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**The challenge of the global  
ecological crisis for world politics**

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Lorenzo Feltrin | Emanuele Leonardi

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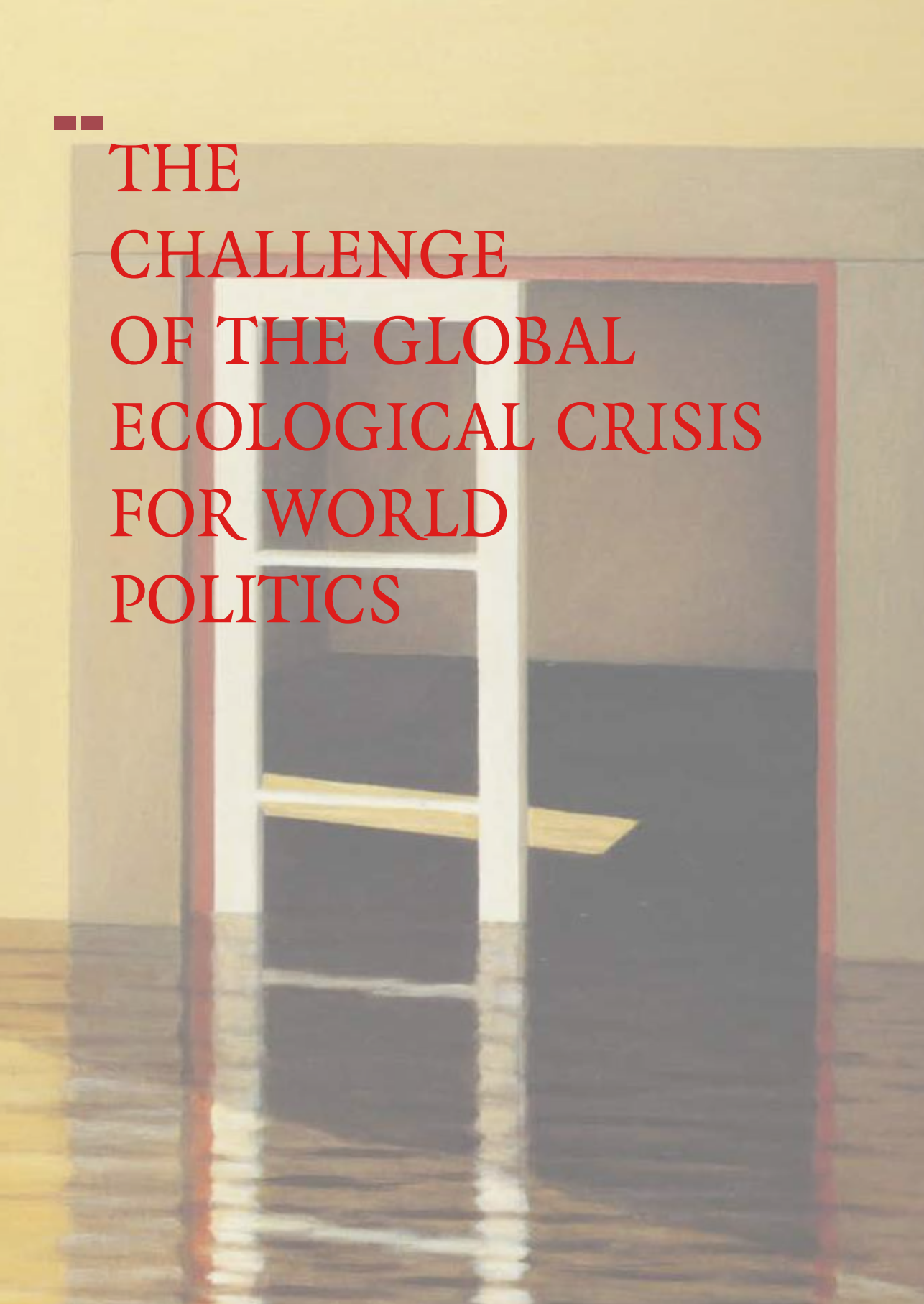
La Grande Crue,

la maison du coin [detail]

Oil painting on canvas, 1996



THE  
CHALLENGE  
OF THE GLOBAL  
ECOLOGICAL CRISIS  
FOR WORLD  
POLITICS



# THE CHALLENGE OF THE GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL CRISIS FOR WORLD POLITICS<sup>1</sup>

*Joana Castro Pereira*

The ecological crisis is one of the greatest challenges humanity faces in this century. Climate change and ecosystem degradation pose real threats to the future of life on the planet.<sup>2</sup> However, despite global security and survival being key themes in the study of international relations, environmental issues have remained on the sidelines of the discipline in recent decades.<sup>3</sup> This reality seems to be changing with the publication of an increasing number of works that seek to rethink the discipline and the practice of world politics through the lens of ecology.<sup>4</sup> These works call for a political transformation to address the crisis<sup>5</sup> and challenge the traditional institutionalist approach dominant in the literature, which focuses on the analysis of intergovernmental cooperation and the effectiveness of international environmental institutions, such as the United Nations (UN) climate and biodiversity regimes.

The critical interdisciplinary literature emerging in this area recognizes that human existence now transcends not only the international or even the global but also extends to the planetary realm. This is evidenced by the anthropogenic subversion of the fundamental processes of the planet. Human actions and the globalization of economic, social, and political issues not only affect the social world but also modify the natural and physical structure that regulates the functioning of the Earth system.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the concept of an Earth system increasingly destabilized and profoundly altered by human activity – encapsulated in the concept of the Anthropocene, a new proposal of geologic era<sup>7</sup> – reveals the existence of a complex planetary socioecological system. It underscores the need to transform how we think and relate to others and the planet. We are facing unprecedented (socio)ecological challenges that open doors to alternative conceptions of ontology, ethics, and politics. Particularly for international relations, this reality implies adopting a ‘post-anthropocentric’ perspective on world politics that embraces its inherent interconnectedness with the Earth system. That is, a theoretical, conceptual, and analytical framework capable of incorporating the permanent role that nature plays in the social world and vice versa, integrating the relationships between humanity, the planet, and the non-human species that inhabit it into all analyses of world politics.<sup>8</sup>

It is within this framework that the present dossier falls in, comprised of five essays that critically address the challenge of the planetary ecological crisis, contributing to the construction of a post-anthropocentric perspective of world politics and paving the way for future research. The authors explore themes such as climate and multispecies justice, as well as ecological and energy transition in particular.

Carlota Houart initiates the dossier with an essay in which she offers a critique of anthropocentrism and state-centrism that characterize world politics and its study (or modern human societies more broadly), which hinder a holistic approach to the ecological crisis. In particular, the author argues that the inclusion of a multispecies justice perspective in the analysis and decision-making process is crucial for promoting global sustainability. This perspective, grounded in the principles and worldviews of indigenous peoples and others beyond the Western context, recognizes the complex relationships between humans, animals, plants, ecosystems, and elements such as water. It also acknowledges human dependence on nature and the subjectivity and agency of multiple beings and forms of life. To illustrate multispecies justice, Houart refers to the case of rivers and various initiatives aimed at protecting these ecosystems, inspired by the counter-hegemonic paradigm of the rights of nature. The author concludes the essay with a brief reflection on possible paths for the multispecies reinvention of international relations, including ecological (cosmopolitan) democracy<sup>9</sup> and interspecies diplomacy,<sup>10</sup> as well as the creation of collaborative networks for knowledge production involving natural, social, and human sciences, as well as the traditional knowledge of indigenous and other local communities.<sup>11</sup>

The essay by Mariana Riquito follows, in which the author critically analyzes the predominant narrative on climate crisis and the ongoing efforts for energy transition, particularly the 'new extractivism' or 'green extractivism', exemplified by the rush for lithium exploration in the mountainous region of Barroso, located in the Vila Real district of Portugal.<sup>12</sup> Like Houart, Riquito rejects the modern dualistic ontology that separates society and nature. Moreover, she emphasizes the dichotomy between climate and ecology present in major academic and political discourses. Understanding the non-human as mere raw material to be exploited, along with the almost exclusive focus on carbon emission reduction, legitimizes socially and ecologically destructive practices, and reduces public responses and policies to climate change to the goal of capital accumulation, often through technological solutions, suppressing all dialogue focused on alternatives.<sup>13</sup> The author therefore calls for an 'ontological transformation', recognizing the coexistence of plural and interrelated worlds, human and non-human – the pluriverse.<sup>14</sup> Inspired by ecofeminist literature, Riquito speaks of an ethic of care for all beings on Earth and encourages us to view the mountains of Barroso as living entities and guardians of life, prompting a reconsideration of the principles and values that shape the 'green' transition.


The theme of energy transition is also the focus of Vera Ferreira's essay. More specifically, the author addresses energy democracy, a concept encompassing democratic control over the energy industry, the redistribution of political and economic power, the recognition of universal rights to renewable energy, and the promotion of social and environmental justice opposed to 'green capitalism'. Ferreira argues that this perspective provides a unique outlook for both critically analyzing the political, socio-economic, and environmental implications of changes in the energy sector and imagining alternative futures. In her article, she presents a set of criteria for identifying and analyzing tools for energy democratization on the national scene. Portugal has committed to becoming a carbon-neutral economy by 2050, making it crucial to ensure that the cost of the energy transition is not unfairly borne by the most vulnerable groups. Ferreira also points out relevant future research lines for comparative politics and international relations, such as analyzing the application and development of energy democracy in the European Union, understanding similarities and differences between member states, and studying the international evolution of energy democracy, addressing challenges in forming a global movement, questioning its Eurocentrism, and evaluating its application in regions of the Global South.<sup>15</sup>

The dossier continues with an essay by Lorenzo Feltrin and Emanuele Leonardi on working-class environmentalism, particularly the convergence between the struggle for workers' rights and climate justice towards an ecological transition originating from local contexts. The authors criticize public policies for mitigating climate change oriented toward economic growth, to the detriment of social well-being. Feltrin and Leonardi remind us that the working class played a fundamental role in politicizing environmental issues, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, in the fights against industrial pollution. They argue that the ecological transition will only be effective if it addresses the concerns of workers (industrial, informal, unemployed) and the communities they belong to. The authors highlight the example of the workers' struggle at the GKN automotive factory in Florence, Italy, who joined climate justice movements to demand a fairer and more democratic ecological transition. They proposed the creation of a workers' cooperative to produce and distribute components for electric vehicles as a sustainable alternative to producing parts for luxury cars. Studying such cases of association between the working class and the environmental movement can help us understand how and under what conditions are workers willing to organize themselves for the sake of an ecological transition.<sup>16</sup>

Thais Lemos Ribeiro and Verônica Korber Gonçalves conclude the dossier with an essay dedicated to the negotiation of carbon credits with the Munduruku indigenous people within the scope of the application of the mechanism for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+), an international initiative negotiated under the United Nations climate regime. The authors research how this mechanism interacts with considerations of local governance and justice, exploring five key ana-

lytical perspectives provided by the Earth System Governance Project (a research network dedicated to advancing knowledge at the interface between global environmental change and governance), namely ‘architecture and agency’, ‘democracy and power’, ‘justice and allocation’, ‘anticipation and imagination’, and ‘adaptation and reflection’. The case study on the Munduruku reveals the complex interaction between global climate governance, indigenous rights, and environmental justice, disclosing the need for a more inclusive, fair, and transparent REDD+ framework that considers diverse worldviews and the interests of all parties involved. Ribeiro and Gonçalves thus contribute to our understanding of the intricate relationships between global climate governance and actors on the ground, emphasizing the importance of exploring spaces wherein different worldviews intersect, as well as recognizing and respecting the rights and knowledge of local communities in environmental initiatives and beyond.<sup>17</sup>

Due to their critical nature, the contributions included in this dossier prompt us to reflect on (and research) the crisis facing the planet and the ecological transition beyond the limits of the conventional paradigm shaping world politics. In particular, they challenge us to view the crisis and its possible solutions with imagination and creativity, from the perspective of the most vulnerable, those who remain invisible (the non-human, the indigenous populations, and other local communities, the working class, among others), towards the construction of a truly fairer and more sustainable world for all beings – human and non-human – that inhabit it. This is one of the possible (and more desirable) ways to build the much-needed post-anthropocentric perspective of contemporary and future international relations.

In an era of planetary ecological crisis, to change is of the essence. However, the necessary change will never materialize if we do not allow ourselves to find and explore other perspectives and possibilities, or the various worlds that coexist on the planet. 

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# REIMAGINING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN TIMES OF ECOLOGICAL CRISIS A DIALOGUE ON MULTISPECIES JUSTICE<sup>1</sup>

Carlota Houart

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND NON-HUMAN AGENCY

Both as a discipline and as praxis, international relations (IR) have historically been permeated by an anthropocentrism and state-centrism that fundamentally condition their approach to the challenges the world faces, particularly the ecological crisis.<sup>2</sup> As a result of this bias, IR have disregarded the role of non-human entities as political agents.<sup>3</sup> This attitude of detachment from the environment by IR (with the exception found in traditional geopolitical studies) prevents the discipline from addressing the complexity and multidimensionality of ecological challenges. This has led authors like Joana Castro Pereira to call for a reimagining of the field.<sup>4</sup>

This appeal is shared by other IR theorists, such as Anthony Burke and colleagues, who assert that the Earth is not 'our' world, meaning a human world built upon an inert nature ready to be manipulated and controlled by human interests, institutions, and practices – which constitutes the prevalent narrative in IR.<sup>5</sup>

Instead, the Earth is a complex set of worlds that are shared, co-constituted, created, destroyed, and inhabited by and with countless other beings and forms of life.<sup>6</sup> Burke *et al.* assert that International Relations are being unraveled by the reality of the planet, as the relevant spaces of

## ABSTRACT

This article departs from a political ecology perspective to build a critique against the predominant anthropocentrism in international relations. It argues that the acknowledgement of the agency of non-human beings, and their inclusion and representation in political decision-making processes, is not only essential to create socio-ecological sustainability in the multispecies communities that we are all part of, but that it is also, fundamentally, a matter of justice. The article introduces the concept of multispecies justice as a possible ally in a dialogue for the reimagining of international relations, both as a discipline and as institutional practice, so that the latter can more adequately, effectively, and fairly respond to the current context of planetary crisis. As an illustrative example of what multispecies justice is (or can become) in practice, the article resorts to the case of rivers and to some of the non-anthropocentric initiatives that have been arising for their protection, conservation, or restoration.

*Keywords:* international relations, anthropocentrism, non-human agency, multispecies justice.





## RESUMO

### REIMAGINAR AS RELAÇÕES INTERNACIONAIS EM TEMPOS DE CRISE ECOLÓGICA: UM DIÁLOGO SOBRE JUSTIÇA MULTIESPÉCIES

Este artigo parte de uma perspectiva de ecologia política para construir uma crítica ao antropocentrismo dominante nas relações internacionais. Argumenta que o reconhecimento da agência de seres não humanos e a inclusão e representação dos mesmos em processos de decisão política são não só essenciais para criar sustentabilidade socioecológica nas comunidades multiespécies de que todos fazemos parte, mas são também, fundamentalmente, uma questão de justiça. O artigo introduz o conceito de justiça multiespécies como possível aliado num diálogo para a reimaginação das relações internacionais enquanto disciplina e prática institucional, recorrendo ao caso dos rios e a algumas das iniciativas não antropocêntricas que têm surgido para a sua proteção, conservação ou restauração.

