 2021: 82). This is fully consistent with what Kudelia, Katchanovski, Matveeva, and others claim elsewhere.

As a partial judgment here, at least three points can be made. First, perceptive authors recognize multicausality – in this case, the certain effect of all three factors: the specific history and identity of the area, the activities of local elites and activists, and the influence of Russia. However, given that the actions of individual actors *"did not all have an equal impact"* (KATCHANOVSKI 2016: 487; CF. MELNYK 2020: 5), the authors usually stick to Carr's thesis that a true historian *"would [...] decide, which cause, or which category of causes, should be regarded [...] as the ultimate cause, the cause of all causes"* (CARR 1978: 89–90). Second, although authors focusing on the role of group and elite policies often rightly separate themselves from the identity and history approaches, in the end, they support a similarly focused argument about the domestic sources of the conflict (even though not the same interpretation). Third, the authors of the second grouping attempt to substantiate the official Russian influence on events, but a significant part of their evidence is circumstantial and partly has a tinge of conspiracy theories.[9]

EVOLUTION

Separating the beginnings of a conflict from its course can sometimes be tricky, especially when there is no general agreement on the period in which the origin of the rift could be found. I will focus here more on the nature of the Donbas conflict, especially in the period from the summer of 2014 until about the end of 2015, for which the presence of a number of foreign volunteers, but also the direct presence of some members of Russian military units, is documented. The central question here is one that can be summarized as follows (CF. HAUTER 2021A: 12, 12–14): Who is closer to the truth – those who emphasize the role of local factors and understand the conflict primarily as a civil war or those who see Russia's pivotal agency and depict it as at least the embryonic stage of an interstate war from the beginning? Not only do scholars differ in their verdicts, but Russia's, Ukraine's and Western countries' differing understandings of its nature

since 2015, as we will point out later, have had far-reaching normative implications for its future course.

All the contributors to the second and third parts of Hauter's anthology speak in favor of the interpretation of the Donbas conflict as an international conflict, albeit sometimes with reservations. Naturally, the most interesting are the arguments with which they buttress individual judgments. The editor himself, who previously published his paper in the *Journal of Strategic Security*, uses the example of Ukraine to show the need to expand the typology of conflict within conflict studies and within the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). Hauter's intuition that within the category of "international conflict," there is no comparable subdivision as in the case of "intrastate conflict" and that the subcategory "internationalized internal armed conflict" does not sufficiently cover the nuances of the Russian engagement in Ukraine (HAUTER 2021C: 148, 152–153),[10] may not be wrong. However, it must be added that the "delegated interstate" conflict he introduced is quite possibly a hollow intellectual exercise. It is based on the questionable assumption that there was no authentic domestic insurgent (rebel) group in Donbas, a view refuted by many authors, at least in part also by Melnyk (KUDELIA 2014; LARUELLE 2016; O'LOUGHLIN – TOAL – KOLOSOV 2017: 126–130; MELNYK 2020: 30, 33). In addition, whether the conflict is a "mixed" type of interstate or, conversely, intrastate ones, could be primarily a matter of arbitrary choice. Indeed, another contributor to the volume, Sanshiro Hosaka, using a different typology, namely Correlates of War (COW), argues, on the contrary, that because of the location of the fighting within Ukrainian territory and the early substantial role of the DPR and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) units, the initial attempts to classify the conflict as "international" or "interstate" were doomed to failure (HOSAKA 2021: 95).[11] Moreover, Hauter's discussion of the actual course of the clash is really just an exhibition of the labelling of the conflict by Ukrainian and Russian authorities and area studies researchers (HAUTER 2021C: 153–157).

Like Hauter, Nikolay Mitrokhin and Sanshiro Hosaka view the conflict in Donbas primarily as an interstate conflict, and assign a pivotal role to Russia, although the latter does so with a reservation. Hosaka's virtue is that he unequivocally attempts to separate the initial phase of the insurgent struggle (primarily the clash between secessionist entities and the central government), which falls more under the category of "civil war",

from its later transmutation mainly into an "extra-state" (interstate) war (HOSAKA 2021: 94–96). He bases his claim on the identification of the *"primary combatant"* as the one *"causing the greatest number of battle deaths"* (the COW criterion). He then derives his thesis about the major role of Russia from the correlation between the documented presence (activity) of members of specific Russian military units on the Donbas territory from June 2014 to March 2016 and the figures of killed Ukrainian combatants over time (IBID.: 100–107). From this point of view, Hosaka's approach does not lack a certain conceptual rigor.

Considerably less satisfying, intellectually, conceptually, and in terms of evidence, is a piece by the Russian-German historian Nikolay Mitrokhin. He discusses the "Russian War in the Donbas" by breaking it down into three phases and mapping the distinct actors involved in each of them.[12] His interpretation is built almost exclusively on rather anecdotal accounts of individuals and groups and, with some exceptions, completely lacks more systematic evidence of their connection to official Russian policy (MITROKHIN 2022; PLATONOVA 2022: 27–28).

The Ukrainian author Yuriy Matsiyevsky himself is completely true to his own statement that most Ukrainian experts – unlike most Western authors – give the greatest weight to Russia's direct and indirect involvement (MATSIYEVSKY 2022: 166–168). Matsiyevsky reaches this conclusion predominantly based on two small surveys of 13 participants and 25 experts respectively. Even if it is legitimate research, the result is not very conclusive. (The answer that the conflict was primarily the result of "Russia's targeted action" was preferred by 15.2% of the academics.) In addition to the formulation of the questions, it is also problematic that 14 of the academics work in Kyiv and another five in the west of the country. More startling, however, is Matsiyevsky's strongly defamatory claim from the conclusion that the challenge for the followers of the opposite perspective (that of internal conflict) is their *"Russo-centric view"* (IBID.: 179–181), THE LIST OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE EXPERT SURVEY (IBID.: 190).

Apart from Alina Cherviatsova's essay on the "hybrid nature" of the Minsk Agreements,[13] no other text in Marples' collection primarily addresses the question of the overall nature of the conflict, although at least three others deal with it indirectly. Perhaps Cherviatsova's main shortcoming

lies in her inability to critically confront the conclusions of the resolutions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU) and/or the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal (ICC), which speak of Russian "aggression" or even a "war against Ukraine" (CHERVIATSOVA 2022: 31–35): she is not even able to compare the not wholly identical positions of the institutions.[14] Partly similar conclusions can also be drawn from the chapter of Alla Hurska on the Russian strategy in the Sea of Azov, and that of Sergey Sukhankin on the involvement of Russian private military companies (PMCs) in the fighting in Donbas, both depicting Russian policy with the fashionable label "hybrid" strategy or warfare (HURSKA 2022: 160; SUKHANKIN 2022: 185–188). Their image, but especially Sukhankin's, of Russian foreign policy is largely predetermined and takes the form of a persistent pursuit of long-term goals through the same methods of "hybrid warfare". References to Russia's opposition to the unipolar world, the expansive conception of the "Russian world" (HURSKA 2022: 166, 179) or its "Eurasian imperial policies" (SUKHANKIN 2022: 182) cannot themselves contribute to understanding the specifics of the case – Russia's motivations, and strategic and tactical objectives regarding southeastern Ukraine. However, this does not mean that Hurska's discussion of the previous multiple disputes between Russia and Ukraine regarding the Sea of Azov (HURSKA 2022: 167–171) has no informative value. When Oksana Mikheieva, in her essay, declares that the conflict was a Russo-Ukrainian armed confrontation, the instrument of which was the *"imitation of a civil war"* through the creation of regional militias (MIKHEIEVA 2022: 67–68), she does not intellectually support her thesis in any way.

Several other authors in Marples' collection deal with some aspects and dimensions of the Donbas conflict, but by far the most extensive information for the entire period of 2014 is given by Melnyk. He does his part with a perhaps surprising but factual statement that despite the geopolitical importance and human losses, the conflict was *"rather limited – whether in terms of the involvement of the population, the intensity of the fighting, the number of casualties, or the scope of violence against non-combatants"* (MELNYK 2022: 124). However, this conclusion is far from exceptional, at least among perceptive war studies theorists. Thus, they acknowledge that the means and ends of both sides of the conflict were limited and do not hesitate to

attribute this to the mutually shared cultural and military norms and values (KÄIHKÖ 2021: 26).[15]

There is already an extensive debate on the past possibilities of resolving the conflict through the Minsk agreements, and the reasons for their failure. The authors largely accept that the slightly higher accommodation of "Minsk II" of February 2015 to the interests of the separatist entities was mainly a consequence of Ukraine's previous defeats (CHERVIATSOVA 2022: 38; ÅTLAND 2020: 137). The perceptive scholars attribute the failure of the agreement to multiple factors – in addition to its vague language, legalistic issues and the situation on the ground, there were also the factors more associated with the actions of both Russia and Ukraine (CF., E.G., ÅTLAND 2020: 133–136; WITTKE 2019: 284–285). Ukrainian officials accepted the agreements but perceived them as bad and kept emphasizing that the conflict was solely an act of "Russian aggression". On the other hand, Russia argued that Ukraine was never committed to the political clauses of the agreements. Although steps were taken in the subsequent period to implement the agreements (through the so-called Steinmeier Formula in October 2016, the U.S.-Russia "Ukraine Track" in 2017–2019, Putin's initiative for a limited U.N. peacekeeping operation in September 2017 and the resumption of discussions in the framework of the so-called Normandy Four in November 2019) (CF. CHARAP – KORTUNOV 2019: 1–2; WELT 2020), arguably the further they moved away from February 2015, the less likely they were to be fully implemented.

The horizon of Marples' volume of papers hardly exceeds Zelensky's election with a large majority of votes in the 2nd round of the presidential elections in April 2019. Thus, only the editor himself tries to briefly recapitulate his policy after taking office in the "Introduction": unlike his predecessor Petro Poroshenko, who *"gradually adopted a hostile attitude to Russia that precluded any compromise or revival of the Minsk Accords",* Zelensky was heading towards *"bringing an end to the Donbas conflict"* (MARPLES 2022A: 1). However, with this statement Marples substantially overestimates Zelensky's *"efforts to end the war in the East"*, since he only illustrates this with a certain, albeit "slow" exchange of prisoners and the withdrawal of Ukrainian troops from border areas of the DPR and LPR (MARPLES 2022A: 2). It is paradoxical because even Wilson, who is certainly not uncritical of Russia's policies, considers both steps to be just as inadequate as Poroshenko's military approach (CF. WILSON 2021: 7). Far more noteworthy

than the emphasis on Zelensky's original "dove-like nature" is the shift in Ukrainian foreign policy away from the efforts to deepen contacts with Russia that occurred in late 2019, six months after Zelensky's election. A closer look suggests that the domestic pressures that caused it were like those faced by his predecessor after the signing of the 2015 accords: fierce pressure from radical-right groups, which was heard by the new head of the presidential office and the president's "right-hand man", Andriy Yermak (GALOUCHKA 2020: 3), on Poroshenko's policies (SCHNECKENER 2021: 40–41).

The assessment of Western states' policies towards the Donbas conflict is not clear-cut, both because of the absence of a single overarching institution (the EU was perhaps the closest to it) and because of the not entirely identical interests and policies of individual states. At the international organizations level (the EU, the PACE, the OSCE) states have strongly condemned the "Russian aggression". In practice, however, the EU member states have adopted a position described by some as *"principled pragmatism"* (BOSSUYT – VAN ELSUWEGE 2021), which apparently refers to the EU Global Strategy launched in 2016. Notwithstanding that Germany and France can be credited with concluding the Minsk agreements, the approach of some other leading Western (or NATO) states, the United States, the United Kingdom, Turkey, etc., has been more provocative and confrontational. Such approaches included substantial sales of sophisticated arms, recurrent declarations of commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity against "Russian aggression", the conduct of repeated military exercises with Ukraine and, ultimately, NATO's reaffirmed commitment to Ukraine's membership in the alliance. The US sanctions were far broader than the European ones. Even an "appropriate" Russian behaviour towards Ukraine could not lead to their lifting (CHARAP – KORTUNOV 2019: 3; CARPENTER 2021; CF. WALKER 2023). Misperceptions of many EU and NATO member states about Russia may have undermined their efforts to politically avert the Russian invasion. At the same time, some of the above-mentioned actions by Western representations may have simultaneously fueled Russian misperceptions about the West and subsequently encouraged Russia's aggression (MINZARARI 2022: 1–2), for an earlier prediction (MARTEN 2015: 100–102).[16] It may even be surprising that in a recent interview, former German Chancellor Angela Merkel called the Minsk agreements *"an attempt to give Ukraine time"*, i.e. to achieve the possibility of Ukraine defending itself (DIE ZEIT 2022).