*Palavras-chave:* relações internacionais, antropocentrismo, agência não humana, justiça multiespécies.

action in the present day are no longer solely the local, the international, or the global, but rather the planetary. IR are academically, institutionally, and legally organized around the modern system of nation-states instead of around ecological and socio-environmental systems (e.g., biosphere, ecosystems, biomes), within which human life unfolds in interrelation with numerous other beings and ecological processes.<sup>7</sup>

The world as portrayed by conventional IR is state-centric, capital-centric, and anthropocentric; a picture that must be radically transformed into a project of reconfiguration of the global in order to respond to the planetary.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, due to its ontological and epistemological premises, IR recognizes a set of human actors or human creations (e.g., states, international organizations, civil society) and denies or undervalues the agency of multiple other subjects that escape the anthropocentric lens.<sup>9</sup> It is, therefore, essential to rethink and transform hegemonic political institutions and norms, especially regarding who is included or excluded, who is heard or silenced – not only, but also, beyond the human.<sup>10</sup> This project of creating a planetary politics will require amplifying marginalized voices and creating new forms of solidarity and governance among subjects.<sup>11</sup>

Rafi Youatt also identifies anthropocentrism as a prevailing characteristic of IR.<sup>12</sup> Societies and human beings are constantly interacting and relating to other species and forms of life. Within Western modernity, whose pillars are the system of nation-states and the global capitalist economy, these interactions and modes of relating to non-human nature have been dominated by anthropocentric perspectives and norms that encourage and legitimize the unlimited exploitation of nature and the beings and resources that constitute it.<sup>13</sup> However, anthropocentrism is not inevitable; the goal, in any case, is not to forego a human perspective, but rather to promote a transformation of moral and political frameworks guiding our relationships with other species.<sup>14</sup>

The ecological crisis (e.g., deforestation, pollution of rivers and oceans, depletion of water resources, global decline in biodiversity, global warming, melting glaciers, extreme climate events), as well as the failure to mitigate it, can be understood as the most visible manifestation of this anthropocentrism underlying academic thought and environmental policies at all levels of governance.<sup>15</sup> However, an anthropocentric interpretation of the world, essentially rooted in the separation between humanity and nature,

is deeply contradicted by the very essence of the crises we currently face.<sup>16</sup> Ecological problems, which are not bound by national borders and cannot be dealt with autonomously or independently, lay bare the need to address our current condition through a holistic and multidimensional perspective. Understanding the ecological crisis and developing effective and appropriate responses to the challenges it poses requires breaking with conventional practice and thought equipped with a post-anthropocentric vision.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, it is possible to argue that these crises are ultimately the product of a dominant paradigm not only in IR but more broadly in modern (or industrialized) human societies. This point is crucial as it helps us understand the complexity and multidimensionality of the collective challenge we face: it is not just a problem concerning IR or other specific disciplines and practices but rather a dominant narrative permeating the political, economic, and sociocultural structures of Western modernity. This

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narrative arises from the Cartesian dualistic paradigm, which represents the belief in human superiority over other forms of life, legitimizing their control, transformation, and exploitation beyond any socioecological sustainability.<sup>18</sup>

The dualistic paradigm has accompanied the development of the state and the market, and expanded beyond Europe through imperialism and colonialism, currently materializing, more obviously and destructively, in the global capitalist economy.<sup>19</sup> It is, therefore, logical to assume that responses to the ecological crisis must necessarily entail a rupture with this dominant paradigm, notably through the recognition of other narratives, practices, and modes of relation with non-human nature stemming from non-Western and indigenous cultures and peoples.<sup>20</sup> Mihnea Tănăsescu refers to the descriptive-prescriptive nexus to argue that how we describe the world (description) profoundly impacts how we act upon it (prescription).<sup>21</sup> Despite 'Anthropocene' being one of the most popular terms today when discussing the crises we face, Tănăsescu suggests the term 'Eocene' to emphasize that ecological processes and environmental and climate changes are profoundly challenging human sociopolitical organizations, necessitating consideration of the agency of non-human beings and co-constituent ecological processes of the world and reality. The question naturally arises: how can non-human agency be reflected politically (i.e., in prescriptive terms)? How should politics respond to this reality?

## **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM**

In recent years, several proposals have emerged – from the fields of Political Theory, Critical Theory of International Relations, post-humanisms, and political ecology, among others – that can be understood as non-anthropocentric in their intentions or content.

These proposals suggest ways to break the traditional conditioning of IR and to consider the subjectivity, agency, and modes of communication of non-human beings in sociocultural, political, economic, and environmental processes.<sup>22</sup> These contributions stem from the so-called ‘non-human turn’ in the social sciences and emerge alongside new political and legal projects aiming to transform dominant modes of relating to non-human nature, as seen in the international movement for the rights of nature. The challenges posed by these non-anthropocentric proposals to the dominant paradigm within International Relations illustrate the fact that all living beings are born and live their lives within multispecies communities.<sup>23</sup> This means that no living being (including humans) exists in isolation, and that, on the contrary, we all are part of networks of interdependence and mutuality with animals, plants, ecosystems, and elements such as water in the worlds we share and co-create. In this sense, Youatt calls for the development of interspecies relations.<sup>24</sup>

From Robyn Eckersley’s proposal for the establishment of ecological democracies that allow the representation of the interests and needs of non-human beings and future generations through the appointment of human spokespeople;<sup>25</sup> to Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka’s proposal for the construction of political systems that recognize non-human animals as members of the polis or citizens of their own sovereign societies;<sup>26</sup> to Anthony Burke and Stefanie Fishel’s proposal for the creation of eco-regional assemblies that allow for the representation of biomes and ecosystems in international politics,<sup>27</sup> all of them share the common goal of reorienting the way modern human societies relate to the non-human world.

This endeavor is crucial if we intend to find robust and appropriate responses to the ecological crisis. However, the proposals for a reimagining of IR that have emerged in recent years still linger on the margins. It is thus essential to create further dialogue between concepts, movements, and initiatives, as well as to foster increasing inter- or transdisciplinarity to reflect on different knowledge and practices. Inter- or transdisciplinarity is, after all, one of the qualities of IR, which is why I believe that they have the potential to reinvent themselves and respond to the socioecological reality in which we live; after all, several of these non-anthropocentric proposals arise from politics or even Critical International Relations Theory.

Pereira argues that the current notion of ‘international’ requires new ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies.<sup>28</sup> This is undoubtedly necessary, although it is also important to critically question the term ‘new’, recognize and (re)valorize ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies (often ancestral) that form the basis of multiple non-Western and indigenous cultures and knowledge systems, which have been (and continue to be) repeatedly silenced and erased during imperialist and colonial periods and, more recently, through global capitalism.<sup>29</sup> This process of reclaiming and (re) valuing other narratives, practices, and modes of relating to non-human nature should also accompany efforts to achieve justice for indigenous and non-Western peoples, who

have been and continue to be exploited by colonial and anthropocentric capitalism, along with other species and ecosystems.

In this regard, it is also important to emphasize that, despite making up less than 5% of the world's human population, indigenous peoples bear the responsibility for the protection and conservation of around 80% of global biodiversity.<sup>30</sup> Here we come across a fundamental point: the ecological crisis inevitably and profoundly involves issues of justice. However, existing concepts (such as 'environmental justice' or 'climate justice') fail to do justice to the subjectivity and agency of the multitude of beings and forms of life that are intertwined in networks of vulnerability, loss, and extinction, but also of resilience, survival, and co-existence with humans.<sup>31</sup> These concepts remain, first and foremost, about human beings. Therefore, the concept of *multispecies justice* has been introduced to reorient political dialogues about justice, particularly in the current context.<sup>32</sup>

In line with Pereira's suggestion for the creation of new ontologies, new methodologies, and new epistemologies, I understand the concept of multispecies justice as one of these 'new' creations – based, however, on principles and worldviews long existing in different non-Western cultures and geographies<sup>33</sup> – with profound ramifications at the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and ethical-political levels. Bringing this concept into the realm of IR paves the way for a non-anthropocentric dialogue that can inspire and promote the development of narratives, practices, and modes of relationship that are more just and capable of addressing the complex socioecological reality in which we live today. There are two main reasons why I believe this concept is useful for IR. First, because justice issues are inherently political, as they concern relations between subjects, particularly power relations, and how these relations enable the construction or destruction of common worlds, include or exclude certain subjects, and are attentive to or silence certain voices. Second, because the multispecies dimension is much more representative of the world (or worlds) in which we truly live than an anthropocentric perspective that rejects non-human subjectivity and agency.

### **TOWARDS TRANSDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUES: IR, POLITICS, AND MULTISPECIES JUSTICE**

The term multispecies justice aims to draw attention to the fact that all forms of life on the planet – human, animal, plant, rivers, mountains, forests, oceans, etc. – are inseparable and interdependent. This suggests that the worlds we co-inhabit are created and transformed by a variety of beings and forms of life with agency, of which only some are human. Consequently, in a context of increasing loss, vulnerability, and injustice such as the ecological crisis, speaking of justice in these shared worlds must necessarily include the multiple subjects (both human and non-human) that constitute them. At its core, multispecies justice invites us to expand the concept of justice to encompass a greater number of subjects, including individuals of other species (animals, plants) and communities of subjects (ecosystems such as rivers or forests).<sup>34</sup> Furthermore,

it represents not only a new research agenda but also a fundamentally normative project based on the rejection of the fiction of liberal individualism in favor of recognizing the vast and complex ecological matrix of relationships that sustain all life.<sup>35</sup> Multispecies justice is also described as an intersectional approach, which recognizes that multiple identities and categories of difference and inequalities (e.g., gender, ethnicity, class, age, ability, species, being) exist simultaneously and are intertwined in processes of oppression and injustice.<sup>36</sup> One of the main goals of multispecies justice, according to Brandon Jones, is the devising of a politics for constructing a common world that accounts for the needs and livelihoods of a diversity of human and non-human life.<sup>37</sup> This interpretation is especially important because it emphasizes that multispecies justice is essentially a political issue. It concerns the relationships and power structures that exist not only among human societies and groups but also between humans and other beings and forms of life. Adopting a non-anthropocentric position that recognizes these relationships and structures encourages us to reflect on two central aspects. On the one hand, it involves considering how our practices and policies affect a wide variety of subjects, both human and non-human, and how excluding non-human beings from our ethical-political considerations is not only discriminatory and unjust but also leads to destructive modes of socio-ecological relationships. On the other hand, in response to these processes of discrimination and exclusion, it involves exploring how it is possible to include and represent the perspectives, interests, and needs of non-human beings in our political decision-making processes.

These two central aspects involve a series of complex questions and challenges. A key question that arises is: what does multispecies justice mean (or might mean) in practice? After all, this is the central axis of IR: it is about developing relationships or modes of



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political relation and practice. In turn, this question inevitably leads to one of the greatest challenges or dilemmas of various post-anthropocentric proposals for the political inclusion and representation of non-human beings: how to truly know the perspectives, interests, and needs of non-human nature? This challenge is, of course, closely related to questions of voice, language, and communication.

As any debate on multispecies justice (and associated issues) is extremely complex, in the next section I present a few ideas through the case of rivers and some movements and initiatives that have emerged to protect, conserve, or restore them.

### **MULTISPECIES JUSTICE IN PRACTICE? THE CASE OF RIVERS**

Rivers are examples of justice subjects according to the 'new' political-normative agenda of multispecies justice. They constitute the primary freshwater resources on the planet,

covering less than 1% of the Earth's surface but (along with other freshwater ecosystems) representing the habitat of approximately 10% of living species.<sup>38</sup> These places them among the most biodiverse ecosystems on the planet.<sup>39</sup> Rivers are indeed crucial not only for the subsistence of countless human riverine communities but also for the survival of multiple species of animals and plants.

However, the planet's rivers have increasingly faced challenges caused by the combination of two threats, namely human action and infrastructure (e.g., channelization, dam construction, pollution, excessive water extraction, and depletion) and the impacts of the climate crisis (e.g., prolonged drought periods, major floods). Combined, these threats have severely affected the water quality and environmental flow of rivers, placing them among the most threatened ecosystems on the planet. Since the 1970s, over 80% of global populations of freshwater species have been driven to extinction due to the state of increasing river degradation<sup>40</sup>. It is important to note that these ecosystems face a combination of threats constituted by a dominant and anthropocentric paradigm of water resource management and governance, i.e., by processes of transformation and industrialization whose impacts are further exacerbated by the climate crisis.

Over the past decade and a half, several networks, movements, and alliances have emerged to address river degradation and protect, conserve, or restore them. Comprising different groups of human actors (e.g., local communities and indigenous peoples, environmental organizations, legal experts, scientists, academics), these mobilizations focus on different agendas, including the recognition of river rights at the local, national, or international levels. The latter agenda is particularly relevant as it is part of a counter-hegemonic paradigm that has gained popularity in recent decades, that of rights of nature.

Campaigns and initiatives advocating for the recognition of river rights are often inspired by indigenous, non-Western ontologies and worldviews that recognize and relate to rivers as living entities, as ancestors or sacred relatives, or as multispecies communities.<sup>41</sup> The most emblematic cases include the Whanganui River in Aotearoa New Zealand; the Atrato River in Colombia; the Vilcabamba River in Ecuador; the Ganges and Yamuna rivers in India; and the Martuwarra/Fitzroy and Muteshekau-shipu/Magpie rivers in Australia and Canada, respectively. These cases have called for the recognition of specific rights for the rivers and their human guardians (e.g., biocultural rights in the case of the Atrato River) or the acknowledgment of legal personhood status for the rivers themselves (e.g., in the case of the Whanganui River). These movements highlight not only the subjectivity and agency of the rivers themselves but also the fact that they are co-constituted by a multitude of beings (human, animal, plant, mineral, spiritual) actively participating in their socioecological processes. In recent years, several academic articles have been published exploring the agency of other beings in the processes of river transformation and preservation. For example, the role that fish play in debates about dam removal in rivers;<sup>42</sup> the indirect action of otters in ecological



restoration processes;<sup>43</sup> or the deliberate habitat creation and transformation work of beavers, leading hydraulic engineers and ecologists to consider them as potential partners in river restoration processes.<sup>44</sup> These works invite us to think of ecosystems such as rivers as co-constituted territories transformed by multiple agents and their interactions, turning these agents into political actors.

Rivers are a good example to illustrate debates around multispecies justice because, on the one hand, they constitute shared worlds where multispecies communities live intertwined in patterns of vulnerability, (in)justice, life, and death in the current context of ecological crisis; and, on the other, because in recent years cases have emerged that help us think about how multispecies justice can be materialized. For example, the fishing communities of the Magdalena River in Colombia, whose lives and livelihoods are intimately connected with the fish and other animals that inhabit the river, practice daily forms of interspecies communication where people refer to the voices and songs of the fish or their ability to predict the weather based on what the animals tell them.<sup>45</sup> During an interview, an artisanal fisherman from one of the communities along the Magdalena River stated:

‘Of course fish have a voice. [...] An animal sings, and I already recognize the sound. We feel accompanied by the animals, and they stay by our side – animals, birds, *babilla* caimans when they start roaring. You won’t believe it, but the fish also have their song’.<sup>46</sup>

This description is an example of interspecies relations that – fundamentally for the purposes of this article – also manifest in the development of ethical criteria for fishing, aiming to safeguard populations and respect specific aspects of fish life (for example, it is forbidden to fish in areas where the fish are sleeping). However, these practices are disregarded by others engaged in intensive fishing or causing pollution in rivers, particularly through mining. They are also overlooked by a national water resource management and governance system that has led to a growing loss of biodiversity in ecosystems like the Magdalena River, jeopardizing the survival of animals and plants and the livelihoods of human communities.<sup>47</sup>

The fact that artisanal fishermen are not recognized as political actors in the Colombian context means that their perspectives, practices, and ethics are not taken into account by the dominant system.<sup>48</sup> This harms not only the human subjects in the region but also various subjects of other species that are interrelated with them, and whose survival also depends indirectly on these human communities and the more sustainable and just ways of relating to non-human nature that they practice. In a case like this, multispecies justice could mean the recognition, inclusion, and participation of artisanal fishing communities in political decision-making processes regarding the management and governance of the Magdalena River, which could also indirectly promote better representation of the interests and needs of other beings, such as fish.

This example points to one of the possible responses to the challenge of representing non-human beings in political processes: the appointment of human spokespersons or guardians.<sup>49</sup> Certain groups and human individuals may be better positioned to represent non-human perspectives, such as indigenous peoples and communities that have lived for thousands of years in relationships with non-human nature based on principles of care, interdependence, respect, and reciprocity;<sup>50</sup> people who study or work directly with animals, plants, or ecosystems (e.g., biologists, ecologists, geologists, botanists); academics and legal professionals involved in socio-environmental causes, animal or nature rights, or with an interest in more ecological deliberative and democratic processes; and concerned citizens. In most cases, the challenge lies in creating more inclusive, intersectional, and less anthropocentric platforms within the constraints of a hegemonic political system that is still fundamentally anthropocentric, capitalist, and colonial.

IN MOST CASES, THE CHALLENGE LIES IN CREATING MORE INCLUSIVE, INTERSECTIONAL, AND LESS ANTHROPOCENTRIC PLATFORMS WITHIN THE CONSTRAINTS OF A HEGEMONIC POLITICAL SYSTEM THAT IS STILL FUNDAMENTALLY ANTHROPOCENTRIC, CAPITALIST, AND COLONIAL.

The case of the Whanganui River in Aotearoa, New Zealand, can serve as an inspiring example here. Known as the first river in the world to be granted legal personhood status in 2017, the Whanganui is recognized as a living entity and a sacred ancestor or relative of the Māori indigenous communities that have lived alongside its banks for multiple generations. The Te Awa Tupua Act, which acknowledges this river as a living being and a multispecies community, includes Māori language representing fundamental non-anthropocentric principles (such as the expression *Kōau te Āwa, kō te Āwa kō au*, ‘I am the river, and the river is me’) and has established a co-governance and co-management system for the river involving Māori representatives and Pakeha (non-indigenous New Zealanders) representatives.<sup>51</sup> Although there are criticisms of the likelihood of real success for the Act or the possibility that it could be a strategy of ‘appeasement’ of Māori territorial and anti-colonial claims (not granting them effective sovereignty over their ancestral territories),<sup>52</sup> other voices also argue that, despite ongoing challenges and tensions, this case represents a positive step, particularly in processes of recognizing indigenous ontologies.<sup>53</sup> As Māori ontology acknowledges the subjectivity and agency of non-human beings, as well as the interdependence between these beings and humans, connecting them through relationships based on principles of interdependence, respect, care, and reciprocity, I would say that this is also a case of multispecies justice.

### **HOW TO BRIDGE IR AND MULTISPECIES JUSTICE?**

The current context of ecological crisis demands a profound restructuring of the dominant paradigm in the international system. Above all, what is required is a transformation of


hegemonic narratives about the world we live in, and of the practices and modes of relation with non-human beings that have thus far (within modern human societies) led to increasing levels of socioecological destruction and forms of multispecies injustice.

IR are not equipped to respond in an adequate and fair way to the challenges we face today, but the discipline has the potential to do so if it undergoes a post-anthropocentric reinvention. The potential stems from a few particular aspects. For example, the recognition of the existence of different scales or levels of action within IR (local, international, and global) can help understand the importance of acting simultaneously or concertedly at various levels. While I agree with Burke *et al.*'s call for the development of a planetary policy, I believe it is fundamental to also act within the levels traditionally recognized by IR and the current political-legal system. As the examples of the Magdalena River and the Whanganui River demonstrate, localized practices and political processes at the local level can profoundly impact modes of relation between humans and non-humans, contributing to greater socioecological sustainability or environmental protection. Additionally, local initiatives can have a national or international impact, as is the case with the Whanganui River, whose example has inspired movements and campaigns for the recognition of river rights worldwide in recent years.

Acting at the local or regional levels can also be more accessible and feasible than trying to develop global and planetary policies or strategies, especially because the international system is still governed by nation-states with different political priorities and agendas, deeply influenced by the global capitalist economy. In this sense, I agree with Robyn Eckersley, who argues that one cannot assume that the State will cease to be a particularly powerful political actor in the near future. This requires, on the one hand, seeking strategies to transform the State itself and, on the other hand, strategies for action outside or beyond it.<sup>54</sup>

Here lies the relevance of post-anthropocentric proposals that have been developed in different political fields and within Critical International Relations Theory. Implementing these proposals also requires negotiation and diplomatic practices that are already part of the field of IR and should continue to be developed, particularly through a non-anthropocentric perspective that seeks to represent and negotiate on behalf of non-human beings.

Finally, IR must leverage its inter- or transdisciplinarity to establish and promote more engaged and profound dialogues with other concepts, movements, disciplines, and fields of action, such as those advocating for forms of multispecies justice. This transdisciplinarity should be manifested not only through a dialogue between the social sciences and the natural sciences but also through an intercultural dialogue that recognizes different knowledge systems (e.g., traditional ecological knowledge, non-Western and indigenous sciences and knowledge) historically excluded by Western modernity. Building alliances and new forms of solidarity and governance may not only contribute

to greater socioecological sustainability but also respond more effectively, appropriately, and justly to the ecological crisis. 

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## ENDNOTES

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# BEYOND THE MASTER NARRATIVE OF 'GREEN' MODERNITY A CRITICAL READING OF THE ENERGY TRANSITION<sup>1</sup>

Mariana Riquito

## INTRODUCTION

Climate change is widely regarded by policymakers as the greatest planetary emergency of the contemporary world. In recent years, it has taken a central place in global political, social, and economic discussions. Recognizing that climate change is caused by greenhouse gas emissions – a consequence of an energy system based on the extraction and burning of fossil fuels – states have developed ‘energy transition’ programs and policies. The energy transition refers to the shift in the global energy industry to move away from fossil-based energy production and consumption, such as oil, natural gas, and coal, towards renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar or hydropower, and energy storage systems. This process, which involves the adoption of new low-carbon technologies, infrastructures, and innovations across all productive sectors, is also known as ‘decarbonization’ or ‘carbon neutrality’.<sup>2</sup>

Aligned with the goals of the Paris Agreement (2015), the European Union (EU) has embraced the energy transition as an urgent, necessary, and top-priority commitment for the coming decades. In December 2019, the European Commission announced the European Green Deal, a set of legislative proposals aimed at achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.<sup>3</sup> At the national level, in 2019, the Roadmap for Carbon Neutrality 2050 was published, which, in alignment with the Paris Agreement, sets out the vision and pathways for Portugal to achieve carbon neutrality by mid-century.<sup>4</sup>

## ABSTRACT

This article critically reflects on the dominant narrative on the climate crisis and its energy transition programs. The energy transition has been reproducing the structures of the contemporary capitalist system, namely its extractivist, technological and financial apparatuses. Inspired by critical perspectives that challenge the dichotomous divisions perpetuated by the hegemonic ontological framework, I argue that in order to face the ecological crisis, we must adopt practices based on non-dualistic ontologies that recognize the deep and close relationships of (inter)dependence that sustain life on Earth.

*Keywords:* energy transition, carbon neutrality, ontology, carbon reductionism.

## RESUMO

**PARA ALÉM DA NARRATIVA-  
-MESTRA DA MODERNIDADE  
«VERDE»: UMA LEITURA  
CRÍTICA DA TRANSIÇÃO  
ENERGÉTICA**

Este artigo, de carácter reflexivo, procura tecer uma leitura crítica à narrativa dominante sobre a crise climática e os seus programas de transição energética. A transição energética



em curso, ao concentrar-se exclusivamente na redução das emissões de dióxido de carbono, negligência a complexidade das interdependências ecológicas, reproduzindo, assim, as políticas ontológicas hegemônicas, baseadas numa ideia de separação entre os humanos e os não humanos. Esta perspectiva redutora legítima, por sua vez, novas formas de destruição socioecológica e padroniza as respostas à crise climática, disciplinando comportamentos sociais, estandardizando políticas públicas à escala mundial e eliminando possibilidades de diálogo sobre outras soluções. Nesse sentido, a transição energética tem vindo a reproduzir e a expandir as estruturas do sistema capitalista contemporâneo, nomeadamente os seus aparatos extrativos, tecnológicos e financeiros. Inspirando-me em perspectivas críticas, que desafiam as divisões dicotômicas perpetuadas pelo quadro ontológico hegemónico, argumento que, para fazer face à crise ecológica, devemos adotar práticas que repousem em ontologias não dualistas, e que reconheçam, por isso, as profundas e íntimas relações de (inter) dependência que sustentam a vida na Terra.

*Palavras-chave:* transição energética, neutralidade carbónica, ontologia, reducionismo carbónico.

This transition is unleashing a global growth in demand for raw materials known as ‘transition minerals’, namely lithium, cobalt, graphite, copper and nickel, required to manufacture green technologies. Lithium – which is used in the rechargeable batteries of electric vehicles and energy storage systems – has been leading this race for ‘transition materials’. The Portuguese government views the energy transition as an opportunity to place the country in a position of leadership within the European continent<sup>5</sup> and has been actively granting prospection and exploitation contracts for lithium since 2016.<sup>6</sup>

In this race for the new ‘white gold’, the mountains of Barroso, in the district of Vila Real, and many other territories, were transformed into a commodifiable resource to be exploited. In the villages of Covas do Barroso, Romainho, and Muro – classified by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization as World Agricultural Heritage –, there are plans to open what would potentially be the largest open-pit lithium mining exploitation in Western Europe. This mining project has faced strong opposition from local communities. In response to the green rhetoric of the energy transition, they assert that ‘Green is Barroso!’ The voices opposing these projects suggest that decarbonization strategies are a contested realm, politically, socially, and ontologically.

While the prevalent narrative of fighting climate change points to decarbonization as a univocal solution to combat climate change, this narrative has been gradually deconstructed by some social movements and academic research. The energy transition, by focusing almost exclusively on carbon emissions, reduces the ecological crisis to a climate crisis, and the climate to a matter of atmospheric carbon. Considering that these challenges are ‘addressed’ by attacking only one part of the problem, the energy transition reproduces the dominant ontology, ignoring the intricate network of deep interdependencies that sustain life on the planet. In doing so, it is justifying new forms of ‘green’ extractivism, perpetuating the dominant extractivist-capitalist paradigm that reduces nature to a mere resource to be exploited for the accumulation of capital through technological solutions.<sup>7</sup>

In this article, I attempt to offer a critique of the dominant narrative on climate change, arguing that it rests on a reductionist perspective which, in turn, legitimizes new forms of socioecological destruction and standardizes the responses to the climate crisis, disciplining social behaviors and homogenizing public policies on a global scale.



Drawing inspiration from critical perspectives that challenge the dichotomies perpetuated by the hegemonic ontological framework, I argue that, to address the ecological crisis, we must adopt non-dualistic ontologies that recognize the deep and intimate relationships of (inter)dependence that sustain life on Earth. In this sense, the ‘transition’ that is urgently needed is much more radical than a simple shift in the origin of our energy sources: it requires a transformation in how we relate to the world, interact amongst humans, and engage with non-human beings. In other words, an ontological transformation is required. From this ‘ontological turn’, it will be possible to construct and reclaim narratives that encompass many worlds, and not just the world of Western modernity, now painted ‘green’.

### **THE MODERN ONTOLOGICAL ARCHITECTURE AND THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS**

This article departs from the theoretical-philosophical premise that the levels of social, climate, environmental, and ecological degradation we experience are the result of a

severe separation between humans and non-human nature. This separation, accentuated, reinforced, and accelerated by the structures of the contemporary capitalist system, finds its ideological substrate in the modern ontological model. By ‘ontological model’, we mean the fundamental assumptions that inform our conceptualization, understanding, and structuring of reality and the world around us. ‘Ontology’, as a branch of philosophy, refers to the

THE LEVELS OF SOCIAL, CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND ECOLOGICAL DEGRADATION WE EXPERIENCE ARE THE RESULT OF A SEVERE SEPARATION BETWEEN HUMANS AND NON-HUMAN NATURE. THIS SEPARATION, ACCENTUATED, REINFORCED, AND ACCELERATED BY THE STRUCTURES OF THE CONTEMPORARY CAPITALIST SYSTEM, FINDS ITS IDEOLOGICAL SUBSTRATE IN THE MODERN ONTOLOGICAL MODEL.

study of being, of the real, and of reality. In the field of social and human sciences, over the last decade, an ‘ontological turn’ was inaugurated which has led to reflections on how ontological questions intersect with political, social, and economic issues.<sup>8</sup> By ‘ontological politics’, we refer to how the assumptions we hold about the nature of the world (about reality) shape human action within it, and, consequently, generate political, social, and economic effects, including eco-ethical effects.<sup>9</sup>

Currently dominant, the modern ontological architecture structures the world – and our understanding of it – in a dualistic and hierarchical manner. According to Latour,<sup>10</sup> the ontological model of modernity is based on a ‘Great Divide’ between nature and culture/society – and ‘this Great Divide serves as the ontological substrate for a system of hierarchies that dualistically structure social reality’:<sup>11</sup> man/woman; reason/emotion; mind/body; subject/object; civilized/savage. These binaries are, in turn, understood as ‘pairs of opposites with unequal value’,<sup>12</sup> that is, the domain of ‘culture’ is seen as ‘superior’ to that of ‘nature’, ‘reason’ is deemed ‘superior’ to ‘emotion’, and so forth. From an ecofeminist perspective, these dualisms are deeply gendered: they are associ-

ated with and attributed to one of the two genders, conceived binarily. ‘Masculine’ is associated with the categories of ‘reason’ and ‘culture’, and ‘feminine’ with the categories of ‘emotion’ and ‘nature’.<sup>13</sup>

The modern way of thinking and acting on the world, by structuring reality dualistically, legitimizes the control of one domain over the other.<sup>14</sup> Only by understanding ‘culture/society’ as ‘superior’ to ‘nature’ can we justify its control, colonization, and extraction. Modern scientific rationality has reduced the complexity of the networks that make up life to a mechanical and mechanistic logic: instead of understanding nature as a living organism, it perceives it as a machine, capable of being dominated by human wisdom.<sup>15</sup> This ‘march of reason over Nature’ has been legitimizing the manipulation of the latter for human benefit.<sup>16</sup> The hegemonic ontological model suggests that we are the ‘owners and masters’ of nature and that we can exceed its limits without suffering the effects of this depletion<sup>17</sup>.

We understand, then, how this ‘Great Divide’ – this disconnectedness between us, human beings, and nature – served as an ontological substrate for the practices that caused the levels of socioecological destruction we witness today, and are continuously accelerated and expanded by the structures of the contemporary capitalist system. In fact, by turning nature into a resource to be controlled, the modern ontological model has provided ideological support for the two foundational pillars of contemporary capitalism: infinite growth and continuous development. Similarly, this ontological dualism has historically justified relations of oppression, domination, and exploitation towards those beings ontologically constructed as ‘inferior’ – perceived as ‘close(r) to nature’, ‘feminine’, ‘savage’, and/or ‘emotional/irrational’.<sup>18</sup> If, on the contrary, we understood ourselves as an intrinsic part of nature, we would not have decimated, exploited, or corrupted it. If we understood ourselves as an intrinsic part of an intricately interconnected whole, from which we depend on, we would not have perpetuated relations of oppression nor destroyed so many of the webs that sustain the possibilities of life.

### **THE ONTOLOGICAL POLITICS OF THE ENERGY TRANSITION**

The ongoing energy transition reflects the modern worldview and its ontological architecture of separation. The first reason why the energy transition reproduces the ontology of separation is that it focuses solely on the climate – what Charles Eisenstein<sup>19</sup> has termed ‘climate fundamentalism’. The second reason is that, within climate issues, it almost exclusively focuses on greenhouse gas emissions, particularly on carbon dioxide – a phenomenon known in the literature as ‘carbon reductionism’.<sup>20</sup> In doing so, the energy transition does not question the ontological model that underlies socioecological destruction and, instead of combating the latter, ends up creating new forms of ecological violence and ontological standardization, as we will see.