Though Russia's actions since February 2014 establish a significant foreign policy escalation, they also constitute a perpetuation of a more assertive Russian policy since the mid-2000s. However, the key decisions of 2014 (and also of 2022) were hardly predetermined. They should be seen as significantly contingent, linked to the international context and influenced by the dynamics of the mutual misunderstanding with the principal Western states (KRICKOVIC – SAKWA 2022: 91–102; TSYGANKOV 2015: 286–294; TOAL 2017: 210–214, 279–302; CF. MARTEN 2015: 100–102).[17] The sources of this dynamic, which can be referred to as a *"conflict of ontologies"* (KRICKOVIC – SAKWA 2022) or, more culturally, as a *"conflict of ways of life"* (WILLIAMS 1980), have been present for decades. In retrospect, however, it seems that after 2018, a mutual intransigence has transformed the tension and contradiction between "freedom of choice" and the "indivisibility of security" into a seemingly inevitable clash.

Both of the dominant mainstream interpretations within IR theory, the liberal and the realist one, may convey some grain of truth regarding Russian conduct, but both fall short of the complexity of Russian foreign policy. The first fails by overestimating Russian fears of the spread of Western values in the country while simultaneously entirely neglecting and not recognizing Russia's distinct values. The second goes wrong since it conceives Russian foreign policy exclusively or predominantly in terms of traditional geopolitics and the invariable "spheres of influence".[18] In short, in assessing the course of events after 2015, Russia's actions, as well as those of Ukraine and leading Western states, must be considered.

CONCLUSION

With the turning of the conflict in eastern Ukraine into a full-fledged Russian-Ukrainian war in February 2022 and also into an ever-intensifying conflict between Russia and the West, it seems as if the prehistory of the conflict has lost its momentousness. While it can hardly be doubted that the post-2022 conflict, not to mention its international dimension, will be at the center of future research, the publications discussed attest that what preceded it does not lose its importance.

The first two parts of the text introduced three general approaches to the Donbas conflict. They are separated by significant conceptual and theoretical differences but also by normative divides, sometimes

even within the approaches. Not a few of their adherents maintain a significantly greater distance and impartiality than is usual in the current media and public space. However, the writings of many scholars mirror contemporary political and moral divisions regarding the conflict in the West as well as in Ukraine and Russia. At least two approaches had their counterparts in the state rhetoric and propaganda: the identity approach manifested itself in the Russian government's rhetoric regarding the "civil war", and the overemphasizing of Russian interference and intervention is a dominant component of both Ukrainian and Western discourse on the Donbas conflict.

What conclusions can be drawn about the premises and claims of the three general interpretive approaches? As for the identity and historical approach, without denying the specific effects of the Donbas territory on its inhabitants, the common attempt to explain the conflict by pointing to the "pro-Russian" attitudes of the inhabitants of the region is inconclusive. Even the local ethnic Russians have been (and are) split on the issue of separatism. But this doesn't necessarily lead to the opposite conclusion – that the sources of the conflict are groundless or superficial.

As for the role of "third" parties, and especially Russia, a significant majority of authors agree that it has changed over time. Russia began to play a more direct role in the conflict in mid-July 2014 and as a result, the early civil conflict was, at least in part, transformed. However, the initial support from Russia is greatly overestimated and at the same time, the level of social discontent and authenticity of the protest movement within the Donbas territory (the Novorussian movement and its successors) is underestimated in a significant part of the writings of Ukrainian and Western authors. Russia's role in the events is then misinterpreted along the lines of mainstream political and media opinion in many cases. As Katchanovski notes, *"foreign governments alone could not have been able to covertly seize power in Donbas and Ukraine, respectively, and to produce large numbers of activists and supporters"* (KATCHANOVSKI 2016: 480).

The key contribution of the third group of interpretations consists in both the method of sociological and ethnographic research focusing on the actual relations between local and regional actors, and the thoroughness of the investigation based on field research and in-depth interviews

supplemented by primary and secondary sources. These approaches, as the writings of Kamitaka Matsuzato and Daria Platonova attest, make it possible to capture the dynamics of events in the area and the links to the outside in the best and most accurate way. Given the absence of documentary evidence of the Russian leadership's motivations (public records remain the best available evidence), in-depth research into groups, individuals and movements in the area is the right way to get as close to the truth as possible. Platonova's comprehensive study is an excellent example of the merits of young scholars' current social science research. Research on contentious politics, similar to approaches focused on identity (as represented by the writings of Kudelia or Matveeva), justifiably makes a point about the local roots of the Donbas conflict. However, unlike the latter, it finds it in situational and relational facets within which the social movements in the Donbas developed.

As part three showed, there is little doubt that the character of the Donbas conflict was transformed by Russia's military intervention after July 2014. However, the intervention was not uniform over time – it had its peaks and troughs – and effectively ended towards the end of 2015. Because it was a response to the setbacks of the original Donbas insurgency, the clash is more accurately described as an "internationalized civil conflict" than as a "delegated interstate conflict". The latter designation ignores the centrality of the original insurgency and calls into question the straightforwardness of the causality since Russia did not *"create and control local militias"*, as Hauter claims (HAUTER 2021A: 16).

The analysis of the subsequent events after the Minsk agreements and the post-2018 path to war itself will undoubtedly be the subject of much further scholarly interest. However, the concept of mutual misunderstanding, different perceptions and understandings of reality, and especially security, and, more generally, the different identities of Russia and the West (and, gradually, Ukraine as well) will have to be an important element in explaining the events that have occurred. Although it was Russia that started the war in February 2022, the path to it was considerably more complicated than is often claimed today. The actions of the Ukrainian leadership and principal Western states cannot be ignored.

ENDNOTES

1 Cf. Marples 2017; Marples – Mills 2015 and several others.

2 Anderson's book became one of the most influential studies in the social sciences in the following decades. See Anderson (1983).

3 Leaving aside the theory on which he relies, by the West he primarily means the US. In addition to NATO expansion, he also mentions EU enlargement and the process of democracy promotion in this respect (Mearsheimer 2014).

4 Let's note that Kudelia's text in the volume is almost exclusively devoted to the settlement of the Donbas conflict and its resolution.

5 A lot of information, even in essays emphasising Surkov's (i.e., Russia's) role, suggests that the activists in Donetsk acted autonomously and did not even want Russia's involvement. Cf. Hosaka (2019); Shandra – Seely (2019).

6 Melnyk is especially interested in the way the bodies of combatants were treated by Ukrainian government authorities and non-governmental organizations. Occasionally he also discusses the way in which military casualties were used by both opposing sides in their information war (Melnyk 2022: 137–138).

7 If he initially specifically mentions *"official Kyiv [*e.g.*,]*, official Kyiv government, Author's note*], oligarchs and other local power holders, Western governments, agencies of the Russian state, [and] pro-Russian organizations in Ukraine"* (Melnyk 2020: 5), then except for the pro-Russian organizations, the other actors are almost absent in the text.

8 In this case she relies primarily on Henry Halle's study (see Halle 2015). Platonova documents patronal politics using examples of regional budget negotiations, among others.

9 An example of this is the depiction of Vladislav Surkov's actions in the texts cited in note 5. For a more realistic picture, see Matsuzato (2022: 44–45).

10 For some similar points see Hosaka (2022: 90–95) and the paper of Timofii Brik (Brik 2022).

11 Let's emphasize that representatives of the UCDP justify their research approach on the premise that the coding of the conflict must be unambiguous, and, accordingly, all three categories of conflicts (state-based, non-state and one-sided violence) are "mutually exclusive" in their research. UCDP Methodology. Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, <https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/methodology/#tocjump_2650597979080307_3>.

12 This structuring has been culminating with the third phase and the involvement of a larger number of members of Russian troops in the conflict from August 2014 onward (Mirokhin 2022: 132–136).

13 By the "hybrid nature" of the agreements, Cherviatsova means that they did not constitute a binding international agreement and did not become part of Ukrainian legislation.

14 However, we should distinguish between the sharp response of these institutions to the Russian annexation of Crimea and their more debatable judgment of the events in eastern Ukraine.

15 Even though the Russian-Ukrainian war has been conducted in an often brutal and ruthless manner over the past year and a half, it is not entirely irrelevant to ask whether respect for at least some of these norms has persisted throughout the conflict.

16 However, Minzanari's rejection of the West's gradualist policy approach towards Russia after the invasion strikes me as highly questionable (Minzanari 2022: 5–8).

17 These four understandings of the motivations behind the Russian decisions, and Putin's in particular, regarding the Ukrainian crisis, are not identical, but they overlap with or complement each other in essential ways.

18 Toal also provides some insights about this, but he mistakenly attributes the same geopolitical incentives to the liberal interpretation of Russian behavior as to the "realist" one (Toal 2017: 20–54, esp. 20–21).

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NOTE

I would like to thank Daniel Šitera of the CJIS editorial team for his advice, both reviewers for their insightful critical comments, and Lukáš Kantor for his selfless feedback on the manuscript.

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Book Forum

Book Forum on Ivan Kalmar's White but Not Quite: Central Europe's Illiberal Revolt

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ABSTRACT

This book forum discusses Ivan Kalmar's pivotal book on the position of "Central Europe" in the racialized hierarchies of "West"/"Europe" and their not-quite-white Others. The authors debate the main contributions and potential blind spots of the book and its key concepts. The concepts of racism and whiteness answer the not-so-new question on Central Europe and Europ's "East" anew: How come that the populations of and in this diverse region happen to repeatedly find themselves in the very same marginal position in European historical orders? This question has very contemporary manifestations; Europe's persistent East-West socio-economic and socio-cultural hierarchies, among others, co-produce the local populations' marginalized or marginalizing positioning vis-à-vis each other and the rest of Europe or the world. In this honest discussion, the authors chart new intellectual pathways for utilizing racism and whiteness to help us better understand this question and its many manifestations from within and outside the region.

KEYWORDS

whiteness, racism, Central Europe, illiberalism, Europeanness, capitalism, inequalities

DOI

https://doi.org/10.32422/cjir.824

Editorial

DANIEL ŠITERA

Ivan Kalmar (2022) has written an important book. His *White but Not Quite: Central Europe's Illiberal Revolt* brings two important contributions, the one being a literary style and the other a new perspective. In style and form, the book provides a bridge from an increasingly prominent but still narrow academic debate on the whiteness in and of Europe's "East" to talking to broader academic and non-academic audiences. Using racism and whiteness as novel theoretical and conceptual perspectives, Kalmar answers a not-so-new question anew: How come this unendingly reconfigured region of Central Europe (imagined currently as being delimited by the so-called Visegrád Four's borders, namely those of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) and its diverse populations have repeatedly found themselves in the very same historical position in the West-centered European or global orders? That position was a symbolic and real marginalization of or a self-marginalization by the white-but-not-quite Central Europeans, as they were considered as allegedly *less developed/white* peripheral Others to the presumably *more developed/white* core of the "West." The book's critical inquiry into the racial hierarchies of (Central) European whiteness is another key for answering the question and understanding the societal, economic, and political effects of this historical position.

All five contributors to this forum, Aliaksei Kazharski, Daria Krivonos, Stephanie Rudwick, Gábor Scheiring, and Kalmar with his final response, offer what every important book and new perspective deserve. They lead a polemical and honest discussion on the book's contributions and potential shortcomings for the simple reason of both theoretically deepening and locally embedding the intellectual horizons of the book's key themes: racism, whiteness, and Central Europe. The result is a transdisciplinary forum that includes sociology, anthropology, political science, and political economy perspectives while offering a deeper intersectional dimension of colorism, class, and gender, among others. Thanks to this, the notion of white-but-not-quite Central Europeans becomes more or less imaginable, especially when thrown into the variegated relations

between Europeans and Africans or with many less privileged Eastern or non-Eastern Others.

Finally, as a Prague-based journal, we are happy that the authors helped us in the mission to regionally embed the rising interest in Europe's racial hierarchies of whiteness and the continent's "East" as the relatively new object of this research. For all the good, bad, necessary, and inevitable reasons behind the knowledge-production on this region, this discussion is very much a product of the transnational, yet West-based academic field. If it is going to gain a bigger and broader credence in Central and Eastern Europe's (CEE) academic and public debates, it should remain open to being reappropriated from inside the region. What follows is the sequence of Scheiring, Krivonos, Rudwick, and Khazarski's more or less appreciative and critical reactions. Kalmar responds to them while charting future intellectual pathways beyond his book and this forum.

From Racial Capitalism to Central European Illiberalism

GÁBOR SCHEIRING

Is illiberalism rooted in economic or cultural grievances? This question has divided social scientists and pundits ever since the populist radical right entered the mainstream in Europe and the United States. However, the most innovative answers evade this tired dichotomy. Ivan Kalmar's book, *White but not Quite*, is one example. The book leverages the racial capitalism framework to infuse fresh insights into the packed literature on Central Europe's illiberal revolt.

Central Europe, which Kalmar equates with the Visegrád countries of Czechia, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary, is home to some of the most virulent illiberal political forces at the forefront of the global movement against liberalism. The usual narrative blames the region's anti-liberal cultural legacies for this, as they provide fertile ground for illiberal mavericks. Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, and Slovaks have never been democratic and liberal enough, as if being illiberal was in Eastern Europeans' blood. The present-day politics of Poland, and especially Hungary, serve up plenty of examples to feed this culturalist narrative. Yet, this argument is incomplete, misleading, prejudiced, and condescending.

Kalmar confronts this narrative by not only showing that racism and capitalism go hand in hand but also highlighting that this culturalist reading of Central Europe's illiberalism fits into a broader scheme of Western anti-Eastern European stereotypes, which Kalmar calls Eastern Europeanism. And Eastern Europeanism is racist, he adds. Kalmar also contextualizes illiberalism in Europe's political economy, echoing the literature, including my own work, on the role of global economic polarization in Central Europe's illiberal revolt.

In this essay, I will first introduce the notion of racial capitalism, which forms the backbone of Kalmar's argument. In the second part of the review, I will summarize the author's arguments and evidence concerning Western European racism against Eastern Europeans. Subsequently, I will

review the book's main points on racism by Eastern Europeans. In the fourth section, I dig deeper into the economic context of illiberalism and racism in Central Europe. Throughout the review, I will highlight some of the book's limitations, such as the sharp hierarchy drawn between Eastern and Central Europe and the need to elaborate on the political-economic dimension in more detail. This omission is especially glaring concerning the notion of social semi-periphery that Kalmar introduces in the book's first chapter. In the very last section, I will conclude with some of the broader theoretical and political implications.

RACE, CAPITALISM, RACIAL CAPITALISM

How could the stereotypes against Eastern Europeans be racist? Eastern Europeans are White, after all. Racism is not only about phenotype, however. As Cedric Robinson (2000: 2), a central figure in the Black Marxist tradition, wrote, *"racism, I maintain, was not simply a convention for ordering the relations of European to non-European peoples but has its genesis in the 'internal' relations of European peoples."* Kalmar's book builds on this Black Marxist tradition to analyze the socioeconomic context of racism by and against Eastern Europeans.

Racism legitimates the privileges of those who are socially constructed as White. It is also applied to less privileged Whites. Early instances of racism were often based on linguistic classification. The Nazis regarded Iranians and Northern Indians as White because they spoke Indo-European languages (see the Nazis' use of the term Aryan). In contrast, Arabic and Hebrew are Semitic languages. The Nazi hatred for the Jewish "race" was not based on color. Neither was the expulsion of Jews from the Spanish Kingdom 500 years earlier. The British hatred towards the Irish was also not based on skin color. White-on-White racism exists.

Second, why would racism and capitalism be intertwined? Racism is systematically embedded in capitalist societies to justify unequal access to power and resources. Racism is not simply about individual attitudes. As Fleming (2018) argues in her book, debunking common misconceptions about race, racism is more than the Ku Klux Klan or the Nazis. Although violent hatred predates capitalism, capitalism elevated racism to a new level. Capitalism builds on the impulse to accumulate surplus capital, which

necessarily produces difference. The difference between owners of capital, those who labor to create value, and those whose lands are stolen and who are sold far away as slaves needs justification.

As Allen (1994) famously showed, the White race itself is an invention spurred by the exploitative plantation economy of colonial America. Racism justifies why some racialized others, people of color, are incapable of exercising the same rights as others, those who are socially defined as White, primarily White capitalists. Racism also helps to maintain the exploitation of White workers. When Black and Irish plantation workers revolted against their White British masters during Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, it posed a severe threat. Racism, the ideology of White supremacy, came in handy as it served to divide the unfree Black and White working classes. White workers were exploited, but they were at least White, carrying the promise of privilege – the *"psychological wage of Whiteness,"* as Du Bois (2014[1935]) called it.

RACISM AGAINST EASTERN EUROPEANS

The literature on racial capitalism in the US has shown how subsequent White groups, initially thought of as non-Whites, or not entirely Whites, became White. Irish, Italian, and Eastern European immigrants in the US were treated with disdain and excluded from accessing White privilege. Gradually, however, they became fully White by accepting the prevailing racial hierarchy. However, as Kalmar (2022: 44) argues, in the past few decades in Europe, *"Eastern Europeans have become not more, but less White."* The primary function of Eastern Europeanism is to refuse to allow full access to Western structures of privilege to Eastern Europeans, and to keep Europe's Eastern periphery in the *"quasi-colonial condition,"* as a source of cheap labor and markets for Western products.

Downwardly mobile groups of the middle class and precarious workers in the West are particularly prone to this racial othering of Eastern Europeans. Kalmar innovatively extends Wallerstein's world-system categories to recognize the core, the semi-periphery, and the periphery within society. The social core consists of upper and upper-middle classes, groups engaged in high-profit, high-tech production, living in glamorous areas of big cities. The social periphery comprises the chronically underemployed

and the lower working class. The term social semi-periphery refers to the downwardly mobile lower middle class and the skilled blue-collar working class. These semi-peripheral groups struggle to defend their privilege. As material resources get scarcer, symbolic resources, such as Whiteness, gain value.

There is plenty of evidence of this anti-Eastern European racism in the West. In January 2023, the Charleroi Public Prosecutor's Office decided that the police were not responsible for the death of Jozef Chovanec, a Slovakian citizen with a history of mental illness (CHINI 2023). Chovanec was detained at Charleroi Airport because he behaved aggressively on a plane. A leaked video shows that police officers then entered his cell at night. Some kneeled on his chest while a policewoman imitated a Nazi salutation. Chovanec later died in a hospital. His family likens his case to the death of George Floyd. The police contend that it was necessary to kneel on him because he was behaving violently in his cell.

However, such cases are rare. Everyday forms of less-violent racism are much more frequent. The Brexit campaign was famously fueled by popular paranoia about Eastern Europeans supposedly draining British health and social services and taking away natives' jobs. A sign put up by the owners of a fishing lake in Oxfordshire that that read *"No Polish or Eastern Bloc fishermen allowed,"* was an expression of this popular sentiment.

However, making this social periphery solely responsible for illiberalism would be a mistake. On the one hand, members of the upper classes also vote for and/or benefit from illiberal politics, from Trump to Brexit. On the other hand, the elites' view of the *"civilizationally incompetent"* (CF. SZTOMPKA 1993) East feeds into this widespread resentment toward Eastern Europeans in the West.

Racism against Eastern Europeans also influences policymaking, as Alexandra Lewicki (2023) recently demonstrated in her article. Leading politicians, including Social Democrats, linked the spread of COVID-19 to the presence of Eastern Europeans in Germany. Yet, they did not close the Eastern borders because Germany depends on Eastern European care workers. Eastern European immigrants in the West are overrepresented in the service sector, specifically in hospitality, cleaning, and care, all of

which are more affected by COVID-19, leading to a higher risk of dying for people involved in these services.

Populist-fueled fears about public-service-misusing Eastern Europeans led to restrictions of social rights after Western labor markets were opened to Eastern Europeans. These restrictions were achieved by linking social rights to having lived in the country for a certain amount of time and earning above a certain amount of income. Another policy area influenced by public perceptions of the alleged criminality of Eastern Europeans is deportation. While overall deportation numbers declined in Germany and the UK in 2020/21, the proportion of deportees from the EU's East has increased (LEWICKI 2023).

RACISM BY EASTERN EUROPEANS

As ugly as this anti-Eastern European racism is, it pales compared to racism towards non-White, colonial people. Eastern Europeans are White and therefore possess partial White privilege. They are White but not quite – dirty White, to use the term suggested by the sociologist József Böröcz (2021), who also contributed significantly to studying the political economy of racism in Eastern Europe.

Racism against non-Whites in Eastern Europe is more severe than in Western Europe. According to Kalmar, Western Europe is not less racist because it is sui generis morally superior and has always been more immune to racism but because it is home to large groups of non-White immigrants. These groups are large enough to matter electorally and organized enough to have a significant public voice. These conditions are lacking in Eastern Europe. Eastern Europe is predominantly White, which is why Western illiberals find the region so attractive. Illiberals frame the battle against immigration in Eastern Europe as the "White man's last stand."

A second feature of racism in Eastern Europe is that the countries in the region did not directly take part in racialized colonial exploitation. Having no colonial past feeds the region's sense of White "innocence." This means some Eastern Europeans refuse to engage in symbolic acts such as kneeling during the openings of sports games. They also refuse to understand the importance of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter

movement, failing to comprehend the racism behind slogans such as "All Lives Matter" or "White Lives Matter."

Third, anti-immigrant racism in Central European EU member states is a misguided, illiberal expression of anticolonialism. According to Kalmar (2022: 175), *"rejecting the demands of Western 'political correctness' proved to be a perfect vehicle to express injured spite. In countries with almost no Muslims, provocative Islamophobia was a politically safe means to stand up to the liberals of Brussels and their perceived lackeys among the local intellectual and business elites."*

The EU has played a vital role in establishing the hegemony of Western multinational companies in the region, which dominate the most lucrative segments of the local economy. This experience of being "colonized" could lead to solidarity with other regions exploited by Western capital. However, the monopoly of illiberal propaganda creates the opposite effect. Regular nationwide campaigns drive Eastern Europeans to reaffirm their Whiteness as a claim to the White privilege the West enjoys. *"The desire to be among the beneficiaries and not among the victims of White privilege goes a long way toward explaining the success of racist rhetoric among many Central Europeans"* (IBID.: 197).

As a social anthropologist, Kalmar mainly concentrates on the cultural and historical dimensions, focusing less on the economy. However, my research on the role of national capitalists in Hungary's illiberal turn underpins his narrative (SCHEIRING 2022). These national capitalists have been lobbying for a long time to get more protection against transnational corporations. However, each government until 2010, especially the Socialist-Liberal coalitions, pushed policies that favored foreign investors over domestic capital. While these policies contributed to the emergence of a competitive export sector, they also led to a schism between the foreign-dominated tech-intensive export sectors of the economy and the less competitive, non-tech, domestically oriented sectors.

The Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán (who declared the country's illiberal turn in one of his speeches) realized the political potential in the frustration of the national capitalists and forged a close alliance with them. The interests of this political-economic alliance drive the clash with foreign

powers and multinationals. However, this alliance is too weak to break the dominance of multinationals in the manufacturing export sectors, so they are left with domestically oriented services and construction – sectors where economic nationalism has dominated under Orbán.

Orbán also manages to sell this alliance to workers disgruntled with the postsocialist transition, who also associate multinationals with colonization and exploitation (SCHEIRING 2020A). However, as Kalmar also argues, this "anti-colonial" fight is not intended to emancipate workers and precarious lower-middle classes; the primary goal is to enrich the new elite around Orbán. The exclusionary nationalism directed at immigrants and other minorities pacifies the regime's relative victims and consolidates Orbán's controversial illiberal alliance.

CENTRAL OR EASTERN EUROPE

Eastern Europeans also create hierarchies among themselves, such as "Central Europe" (dominantly Catholic or Protestant, Visegrád countries) vs. Eastern Europe (Orthodox Christian post-Soviet countries) vs. the Balkans (Orthodox and also with an Islamic influence). Kalmar (2022: 197) is critical of these imagined hierarchies. He critically notes that constructing Central Europe is *"not an innocent historical exercise."* Central European elites locate their countries on the Western side of Europe while keeping their Eastern and Southeastern neighbors in the role of the devalued Other. In this regard, Kalmar follows in the footsteps of the likes of Maria Todorova (2009) and Attila Melegh (2006), albeit with a more explicit focus on racism. Thus, it would have been nice to see more engagement, especially with Melegh, while keeping this critical focus on the East-West slope throughout the book.

However, Kalmar inadvertently seems to reinforce this distinction between Central and Eastern Europe in the chapter on half-truths about Central Europe. In this respect, Kalmar's book shows how hard it is, even for him, to go beyond such distinction-making when trying to show that Easterners are as (economically) White as Westerners. This points to the overall stickiness of this othering paradigm and the lack of alternative paradigms that would allow us to speak differently about the East than just through comparisons of it with the West.

The primary aim of this chapter is to debunk Eastern Europeanist prejudices by showing that Central Europe is not that different from the West. For example, in terms of criminality and peace, the countries of Central Europe are among the best performing globally; Czechia is 8th, and Hungary is 13th worldwide, according to the Global Peace Index (INSTITUTE FOR ECONOMICS & PEACE 2023).

The most thought-provoking aspect of these comparisons is when Kalmar compares regions and cities. For example, the GDP per capita PPP in Czechia is higher than that in Mississippi. Budapest's GDP per capita PPP is higher than Italy's or Kentucky's. Indeed, Prague and Budapest are among the "richest" regions in the EU (EUROSTAT 2023), which is, of course, due to the high concentration of foreign investment in these cities, which deepens the metropolis-province inequalities. These numbers show not that Central Europe is rich but that there are substantial regional inequalities both in the East and in the West. Western regions left behind are at the level of semi-peripheral, emerging economies, which is an essential factor behind the popularity of radical right populism in these regions. The socially semi-peripheral position of key segments of Western societies again highlights the parallels between East and West. This is one more reason why it would have been great to read more about the idea of the social periphery in the book.