By focusing almost solely on the issue of climate change, the hegemonic narrative perpetuates the idea that to achieve a ‘sustainable’ future, it is sufficient to ‘solve’ the challenge of climate change. In the terms of Charles Eisenstein,<sup>21</sup> this ‘climate funda-

mentalism' is based on an ontology that conceives the climate as a sphere distinct and separate from ecology, which is, in turn, decoupled from socio-political and economic issues.<sup>22</sup> In this sense, this narrative reproduces the modern ontology that views the natural world as mechanical, thereby ignoring the complexity of the biosphere, 'in which everything is interconnected',<sup>23</sup> and reducing it to mathematical calculations. The networks that sustain life cannot be reduced – or flattened – solely to climate issues: climate change itself is affected (and impacted) by numerous other ecological processes, from soil erosion to rising sea levels, to the extinction of various non-human species, desertification, and deforestation, as well as numerous other socio-economic processes, such as mass consumption or intensive farming. From an ecological perspective, reality is not a 'collection of separate and causally dissociated phenomena',<sup>24</sup> but rather the result of a complex matrix of interdependencies that extend beyond climate alone. The dominant narrative on environmental issues, by giving almost exclusive priority to climate concerns, also falls into what Eisenstein<sup>25</sup> coined as 'carbon reductionism'. According to Gelderloos, 'carbon reductionism' refers to the process through which 'the ecological crisis is reduced to and compartmentalized into a simple (and technocratic) issue of atmospheric carbon'.<sup>26</sup> Once again, carbon reductionism reproduces the dominant ontology that ignores broader ecological contexts and the more-than-human webs that sustain the possibility of life on Earth. By pinpointing a single and identifiable cause – the reduction of carbon emissions – the dominant narrative on the energy transition facilitates the conversion of nature into quantifiable and commodifiable units. Indeed, climate policies conceptualize environmental parameters into technical aggregates and mathematical schemes (such as biodiversity or carbon offset schemes; carbon credits) that 'decouple socio-economic activity from environmental materiality' and 'rely on a disembodied ontology' that creates a 'distancing' between human activities and the intertwined and 'embodied natures' on which they depend.<sup>27</sup> This worldview is heavily grounded in modern scientific rationality, which perceives nature as a machine, capable of being calculated, quantified, and manipulated. Currently, this ontology serves the purposes of the financialized capitalist system: for instance, carbon emissions can be bought and sold in the global carbon market. Similarly, by treating 'climate' as something we can 'solve' or 'fix' by reducing – or stopping – carbon emissions, this perspective favors what is referred to in the literature as a 'techno-fix'. A techno-fix involves using technology to solve a problem created by previous technological interventions. According to Evgeny Morozov, who coined the term 'technosolutionism',<sup>28</sup> this practice is, in fact, 'an ideology that recasts complex social phenomena to neatly defined problems with definite, computable solutions'.<sup>29</sup> The ideology according to which it is possible to find a solution to all problems by relying on new and better technologies favors the structures of the capitalist system, as these technological solutions are mediated by the market. In the case of addressing climate change, we can argue that we are witnessing the emergence of a 'techno-sci-

entific dogmatism',<sup>30</sup> because, to a large extent, the 'solutions' presented for this challenge are based on the development of new technological infrastructures. The case of geoengineering is emblematic: geoengineering refers to a set of technologies aimed at intentionally modifying the Earth's system on a large scale to fight climate change.<sup>31</sup> Geoengineering is widely considered in the literature as a form of 'technosolutionism' because it is a solution strictly based on technological responses that do not address the root of the problem.<sup>32</sup> Although still controversial, these technologies have been gaining prominence in political and academic discussions on climate mitigation<sup>33</sup> and operate under the same ontological perspective that reduces the challenges we face to a carbon emission problem.

In this sense, we can argue that the 'climate crisis' and, in particular, 'carbon', have become a metanarrative legitimizing a series of policies and mechanisms with serious

■ IN THE NAME OF THE GREEN ENERGY TRANSITION, GOVERNMENTS AND COMPANIES HAVE JUSTIFIED THE EXPANSION OF NEW EXTRACTIVE FRONTIERS, SUCH AS THE PLANNED LITHIUM MINES IN THE BARROSO MOUNTAINS.

environmental, ecological, social, and economic consequences. In the name of the green energy transition, governments and companies have justified the expansion of new extractive frontiers, such as the planned lithium mines in the Barroso mountains.

■ The commodification and subsequent extraction of nature are justified as a means to achieve carbon neutrality, regardless of their social, human, or ecological impacts. The synonymy created between 'green' or 'sustainable' and 'carbon-neutral' is problematic because it equates mining extraction with sustainability.

Moreover, even in the case of so-called 'renewable' energy technologies and infrastructures – such as solar panels, wind turbines, or high-voltage power lines –, several authors have pointed out how the so-called 'renewable' infrastructures and technologies require continued reliance on both extractivism and fossil fuels.<sup>34</sup> The works of Alexander Dunlap,<sup>35</sup> in particular, have extensively documented the continuum connecting green industries to fossil industries. Highlighting both the similarities and continuities between green industries and extractive industries, and between renewable energies and fossil fuels,<sup>36</sup> Dunlap<sup>37</sup> suggests the term 'fossil fuel+' or 'fossil fuel 2.0' as more appropriate to designate renewable energies since these do not imply a veritable abandonment of fossil fuels. In the words of York and Bell,<sup>38</sup> considering that 'there has been no real shift from one [energy] source to another', as so-called 'renewable' energies also depend on fossil fuels, the current paradigm more closely resembles an 'energy addition' rather than an energy transition.

In addition to justifying environmentally destructive practices, the hegemonic narrative of the energy transition by establishing a universal definition of what 'saving the planet' entails – closes off the possibilities for dialogue about other potential solutions. The urgency to reduce carbon emissions is shared among actors from various spheres

– governments, companies, and social movements – forming an unequivocal global consensus. In this sense, we can consider that a ‘regime of truth’ has been created, in Foucault’s terms, based on a technoscientific rationality that, under the guise of scientific neutrality, hinders the possibility of questioning it. The rhetoric of inevitability – the need to undertake an energy transition dependent on critical raw materials – coupled with the global consensus, prevents any questioning of this narrative.<sup>39</sup>

This dominant metanarrative on the climate crisis favors, on the one hand, the standardization of public policies, and on the other hand, processes of political governmentality and of social disciplining. On the one hand, it promotes the homogenization of public policies, as they now have to follow master guidelines from authorities, such as the United Nations or the EU. The standardization of the responses to the problem (carbon reductionism) and the framing of the problem (climate fundamentalism) only serve to favor hegemonic power structures, which, in the name of saving the planet, create new markets, new profit opportunities, and expand their technological apparatus. On the other hand, the standardization and homogenization of public policies worldwide are creating a new form of governance, by which the political decisions are now dictated by technoscientific rationality. This new governmentality is also disciplining the ‘behaviors’ of consumers: the ‘good’ consumer is the one who complies with decarbonization directives and, therefore, buys an electric car, for example.

In this section, I sought to demonstrate how modern ontological assumptions are currently reproduced in the energy transition. This narrative reaffirms the ontology that views humans as ‘owners and masters’ of nature, understood, in its turn, as ‘fixable’, ‘measurable’, and ‘commodifiable’. In doing so, it is creating new forms of ecological violence, such as lithium mines, and accentuating the ontological standardization of climate discourses, normalizing the desire to aspire to a ‘green’ future facilitated by ‘technosolutions’. With these reflections, my intention has not been to undermine the seriousness of the threat posed by the climate crisis or the need to adopt policies to reduce carbon emissions. Climate change is undoubtedly a serious global problem, with highly detrimental social, political, economic, and ecological consequences – which can be felt already, especially among the world’s most vulnerable populations and regions. It is foreseeable that these consequences will continue to spread in an increasingly intense and frequent manner. With this article, I aimed to frame the challenge of climate change within the vast – and complex – networks of socioecological (inter)dependencies, emphasizing that it constitutes nothing but a symptom of the disruption of the networks that sustain life. Furthermore, the purpose of these reflections was to demonstrate how the hegemonic narrative, by framing decarbonization as inevitable, constrains sociological and anthropological imagination about alternative futures and perpetuates the dominant understanding of the world that triggered the crisis we seek to address. This onto-logics – which claims for itself the right to be the only one – dismisses other ‘onto-epistemological possibilities for “knowing nature” and conceptualizing socioenvironmental

issues'<sup>40</sup> outside the ontology of separation and the logics mediated by the market and technology. Taking this perspective seriously, several authors have suggested that it is necessary to go *beyond* the dominant energy transition, thus dreaming of other futures.

### **UNDOING THE ENERGY TRANSITION: SACRED MOUNTAINS, BODY-TERRITORIES, AND MORE-THAN-HUMAN NETWORKS**

Recognizing that the ontological dualism of modern ontopolitical architecture has created a profound disconnection between humans and the non-human world, it is urgent to adopt ontologies that undo these dualisms. In the words of ecofeminists Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, the dimension of the crises we face invites us to 'think differently', to adopt 'cosmologies' that recognize that 'life in Nature is sustained by the bias of cooperation, mutual care, and love'.<sup>41</sup>

In the specific case of the energy transition and the climate crisis, we might say that the problem does not limit itself to carbon emissions – it is about caring for a living

IN THE SPECIFIC CASE OF THE ENERGY TRANSITION AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS, WE MIGHT SAY THAT THE PROBLEM DOES NOT LIMIT ITSELF TO CARBON EMISSIONS – IT IS ABOUT CARING FOR A LIVING PLANET, NURTURING THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN NETWORKS THAT ALLOW THE FLOURISHING OF THE MULTIPLE EARTHLY BEINGS THAT COEXIST ON THIS PLANET.

planet, nurturing the more-than-human networks that allow the flourishing of the multiple earthly beings that coexist on this planet. In his latest book, biologist and mycologist Merlin Sheldrake<sup>42</sup> brilliantly shows how life is a network of interwoven and entangled webs. In it, Sheldrake takes us on a journey into the mycelial networks, which correspond to the tangled mass of fungal hyphae that can extend for endless

kilometers, sustaining life in this living organism called Earth. Sheldrake explains how all life on Earth is the result of symbiotic relationships, i.e., relationships of deep and close intimacy formed between unrelated organisms. The human body, for example,

'consists of more microbes than human cells; there are more bacteria in our intestines than stars in the galaxy; it's the approximately 40 trillion microbes living inside and outside our bodies that nourish us, producing the minerals we depend on and enabling us to digest the food we consume'.<sup>43</sup>

Our 'self' is, after all, more bacterial and microbial than human. *Being* human involves *being* non-human. We are composed – and decomposed – by other beings. In the words of the anthropologist Donna Haraway, 'all earthlings are kin in the deepest sense', they are 'linked in complex, intertwined, and "tentacular" ways'.<sup>44</sup> In other words, we are alive because we are profoundly and intimately interconnected. Nurturing these intimate relationships among all terrestrial beings and adopting ethics and practices of care that go beyond the human is how we can sustain life on Earth.

The concept of ‘body-territories’ (*cuerpos-territorios*) – developed by decolonial community feminists from indigenous Americas – illustrates the ontological unity between our bodies and the territories we inhabit. We cannot think of ourselves without considering how we relate to the space we inhabit, and which we build, and shape. Going further, and adopting an ecological perspective, we can say that our bodies are themselves territories – hosting thousands of beings –, which, in turn, inhabit a larger territory, itself composed (and decomposed) by many other bodies and beings. In contrast to green energy transition projects for whom mountains are perceived as empty spaces awaiting to be occupied (a highly patriarchal view), a more-than-human ethics of care recognizes mountains as living entities. Mountains are an ecology of existences: they are bodies-territories hosting hundreds of beings, giving life to more-than-human networks, and organizing social and economic practices around them. Mountains, in Barroso and elsewhere, are guardians of life. To ravage them in the name of a ‘green’ transition would entail destroying the life they nurture, consequently affecting all life on Earth.

## CONCLUSION

As ecofeminist researcher Stefania Barca<sup>45</sup> argues, Western modernity has created a ‘master narrative’ about the world that needs to be ‘rejected: this is because by accepting it, we subscribe to the idea that history has come to an end and that no more resistance can be expected. That the world is what the master made of it’.<sup>46</sup> This master narrative, now painted green in the form of the energy transition, urgently needs to be deconstructed. According to Barca, undoing the master model involves telling stories that escape its ontological colonization – the ‘other-than-master stories’<sup>47</sup>). In Barroso, with all its contradictions, we find some of these stories: here, every day, people care for their lands and animals; they communally share and manage the water and help each other in everyday practices; they harvest the plants they have sown and drink those that they have fermented. Through slow rhythms, more-than-human networks are sustained, fostering harmony between social and economic practices and their environmental and ecological realities. It was partly because of these reasons that this region was the first in Portugal to be classified as World Agricultural Heritage by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 2018. This organization also recognizes the significant number of ‘very significant and relatively intact environmental areas found in this region’, hosting ‘numerous plant and animal species that are extremely important for nature conservation’.<sup>48</sup> The ‘green’ energy transition projected for these mountains – in the form of various open-pit mines – is the opposite of what they represent and safeguard. In times when nurturing life is more urgent than ever, it seems counterproductive to invest in ‘solutions’ that are, in fact, part of the problem. REI

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**31** Geoengineering technologies can be either solar radiation management technologies or carbon dioxide removal technologies.

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**36** We can, by way of example, consider the life cycle of a wind turbine, often regarded as the most 'renewable' energy technology. The construction and assembly of wind turbines require the extraction of hundreds of tons of materials – from steel to concrete, fiberglass, copper, and rare materials such

as neodymium and dysprosium – which has a significant ecological, climatic, and energy impact. To install a turbine, it is necessary to transport these raw materials in large trucks or ships, flatten hectares to make way on elevated terrain, and erect the structures with large cranes – all of which require the use of fossil fuels, notably diesel. Additionally, a key ingredient for the operation of wind turbines is oil, which ensures lubrication, hydraulic systems, and turbine gears. During their operation, wind turbines often end up affecting part of the populations of surrounding birds and bats, as well as the life of the soils where they are located. Finally, at the end of their life cycle, wind turbines – as well as solar panels or lithium batteries – leave behind tons of non-recyclable waste.

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# ENERGY DEMOCRACY

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH AGENDA FOR THE PORTUGUESE CASE<sup>1</sup>

Vera Ferreira<sup>2</sup>

### REPOLITICIZING ENERGY

Although often presented as a technocratic exercise, the energy transition is inherently political, as it is traversed by power relations. For this reason, it opens up a space for dispute and the construction of alternatives. The genesis of energy democracy is precisely associated with the demand for a politicization of the energy transition. Energy has always been fertile ground for conflict, being ‘shaped by ongoing processes of political and social contestation’.<sup>3</sup> This can be illustrated by various movements that, in recent years, have sought to reclaim democratic control of the energy sector, envisioning and beginning to build more just and democratic energy futures.

The proposals of energy democracy start with the redefinition of energy, interpreting it as a public good and a universal right. They then move on to the redistribution of political and economic power and the assurance of social justice throughout the energy transition. Thus, ‘a democratic response to the climate emergency requires immediate resistance to fossil fuels coupled with the deployment of renewable energy systems at a pace that sustains and can be sustained by democratic governance.’<sup>4</sup> Energy democracy would thus constitute a democratic instrument mediating the energy transition, reconciling resistance against the *old* – the energy system fueled by fossil fuels – and the construction of the *new* – renewable energy systems.

### ABSTRACT

The genesis of energy democracy is associated with the demand for a politicization of the energy transition. Its dimensions include democratic control of the energy sector, the redistribution of political and economic power, the universal right to renewable energy and social justice. Energy democracy provides a unique lens to critically assess the political, socio-economic, and environmental implications of energy transitions. Therefore, based on the Portuguese case study, an analysis grid is developed that aims to facilitate the identification and evaluation of energy democratization instruments in the national context. A research agenda around energy futures in Portugal is also advanced.

*Keywords:* energy democracy, energy democratization, Portugal, energy transition.

### RESUMO

**DEMOCRACIA ENERGÉTICA: QUADRO CONCEPTUAL E AGENDA DE INVESTIGAÇÃO PARA O CASO PORTUGUÊS**

A génese da democracia energética está associada à reivindicação de uma politização da transição energética.