No matter the GDP figures, wages in the East-Central European region lag far behind those in the West. While the GDP per capita of Hungary is higher than that of Wales, the yearly net medium wage in Hungary is half of the medium wage in Wales. *"It is obvious that, despite what is still a relatively egalitarian distribution of wealth in Central Europe, a highly disproportionate amount of the wealth generated since the return to capitalism has gone to employers and investors, rather than people living off their wages"* (p. 139). Here, Kalmar touches upon a misleading feature of East-Central Europe's political economy: how the mirage of economic growth and export competitiveness masks the developmental bottlenecks and the massive social and economic disintegration (SCHEIRING 2021).

Importantly, Kalmar also highlights that until recently, Central Europe was not significantly less democratic than many countries in Western Europe. Hungary boasted a high level of support for liberal values

and institutions right before Viktor Orbán took power – there was no cultural demand for the destruction of democracy (PEW RESEARCH CENTRE 2009). Czechia continues to beat many Western countries in several indicators of democracy. Democracy has similar roots in Central Europe as in several Western countries considered stable democracies today. The liberal constitution passed by the Polish parliament, the Sejm, in 1791 was the first written constitution in Europe.

Racism is also not historically given in the region. Kalmar tells the story of Polish soldiers sent by Napoleon to fight against the Haitian rebels. However, after their arrival in Haiti, they joined the enslaved Black people. In response, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the first head of state of the first Black republic, called these Polish soldiers *"White Blacks of Europe."*

CONCLUSIONS

White but not Quite makes crucial innovations that will change how we think about illiberalism. Extending the racial capitalism framework has a vast untapped potential to help us understand Eastern Europe's illiberal turn. The book is a bold challenge against an essentializing culturalist narrative that is popular not only among disgruntled workers worried about Eastern European immigrants draining Western public services but also among the liberal mainstream in Western and Eastern Europe. Because of this, the book is undoubtedly going to raise some eyebrows. However, Kalmar, a social anthropologist at the University of Toronto, does not shy away from the task. His book does a convincing job of dissecting Eastern Europeanism as a form of racism rooted in economic inequalities, as Eastern Europeans' racism against racialized others is also partially driven by economic logic.

Kalmar's book shows that the culture of racism and illiberalism in Europe is deeply intertwined with Europe's political economy. The notion of the social semi-periphery Kalmar introduces in the book's first chapter as a framework to explain the racism of downwardly mobile middle- and working-class people also has a vast potential. It would have been great to see this idea applied later in the empirical chapters, but it never turns up again after the introduction.

Even with this limitation, the book offers lessons for not only social theory and research but also politics. It reminds us that the idea of the core, equating to democracy, well-being, and peace, versus the (semi-)periphery, equating to illiberalism, misery, and violence, is deeply flawed. All the ideals connected with the core can be realized at lower income levels just as well as in the most advanced core countries, provided that more equitable conditions prevail. For that, the semi-periphery needs to abandon the competition for White privilege (we might also call it the imperial model of living) and focus on the fact that one can be happy and live a comfortable "non-White" life in semi-peripheral societies, such as East-Central Europe.

Kalmar's book is one of the most significant current attempts to bring the Black Marxist tradition into dialogue with racism against and by Eastern Europeans. It is a book that everyone should read to understand the political economy of racism and illiberalism in Europe.

"White but not Quite": Postsocialist Resentment and Its Eastern Others?

DARIA KRIVONOS

Ivan Kalmar's *White but Not Quite: Central Europe's Illiberal Revolt* is a contribution to the growing body of work which explores race, racialization, whiteness and (post)coloniality in the region commonly referred to as either "Central and Eastern Europe," "East Central Europe," "Central Europe" or "Eastern Europe" – terms which typically open an extensive discussion. With scholarly work on race focusing on white/non-white dualities predominantly in Anglo-American contexts, Kalmar's book is a much-needed work in the bourgeoning discussion on race in the CEE region.

The author reveals his approaches to the topic already in the title of the book: "illiberalism" and "Central Europe" are loaded terms that signal the author's choices regarding the agenda that the book offers. Kalmar (2022: 105) frames the major task of his contribution as restoring "Central Europe" in the middle of *"the unbridgeable contrast between Eastern and Western Europe."* Defending "Central Europe" as a geopolitical entity distinct from both Western and Eastern Europe is a provocative move at a time when many scholars started to move away from dividing the world into "areas" and separate geotemporalities, and when decolonial scholarship in the region has increasingly questioned the distinction between "Central" and "Eastern" Europe. This partly comes as a response to the observation that nobody wants to be identified with "*Eastern* Europe" as a sign of backwardness (E.G. BOATCĂ – ȚICHINDELEANU – İŞLEYEN 2021).

I read the book from the perspective of my own research conducted on the eastern borders of the EU, namely in Finland and Poland, where I observed significant effort from both migrants coming from the neighboring eastern countries and nation-state narratives to disidentify from "Eastern Europe" – of course, at the expense of those racialized further down the hierarchy of value (KRIVONOS – NÄRE 2019; KRIVONOS 2022). From this perspective, at times, the book reads as an attempt to unveil some of the common stereotypes about the region, while making an effort to distinguish it from Eastern "backwardness" and move it closer to the West. It then becomes

an appeal primarily to a Western reader and aims to convince them that *"the things said about 'Eastern Europe' are mostly false, even though they may have an element of truth in them"* (p. 105). This type of "fact-checking" runs the risk of reproducing the Eurocentric episteme where global populations are graded hierarchically and measured against each other along the lines of *"freedom and democracy, corruption, criminality, [and] human development,"* which are taken at face value and as central criteria for measuring the region's position in the global hierarchies (Chapter 4). The project of unveiling *"half-truths"* then produces the region (and other global populations) exclusively through the Western lens and value systems that continue to portray the region through the narratives of civilizational development and the immaturity of its capitalist market economies and democracies. Instead of unmaking this project rooted in the (in fact, racist) tradition of the Enlightenment, the book frequently attempts to recognize the region as part of the West, where *"the Happiness Report ranks Prague right next to Paris"* (p. 128). The need or the desire to compare everything to Western capitals then remains intact, which is an observation aptly made by Anca Parvulescu (2020) (and indeed, cited by Kalmar) when she invites East European scholars to bypass Paris, Vienna and New York as mediators of our conversations on the region. Showcasing the region's affinity to the values of the Enlightenment can become another attempt to recenter whiteness and prove "Central Europe's" proximity to Europeanness proper, thus running against the project of decolonization.

In the rest of my reaction, I will use this perspective to discuss the book. First, I examine how the work of *"fact-checking"* based on racializing criteria of "freedom and human development" inevitably produces the racialized Other. I discuss Kalmar's important contribution to current debates on (post-)coloniality in the region, namely, the ways in which some academic theories became appropriated for certain political gains. Second, I discuss the approach of comparing the "degrees of violence" experienced by differently racialized people through the topic of gendered political economy of movement. Finally, I engage with the proposed idea that "illiberalism" threatens a "democratic order." I offer my remarks from the perspective of continuing the important conversation to which Kalmar's book is certainly a major contribution.

THE TRAP OF NESTING ORIENTALISMS (YET AGAIN) WITH GOOD INTENTIONS

With the values of "development" and "progress" put at the center of the book's "fact-checking," it is no accident then that "Central Europe" is often compared to Russia, Belarus and Ukraine with the latter three scoring much lower than their western counterparts. Such comparisons can become illustrations for Kalmar's own important argument on the attempts of "Central European" elites to distance themselves from any associations with the East. The effect of such comparisons is the remaking of the catching up narrative through which the wider region has been often narrated: *"Central Europe is below Western Europe, but above the rest of Eastern Europe, and on some measures closer to the West than to the East"* (p. 139). This effort to distance the region from "Eastern Europe" proper and align it with the West fixes the region in essential geopolitical boundaries and misses the opportunity to build possible coalitions with other racialized subjects who may not be equally invested in the idea of "Central Europe" or who originate from beyond its demarcated borders. Those coming from the east of "Central Europe" are then left wondering about the following question: if "Eastern Europeanism" is wrong for "Central Europeans," does this mean that the violence against those further east is justifiable because they have not progressed enough in the hierarchies of development? If "*Eastern* Europeanism" wrongly racializes "*Central* Europeans" and we must defend "Central Europe" as an entity distinct from "Eastern Europe," does this imply that the aim of "Eastern Europeanism" is simply misplaced and should be directed against the real "backwards" states further east?

This move of unveiling the myths through the reproduction of the Western lens runs against some very important arguments made further on in the book. The book's powerful contribution lies in questioning the recent instrumentalization of the postcolonial discourse in Central Europe, especially by right-wing political formations. Kalmar importantly shows how the cry "We are not a colony!," which is directed against the West as a response to Central Europe becoming its periphery, has little to do with any solidarity with the global South (Chapter 8). In fact, *"the last thing the illiberals want is to be seriously compared to the racialised populations in or from the former colonies"* (p. 216). The instrumentalizing of the postcolonial discourse by right-wing formations in Central Europe goes hand in hand

with the desire to be counted *"not with the 'Asian' East but with the 'European' West."* Kalmar shows the effort of Central European political elites to distance themselves from the East and especially authoritarian Russia. The calls to compare the postcolonial and the post-communist condition – which became particularly strong in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion into Ukraine – have rarely led to any meaningful solidarity with migrants from the global South, whose movement the Central European states are violently and actively stopping – indeed, in the name of EU/rope. This is a timely and much needed reminder at a time when the "postcolonial" entered the everyday language and is oftentimes used by right-wing formations to claim their innocence.

In line with this, Kalmar (2022: 5) shows that the potent narrative of unification with Europe vis-à-vis communism and the "East" goes hand in hand with the will to be accepted in white privilege on par with the West: *"The dream of 'transition' from communism was that they would fully access white privilege – live the same standard as the West and be accepted as equal by it."* This claim is an important challenge to supposedly innocent race-less narratives of the "return to Europe." This could be a great starting point and an opportunity to further examine the region's entanglements with global structures of race and coloniality, and the desires, fantasies, and material practices of domination over racialized others, even if from the perspective of a global semi-periphery. Indeed, many Central and East European governments, from Hungary to Bulgaria, have been highly successful in articulating white supremacy, and became models for many fascist groups far beyond the region. This would be an important opportunity to explore the region's own active reproduction of racial violence and the becoming of the frontier between "Europe" and its Others.

Yet, the book articulates the racism of Central Europe predominantly as a postsocialist phenomenon rooted in the region's resentment against the Western-dominated, global market neoliberalism that turned the region into a mere pool of cheapened labor. In such a picture, racism becomes external and alien to Central Europe, originating exclusively as a resentment towards the West. The analysis then fails to see the socialist and pre-socialist era structural racism within the region, and the desire to partake in colonial conquest beyond "Europe." This logic can be easily inverted into a simple plea to become included in the Western core as

proper whites, and not just as "not quite white" ones. It also takes away the responsibility for racism from Central European states, reproducing the idea that race and racism are only matters of Western colonial empires. In addition, describing the region's population as *"almost entirely white"* (p. 147) in several part of the book may easily feed into silencing discussions about anti-Roma racism, which is far from being just a post-Cold War phenomenon. Racial hierarchies and claims to whiteness have been long construed vis-à-vis Roma people long before any resentment against postsocialist capitalist development. The book's important arguments could thus be strengthened through an engagement with longer histories of racism in the region, which would give more space to those who have long been at its receiving end.

BLINDSPOTTING THE RACIALIZED RELATIONS OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

When examining the racialization of East Europeans or what Kalmar calls *"East Europeanism,"* the book argues that what is different from the situation of (formerly) colonized Others is that East Europeans are white, even if not quite, which gives them a potential access to white privilege. Throughout the book, Kalmar (2022: 36) argues repeatedly that racism experienced by (white) East Europeans is nowhere as close to that targeting non-white populations, and so far has not been morphed into systemic, as opposed to *"personal and sporadic violence."* In this argumentation, the problem is presented as a matter of *degrees* of violence, which are experienced individually. It then reproduces the idea that racism is merely a matter of an individualized *"event"* (LENTIN 2020). It is indeed important to recognize different forms of racist violence, as Kalmar does. But it could also be productive to talk about different *logics* behind different forms of racialization, and the ways in which they co-constitute one another. Wouldn't West European markets' reliance on the seasonal, care and service labor force coming from Central (and Eastern) Europe, together with the inter-generational violence it entails, be considered structural rather than sporadic and personal? In fact, as Raia Apostolova and Tstevelina Hristova (2021) argue, to many across the region, migration became a means of social reproduction, that is, a way to revitalize one's life itself – a condition from which West European labor markets benefit enormously. Would such displaced models of social reproduction for which West European

states pay nothing be considered sporadic? And how does the recruitment of cheapened labor relate to the expulsion and complete abandonment of non-white others? Seeing racism and racialization of different global populations only through the lens of degrees of violence does not allow us to examine how these communities can be positioned and racialized *in relation* to each other, sometimes following different and diverging racial capitalist logics, which yet unfold at the same time.

While the book uses the lens of racial capitalism and locates political economy at the center of the understanding of "Eastern Europeanism," it overlooks one crucial aspect of "postsocialist transition" – the feminized labor migration from the region. The analysis of the gendered political economy and that of racial capitalism are then produced as two separate matters, thus presenting "Eastern Europeanism" as a gender-neutral phenomenon. The book overlooks the fact that racialization is accomplished through different gendered logics, which go hand in hand with the reproduction of capitalist regimes. In her book *In the Name of Women's Rights*, Sara Farris (2017) argues that tired tropes of "populism" that see national communities as "us" and migrant others as "them," are ill-equipped to understand gendered representations and practices of migration. While non-Western migrant men are seen as stealing "Western" jobs and considered a threat, non-Western women are actively recruited and integrated as cheapened care and domestic workers through workfare schemes. This analysis helps in seeing how racialization is always gendered, especially in the context of feminized migration from Europe's East. Yet, gendered images of women from Central Europe often remain limited to mere references of their portrayals as *"prostitutes"* or *"pretty but desperate local women"* (p. 123), overlooking political economic logics of feminized labor migration to Western Europe with both individual and structural consequences.

THE FALSE BINARY OF EUROWHITE (IL)LIBERALISMS

"Illiberalism" and "illiberal revolt" are two other key terms of the book. Here, Kalmar importantly unpacks the liberal/illiberal binary where hegemonic discourses on Central Europe position the region as "anti-Western." In fact, as Kalmar argues, white Central Europeans often see themselves as the real, that is, purely white, Europeans and as the last bastion of genuine European civilization (Chapter 5). This argument is an important

contribution to some recent discussions which tend to portray right-wing political formations in Central East Europe as "Eurosceptic," "anti-Western" or exceptional for "Europe." Kalmar (2022: 158) shows that right-wing and far-right political formations in Eastern Europe are not Eurosceptics in any sense and, in fact, fulfill their desires for a white European gated community: *"Central European illiberals are not anti-Western. They do not want the exclusive Western club and its global white hegemony to disappear. They just want to make sure that the club survives long enough to at last accept them."*

The argument might have been pushed even further to unmake the notion of "(il)liberal democracy" altogether. Kalmar often argues that "illiberalism" presents a threat to "liberal democracy." But what is this "liberal democracy," which is equally invested in the maintenance of the global white gated community? It is no accident that the leader of the Italian right-wing Lega Party, Matteo Salvini, called the establishment of a formal alliance of right-wing parties in the European Parliament a "*renaissance*" in Europe (p. 154). When seen as a threat to "liberalism" and "liberal democracy," however, "illiberalism" remains portrayed as an aberration from EU/rope as "an area of freedom, security and justice," which leaves the fantasy of the good, innocent, liberal Europe we should strive for squarely in its place. What remains intact is how, for example, the policing of EU borders is done in the name of "liberal Europe" and protection of the "European garden," and, in fact, exceeds any "Eurosceptic" "illiberal" fantasies.

Instead of referring to (il)liberalism, the book could have made a stronger argument on the region's reproduction of Europe's coloniality since both "liberal" and "illiberal" governments are actively committed to keeping EU/rope as a white gated community.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Kalmar's *White but Not Quite* is a companion to the discussion of race and racialization in Europe, which invites us to move beyond rigid East/West and white/non-white dualities. It gives the reader critical tools that would enable them to continue engaging with the topic while staying cautious towards quick cooptations of critical thought in the name of right-wing victimhood. Examining the workings of whiteness in the region then means recognizing racism in "Central Europe" not merely as a form

of postsocialist resentment against the West but as an active investment in the extension of Europe's colonial and racial politics that predates postsocialism. Future engagement with the topic would also require further attention to how formally "illiberal" governments may not disrupt the "liberal" order but merely continue long normalized racist violence conducted in the name of liberal democracies.

"Quite White" – Central Europeans Beyond Europe

STEPHANIE RUDWICK

In the past few decades, the specific identity politics playing out in Central and Eastern Europe, and specifically the Visegrád countries have been the topic of a broad body of scholarship but hardly any scholar has found as compelling a title for their work as did Ivan Kalmar. *White but Not Quite* is a comprehensive and compelling monograph at the intersections of anthropology, and historical and political science which seeks to offer explanations for the region's recent resurgence of illiberalism. The monograph's primary objective is to advance understanding of the roots of the region's *illiberal revolt*, as Kalmar calls it. Offering a broad socio-historical account of the region, he finds explanations of CEE illiberalism as a reaction to the politics imposed by the West and the attitudes of superiority conveyed through the West.

Unsurprisingly, a central space in the book is reserved for the development in Hungary and Viktor Orbán's dangerous clinging on to some illusionary purity of the Hungarian nation. While Polish, Slovakian, and Czech politics have seen some similar rejections of migration it also needs to be remembered that the region itself greatly varies as regards religious, socio-economic, and political constellations. But for the most part, Kalmar finds enough nuance to describe important similarities between the countries; without doubt, *White but Not Quite* is a valuable contribution to socio-political scholarship on an understudied region of Europe.

The book decisively has a lot to offer, as Kalmar reviews much important scholarly work and constructs good arguments. However, when it comes to the overarching approach and argument, I have some reservations. While I mostly agree with Kalmar's (2022: 5) assertion that *"central Europe's failure to become as prosperous and as liberal as the West must be viewed as largely wrought by the invisible hand of intervention by Western-dominated, global market neoliberalism,"* I would probably replace "largely" with "partly." More importantly, I do not feel entirely comfortable with

the subsequent sentence stating that *"to be blind to this, and instead to blame 'Eastern European' backwardness for what is very much the West's doing, is racist."*

As I will try to show in this review it is debatable whether the term "racist" is, in fact, a useful term for the analysis of this particular political power dynamic. I concede that this review is a personal account of a German linguistic anthropologist with a decade long residence in Czechia. My doubts about the conceptual framework have their grounding in African Studies and my long residence in South Africa, a country with a history and presence of racial politics par excellence. For sure, from an African Studies perspective the book has strong explanatory limits. While Kalmar is acutely aware of the significance of the historical constructions of race and racism, his monograph conveniently omits the more global history of eugenics in the context of colonialism and Blackness in CEE. The significance of phenotype in the global history of what race is perceived to be and how it is understood, cannot, in my view, be omitted in a study that conceptualizes race.

THE LIMITS OF RACE AS AN EXPLANATORY TOOL

While the initial chapters of the book make for an interesting historical discussion of the complex identity trajectories of CEE people, I find the extensive description of 19th and 20th century geopolitics as having to do more with East and West dynamics than with a history of racial formations and understandings. Chapter III ends with a compelling last paragraph in which Kalmar (2022: 104) states that *"through the many transformations of the Central European idea, from German Mitteleuropa, through socialism with a human face, to the illiberal rhetoric of the ordinary white man as victim, what has continued is the resurgent desire to make Central Europe central to Europe."* Here, I concur with Kalmar's (IBID.) argument that there is *"a desire to lead in a club to which one has not even been fully admitted."* For sure, I have encountered various forms of the *"inferiority complex"* and the *"illiberal revolt,"* as Kalmar calls it, and these dynamics might well have their root in a feeling of *"not quite"* being.

However, framing all this through the prism of race is problematic in my view because Eastern Europeans themselves hold on to constructions

of whiteness that have long been disposed of in the West. In fact, in many if not most Western European countries black people with European roots are no longer seen as aliens and strangers. For example, to be black and French is certainly not considered an oxymoron in French mainstream society. While this can be explained through colonialism and does not mean in any way that racism is not part of Western societies, it suggests that engagement with and acceptance of racial diversity within the nation state already has a long history. And the corresponding situation, I would like to argue, is very different in the CEE region, where a narrative of "colonial exceptionalism" persists and many, if not most, citizens grapple with embracing a non-white individual as a fellow citizen. This is illustrated through recent research in Poland and Czechia (E.G., BALOGUN 2020, 2023A; BALOGUN – JOSEPH-SALISBURY 2021; OHIA-NOWAK 2016, 2020; RUDWICK – SCHMIEDL 2023; RUDWICK 2023; RUDWICK – SIMUZIYA 2023) which demonstrates that in those countries, whiteness continues to be so hegemonically constructed that citizens of color are routinely discriminated against. It is indeed paradoxical that societies which perhaps can be constructed as being seen as "not quite white" within one framework can be observed as striving to, in fact, stay "whiter" than those societies which might ascribe to them the "not quite white" status.

While Kalmar acknowledges that *"Eastern Europeanism"* is not comparable in severity to the racisms that originated in colonial oppression, he nonetheless sees Eastern Europeanism as similar. After all, he writes about the treating of *"Central Europeans and others in or from post-communist Europe as a different and inferior breed"* (p. 5). Even if this is de facto experienced as such, I cannot help wondering why "race" should be the best explanatory tool in analyzing these power dynamics among white Europeans. From my perspective, Kalmar's analysis only holds up if kept within this restricted West-East European context, while outside of the continent, Central and Eastern Europeans are mostly seen within a framework of quite "normative" white privilege. To make this point clearer, I would like to refer to the inextricable connection between race and colorism. Central and Eastern European people are phenotypically white and far from not quite white in most places in the world. In South Africa, for instance, people from CEE are unambiguously categorized as "fully" white and see themselves unmistakably as such.

THE AMBIGUITIES OF RACE AND METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

While race and its constructions are fluid, I would like to stress that fluidity in one context can also mean fixity in another. To be fair, Kalmar (2022: 7) does urge the reader not to misunderstand or interpret his writing as relativizing anti-Black racism and equating it with Central or Eastern European victimhood. However, he also continues to argue that the same system that produces such radical racial oppositions as White and Black or colonizer and colonized, also produces ambiguous positions of partial privilege coexisting with oppression, such as "Eastern European" (which subsumes Central Europeans). I concur that ambiguity is doubtlessly a central element in conceptualizing race, but it is also true that racial hierarchy is much more complicated than Kalmar makes it out to be and phenotype is far from insignificant here.

To make the above point more tangible I draw from my own participant observation in the CEE region in relation to the ongoing Ukrainian-Russian war. For sure, there was a very broad Central European solidarity towards Ukrainian refugees, at least at the outbreak of the war; this was partly so because Ukrainians were widely "seen" and accepted as white refugees. Multiple international news platforms, however, reported on the segregation and discrimination of black refugees at the borders of CEE countries, in particular, Poland (BALOGUN 2023A). Given that the broad solidarity did not so much extend towards refugees who were people of color, phenotypical whiteness unambiguously emerged as an essential criterion for the acceptance of Ukrainian refugee status. The link between race and colorism simply matters and not acknowledging the significance of phenotype is, from my perspective, tantamount to obstructing social justice. Of course, Kalmar does not fall into this trap; he rightly recognizes, as mentioned before, that racism experienced by people of color is far more severe than racism against Eastern Europeans. And indeed, Kalmar also delivers a convincing analysis throughout many parts of the book. And yet, from my perspective, the study only holds up within Europe and among white Europeans because as soon as we start taking people of color seriously into consideration, the framework becomes shaky and globally insufficient.

As for the methodological grounding of the book, I cannot help feeling a little disappointed. As an anthropologist, I utterly appreciate that Kalmar writes about his own identity trajectory and his sense of belonging to the Central and Eastern part of the world in the postscript. Apart from this, however, he is not particularly transparent in terms of his actual empirical research among the people in the region or his own positioning. Unless I missed it in the book, there is not much transparency and even less critical interrogation of the *"locus of enunciation"* (GROSFOGUEL 2011: 6). Given that Kalmar is affiliated to a highly prestigious North American institution and, as a result, is inevitably influenced by an Anglo-American approach in his analysis, I personally would have welcomed a more profound critical introspection and discussion of his own positionality. It is a bit paradoxical that in a sense Kalmar deprives the CEE populations of agency in their own illiberalism due to the dominance of the West but, at the same time, he employs in his analysis of the in-between space that CEE constitutes the conceptual toolkit of racial capitalism which is firmly grounded in global North paradigms.[1]

Linked to this point are also further questions of methodology that arise. Given his disciplinary grounding, I am wondering whether there was in fact any ethnography in his research at any point, or in other words, any "deep hanging out," as we anthropologists like to call it. Were there systematic interviews with Central and Eastern Europeans? How do the minutiae of everyday life play out in relation to the broader political dynamics we see analyzed in the book? Many of the arguments throughout the monograph are substantiated on the basis of quantitative data, which are not always displayed in a consistent way. From an anthropological perspective, narratives of lived experiences would have benefitted the analysis and perhaps drawn attention to the fact that the way "race" operates in multiple ways in the CEE region goes far above and beyond the "white but not quite" framework. Kalmar (2022: 56) uses, for instance, something as obscure as a Quora thread in order to discuss whether Eastern Europeans are believed to have distinct racial features. It surprises me that as a seasoned anthropologist, he does not deliver an ethnographic perspective. Despite all its limits, an ethnographic perspective shows how multiple dynamics of power and disempowerment constitute peoples' self- and other ascribed identities. Where are the minutiae of everyday life from Hungary, Poland, Czechia, and Slovakia?