As suas dimensões incluem o controlo democrático do sector energético, a redistribuição do poder político e económico, o direito universal à energia renovável e a justiça social. A democracia energética concede uma lente original para avaliar criticamente as implicações políticas, socioeconómicas e ambientais das transições energéticas. Assim, partindo do estudo de caso português, é desenvolvida uma grelha de análise que pretende facilitar a identificação e avaliação de instrumentos de democratização energética no contexto nacional. É ainda avançada uma agenda de investigação em torno dos futuros energéticos em Portugal.

*Palavras-chave:* democracia energética, democratização energética, Portugal, transição energética.

In the United States, it was a fringe of the labor movement, integrated into the Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED), a global network of unions advocating for democratic control of the energy sector, alongside movements for environmental and racial justice, that first spread the idea of energy democracy. In Europe, the concept became popular within the German climate justice movement around 2012, with its dissemination mostly linked to energy cooperatives. The report *Resist, Reclaim, Restructure: Unions and the Struggle for Energy Democracy* systematized, for the first time, the strategic objectives of energy democracy.<sup>5</sup>

Firstly, to resist the dominant agenda of fossil fuel companies by uniting efforts to delegitimize the entire industry and reduce its political influence. Secondly, to reclaim the components of the energy sector that had been pri-

vatized and/or commodified for the public sphere. Thirdly, to restructure the energy system by democratizing it. This is an indispensable condition for massifying renewable energies, modernizing infrastructure, increasing energy efficiency, promoting job creation, and ensuring greater collective control.

Energy democracy is therefore necessarily multifaceted. On one hand, it is advocated by various sociopolitical movements that aspire to accomplish it, especially through changes in ownership relations and forms of energy access. On the other hand, as will be highlighted below, it is a concept that frames a rising research agenda, predominantly in the areas of social sciences and humanities.

In fact, the first articles in scientific journals were published from 2017 onwards, sparking a flourishing discussion around its definitions and typologies, attempts at operationalization on multiple scales, articulation with other concepts and movements, research agendas, and political action roadmaps. The proliferation of scientific research has contributed to the gradual affirmation of energy democracy, offering an original lens to critically assess the political, socio-economic, and environmental implications of energy transitions (themselves plural), by discerning the asymmetrical power relations underlying them and the mechanisms capable of (re)producing multidimensional inequalities.

Energy democracy, as a concept-discourse-movement-process-objective-research agenda, is a contested idea, making it difficult to assign an intrinsically and universally valid meaning to it. We propose to conceive it, for now, as an idea in constant motion and (re)construction, marked by geographical divisions and theoretical disagreements. Given the conceptual dispersion, energy democracy has been primarily understood through the alternative energy futures it allows to envision and

the operationalization attempts it stimulates, always contextual and rarely extrapolatable. Therefore, there are those who speak of energy democracies in the plural,<sup>6</sup> or even those who consider conceiving it as an ‘ongoing process of democratization’ and struggle for energy control, rather than a mere ‘future utopia’.<sup>7</sup>

The breadth of energy democracy allows for the coexistence of varied perspectives, from sociopolitical movements that see it as a tool to achieve systemic socioecological transformations, demarketing liberalized energy systems and reorganizing them according to democratic principles, to renewable energy cooperatives and communities (REC).<sup>8</sup> The latter are primarily engaged in the decentralization of renewable technologies and the potential (re)appropriation of energy by citizens. Both perspectives seek support in energy democracy, which simultaneously encompasses opposition to fossil capitalism – seen as the driver of the climate crisis and (re)producer of systems of exploitation and oppression – in a struggle for social, racial, environmental, and climate justice; and the implementation of local-scale renewable energy projects, turning citizens, previously mere consumers, into owners of energy production means and decision-makers of their own energy future.

These visions do not mutually exclude each other but urge us to think about energy democracy in different geographies, scales (from global to local), and to include a multitude of actors (from the State to citizens). However, this task is complicated by the absence of a consolidated analytical framework that enables geographically anchored conceptualizations of energy democracy, or at least the identification of dimensions that allow delimiting and characterizing it in specific political, socio-economic, environmental, and necessarily energy contexts.

ENERGY DEMOCRACY HAS BEEN PRIMARILY UNDERSTOOD THROUGH THE ALTERNATIVE ENERGY FUTURES IT ALLOWS TO ENVISION AND THE OPERATIONALIZATION ATTEMPTS IT STIMULATES, ALWAYS CONTEXTUAL AND RARELY EXTRAPOLATABLE.

## MEANINGS OF ENERGY DEMOCRACY

In a mapping of the uses of energy democracy, Szulecki observes that two meanings are attributed to it: on the one hand, it denotes the normative goal of decarbonization and energy transformation; on the other hand, it describes examples of decentralized civic initiatives, mostly bottom-up.<sup>9</sup> The author then proposes to understand energy democracy as an ‘ideal political goal, in which the citizens are the recipients, stakeholders (as consumers/producers<sup>10</sup>) and accountholders of the entire energy sector policy’.<sup>11</sup> The first critical conceptual review of energy democracy, ‘a politically oriented concept’, places it somewhere between ‘the narrower and more descriptive notion of ‘community energy’ – which emphasizes scale and geographic proximity – and that of ‘energy justice’, a powerful critical tool that can be used to incorporate injustices related to class, race, gender, or spatial inequalities.<sup>12</sup>

In the face of the diversity and fragmentation of the literature, and rejecting the imposition of a single definition, three core understandings of energy democracy are highlighted:

‘A *process* – which, through dispersed grassroots initiatives and a transnational social movement, is challenging the incumbents; an *outcome* of decarbonization – the more we move to a renewable and distributed system, the more the energy sector is democratized; a normative *goal* – an ideal to aspire to in an unspecified decarbonized future’.<sup>13</sup>

According to the first understanding, energy democracy would be simultaneously an ongoing process and a social movement driving it; the social movement then becoming both a product and a producer of energy democracy. In the second understanding, the terms are reversed: energy democracy would be the outcome of the change in material factors, notably the reorganization of energy systems and the gradual transition to renewable and distributed sources. In this case, technological transition would precede and enable political and social change. Finally, as a goal, energy democracy would be ‘an ideal to which communities can aspire, and a principle guiding policies and actions towards a just and democratic energy system’.<sup>14</sup> Energy democracy would be situated in a future horizon and depend on technological changes, but also on a politicization of the energy transition ‘informed by democratic ideals’.<sup>15</sup>

In a review of recent literature, the characteristics most frequently ascribed to energy democracy are systematically outlined, specifically: the inclusion of non-traditional actors – local communities, civil society organizations, and historically marginalized populations – in political processes related to energy; the transition to direct forms of citizen participation, such as prosumerism, community ownership, and cooperatives, which are deemed essential in the democratization of energy systems; and a preference for decentralized energy systems, seen as more democratic.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this diversity, there is a set of interdependent premises related to power, the economic system, social justice, energy production models, modes of ownership and control of the energy system, scales of action, and actors that allow framing energy democracy and outlining a preliminary characterization.

Firstly, it is imperative to recognize existing power structures and the opportunities and spaces of resistance available for those, such as the advocates of energy democracy, seeking to transform them.<sup>17</sup> Assuming that power relations within the framework of neoliberal capitalism are ‘profoundly anti-democratic’, any ‘emancipatory energy transition’ would require a transformation of existing power dynamics and a political strategy for its realization – ‘we need to think about building power’, emphasizes Angel – lest the effectiveness of democracy be limited.<sup>18</sup>

In the same vein, Thombs argues that democracy is a necessary but not sufficient con-

dition for a just transition, as most societies are permeated by asymmetric power relations that, in turn, shape and are shaped by energy.<sup>19</sup> The author points out that energy cannot be separated from the social processes that produce, distribute, and use it, since these are embedded in certain sociopolitical structures.<sup>20</sup> Paraphrasing Robert Cox, energy is always for someone and for some purpose;<sup>21</sup> the same holds true in the current transition towards renewable energies. Therefore, it is crucial to assess the political economy of renewable energies – who produces it, on behalf of whom, for what purpose, and for whose benefit.<sup>22</sup>

Energy democracy implies criticism of neoliberalism and the rejection of the ‘anarchy of liberalized energy markets’.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, it opposes the conversion of the capitalist model into green capitalism and the commodification of nature. Energy democracy aims to redefine the very notion of energy, interpreting it as a commons rather than a commodity, and incorporating it in a regenerative economic model rather than an extractive one, in harmony with the ecological limits of the planet.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, energy democracy recognizes how fossil fuel-based energy and economic systems – and the concentration of power and wealth associated with them – perpetuate socio-economic, racial, and gender inequalities.<sup>25</sup> In fact, movements advocating for energy democracy demand a socially just renewable energy system, steered by the public interest rather than profit, translated into universal access to energy, fair prices, and jobs with decent wages.<sup>26</sup>

In the energy transition towards renewables, the configuration of the energy production model – centralized versus decentralized – is unavoidable, as well as ownership and control of the infrastructure. Advocates of energy democracy tend to prefer decentralized models, emphasizing local scale and active citizen involvement in the management of the energy sector (organized, for example, in cooperatives or REC). In principle, decentralized production should increase democratic control of the energy infrastructure, prioritizing local socio-economic and environmental needs over profits and wealth accumulation.

However, some authors have warned against the dangers of romanticizing communities and the local scale, problematizing their main vulnerabilities and potential detrimental effects. Using the example of cooperatives, these may prioritize member incomes over the public good.<sup>27</sup> In a liberalized energy market in which competitive dynamics prevail, they may accentuate the lack of coordination; conversely, the threat of large private companies seizing decentralized projects should not be underestimated. There is also the anticipated risk of replicating inequalities, as joining a cooperative may require initial investments unaffordable for certain segments of the population.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, ‘local control is no panacea’.<sup>29</sup> On one hand, decentralization fosters various forms of democracy (deliberative, associative, and material); on the other hand, the presumption of intrinsic superiority of decentralized systems overlooks the multiple scales at which justice and democracy, as well as inequalities (of class, race, and gender), operate.<sup>30</sup> The nominal inclusion of previously underrepresented groups in decision-

-making processes does not automatically ensure a transfer of power, as power asymmetries may persist within communities and internal exclusion mechanisms.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, the actors and spaces of energy democratization are not limited to communities and the local scale. One should take note, in particular, of campaigns for the (re)municipalization of energy services and the role of public companies. If committed to social and labor justice objectives, these entities offer several advantages: they are governed by the public interest, employ more local workers, and can ensure the construction, operation, and maintenance of renewable energy infrastructure.<sup>32</sup>

At the national level, the role of governments in the energy transition stands out, especially in the swift and massive dissemination of renewable energies, which will involve reclaiming planning instruments.<sup>33</sup> Issues of coordination, redistribution, and investment, associated with the power of the State, are also relevant:

‘State institutions are deeply embedded within social relations of domination and oppression, from capitalism to colonialism to patriarchy. As such, the State will often frustrate endeavours towards emancipatory change. Yet, the State is no mere instrument of the ruling class: while it is structurally biased towards the reproduction of the status quo, struggle from within and outside the State can shift its form and function’.<sup>34</sup>

In this sense, State planning will be essential to replicate and expand energy democracy beyond a micro scale, effectively transforming the entire energy sector.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, challenges that transcend national borders, such as the climate crisis, the

CHALLENGES THAT TRANSCEND NATIONAL BORDERS, SUCH AS THE CLIMATE CRISIS, THE PROTECTION OF GLOBAL COMMON GOODS, THE ENERGY TRANSITION, AND THE DISMANTLING OF THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY, REQUIRE A RADICAL RESTRUCTURING OF THE GLOBAL POLITICAL ECONOMY.

protection of global Commons, the energy transition, and the dismantling of the fossil fuel industry, require a radical restructuring of the global political economy. In Fairchild’s view, for energy democracy to be truly transformative, it must inspire a global movement.

The author argues that the fossil fuel-based economic system is global, so its opponents

should build a countermovement that operates on the same scale.<sup>36</sup>

In short, democratic energy futures will likely consist of a mix of renewable technologies, ownership structures, and actors, and will require the compatibility, through political coordination on multiple scales, of centralized and decentralized production models. While production models and modes of ownership and control (from cooperatives and RECs to municipal or national public enterprises) are contested, the consensus is that political and economic power must be removed from the control of fossil fuel companies and transferred to the collective sphere.

## **ENERGY DEMOCRACY AND ITS CONTEXTS**



Since the Industrial Revolution, energy has been a field of political contention par excellence. The unequal distribution of finite reserves of fossil fuels has determined its geopolitical and economic significance. Indeed, the capitalist system is inexorably dependent on virtually unlimited energy production, given its vocation for wealth accumulation. Over the past two centuries, the expansion of capital has been umbilically linked to the extraction and burning of fossil fuels, earning it the designation in the field of political ecology as fossil capital.<sup>37</sup>

Energy, from raw material to final consumption, is therefore inherently political. The difference introduced by energy democracy is not only the recognition of energy as a political object but, above all, its redefinition: from a commodity in the capitalist system, it becomes a potential tool for democratization in the socioecological transition, reshaping its role in the pursuit of equally renewed political, socio-economic, and environmental goals. Thus, energy serves as the substrate for a broader democratization project. It is the starting point, or even a necessary condition, for political and socio-economic democratization as well.

In this sense, *energy democracy* might be interpreted merely as the culmination of this broader process of political and socio-economic democratization. This would mean that energy democracy would only be discernible and legitimate as a result, downplaying the preceding stages of its construction. There would be, therefore, no isolated manifestations of energy democracy within the framework of fossil capitalism.

This understanding might be overly simplistic, as it fails to take into account the prior and indispensable process of *energy democratization*. Energy democracy can be understood as a future goal whose construction starts in present through a process of progressive sociopolitical institutionalization.

This process unfolds simultaneously at multiple scales – local, regional, national, and international – and may involve multiple actors, from communities to the State. The temporal horizons, speeds, and viability of energy democratization are indeterminable in the abstract, as this process is influenced by the geographical, political, socio-economic, cultural, and environmental contexts in which it takes place.

Establishing a universal, ultimate, and all-encompassing definition of energy democracy may be premature not only because its construction is ongoing but also due to the distinct contexts in which democratization processes occur. It is vital to consider the varieties of democracy and the objective differences between socio-economic and political systems. Energy democracy, if accomplished, will necessarily be plural, reflecting the unique features of each democratization process.

While acknowledging this plurality, there is also a need to clarify the dimensions that allow the delimitation and characterization of energy democracy in specific contexts. Using the case study of Portugal, this article shall develop an analytical framework aimed at facilitating the identification and assessment of energy democratization instruments in the country. This exercise is particularly relevant given the increasing decen-

tralization of renewable electricity production – deemed by the European Commission and the Portuguese government the main means of citizen participation in the energy transition and, consequently, as a condition for a just transition.

Numerous actors and initiatives incorporate energy democracy into their discourse and action, contributing to its flexibility and growing popularity, but also to a conceptual dilution and dispersion that render it susceptible to co-optation and distortion attempts. Thus, the dimensions presented here – democratic control of the energy sector, redistribution of political and economic power, universal right to renewable energy, and social justice – can serve as reference points throughout the energy democratization process. On the one hand, the breadth of this delineation allows for distinguishing the diversity of typologies emerging in the field; on the other hand, it is circumscribed enough to avoid misunderstandings in recognizing energy democratization instruments, thwarting potential attempts at misappropriation.