If we conceptualize Eastern Europeanism as racism, would it then not also make sense to provide evidence of Central and Eastern Europeans themselves conceptualizing their experiences as instances of explicit racism? Regrettably, I do not find much evidence for this in the book. Kalmar (2022: 10) himself emphasizes that as anthropologists *"we insist on respecting the insider perspective of the people we study."* So why is there so little reference to Central Europeans' lived experience of an explicitly racist Eastern Europeanism? Admittedly, I am not in a position to argue that Czech, Slovak, Polish and Hungarian people do not experience the Western arrogance as "racist" but in order to accept it as such, I would like to be shown some evidence from qualitative sources.

VICTIM OR PERPETRATOR?

A related point to consider is the victim-perpetrator binary. One can, of course, be both, even at the same time, and in my understanding the flagging of one's victimized racial positioning can flare flames of hatred and potentially make one a still more ardent perpetrator of racism against those who are slotted at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. For instance, in a recent article (RUDWICK – SCHMIEDL 2023) we show that Czech football enthusiasts tend to highlight their own victimized positioning within Europe on social media rather than recognizing the problem of racism against black players in their own rows. Kalmar, I am sure, does not in any way want to relativize racism against African people through his approach, but I think he would do well in eliciting opinions among CEE residents of color. It simply worries me that one would primarily frame Central and Eastern European whites as the victims of Western racism while quite atrocious everyday racism is experienced by people of color all over Europe.

So once again, I am wondering just how useful it is to frame Eastern Europeanism as racist. To be sure, the dynamic, which, no doubt, is seriously discriminatory, ought to be addressed. But to what extent is it really productive to conceptualize power dynamics between white people – who altogether hold a decent amount of privilege – as racist per se? If we acknowledged, which Kalmar does, that illiberalism is a global force and analyzed every power dynamic along a racial capitalist framework, it would probably mean that any elitist urban intellectual who is dismissing someone from the ultra-right could also be framed as racist. But is this

really fruitful? What happened to class stratification and the urban-rural divide? Personally, and as an African Studies scholar, I would argue that race as a concept has a very limited explanatory power in such macro politics. Why should the global North framework of racial capitalism rule in the analysis of power dynamics between different nations?

If we adopt such a broad lens on racism, then any discrimination can be framed as racism. Kalmar (2022: 41) dichotomizes the *"race as a matter of looks or phenotype"* approach with the common social science approach to race, which sees it *"as the result of socioeconomic factors, particularly under capitalism"* but the construction of this binary restricts his own perspective. As a result, he fails to mention that most social constructionist understandings have not abandoned giving significance to phenotype. From my perspective, there is not sufficient theoretical and conceptual engagement with race as a category of human belonging from a socio-historical and global perspective in this book. Kalmar does, however, discuss the specific European West-East divide in a compelling and nuanced way. It is welcome, for instance, how Kalmar charges the West with racism against Central and Eastern Europeans on page 45 because of course the negative attitudes towards CEE people in Western Europe are a reality and need to be addressed.

Kalmar (2022: 197) himself recognizes that the CEE region has historically benefitted and continues to benefit from Western imperialism. This is a context I consider paramount in discussing the paradox of the whiteness that might be felt as not being "quite enough" and the whiteness that strives to maintain the idea of being a kind of white that is whiter than the West in terms of actual human diversity that I referred to earlier. As a German person living in Czechia for more than a decade, I have close experience with political discussions where illiberalism plays out in direct opposition to, for instance, the increasingly multicultural and multiracial German society. My own participant observation in these debates gives testimony to a common Czech narrative: that such multiracialism is not desired, and that Czech society, as a whole, prides itself on its sense of now being "purer" than the "watered down" Germans. Is it not, again ironically, a nice antidote to Kalmar's meticulous discussion of Nazism in the book? Much of the general discussion in the book focuses, unsurprisingly, on the pitting of Russia against the West as the extreme pole in a binary matrix.

However, the identities of Russians do not receive much attention in the book, which makes me wonder about the following question: if CEE people are not quite white, what are Russians, then? Not at all white? Does the racial framework really work here, or are geopolitical binaries and discussions of in-betweenness not more useful after all?

ENDNOTES

1 I would like to thank Daniel Šitera and Zuzana Uhde for helping me refine my thinking here.

Central Europe: Racialized or Elusive?

ALIAKSEI KAZHARSKI

Ivan Kalmar's (2022) recent book is an impressive contribution to the ongoing debate on Central Europe, the East-West relations in the European Union, and the shifting images of Central and Eastern Europe in the West. In my opinion, the most vital theme of the book is the argument about "Eastern Europeanism," which I discuss below. Professor Kalmar argues that "Eastern Europeanism" is a form of *racism*, but it is a racism that is not directly tied to the "phenotype" (i.e., skin color), and hence the witty title of the book.

For sure this phenomenon is linked to the recent democratic backsliding in the EU's post-Communist new member states and the rise of so-called *illiberalism*, an ideology espoused by corrupt and hybrid or partially authoritarian political regimes such as that of Viktor Orbán in Hungary. Without neglecting to discuss that obvious connection, the author insists on seeing a much broader context set by the *semi-peripheral* position of Central Europe in the regional/global division of labor. Thus, the author points out the need to link the analysis of identitarian and ideological discourses to materialist analytical frameworks inspired by the works of neo-Marxist scholars like Immanuel Wallerstein (2000) with his world systems theory. And even though, empirically speaking, this book does not take us very far in that direction, I believe this to be a promising project.

The book contains many sharp insights into Central Europe with which I wholeheartedly agree. Discussing all of them would take the essay too far beyond its word limit, and this is why below, I concentrate mostly on points that, in my opinion, leave some room for conceptual debate.

However, what I find to be the most crucial contribution of the book is the critical analysis of "Eastern Europeanism" as a new form of *crude binarization* that divides Europe, in a dichotomous manner, into the "democratic West" and the "authoritarian" and "backward East." A brilliant example of such critical analysis can be found in Chapter 4, where Professor Kalmar discusses the *"half-truths"* about Central Europe. This is where

the author demonstrates how the fashion in which the results of regional opinion polls are published and visualized through maps by the American Pew Research Center, can contribute to promoting simplistic dichotomies rather than to developing more nuanced understandings. Such simplifying images can make it easier to forget that neither the "West" nor the "East" is homogeneous in terms of the distribution of public attitudes, thus allowing the black and white to eclipse the fifty shades of gray.

GOING BEYOND SIMPLISTIC METHODOLOGIES

This is where Professor Kalmar's argument once again points us in the direction of a very important research agenda that will have to be explored in the years to come. Sadly, binarizations and dichotomous representations seem to be inevitable in the mass media discourse because of the way in which information is served and consumed. In other words, there is a political economy to it. *Inter alia* this has been visible in the discourse on "authoritarianism" and "democratic backsliding" in the Visegrád Four (V4) in recent years, as Hungary and Poland were regularly lumped together despite the obvious differences in the extent to which fair political competition and the "level playing field" were preserved in the two countries.

Naturally, the public bromance between Jarosław Kaczyński and Viktor Orbán, and their declarations of ideological affinity and calls for a "cultural counter-revolution" had to contribute to this effect. Yet, discourses – self-designations included – are but one dimension of political analysis. In relation to this, I find it worth it to mull over one point that caught my attention as I was reading Professor Kalmar's discussion of the terminology. Thus, he writes on page 8: *"I prefer 'illiberalism' over such terms as 'populism', for one thing because as an anthropologist I respect the terms the groups I study use themselves."*

That is a very generous approach indeed. However, would it also mean that we need to buy into Orbán's designation of his political regime ("illiberal democracy") as a *democracy* when we know for a fact that the level playing field in Hungary has been subverted and political competition emasculated, and the Hungarian parliamentary elections may still be free, but they are no longer *fair*? (OSCE 2022). The same goes for other similar manipulative terms such as the earlier Putinist construct of "sovereign

democracy," from which Orbán "copy-pasted" massively, for a systematic comparison see (KAZHARSKI – MACALOVÁ 2020). And what about more notorious self-designations, such as *das Herrenvolk*? All this leaves me wondering about the limits of this generous approach to terminology in political science.

Having said that, I am also generally sympathetic to Kalmar's treatment of "Central Europe" as an open project into which it is possible to inscribe oneself rather than as a fixed geographical entity. Thus, whilst he considers the Visegrád Four the undisputable "core" of Central Europe understood in the *"narrowest geographical sense"* Kalmar (2022: 9) admits that *"Ukrainians and Belarusians who want closer ties to the West would include themselves [in "Central Europe"], too."* This subject returns us to the recurrent discussions of the regional geopolitical imaginaries, of who belongs and who does not belong to a particular region, and of the ways in which we draw borders – also through our own writing.

In this respect, Professor Kalmar's approach is somewhere halfway between the social constructivist paradigm and an *ad hoc* method. Understandably, the "viewpoint" format of the book does not leave room for abstract theoretical deliberations. However, every now and then, this approach also yields certain ambiguities and inconsistencies, such as on page 97, where *"the people of the Visegrád Four countries"* are said to *"generally consider themselves to be more Western than predominantly Orthodox nations like Ukrainians, Russians, Serbs, Romanians, or Bulgarians."*

What makes me question this new dichotomy is not so much the results of the more recent opinion polls in places like Slovakia, which do not rhyme very well with it as the collective identification with the West there is observed to be far from unambiguous (SEE HAJDU ET AL. 2022). Rather, it is the distinctly Huntingtonian flavor about the term "predominantly Orthodox nations." Indeed, it is not clear why one would find this distinction useful, considering that in some of the said nations only around 5–8% have been known to be regular churchgoers (EVANS – NORTHMORE-BALL 2012) and traditional religion does not seem to play a significant role in people's lives. For the author of the infamous "clash of civilizations" thesis, religion was one easy way to draw hasty dividing lines but it is unclear why good social science would want to buy into this sketchy reasoning.

DOES CENTRAL EUROPE EXIST?

In the end, it is, perhaps, impossible to escape ambiguities when drawing the line between "Eastern" and "Central Europe," and the use of categories very much depends on the analyst's perspective, which is shaped both by their personal background and by the situational context of the analysis. In the words of Milada Anna Vachudova, the post-1989 Visegrád Group was *"first and foremost a triumph of marketing: the term 'the Visegrád group' became shorthand for the politically and economically most advanced, most 'Western' post-communist states"* (VACHUDOVA 2005: 94). Implicitly at least, this exercise in "Central Europeanness" could mean othering and even exclusion not only of Russia, as in Milan Kundera's seminal 1984 essay, but also of other post-Soviet and post-Communist states to the geographical East and South of the V4 (SEE, FOR EXAMPLE, IORDACHI 2012).

Today, as we are approaching the twentieth anniversary of the 2004 climax in the V4 "marketing triumph," the dichotomy of "Central and Eastern" (or, perhaps, Central *at the expense* of Eastern) Europe may look somewhat less convincing. It is not just that in 2022, only 34% in Slovakia seemed to be convinced that their country should belong in the West rather than "somewhere in between" or to the East. In 2021, prior to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, this count of "Westernizers" was reported to be even lower (26%) (SEE HAJDU ET AL. 2022), also for an academic reflection (ČANJI 2023). If we forget about geopolitical imaginaries for a moment, then in terms of any honest analysis, in comparison to Hungary, that one time "Central European" star pupil of transition, representative democracy is obviously doing much better not only in the de-occupied "post-Soviet" Baltic States but even in the now war-torn Ukraine, where the incumbents have been regularly defeated in democratic elections. So much for the general *"difference between Central and the rest of Eastern Europe"* (p. 145).

All these observations raise questions about the meaning of the said term and the extent to which it can be useful as an analytical category that can be disentangled from geopolitical myths and instrumentalized narratives. Professor Kalmar's generous "anthropological" approach to self-designations implies treating the V4 unconditionally as the "core" of Central Europe, as its primary *signified*. This is a convenient shorthand of which I am also very much guilty (E.G., KAZHARSKI 2022A).

At the same time, I also believe that social science can also be done without drawing boundaries in the geographical manner. Professor Kalmar (2022: 66) makes a very interesting observation to the effect that the post-WW2 expulsion of the Germans from CEE sealed the geopolitical imaginaries in the sense that it was now *"possible for the first time to imagine East Central Europe as unambiguously 'Eastern European.'"*

I would say there are two ways to look at this: not only is CEE inalienable from the German cultural legacy but the Germans themselves, at least up to a certain point, were very much a "Central/Eastern" European nation that was shaped by the same very well recognizable peripheral complexes as everyone else on the spectrum, from Hungary to Russia. Thus, Friedrich Naumann's initial project of Central Europe (*Mitteleuropa*) is part of the effort to escape the European margin by establishing Germany as a peer of the "West" – a concern or complex that is quite typical for the whole region. In this sense Central/Eastern Europeanness is nothing but "transitive peripherality," if I am allowed to play a bit on Professor Kalmar's (2022: 183) clever term *"transitive Orientalism."*

Finally, in this context, it is also impossible not to point to the emergent link in the chain of semantic mutations that the *"idea of Central Europe"* has been undergoing, see for a comprehensive overview (DHAND 2018). Thus, the new ideologues of *"Central Europeanness"* have worked to redefine it by juxtaposing it to being Western, breaking with the Kundera-inspired post-1989 interpretation of Central Europe as a severed Western limb, which once underpinned the "applicant state narrative" (MOISIO 2002). This has been happening not only in Hungary (SEE BALOGH 2017), which is the usual suspect in that regard, but also in Czechia (E.G., TÉRA 2022), although in the latter case it is, of course, much further from becoming the official mainstream position.