While it is assumed that democracy and democratization are not autonomous spheres of analysis, it is considered that energy democratization can be partially grasped through its instruments, i.e., conduits that contribute to strengthening the dimensions of energy democracy. More specifically, energy democratization unfolds into two interdependent

ENERGY DEMOCRATIZATION UNFOLDS INTO TWO INTERDEPENDENT STRATEGIES: RESISTANCE TO FOSSIL CAPITALISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ALTERNATIVE ENERGY FUTURES.

strategies: resistance to fossil capitalism and the construction of alternative energy futures. Each of them involves the use of a wide range of instruments, requiring action within democratically elected political institutions and beyond them, in a hybrid of

representative democracy and direct democracy, prompting a dynamic of co-construction in multiple directions along power hierarchies. Both strategies rely on collective mobilization and organization, as well as dialogue and alliance-building with other deeply rooted sociopolitical movements (labor movement, climate justice, social justice) with whom energy democracy shares a common agenda. In processes of energy democratization, the role of citizens is not limited to individual and atomized participation, for example, as prosumers – indeed this might ultimately result in the expansion of private ownership of energy production means.<sup>38</sup> On the contrary, their involvement extends beyond the domestic sphere, bringing them closer to the community and the public space. Citizens can be involved, for instance, in local communities and other movements, cooperatives, associations, unions, or political parties. Their actions are focused on spaces such as learning institutions, workplaces, and places of residence. Repertoires of collective action may include protests and demonstrations, campaigns, civil disobedience, assemblies (residents, workers, consumers), as well as pressure on political institutions, candidacies for political office, and also the creation of collective projects around renewable energy.

It is worth noting that democratization instruments are not limited to the so-called civil

society. That might ultimately limit its scope, keeping it on the margins and therefore away from the spheres of power. For energy democracy to be institutionalized, the democratization process cannot do without the power dynamics emanating from the central State, local authorities and public bodies, public companies, and political parties.

Judging by the attempts to operationalize energy democracy that are beginning to emerge in the field, cooperatives, REC, or other collective initiatives related to renewable energy would, in theory, be privileged instruments for energy democratization. However, given the risks of romanticizing the ‘local’ and the ‘community’, as several authors warn, their effective contribution to strengthening the dimensions of energy democracy should be assessed by considering a set of markers. Indeed, each dimension – democratic control of the energy sector, redistribution of political and economic power, universal right to renewable energy, social justice – must include criteria that, on the one hand, consolidate the delimitation of energy democracy and, on the other, assess whether certain initiatives to decentralize the production of renewable electricity are truly instruments of energy democratization.

The development of these indicators starts from premises that reflect certain expectations regarding the configuration and results of energy democratization instruments. These premises concern acceptable and desirable forms of ownership and control in an energy democratization process, actors who have legitimacy to conduct them, the degree of democraticity and inclusion of decisions, the improvement of citizens’ material conditions, and the fight against socioeconomic inequalities.

Therefore, democratic forms of ownership and control are all those that enable public and/or collective ownership and control of renewable electricity production, transportation, and distribution infrastructure (e.g., cooperatives, associations, public companies) and, consequently, allow the transfer of power to the public and/or collective sphere, i.e., to political subjects considered legitimate, such as collectively organized citizens and their democratically elected representatives. Retrieving the first strategic objective of energy democracy, it is imperative to resist the dominant agenda of fossil fuel companies and gradually reduce their political influence, which implies progressively removing them from the energy system. Instead, cooperation between/with actors such as local communities and citizens’ movements, cooperatives, associations, unions, local authorities and public bodies, political parties, sociopolitical and environmental movements should be favored, as this may facilitate the incorporation of energy democracy into their agendas.

Moreover, democratic and inclusive decision-making processes, i.e., those that allow the redistribution of political and economic power, require active participation of citizens and communities in decision-making processes. This can translate into direct involvement in the management of renewable energies (through cooperatives and REC, for example) or the ability to demand accountability from their representatives for decisions regarding collective energy futures (e.g., the location, size, and ownership

of renewable energy projects or legitimate uses of that energy).

On the other hand, energy democratization instruments should yield improvements in the material conditions inherent in the universal right to renewable energy, conceived as access to essential energy services that should include at least renewable electricity for various domestic uses at a fair price and the increase in energy efficiency and self-sufficiency. They should also contribute to tackling socioeconomic inequalities with a view to the eradication of energy poverty, the creation of jobs in the energy transition, and a reduction in territorial asymmetries.

Below are the criteria that integrate the four dimensions of energy democracy and that, together, constitute an analytical framework that can be applied to identify and assess energy democratization instruments in Portugal, specifically regarding decentralized production of renewable electricity. This matrix will allow testing potential examples of energy democratization instruments, particularly initiatives in Portugal that self-identify as ‘Renewable Energy Communities’, or even exposing attempts to co-opt energy democracy. Note that these markers are not absolute or definitive. As the energy transition progresses, it may be necessary to supplement this list with new elements that express the specificities of the energy democratization process in Portugal.

Democratic control of the energy sector:

- Type of ownership and control adopted.
- Identification of the types of democracy (participatory, associative, and material) in action. Questions can be raised, such as: Are there elected bodies responsible for all decision-making, or do decisions mostly result from collective deliberation? Are decisions made by majority or unanimity?
- Scope of the right to vote, determining on what occasions it applies and who can vote.

Redistribution of political and economic power:

- Presence of fossil fuel companies and/or private renewable energy companies.
- Cooperative relationships between/with specific actors (local communities and informal groups of citizens, cooperatives, associations, unions, local authorities and public bodies, political parties, sociopolitical and environmental movements).
- Temporality, regularity, and formats of citizen and local community participation. It is intended to determine if this participation occurred from the beginning or only in a more advanced stage, if it is frequent or occasional, if it takes one or multiple formats.
- Distribution of revenues from renewable electricity production. Questions may include, for example, whether they benefit the community as public goods or are privatized.

Universal right to renewable energy:

- Guarantee of access to essential energy services (at a minimum, renewable electricity for domestic uses).
- Fair pricing (should be equal to or lower than the price set for the regulated electricity

market, ensuring savings on the bill).

- Improvement of energy efficiency and thermal comfort inside buildings.
- Increase in self-sufficiency, which can be measured in terms of growing autonomy from private energy retailers.

Social justice:

- Participation free from financial constraints, meaning citizens have the possibility to participate regardless of their socioeconomic status.
- Inclusion of households suffering from energy poverty and/or benefiting from the social energy tariff.
- Direct or indirect creation of jobs with rights and dignified wages.
- Qualification and training of workers.
- Contribution to territorial cohesion, meaning specifically that social, economic, and environmental benefits are not restricted to urban and densely populated areas.
- Transfer of knowledge and best practices and support for other initiatives.

It is not required that an energy democratization instrument contribute to all dimensions simultaneously and strictly meet all criteria. It may even promote energy democracy through means not indicated here. On the other hand, an initiative to decentralize the production of renewable electricity is unlikely to be an energy democratization instrument if it does not reinforce at least one of these dimensions.

### **ENERGY FUTURES IN PORTUGAL: A RESEARCH AGENDA**

At a time when Portugal commits to achieving ‘carbon neutrality’ by 2050, it is only fair to avoid disproportionately burdening vulnerable groups, thereby reproducing multidimensional inequalities. A just energy transition must necessarily be grounded in energy democracy.

Decentralization is not necessarily synonymous with democratization. In fact, the decentralization of renewable electricity production through REC or other community-based initiatives will only be truly desirable if it contributes to democratic control of the energy sector, the redistribution of political and economic power, universal access to renewable energy, and social justice.

However, many of the REC initiatives emerging in Portugal reflect and may come to replicate the socioeconomic inequalities that permeate the country, as participation in such initiatives is strongly conditioned by citizens’ financial resources. On the one hand, investment guarantees ownership and control by REC members, but those who lack the means to participate are bound to be left out. In Portugal, given the alarming numbers of energy poverty affecting between 1.8 and three million people, a considerable portion of the population is automatically excluded.

If energy is understood as a right and not as a commodity, it is crucial to discuss the

role of the State in providing this public good and controlling the energy sector, expanding the spheres and scales in which energy democracy is typically conceived. The building of power and the progressive institutionalization of energy democracy require an analysis of planning tools, subordinated to ecological and social justice goals, which can be mobilized in the energy transition. It also requires a comparative analysis of energy democracy, especially within the European Union, exploring possible similarities and differences between member states. It is furthermore important to explore the international trajectory of energy democracy, the challenges in building a global movement, to challenge its Eurocentric bias, assess its applicability to the Global South, and investigate its incorporation into the discourse and practice of different international organizations.

Equally relevant is the assessment of the new relationships between emerging actors in the energy transition, such as REC, and incumbent actors, notably private fossil fuel companies, now transformed into renewable energy companies leading, to all practical purposes, the energy transition. Finally, it will be important to explore the asymmetric power relations that have transitioned from the fossil fuel era to the era of renewable energy, as well as tensions, potential dynamics of cooptation, and misappropriations of the ideas of ‘energy community’ and ‘energy democracy’.

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# WORKING-CLASS ENVIRONMENTALISM AND CLIMATE JUSTICE STRATEGIC CONVERGING FOR AN ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION FROM BELOW<sup>1</sup>

Lorenzo Feltrin | Emanuele Leonardi<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION: THE FAILURE OF THE ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION FROM ABOVE

Since the climate strikes of 2019, and even more so after the acknowledgment of the environmental roots of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ecological transition seems to be everywhere. While the European Union turned it into the cornerstone of its recovery strategy, some European Union governments have even established brand new ministries just for it. Nonetheless, a succinct historical recognition is sufficient to moderate such enthusiasm. In fact, it is at least since 1992 – year of the renowned Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro – that, under the aegis of the United Nations, the involved countries legislate according to a strategy that we can define as ‘ecological transition *from above*’. The core idea behind it is simple but ground-breaking: it is not true, as it was formerly believed, that environmental preservation and economic growth are mutually exclusive. To the contrary, the green economy – if properly understood – allows for internalising the ecological limit, which is transformed from a ‘blockage’ to capitalist development into the ‘foundation’ for a new cycle of accumulation.

Focusing our attention on transnational climate governance, the adaptation of such core idea is that even if global heating is a market failure, resulting from the fact that so-called ‘negative externalities’ are not accounted for, the only way to deal with it is the establishment of further

## ABSTRACT

This essay assesses the historical unfolding of the labour-environment nexus to argue that a particular form of it – the ecological transition *from above* – has been hegemonic in the last decades but is undergoing a deep crisis. In this context, a new process of strategic converging between working-class environmentalism and climate justice movements is being deployed within a new horizon, that of an ecological transition *from below*. Firstly, we discuss what such process implies for theoretical reflections about class composition and ecological activism. Subsequently, we delve into the case study of ex-GKN Factory (automotive sector, situated in Campi Bisenzio, near Florence, Italy) and its Workers’ Collective, which has been prominent in recent months to elaborate and practice strategic convergence.

*Keywords:* class composition, climate justice, noxious deindustrialization, working-class environmentalism.

## RESUMO

**AMBIENTALISMO OPERÁRIO  
E JUSTIÇA CLIMÁTICA:  
CONVERGÊNCIA PARA UMA  
TRANSIÇÃO ECOLÓGICA  
PARTINDO DO LOCAL**



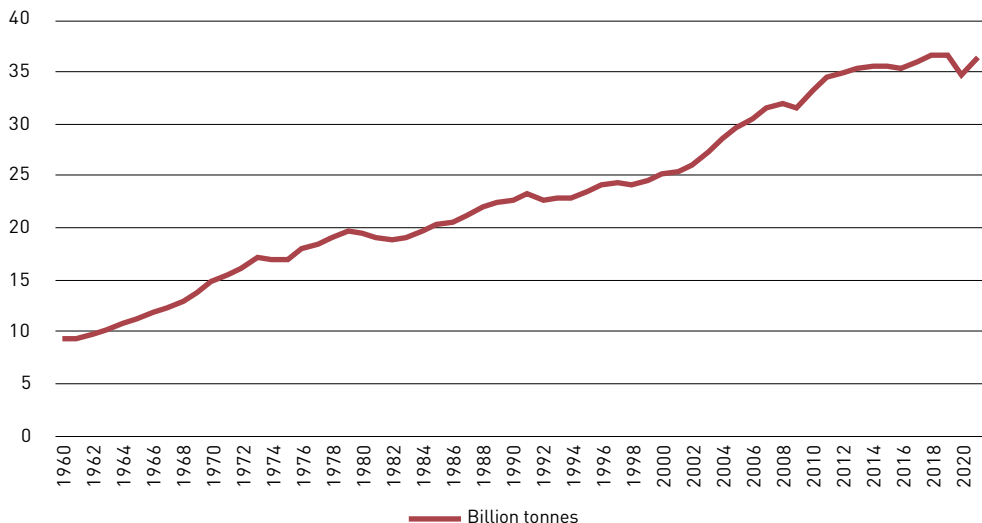
Este ensaio analisa o desenvolvimento histórico do nexa trabalho-ambiente, defendendo que uma forma particular deste – a transição ecológica *partindo do global* – tem sido hegemônica nas últimas décadas, mas atravessa uma profunda crise. Um novo processo de convergência estratégica entre o ambientalismo operário e os movimentos de justiça climática está a ser implementado dentro de um novo horizonte – o de uma transição ecológica *partindo do local*. O ensaio discute as implicações de tal processo nas reflexões teóricas sobre a composição de classes e ativismo ecológico. Posteriormente, aprofunda o estudo de caso da ex-Fábrica GKN e o seu Coletivo de Trabalhadores, que se tem destacado pela elaboração e pela prática da convergência estratégica.

*Palavras-chave:* composição de classes, justiça climática, desindustrialização nociva, ambientalismo operário.

markets to price – and exchange – different types of ‘nature as commodity’, for example forests’ capacity to absorb CO<sub>2</sub>. These are not wild trips to a Platonic realm of abstract theory: such flexible mechanisms for the com-modification of the climate, established by the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and relaunched by the 2015 Paris Agreement, are still the main economic policy tool deployed by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The message is clear: ‘give a price to nature – the problem will be solved’.<sup>3</sup>

Since the beginning, the promise of this ecological transition – applied to global heating – was ambitious and explicit: the ‘invisible hand’ of the market would be capable of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and, concurrently, of guaranteeing high profit rates. No doubt, a quarter-century is a timespan long enough to evaluate the effectiveness of a public policy, even more so in the case of the ecological crisis, as the urgency to take decisive action is in this regard obvious. The question, thus, is: have emissions declined?

**Graphic 1** > Global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from fossil fuels (1960-2021)



Source: Global Carbon Project.<sup>4</sup>

This graph is quite eloquent: no, emissions have not declined.

Rivers of ink have been spilled to debate the reasons for such debacle. Here are some hypotheses: excessive ‘generosity’ in the allocation of the quotas, imperfect information, ubiquitous corruption, design flaws, regulatory shortcomings. Nonetheless, the result – which is what counts – is crystal clear: placing the market as the pivot of economic and climate policy does not lead to a decline in emissions, but to further increases. Being aware of this, we can proceed to pose the question of strategic converging between workplace struggles and climate justice today.<sup>5</sup>

### **THE WORKING-CLASS ROOTS OF POLITICAL ECOLOGY**

Before reaching the heart of the matter, two warnings are in order. The first concerns the fact that the ecological transition *from above* suggests a compatibility – more, an elective affinity – between environmental protection and economic growth<sup>6</sup> only under the condition of relegating the labour movement, with its social function of contrasting inequality, to the margins – or, worse, to the role of an actor resisting change in the name of protecting ecologically unsustainable jobs. The subject of the green economy is the ‘self-entrepreneur’: daring, enlightened, smart. *Her/his* innovating charge, in fact, springs from an indifference towards the shackles posed by intermediate bodies (unions in the first place) and the time-wasting red tape of institutional mediation, particularly democratic practices. This generates a tendency – second warning – to assume that the cause of labour and that of environmentalism are hopelessly at odds. The underlying idea is that the job blackmail – ‘your health or your wage’ – is essential to the fate of industry.<sup>7</sup>

Such narrative has been given a certain historiographic legitimation but, even if the latter is not completely false, it is certainly partial and far from innocent. Dating the first widespread politicisation of the question concerning the environment to the period between the late 1970s and the early 1980s – that is, after the great cycle of struggles of the Fordist phase – is in fact an implicit internalisation of the defeat of the so-called Long 1968, an extraordinary season of mobilisations which had pointed to economic democracy as the necessary condition to contrast workplace environmental degradation – including air, soil, and water pollution – in some cases eliminating it completely. To avoid any misunderstandings, let us clarify that there is no way around the fact that such defeat happened. It is however legitimate to question its putative inevitability. Furthermore, the constant deterioration of the material bases of the biosphere’s reproduction makes it extremely urgent to look at that historical turn from a new perspective. The marginalisation of the labour movement, in fact, has not come with the eradication of industrial noxiousness. Despite decades of climate negotiations, over the last thirty years, the amount of greenhouse gas emissions has exceeded the total produced between the 18<sup>th</sup> century and 1990. It is necessary to break free from the fetish of a complicity between capital and the environment to open the space to (re)link ecological and labour movements. This is – in a nutshell – what we need, and it is perfectly exemplified by

the ex-GKN Plan for a Public Hub for Sustainable Mobility, as we shall see. Against this background, reinterrogating the conflicts around noxiousness that took place between the 1960s and the 1970s allows for demonstrating that ecological issues became widely politicised thanks to, not in spite of, the labour movement.<sup>8</sup> It was in the wake of harsh and innovative disputes such as those at FIAT's painting units<sup>9</sup> or Montedison's chemical plants<sup>10</sup> that the demand for a healthy environment – first in the factory and later in the territories surrounding it – was turned from a technicality into the political stake of trade union and social movement struggles.

AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, REINTERROGATING THE CONFLICTS AROUND NOXIOUSNESS THAT TOOK PLACE BETWEEN THE 1960S AND THE 1970S ALLOWS FOR DEMONSTRATING THAT ECOLOGICAL ISSUES BECAME WIDELY POLITICISED *THANKS TO*, NOT *IN SPIKE OF*, THE LABOUR MOVEMENT.

We can use the evocative formula 'working-class environmentalism'<sup>11</sup> to designate the constitution of a partisan knowledge focused on the workplace. The latter thus became a peculiar type of ecosystem as the working class turned it into its 'natural' habitat, ending up knowing it better than anybody else. It is not by chance that the conflicts against industrial noxiousness were the first to fiercely criticise the so-called 'monetisation of health', that is, the notion that wage increases and bonuses could compensate for the exposure to toxic substances – sometimes deadly – and other forms of occupational hazards. It was around the impossibility of indemnifying health damage that key figures of those battles – such as Ivar Oddone<sup>12</sup> in Turin and Augusto Finzi in Porto Marghera – centred enduring militant campaigns, whose trail is easily recognisable in the 1978 health reform, which established Italy's national health service.<sup>13</sup>

Two important elements must be added to the picture. The first is that the struggles against industrial noxiousness would not have had such a disruptive impact without their connection to broader mobilisations asserting the centrality of social reproduction, thanks to the developments of feminist thought. The second aspect is that the labour movement did not manage to reach a unified strategy: there rather emerged a tension between the perspective of a 'redemption of' wage labour – supported, for example, by Bruno Trentin, who at the time was the secretary general of Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici (FIOM), the largest metalworkers' union – and that of a 'liberation from' wage work, embraced by the workerist organisations such as Potere Operaio first and Autonomia Operaia later.

We think it reasonable to suppose that the incapacity to reconcile these two options around the common demand for a reduction of the working day (with no wage cuts) was a significant element in the defeat of that cycle of struggles. Instead of a working-class power over the qualitative composition of production, what occurred was capital's violent reaction:<sup>14</sup> fragmentation of labour, retrenchment of the welfare state, accelerated financialisation, as well as – environment-wise – the ecological transition *from above* we have just outlined. However, as the failure of such strategy becomes manifest,

the game reopens. The memory of the struggles of half a century ago takes on a renewed relevance today and the question of strategic converging between workplace disputes and climate and environmental mobilisations reveals itself as an extremely timely one.

### **‘CONVERGING TO RISE’, WITHIN AND AGAINST THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS**

The defeat of the Long 1968 propelled us into a world of *noxious deindustrialisation*, a phrase that designates employment deindustrialisation in areas where significantly noxious industries are still operating.<sup>15</sup> According to the recently updated estimates by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the global share of manufacturing employment has slowly but steadily declined from 15.6% in 1991 to 13.6% in 2021. Over the same period, fossil fuel-generated carbon emissions – which include those from devices produced by industry but used in all other sectors and by final consumers – increased from 23 to 36 yearly billion tonnes (as shown by the graphic in the Introduction). Furthermore, between 1991 and 2018, the emissions generated by industry directly shifted from 4.4 to 7.6 billion tonnes according to Climate Analysis Indicators Tool. In sum, the logic of profit resulted in both (relative) job losses in the factories, with the precarisation of employment that usually follows them, and in the deepening of environmental devastation.

The unprecedented temperatures, droughts, poor harvests, melting glaciers, and deaths caused by extreme weather that we witnessed in 2022 are the umpteenth confirmation that the situation is dramatic. We are in the ecological crisis, not merely as the victims of the highly unequally distributed impacts of environmental devastation along class, ‘race’, and gender lines on a global scale. We are in the crisis because, in our society, the subsistence of the working class depends on capitalist work and therefore most people depend on the infinite growth of commodity production. In this sense, the job blackmail does not concern highly noxious productive facilities only, it is rather an intrinsic and transversal property of capitalism, which appears with variable levels of intensity in different contexts.

To pose the question of how to strengthen an environmentalism from below, we think it useful to update the method of class composition<sup>16</sup> analysis along three lines: 1) an expanded conception of the working class, defined by the compulsion to sell its labour power; 2) a conception of work including both production and reproduction; 3) a conception of working-class interests<sup>17</sup> encompassing both the workplace and the community (or territory).<sup>18</sup>

Firstly, we consider as part of the working class all those who – dispossessed from ownership and control of significant magnitudes of means of production – live under the compulsion to sell their labour power, both for the production of commodities and for the reproduction of additional labour power, independent of whether they find stable buyers or not. Even if this conceptualisation excludes the middle class – to which capital delegates some responsibilities in the management of society – it is nonetheless

broader than the narrow dominant views; broad enough to include the unemployed, reproductive workers, informal workers, subordinated intellectual workers, and dependent self-employed workers.

Secondly, following social reproduction feminism,<sup>19</sup> we define as capitalist work all those activities – waged and unwaged, directly productive and reproductive – explicitly or invisibly subordinated to capital accumulation, regardless of the economic sector. The dispossessed, in fact, work either in the making of commodities (directly productive work) or in the non-directly-commodified making and maintaining of an employable workforce for capital (reproductive work). The distinction between directly productive and reproductive work is determined not by different types of concrete activities, but by the ‘frontier of decommodification’.<sup>20</sup>

Thirdly, we see working-class interests as related to both the workplace and the community or territory. The distinction between workplace and community – similarly to the one between production and reproduction – is not based on different physical spaces but on social relations: the workplace is the domain of ‘workers-as-producers-or-reproducers’ while the community is the sphere of ‘workers-as-reproduced’.<sup>21</sup> Working-class interests are often conceived as workplace-centred (job security, high wages, health and safety, etc.). No doubt, wealth redistribution via higher wages for shorter hours would help to overcome the

jobs versus environment dilemma by reducing the need for jobs in the first place. Yet, in any case, workers do not disappear after leaving their workplaces. To the contrary, they return to their neighbourhoods, breathe the air outside the factories and offices, enjoy their free time by relating to the ecologies surrounding them. Working-class interests, then, do not involve only workplace rights, but also the conditions of their communities (consumer prices, welfare services, healthy ecologies, etc.).

The triple expansion of working-class, work, and working-class interests proposed here is meant to overcome those perspectives that reinforce the job blackmail. In fact, if ‘real’ work is waged and industrial only and thus the ‘real’ working-class is disproportionately male (and white, until recently), and if ‘real’ working-class interests mainly consist in keeping one’s job as it is, a way out is beyond reach. Such impasse further deepens if community mobilisations are seen as devoid of any class content, as if the inhabitants of the mostly working-class communities affected by severe environmental injustices did not have to work for a living. Conversely, an inclusive understanding of such concepts lends itself more easily to the building of coalitions among workers differentially located within the gender-race class system.

WORKING-CLASS INTERESTS ARE OFTEN CONCEIVED AS WORKPLACE-CENTRED (JOB SECURITY, HIGH WAGES, HEALTH AND SAFETY, ETC.). NO DOUBT, WEALTH REDISTRIBUTION VIA HIGHER WAGES FOR SHORTER HOURS WOULD HELP TO OVERCOME THE JOBS VERSUS ENVIRONMENT DILEMMA BY REDUCING THE NEED FOR JOBS IN THE FIRST PLACE.

In workerist theory, the ways in which workers are deployed, segmented and stratified in the workplace through different economic sectors, labour processes, wage hierarchies, commodity chains, etc. constitute the technical composition of the working class, its 'objective' side. The political composition of the working class, instead, indicates the extent to which workers as a class overcome, or not, their divisions to assert their common interests vis-à-vis capital. This is the 'subjective' side, made up of workers' forms of consciousness, struggle, and organisation. Seth Wheeler and Jessica Thorne usefully proposed to update this frame by adding the social composition of the working class, that is, the ways in which workers are reproduced in the community, for example through family, housing, welfare, and health regimes.<sup>22</sup> The objective side of class composition is then bifurcated between technical composition (related to the workplace) and social composition (related to the community).

From this perspective, it is possible to analyse how the working class is segmented also in relation to environmental degradation. For example, the fence-line communities living by highly polluting industries are often disproportionately composed of the most disadvantaged ranks of the working class, in many cases racialised too, and do not necessarily have widespread access to jobs in the factories. For these working-class segments, local ecological transitions would mean a welcome drop in higher-than-average cancer rates and other diseases. For workers employed in polluting industries, though, the situation is different, even if not necessarily irreconcilable. For them, ecological transitions more likely represent a risk of ending up in more precarious and lower-paying jobs.

The challenge of being *against* the ecological crisis is thus that of breaking the blackmail by creating convergences between workplace and community struggles.<sup>23</sup> This step is far from automatic, as the working class is fragmented along a myriad of occupational and residential configurations, an objective reality that too often fuels divisions between trade unionism as the expression of workplace interests and 'environmentalism from below' as the expression of working-class community interests. It is about striving to re-compose such segmentations politically, building platforms of demands to articulate together workplace and community struggles.

### **THE EX-GKN DISPUTE AND THE ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION FROM BELOW**

The struggle of the ex-GKN Factory Collective is a key step in the construction of an alternative to an ecological transition *from above* that – as it avoids questioning the system that produced the crisis – does not have much to offer in the way of real sustainability. In fact, recovering the red thread of working-class environmentalism, the Collective gave a practical, militant demonstration that the convergence of workplaces and territories around the watchwords of climate justice is a viable strategy.<sup>24</sup> Their innovative approach was in fact able to generate broad mass mobilisations, repeatedly bringing to the streets tens of thousands and thus managing to alter restructuring plans that have not encountered impactful resistance in comparable situations elsewhere.

Let us briefly recall what happened in Campi Bisenzio: up until 9 July 2021, GKN blue collars used to produce axle-shafts, mostly for luxury cars. However, on that day Melrose Industries – the financial owner of the plant – sent out an email announcing the dismissal of more than 400 workers. The dismissal was portrayed as the natural outcome of the ‘ecological transition’ in the automotive sector: ‘Haven’t you embraced Greta?!?’, the mainstream narrative reproached the radical unionists of the Factory Collective. ‘Now accept the inevitable layoffs!’<sup>25</sup> But they refused to accept them and launched a permanent assembly within the factory – which is still operating today.<sup>26</sup>

At first, these workers demanded one usual thing: to get back their jobs. As weeks passed, however, they realized the only way to keep production running was to advocate for a public and (territorially) integrated factory, which essentially meant to profoundly change production. In what direction? Well, here is probably their most significant intuition, as the answer was: *towards climate justice*. In a joint declaration with the Italian branch of Fridays for Future (25 July 2022), blue collars and young protesters put forward a clear argument:

‘The reality is that climate justice (CJ) cannot be achieved without touching the deepest and most dominant economic interests in society. CJ cannot be achieved without clashing against the dense web of economic interests at the top of society. To achieve CJ, it is crucial to radically rethink the production and consumption model, which is currently based on a strong power asymmetry. This implies, among other things: collective ownership of key economic sectors in order to conduct industrial policy in line with ecological principles; necessity and sufficiency; lowering the consumption of the wealthiest, thereby protecting the weakest segments of the population, while simultaneously decreasing the climate burden of consumption of the super-rich and establishing, through redistribution, truly universal welfare measures that recognize the importance of care activities’.<sup>27</sup>

Such process goes well beyond the fate of the factory itself, as indicated by a previous joint statement, again by the ex-GKN Factory Collective and Fridays for Future to launch the successful demonstrations of 25-26 March 2022:

‘A real climate, ecological, and social transition cannot disregard the capacity of a society to establish comprehensive and sustainable forms of planning. And such planning cannot be generated through workplace blackmails and hierarchies or in the oppression and repression of the communities – as it has been the case for years, for example, in the Susa Valley – but it must come from an awakening of radical, participative democracy’.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, such ‘radical, participative democracy’ insists on an inherent connection between working-class environmentalism, social mobilization at large and climate justice:



‘The drought, the melting of secular glaciers, and the ever more intense heatwaves are the dramatic confirmation of the changes engendered by global heating. We are constantly struggling to reach the end of the month, against precarity, against outsourcing, against inflation, and for a dignified wage. However, the struggle for the end of the month has no sense if we do not win that against “the end of the world”. And it is impossible to get increasing shares of the population involved in the struggle against the end of the world if we do not join it with the struggle to reach the end of the month’.<sup>29</sup>

Such words grasp the systemic dimension of our predicament. Commodification, in fact, is a wedge separating capitalist production from life reproduction and subordinating the latter to the former. Profit does not rely on infinite growth only, but also on the capacity to produce things that people will buy. However, market consumption choices are intrinsically individualist and short term, while democratic planning is collective and potentially far-sighted. The conversion plan drafted by the ex-GKN Factory Collective and their Solidarity Research Group is an example of how such apparently faraway horizons can encounter, even in today’s unfavourable political conjuncture, a concrete outlet: nationalisation under workers’ control for the creation of a Public Hub for Sustainable Mobility. The idea was to keep producing axle-shafts, but for electric buses, because the automotive sector, within the framework of an ecological transition from below, cannot but rely on a strong critique of the private car. The plan gathered a lot of attention, gained recognition by the Ministry of Economic Development and was eventually published by Fondazione Feltrinelli. Yet, no Government so far has had the courage to promote a regional supply chain for collective public mobility.

Confronted with a deaf political system, the Factory Collective kept working with climate justice movements to free up space for imagining a politically attractive ecological transition *from below*. Together with the qualitative dimension of decommodification, the quantitative, distributive aspect related to income levels and working hours must also be tackled: ‘We demand a reduction in working hours with no wage cuts, so that

CONFRONTED WITH A DEAF POLITICAL SYSTEM, THE FACTORY COLLECTIVE KEPT WORKING WITH CLIMATE JUSTICE MOVEMENTS TO FREE UP SPACE FOR IMAGINING A POLITICALLY ATTRACTIVE ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION *FROM BELOW*.

work quotas be equally redistributed across the population. It is possible to work less if everyone works, and it is a right that every worker, of today and tomorrow, should fight for’.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, the rising prices of food and energy over 2022 – which have generated a wave of mass mobilisations and revolts in manifold countries (Peru, Ecuador, Panama, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, etc.) – confirmed that no ecological transition will be possible without wealth redistribution on a global scale.


## **CONCLUSION: WORKERS' COOPERATIVES AS INSTANCES OF AN ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION FROM BELOW?**

What we see rising, we argue, is the unprecedented profile of an ecological transition from below. Here are some key elements of it: decommodification of production, reduction of working hours, redistribution of wealth. The convergence between workplace and community struggles, of which the ex-GKN dispute is an example, will be a crucial node for the broad mobilisations necessary to reach the end of the month while moving beyond the end of the world.