THE RISKS OF CONCEPTUAL OVERSTRETCH

Leaving geopolitical imaginaries aside, I would focus on two more aspects of Professor Kalmar's book that have left me pondering. The first one also pertains to terminology. The witty title of the book is not a mere figure of speech. The author uses "racism" as an analytical category to examine the practices of East-West othering and exclusion in Europe. In this case

it is understood as a "non-phenotype" breed of racism that essentializes people not on the basis of their skin color but – if I understand correctly – based on their ethnicity/nationality, geographical origin, and their place in Europe's division of labor.

On the one hand, it is certainly useful to reflect on whether our commonsensical understanding of racism has not become too US-centric (or West-centric), underpinned by the North American experience and/or the Western European maritime imperialism. The overall usage of the term has historically been broader, so, for instance, when Robert William Seton-Watson, also known as Scotus Viator (1908), wrote his *Racial Problems in Hungary* he certainly was not referring to problems revolving around the differences in skin color.

Furthermore, these possible reconceptualizations of racism are closely linked to the very important discussions on decolonization sparked by the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine (SEE MÄLKSOO 2022). Central and Eastern European critical scholars have long pondered on how the theoretical apparatus of postcolonial studies can be applied to analyzing Russian colonialism in their region (SEE RIABCHUK 2013). Its various supremacist practices have included, *inter alia*, the traditional marginalization of the Belarusian and Ukrainian languages as "peasant" dialects, as some *Untersprachen* incapable of begetting anything even remotely resembling "the great Russian culture." In Mykola Riabchuk's (2021) words this was (and still is) the situation of the subalterns having *"white skin [but] black language."*

On the other hand, if one were to engage in such reconceptualizations in an academic manner, one would of course need clear definitions of race and racism that would take them *beyond the phenotype*. In his text, Professor Kalmar does offer such a definition, formulated by Geraldine Heng. Heng (AS CITED IN KALMAR 2022: 38) suggests that racism is about: *"... a repeating tendency [...] to demarcate human beings through differences among humans that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differentially to human groups. Race-making thus operates as specific historical occasions in which strategic essentialisms are posited and assigned through a variety of practices and pressures, so as to construct a hierarchy of peoples for differential treatment."*

There is no doubt that through its history, humankind has convincingly demonstrated that it is a very hierarchical and oppressive animal. However, it remains unclear from the presented definition *which differences* have to be used to construct race and, consequently, what makes racial difference distinct in the universe of cases, isolating it from alternative forms of supremacist othering, let us say, for example, from *gendered* ones.

As Professor Kalmar (2022: 7) points out, some authors prefer to speak of *"chauvinism[,] not racism."* If we were to disagree with them, we would need to somehow specify the open definition provided above. Otherwise, I am afraid we might be facing the danger of a conceptual overstretch, and the analytical value added of grouping several different contexts under one conceptual roof can remain unclear, especially considering that the divergences between them are also not insignificant. After all, as Professor Kalmar (IBID.: 206) himself indicates, "Eastern Europeanism" implies one key difference: *"If you're not too Eastern European, if you speak excellent English, dress and eat like a Westerner, if you are able to share topics and opinions in a way that fits the expectations of Western society, then you have a fair chance of being accepted, personally, as an equal. Your children born in the West will in most cases pass without even having to try."*

This stands in notable contrast to the conventional postcolonial situation where skin color can be the basis of that insurmountable difference which ensures that "*equality is promised, but delayed forever*" (IBID.: 194).

From my side I could, perhaps, provide an alternative and much narrower usage for the term "racism" which would also take it beyond the "phenotype." I would point in the direction of those discourses that use nativist, pseudobiological notions to essentialize people, such as when the Russian rulers shock the public with their talk about Volodymyr Zelenskyi and *"Hitler's Jewish blood,"* see for a brief analysis (KAZHARSKI 2022B) or when some Ukrainian internet commentators refer to Russians as "orcs" or *"a horde of genetic slaves."* These primordialist discourses are very much alive and well in the Eastern parts of Europe, and in their references to pseudobiological notions, they are not unlike the 19th century racial doctrines.

The alternative would be to stay with the open definition, but when applied, it would lead us into a very fuzzy notion. Notably, Professor

Kalmar (2022: 73) subsumes prejudices between the former West and East Germans (*"die Ossis"*) under *"Eastern Europeanist racism,"* even though in this instance we are clearly looking at different geographies and political experiences but, by and large, one ethnie. Whether *race* and *racism* are still the best categories for critical analysis here remains very much an open question for me.

In connection with this there is a second point I would raise about the argument developed in the book. Professor Kalmar's common denominator for different guises of racism lies in political economy. It is capitalism and the *"capital's need for cheap labor and compliant markets"* that spurs racism (2022: 23). This logic is also used to explain the phrase "*white but not quite*"; i.e., the Central Europeans' *"partially privileged"* racial status is preserved by their semi-peripheral position in the regional division of labor – as seen in terms of Wallerstein's (2000) famous world-systems analysis.

I certainly agree with both the political-economic situating of Central Europe in the semi-periphery ("base") and the assessment of the ambiguous cultural status of Central Europeans ("superstructure"), although this is where I would also differ from Professor Kalmar by talking about norms and identities rather than about races and racism. At the same time, connecting these two (the "base" and the "superstructure") in a causal manner remains but an interesting hypothesis without empirical support – which it does not receive in the book.

Criticism of capitalist relations is somewhat of a hegemonic discourse in North American universities and the *"amoral essence of capitalism"* (KALMAR 2022: 123) is a doxa among the left-leaning academics. Perhaps, they are right, but with respect to the specific case in question, I would also love to see some empirics. If the Central Europeans are, indeed, deliberately held back from becoming fully "Western," then who is doing it, where, and how – which social actors and through which social mechanisms? This is an empirical sociological question.

On a related note, I also have questions about the political-economic aspects of the purported Western "colonialism" in Central Europe. Professor Kalmar (2022: 200) writes about *"a quasi-colonial takeover of Central Europe by the West"* that is, in turn, exploited by the right-wing populists

who hijack the anti-colonial rhetoric. The prefix "quasi-" is rather handy when one engages in writing that is heavily embellished by figures of speech, but in academic terms, it leaves too much ambiguity, which good social science normally wishes to avoid. Something is either "colonial" or it is not. Otherwise, the term stops being convenient as an analytical category and creates much room for its manipulative use that results in what Professor Kalmar calls the *"perverted parlance"* of the populists (2022: 199).

CONCLUSION

I would finish by highlighting something that is potentially much more significant than these conceptual debates. From the point of view of its form, Professor Kalmar's book is brilliantly written and absolutely captivating. Though it is a "viewpoint" rather than a "research" text, its style, its anecdotes, and the intimate personal connection to the region can perhaps communicate more than a dozen articles that are grounded in elaborate theory.

In particular, this concerns those readers who are new to the Central European topics. While the regular narrations of the basics of regional history in the text may seem excessive to someone who is from or working on Central Europe, they will be indispensable to the newcomers. Professor Kalmar's modesty does not allow him to start the book with the dramatic and fascinating story of his family, which is a true mirror of the history of the region! Instead, the book opens with the story of another Central European, whose biography is, for sure, also something of an epitome when it comes to the contemporary regional developments. Overall, these qualities of the book make it a wonderful introduction to the region, which is certain to stimulate an avid interest in and promote further international debate about Central Europe.

Race in Central Europe: A Rejoinder

IVAN KALMAR

In the four Central European countries I focus on – Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary – the fall of the communist regimes in 1989 meant to most people that they would be "returning" to Europe and the West. In the words of the well-known author Milan Kundera (1984), Central Europeans were *"several nations who had always considered themselves Western"* and had been *"kidnapped"* east by Soviet Russia. Now they were ready to come home.

If they hoped to be welcomed back as long-lost family, though, they were soon to be disappointed. Many in the West saw them as too different, too backward, too "Eastern European." Worse, communism seemed to have incubated in them the demons of the past that the West felt it had overcome successfully: a heritage of authoritarianism and racism, including especially antisemitism. Such folks could not easily rise to the level of a free Western society. Even if they reluctantly tried to climb up on the slippery pole of liberal democracy, they were bound to "backslide."

In *White But Not Quite*, I detail and reject such othering and inferiorizing discourses about Eastern Europeans. I call them "Eastern Europeanism," and suggest that they are a form of racism. To explain the illiberal revolt in the area, I choose not to attribute it to some allegedly innate anti-democratic, inherently Eastern European character. Rather, I place it in the global context of a misguided rebellion that has engulfed many other groups as well.

I believe that illiberalism in Central Europe is part of a worldwide revolt against the brutal policies of unbridled neoliberalism that engulfed the world towards the end of the twentieth century. Though they claimed the fall of communism in 1989 as their greatest geopolitical triumph, these policies caused upheaval, and subsequently resentment, in the more peripheral areas of the world. I rely for my analysis on the concept of "racial capitalism," as developed by Cedric Robinson (2020; SEE ALSO BHATTACHARYYA 2018; JENKINS – LEROY 2021). As I wrote elsewhere (KALMAR 2023: 1465), *"Racial capitalism requires that the subaltern periphery, providing cheap labour and new*

markets, be placed behind an imagined racial barrier, so that the full protection of the liberal state is not extended to it." The most obvious example is colonization during the height of Western imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Western powers installed and protected an unequal economy and rationalized it by racializing discourses, which suggested that the subordination of the colonized was due to their race. The brown and black people in the colonies were deemed congenitally incapable of effectively accumulating capital, and thus developing a prosperous capitalist economy on their own. In *White But Not Quite*, I suggest that a similar coupling of economic subordination and racialization has applied also to the "Eastern enlargement" of the EU.

I conclude that *"[t]he real, if partial, similarities between the postcolonial and the post-communist condition [...] offer an opportunity for Central Europeans to understand, empathize, and cultivate solidarity with people in and from the Global South"* (p. 226). I note, however, that "few have answered the call." Illiberal Central Europeans choose instead to distance themselves from the postcolony, and assert their precarious claim to privilege as native-born "Europeans" and "Christians," but such claims are thinly disguised, if disguised at all, references to being White.

In this, Central Europeans resemble others in what I call the "white periphery" in the West, as in parts of the American rustbelt or the French countryside. The relation between the white periphery and the core of capital accumulation in the glitzy cities of the West is one that is partially captured by Wallerstein's (1976) term *"semi-periphery."* Racial capitalism produces several iterations of peripheralization, at different scales. At the highest, global, scale is the peripheralization inherited from classic imperialism, that between the (post)colonizer of the Global North and the postcolony of the Global South. But because capital accumulation, and exclusion from it, take place at every scale, there are peripheralizations, and accompanying racial otherings, also *within* the global core (and within the global periphery).

In racial capitalism, the Western core as a whole is racialized as white. But the internal peripheralization of Eastern Europeans within the Western core effectively makes them less than fully so. This is what I mean by "white but not quite." In response, the illiberal revolt of the white

periphery, including by white Central Europeans, is a misguided revolt against their demotion within the white core to a white-but-not-quite internal periphery. They refuse solidarity with the even more deeply othered global peripheries, and instead demand the restoration in the West of uncompromising white privilege, so that they can fully participate in it.

Not everyone in Central Europe is equally open to joining this illiberal revolt. The main supporters are found among groups whose interests are most impacted by globalization, and who stand most to benefit from the protection of the nation state. These, I argue, include some workers and small business people near but not at the bottom of the social hierarchy, as well as owners and managers of capital engaged in largely local activities, such as construction or resource extraction. I speak of an *"alliance between the very rich and the not-so-poor"* (pp. 26, 244).

Such, in sum, is my approach to explaining illiberalism in Central Europe. It locates the illiberal revolt among some Central Europeans as a specific instance of a misguided response around the world to the late twentieth-century phase of global neoliberalism and its continuing effects. In Central Europe, it is also a response to the racism against Eastern Europeans that intensified with the fall of the communist regimes, as global neoliberalism engulfed the area.

In what follows, I flesh out this summary, with attention to the comments offered by the four reviewers. No reviewer can be expected to address all aspects of the book, if only because of limitations of space, and perhaps I can be excused also if I do not address all elements in all the reviews. What I would like to focus on are two questions that have been raised by some of the reviewers and which have also been frequently raised by other readers of the book. Why use race to explain the tensions of the East-West relationship that I discuss? And why insist on separating Central Europe from Eastern Europe?

WHY RACE

We may accept Eastern Europeanism as a fact, but also ask if it would not be better to call it something else. Might "xenophobia" or "regional intolerance" not do better? Why speak of racism? Nesting within this general

question is a more specific one: Is it right to speak of racism by whites against whites?

Reviewers Aliaksei Kazharski and Stephanie Rudwick both question my use of "race" in this context, though Rudwick does so more emphatically. In her formulation, race is a matter of phenotype. This is not my position, but in fact if we were to ask if the "Eastern European" imagined by Eastern Europeanism is a phenotype, then the answer is yes. On page 55, I quote a number of Quora users who say that Eastern European men's heads are flat at the back, and that their faces are rounder, among other things. One user reflects a common refrain when he says that these features are due to the Mongolian invasion of the Middle Ages. I relate such comments to the long history of regarding Slavs as *"semi-Asiatic"* (p. 57).

Reading such facts might have convinced Rudwick that the East-West European differences are properly racial even according to her own, phenotype-dependent definition of race. That it did not, suggests that what Rudwick means by phenotypical difference is restricted to epidermic difference: a difference in skin color. This was the legal definition of race in the Jim Crow era United States and in apartheid South Africa. But we are not obliged to follow the apartheid regime's essentializing of race, a social construct, as if it were given by nature through the biology of human pigmentation.

That, to be fair, is not Rudwick's argument. She and others who object to my use of "race" in this context do have at least one debatable point. I think it is often a good choice to use terms the way they are used in ordinary language, and "race" is not used in ordinary English and other languages today to label white Eastern Europeans. It was different in the past. Much of Chapter 1 is taken up by explaining how racism began in Europe and was not particularly concerned with skin color. To those who insist on differentiating between race and ethnicity, I invoke the African-American scholar Thomas Holt (2000: 17), who quipped that *"[r]ace is something blacks have; ethnicity belongs to whites."* Cedric Robinson (2020: 2), too, was adamant that racism was not necessarily about skin color, and that its origins were in Europe: *"Racism, I maintain, was not simply a convention for ordering the relations of European to non-European peoples but has its genesis in the 'internal' relations of European peoples."*

Well into the 20th century, it was still normal to speak of the "English race" or the "Hungarian race." In German, and in the four Central European languages I deal with (which have been decisively influenced by German), to be sure, the linguistically closest equivalent of "race," *Rasse*, would not be used in that context; one would probably use *Volk*. *Rasse* was more of a pseudoscientific term. It, no more than *Volk*, however, confined itself to phenotype. Antisemites, including the Nazis, spoke of the Jews as a *Rasse* and theorized their own Aryan superiority in terms of a supposed *Rassenkunde* (racial science), while they discussed their ban on miscegenation and eventually their murder of Jews as *Rassenhygiene* (racial hygiene). But, contrary to what some perhaps believe, the German National Socialists never described the Jews as not white. At the other side of the ocean, in the meantime, according to Bernasconi (2014), "racism" was used as a term in order to describe antisemitism before the term was widely employed to target anti-Black actions and prejudice. That the racial difference between Blacks and Whites became the prototypical racial difference in many languages, happened no doubt under the influence of racist legislation in the US and in South Africa. Legal restrictions there indexed what at least in those regions was the most basic racial boundary in racial capitalism.

Yet for whatever reason, the fact is that "race" has come to signify, in ordinary language, mainly the black/white contrast. So in the interest of accessibility (which for me is always a major goal), might it not be advisable to stay with that narrow, epidermic definition of race, unless there are compelling reasons to re-extend its purview?

I think that such reasons do exist. To confine the term "race" to epidermis obscures more than it reveals. The term "ethnic group" or even "nation," does not identify anything different from "race," unless we are talking about taxonomic hierarchies, so that "Czech" is an "ethnic group" within the white "race." But what I address in the book – racism against Eastern Europeans – is not at the scale of national ethnic groups, but rather of supranational populations. Eastern Europeans may not be normally spoken of as a race, but they are also never represented as a (single) ethnic group or nation. To speak of them as such confuses things beyond where they can be usefully sorted out in terms of global and European relations under capitalism. Since such relations are my concern, to speak in my book of race provides clarity that "ethnicity" does not. It reveals that

Eastern Europeanism, as much as epidermic racism, is a product of racial capitalism.

Using race to explain capitalism in Europe is not an act of importing, as some may believe, an American or perhaps "Anglo-Saxon" issue onto the European continent, where it does not belong. On the contrary, it is bringing it back to where it came from. Some people regard Europe as the home of a civilization that has overcome its colonizing heritage, and relegate that colonial past to irrelevant dustbins of history. Wekker (2016) has called the Dutch variety of this denialism *"white innocence."* However, the migration of millions of people of color from the former colonies has made professions of white innocence, and, by extension, inattention to race, much more difficult in Western Europe. In comparison, although Central Europe is also receiving increasing numbers of immigrants from outside Europe, they still only represent a trickle compared to the West. So it has become common for some Central Europeans to deny that *they*, as opposed to Western Europeans, ever had anything to do with colonization. This differentiation from Western Europe is one of the cornerstones of Central European anti-migration rhetoric, and increases the region's alienation from Brussels.

The protestation of colonial innocence by Central Europeans, which I discuss at length in the book, is, however, based on fiction. It was not only the countries and regions that politically controlled overseas colonies that benefitted from the Western domination of them, or articulated the White supremacist rhetoric of imperialism. Central Europe did, too. Contrary to Daria Krivonos' remarks, I recognize Central Europe's historic role in the *"extension of Europe's colonial and racial politics."* In fact, I devote an entire section of the book to it, entitled *"So, is Central Europe responsible for colonialism?"*, which I answer with a resolute *"yes"* (pp. 221–226). The refusal to acknowledge the complicity and responsibility of Central Europe in colonialism is problematized extensively, if informally, also in Chapter 9, where I recall the rhetoric around racist incidents during and after several international football matches.

WHY CENTRAL EUROPE

Referring to East-West relations in Europe as racial clears up avenues of research that allow us to locate race in Central Europe in a full global context, reaching beyond the boundaries of the continent. Before we can widen our scope beyond Europe, however, it is essential to first break the problematic of race and illiberalism in Central Europe out of the confining mold of an approach that locates it in an essentialized, uniform, and undifferentiated "Eastern Europe."

This does not mean that different instances of racialization are the same, either within Europe or elsewhere.1 Though all of Europe was involved in colonialism and benefited from white privilege, the racial contract discussed by Mill (2022); see also (BALOGUN 2023B), the involvement of different countries and areas has been quite different. As one goes from West to East, it was progressively less. There was also exploitation within Central Europe of one group by another, especially in the context of serfdom, which increased in the East of Europe at the same time as Atlantic slavery. Exploitative labor relations functioned around lines that I call racialized. Polish landlords exploited Ukrainian serfs; Hungarian landlords ruled over Slovak and Romanian ones (p. 71). The case of Central Europe demonstrates that racialization is always based on economic exploitation; it demonstrates also that racialization is a process applied iteratively. A group that is racialized as insufficiently White projects the same racialization, in turn, to another group deemed even less White. I suggest that this iterative racialization of Whites by other Whites proceeds in stages, in Europe, from West to East, with England being the whitest and Russia the least so (Chapter 2). (Russians, heirs of a competing empire of their own, however, have their own alternative hierarchy.)

The term "Central Europe" functions within this iterative East-West racialization of European populations. It works as a defensive concept. "Central Europe" is a term most used in the area itself; elsewhere the region is most commonly included, indiscriminately, in "Eastern Europe". Many Central Europeans consider themselves to be more Western than their eastern and southeastern neighbors. "Central Europe" is not an innocent notion. It can reinforce the discriminatory mechanism of Eastern Europeanism at another scale, suggesting in effect that Eastern

Europeanism is alright, as long as you apply it a little farther East than where Central Europeans are (pp. 97–98, 197–198).

This, certainly, is the wrong reason for separating Central and Eastern Europe. Kazharski and Krivonos worry perhaps that it might also be my reason for doing so. This criticism is very useful to me. I deeply regret the appearance of bias, and feel that I should have been even clearer in the book that I am firmly opposed to it. Nevertheless, I do trust that there are good reasons for not lumping Central and Eastern Europe together; reasons that undermine rather than reinforce the overall edifice of Eastern Europeanism.

My strategy for demonstrating, in the early chapters of *White But Not Quite*, that historical and contemporary facts contradict the habitual association of Central *and* Eastern Europe, is not to argue for the superiority of the former over the latter. Rather, it is to demolish the flattening of difference that all racism, including Eastern Europeanism, encourages in the racialized object. My intention is to answer the reader who reads my list of typical prejudices about Eastern Europeans, such as that they are more racist or that they are more inclined to organized crime. The reader will be inclined to ask the natural question, "but is it true?" In Chapter 4, I demonstrate that most assumptions about Central Europeans are, at most, half true. My methodology has involved collecting and reinterpreting an array of quantitative data, including from America's Pew Research Center, Sweden's University of Gothenburg, and other Western institutions, but also from the Polish, Czech, and Hungarian statistical and election offices. Although Krivonos critiques the methods through which the data was collected as infected with a Western bias, she does not contradict the specific facts those methods produced. The "Western lens" is manifested not so much in the way facts were collected, but in the way they are presented by the organizations that obtained them. For example, Western and Eastern Europe are colored differently on the Pew Research Center's maps communicating survey results, though the difference is not justified by the facts (pp. 106–109). This ensures arbitrarily that the East and West of Europe will always look different and the Center and East of Europe will always look the same. I deconstruct, not support, such bias.[2]

There is yet another reason to identify Central Europe as a region distinct from both East and West. Central European identity is not only an

unfortunate, negative construct to assert difference from those farther East or (as Kazharski rightly notes) from Europeans who are Eastern Orthodox. "Central Europe" also has positive content. That is the ambition to make Central Europe central to Europe. I describe the ever-changing content of this aspiration, to create a meaningful Third Way between the West and Russia (even if one that still remains a part of the West), in Chapter 3.

Ultimately, I needed to identify the distinctiveness of Central Europe from Eastern Europe to next confront the global nature of illiberalism. It was only once I was liberated from the racist assumption that everything in "Eastern Europe" is the same and different from the West, that I was able to liberate my topic from the ghettoizing confines of "Central and Eastern European Studies," and to seek parallels between Central European illiberalism and its closest relatives, which are illiberalism in Western Europe and North America.

CONCLUSION

Reviewers Gábor Scheiring and Kazharski have summed up many parts of the book perhaps more eloquently than I could, so I do not feel a need to elaborate further. I am particularly grateful to Scheiring for recognizing the parallels between his work (E.G. SCHEIRING 2020B; SCHEIRING – SZOMBATI 2020) and mine. My references to illiberalism as being underpinned by the class alliance between segments of "national" capital and "national" labor (pp. 206–209), find substantial confirmation and elaboration in his work, although I was not familiar with it at the time of writing. This has become a major topic for my current research, and I am greatly looking forward to working on it with Scheiring and his colleagues.

I consider my book to be a work of what Herder called *Einfühlung* (PIIRIMÄE – LUKAS 2020; BERLIN 2013: 102). For Herder, "in-feeling" (often translated as "empathy") was a personalized method of understanding history and society. My book bids the reader to feel their way with me into Central Europe as I have known it. I am deeply grateful to the reviewers for accepting that invitation and for their valuable feedback. And I am most thankful to the convener of this book forum, Daniel Šitera, for putting together the debate and seeing it to print, and to the *Czech Journal of International Relations* for hosting it.

ENDNOTES

1 In this context, I state in the book as a matter of moral obligation that the violence resulting from racism against Central, and Eastern, Europeans is not comparable in intensity to the much more widespread violence against Blacks and other people of color. Krivonos thinks that by this I mean that racism against Eastern Europeans is, unlike that against people of color, personal rather than structural. I don't.

2 This is not the only place where Krivonos appears to misread a position that I criticize, for one that I believe in myself. For example, I emphatically do not restrict the image of Eastern European women to sex workers; what I am saying is that Eastern Europeanists do. The specific experience of female migrants from Eastern Europe that Krivonos cites is not, therefore, in any contradiction with my conclusions, which, unlike Krivonos' work, focus not on migration but on illiberalism *in situ* in Central Europe (though the mutual influence of illiberalism among migrants and illiberalism "at home" is considerable, as I discuss in Kalmar 2023; see also Lewicki 2023; Gawlewicz and Narkowicz 2015).

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NOTE

Daria Krivonos's contribution was supported by the Academy of Finland funded Centre of Excellence in Law, Identity and the European Narratives, 36678 & 353311.

Aliaksei Katgarski is thankful to Uppsala University and the Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies (IRES) whose invitation to pursue a one-month visiting researcher fellowship in 2023 helped him complete this text.

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