In this sense, even when confronted with a blatant lack of political will to even consider the feasibility of the Public Hub for Sustainable Mobility – which is to say, in the last few months – the Factory Collective refused once again to capitulate. Through a new round of exchanges with the Solidarity Research Group, the workers came up with the Reindustrialization Project 2.0. One of the goals is to contribute to the decarbonization of small-scale logistics both in large workplaces and in Italian cities which are still far from uniformly adopting sustainable mobility plans. The first cargo-bike prototype was realized in a few months and presented in February 2023, with technical designs coming from knowledge shared by eco-social enterprises and raw materials coming from recycled components.

The project of such work-recovered enterprise<sup>31</sup> is still in its inceptive phase and has received funding from a successful crowdfunding campaign called 'ex-GKN FOR FUTURE', supported by Fridays for Future Italy, BancaEtica (an ethical banking institution, close to the cooperative and social movements) and ARCI, the oldest network of entertainment and cultural clubs in Italy. As activist-scholars Francesca Gabbriellini and Paola Imperatore put it:

'the idea is to build a popular shareholder base to support the new project: the land the factory is built upon will be the first shareholder of this small eco-revolution. The first step of the campaign is aimed at accumulating the necessary funds to concretely launch the workers' cooperative. In less than a month, with the participation of hundreds of citizens and associations, the crowdfunding campaign has already exceeded 175.000 euros'.<sup>32</sup>

It might look like the working class has finally realised that its leadership is necessary for the ecological transition from below to actually stand a chance to become the most ambitious climate justice-inspired policy ever imagined. 

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>3</sup> BENEGIAMO, Maura; LEONARDI, Emanuele – 'André Gorz's labour-based political ecology and its legacy for the XXI century'. In RATHZEL, Nora; STEVIS, Dimitris; UZZELL, David, eds. – *The Palgrave Handbook of Environmental Labour Studies*. London: Palgrave, 2021, pp. 721–41.

<sup>4</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/co2-emissions>.

<sup>5</sup> By climate justice, we mean a perspective that sees global heating as a symptom of inequality on a planetary level. Such inequality can take two forms: between the Global North and South (that is, between the countries that have more responsibilities for creating the problem and those that are most exposed to its detrimental consequences) and between the social classes (the responsibilities for investments in fossil fuels, similarly to their impacts, are not equally distributed in this respect too). The earliest versions of climate justice – in the late 1990s – emphasised the first form. Since 2019, however, there have been more attempts to articulate both forms in an international and social critique of 'fossil capitalism'.

<sup>6</sup> LEONARDI, Emanuele – 'Bringing class

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<sup>7</sup> BARCA, Stefania; LEONARDI, Emanuele – 'Working-class ecology and union politics: a conceptual topology'. In *Globalizations*. Vol. 15, No. 4, 2018, pp. 487–503.

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<sup>10</sup> FELTRIN, Lorenzo; SACCHETTO, Devi – 'The work-technology nexus and working-class environmentalism: workerism versus capitalist noxiousness in Italy's Long 1968'. In *Theory and society*. Vol. 50, No. 5, 2021, pp. 815–35; SACCHETTO, Devi; SBROGIÒ, Gianni, eds. – *Quando il potere è operaio: Autonomia e soggettività politica a Porto Marghera, 1960–1980*. Rome: Manifesto Libri, 2009; ZAZZARA, Gilda – *Il Petrochimico*, Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> See BELL, Karen – 'Working-class environmentalism in the UK: organising for sustainability beyond the workplace'. In RATHZEL, Nora; STEVIS, Dimitris; UZZELL, David, eds. – *The Palgrave Handbook of Environmental Labour Studies*. London: Palgrave, 2021, pp. 441–63.

<sup>12</sup> ODDONE, Ivar – *Psicologia dell'ambiente: Fabbrica e territorio*. Turin: Giappichelli, 1979.

<sup>13</sup> DAVIGO, Elena – *Il movimento italiano per*

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<sup>14</sup> BALESTRINI, Nanni; MORONI, Primo – *The Golden Horde: Revolutionary Italy, 1960–1977*. Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2021 [1988]. BORGHI, Vando – 'Capitalismo delle infrastrutture e connettività: Proposte per una sociologia critica del mondo a domicilio'. In *Rassegna italiana di sociologia*. Vol. 3, 2021, pp. 671–99.

<sup>15</sup> FELTRIN, Lorenzo; MAH, Alice; BROWN, David – 'Noxious deindustrialization: experiences of precarity and pollution in Scotland's petrochemical capital'. In *Environment and planning C*. Vol. 40, No. 4, 2022, pp. 950–69.

<sup>16</sup> BOLOGNA, Sergio – 'The theory and history of the mass worker in Italy'. In *Common sense*. Vol. 11, 1991, pp. 16–29, and Vol. 12, 1992, pp. 52–78. Available at: <https://libcom.org/article/theory-and-history-mass-worker-italy-sergio-bologna>.

<sup>17</sup> See HANSEN, Bue R. – 'The interest of breathing: towards a theory of ecological interest formation'. In *Crisis & critique*. Vol. 7, No. 3, 2020, pp. 108–37.

<sup>18</sup> See FELTRIN, Lorenzo – 'Situating class in workplace and community environmentalism: working-class environmentalism and deindustrialisation in Porto Marghera, Venice'. In *The sociological review*. Vol. 70, No. 6, 2022, pp. 1141–62.

<sup>19</sup> See DALLA COSTA, Mariarosaria – *Women and the Subversion of the Community: A Mariarosaria Dalla Costa Reader*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019. FORTUNATI, Leopoldina – *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital*. New York, NY: Autonomedia, 1996 [1981].

- 20 For example, food is necessary to the reproduction of the workforce. Yet, growing food for an agricultural company is directly productive; cultivating it for self-consumption within a capitalist context is reproductive.
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# FOREST CARBON PROJECTS WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES REFLECTIONS ON GLOBAL GOVERNANCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE PROJECT<sup>1</sup>

Thais Lemos Ribeiro | Verônica Korber Gonçalves

There is a consolidated research agenda on global climate governance in the field of International Relations. However, one of the considerations regarding this agenda is the manifold meanings of the concept and their implications for the analysis of real-world phenomena. The Earth System Governance Project (ESG) reflects a decade of interdisciplinary research on global environmental governance. The project has scientific plans that aim to guide the research agenda of the community, identify central issues, methods, and research processes for the field of global governance of Earth systems. The present work makes use of the framework of the 2018 scientific plan<sup>2</sup> to reflect on how the research lenses proposed by the ESG allow us to analyze the case of carbon credit negotiations with the Munduruku indigenous people. This case was chosen for its specific features, without any aspirations to generalize.<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting, however, that this was not an isolated case: as reported by Mesquita, between 2010 and 2012, over 30 ethnicities were approached by companies or intermediary institutions regarding carbon projects<sup>4</sup>. The attempt to formalize the contract for the sale of forest carbon credits with the Munduruku is part of global climate governance processes, as the instrument used to approach the indigenous people was REDD+, negotiated under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with the aim of preventing gree-



## ABSTRACT

The Earth System Governance Project is an interdisciplinary research network on global environmental governance that presents a proposal organized around contextual issues and analytical lenses. This work aims to apply the five analytical lenses for global governance by Earth System Governance Project in a carbon credits negotiation case in 2011 between an Irish company – Celestial Green Venture PLC – and the Munduruku indigenous people in Brazil. Based on this case, we identify the scope and challenges of applying these analytical lenses in governance processes at the local level and with specific groups, such as indigenous peoples.

*Keywords:* global climate governance, Earth System Governance Project, REDD+, indigenous peoples.



## RESUMO

**PROJETOS DE CARBONO FLORESTAL COM POVOS INDÍGENAS: REFLEXÕES SOBRE GOVERNANÇA GLOBAL DO CLIMA ATRAVÉS DA PERSPETIVA DO PROJETO EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE**



O Projeto Earth System Governance é uma rede de pesquisa interdisciplinar sobre governança global ambiental, que apresenta uma proposta organizada em torno de questões contextuais e lentes analíticas. Este trabalho tem como objetivo aplicar as cinco lentes analíticas para governança global num caso concreto de negociação de créditos de carbono realizada em 2011 entre uma empresa irlandesa – Celestial Green Venture PLC – e o povo indígena munduruku no Brasil. Partindo deste caso, identificamos o alcance e os desafios de aplicação destas lentes analíticas em processos de governança no nível local com grupos específicos, como povos indígenas.

*Palavras-chave:* governança global do clima, Projeto Earth System Governance, REDD+, povos indígenas.

house gas emissions by fighting deforestation and promoting sustainable forestry practices. REDD+, due to its characteristics, involves both State and non-State actors and creates spaces for international negotiation beyond conventional formal institutions. The intersection of norms related to REDD+ requires looking at different levels – in this case, the local level.

The analytical lenses of the ESG project allow the study of a phenomenon through multiple perspectives, as proposed by the analytical framework of global governance, encompassing aspects of the institutionalist agenda, such as architecture and agency, to environmental justice aspects, such as allocation issues and power considerations. However, the lenses are unable to encompass the totality of the issues proposed by the case, such as the agency of non-human actors and the encounter of different worldviews.

The article is divided into three sections, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. The first section provides a brief review of the literature on global climate governance, followed by a detailed explanation of ESG's second scientific plan. The second section offers information on carbon credits and the contextualization of the REDD+ case with the Munduruku people. The third section explores the five analytical lenses of the ESG in the case at hand.

## **GLOBAL CLIMATE GOVERNANCE AND THE ANALYTICAL PROPOSAL OF THE SCIENTIFIC PLAN OF ESG PROJECT**

In International Relations (IR), the concept of global governance has a strong institutionalist bias, and the origin of its usage is related to the concept of international regimes.<sup>5</sup> Governance, a broader concept, has to do with the need to guide behaviors toward a common goal, whether through formal or informal mechanisms and supported by common values.<sup>6</sup> Global governance, as an analytical lens, is associated with reflections on global order,<sup>7</sup> acknowledging the diffusion of State power to subnational and transnational actors, and expanding the scope of analysis to various levels – from the global to the local. Thus, global governance includes more actors beyond the State and consequently alters power relations and the construction of rules and institutions. Global climate governance refers to an analytical category for studying the 'construction of institutions and policies to respond to global climate change'.<sup>8</sup> These institutions are characterized by involving formal and informal actors and processes in traditional spaces for climate debate – such as the UNFCCC – as well as non-traditional spaces – such as the United Nations Security Council, the International Civil Aviation Organization,

the World Trade Organization, etc., configuring its multi-sectoral nature and potentially involving various research agendas, such as the environment, political economy, security, among others.

Among the analytical efforts to study governance processes, the ESG<sup>9</sup> stands out, working, through a research program,<sup>10</sup> on the dimensions of governance architecture

AMONG THE ANALYTICAL EFFORTS TO STUDY GOVERNANCE PROCESSES, THE ESG STANDS OUT. THE OVERALL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH PROGRAM ASSUMES THAT THE WORLD IS COMPLEX AND DYNAMIC, JUST LIKE THE EARTH SYSTEM, AND THAT MULTIPLE WORLDVIEWS COEXIST.

and agency, allocative justice, democracy and power, anticipation and imagination, and adaptation and reflection. The overall framework of the research program assumes that the world is complex and dynamic, just like the Earth system, and that multiple worldviews coexist. The plan uses four contextual conditions that define the research

framework and are addressed in a broad empirical base and social and academic debates – transformations, inequality, the Anthropocene, and diversity.

The analytical lenses of the scientific plan offer a broad view of the governance system, here the climate governance system, through various research fields. They are organized in pairs to highlight the relationship between the concepts.

#### ARCHITECTURE AND AGENCY

The focus of this lens is on institutional aspects and actors of the governance system and how they interact, considering changes over time. Architecture is a network of widely shared principles, institutions, and practices that influence decisions in all areas of a governance system.<sup>11</sup> Although the plan does not present an explicit definition of agency, Inoue<sup>12</sup> defines it as the ‘ability of individuals and collective actors to [change] the course of events or the outcome of processes, provided that such ability is based on authority, and not force’. The inclusion of other actors in the analytical framework, as previously highlighted, implies complex interactions between agents and architecture, resulting in diverse patterns of power distribution, alteration, creation, and diffusion of institutions and norms.

#### DEMOCRACY AND POWER

Domestic political regimes have implications for governance systems as they influence the ability to act across levels (from local to global) to address collective problems in terms of transparency, decision-making processes, the quality of deliberative processes, and the transmission of values from citizens to institutions at the global level.<sup>13</sup> There is also literature addressing the outcomes of democratic processes for environmental issues and the representation and participation of vulnerable groups, such as indigenous peoples and traditional communities. As for power, it is considered an inherent characteristic of all types of governance. It is viewed as a multidimensional concept that



can be expressed through the control of material and ideational resources in a relational, diffuse, structural, and discursive manner. Moreover, different societies define power differently.<sup>14</sup>

#### JUSTICE AND ALLOCATION

The scientific plan employs the concept of justice in three dimensions while acknowledging the diversity of possible approaches by different fields of study. The three dimensions are: intergenerational (among generations), international (among states and regions), and intersectoral (among human groups or categories in society defined through the intersection of age, class, caste, gender, race, among other categories).<sup>15</sup> The aspect of allocation is related to the concept of distributing negative impacts and benefits of cooperation, but there are various principles to define what would constitute a fair distribution. Recognition and representation then become necessary elements for achieving a fair allocation of negative impacts and benefits.

#### ANTICIPATION AND IMAGINATION

This lens refers to processes of anticipation and imagination of futures through models, scenario building, and integrated analyses. Anticipation involves the development of governance mechanisms in the present and the building of capacities for future transformations in a context of normative, scientific, and technological uncertainties, such as in the case of geoengineering. It seeks to imagine and experiment with plural and challenging futures in advance to question what futures are possible. The models and forecasts of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are an example of anticipation processes.<sup>16</sup>

Imagination seeks innovative alternatives for current problems, known as wicked problems due to their complexity, such as global climate change. However, imagination can be limited by the social and cultural (hegemonic) aspects of a particular society. At this point, the diversity of worlds enriches imagination exercises and reinforces the agency of diverse actors through democratic processes of participation and multiple languages (such as arts, culture, games, science, etc.) for experimenting with new ideas.<sup>17</sup>

#### ADAPTATION AND REFLECTION

Adaptation is considered an umbrella term for concepts such as vulnerability, resilience, adaptability, social learning, among others related to responding to changes and efforts to anticipate changes in the Earth system. Adaptation refers to both social and ecological processes and processes of the climate governance system. Thus, the capacity for critical reflection complements the effort to respond by conducting self-examination on values, practices, and actions at all levels – from local to global – to reform institutions, other elements of the governance system, and processes.<sup>18</sup> There is ongoing

research on how to enhance the capacity for reflection either endogenously (building on existing institutions) or through external catalyst factors, such as crises or the actions of social movements, and how to respond to local issues embedded in a context of global interconnection, with ramifications for other groups, systems, or countries. The atmosphere is an example, as are hydrological systems spanning territories.

### **CARBON CREDITS, REDD+, AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: THE CASE OF CARBON CREDITS WITH TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN BRAZIL**

In August 2011, a meeting took place between representatives of the Munduruku indigenous people, the company Celestial Green Venture PLC, and councilors in the city of Jacareacanga, in the state of Pará, located in northern Brazil. During this meeting, a project was presented for the transfer of carbon credit rights for an area of nearly six million acres for the amount of 120 million dollars over thirty years. The transfer of rights implied all certified rights or benefits obtained from the biodiversity of the area, which might even include the traditional knowledge of the Munduruku people.<sup>19</sup>

This negotiation falls within the architecture of REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, ‘plus’ conservation, sustainable forest management, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks), which refers to an international initiative developed under the UNFCCC with the goal of preventing greenhouse gas emissions by fighting deforestation and promoting sustainable forestry practices, contributing to addressing climate change.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, it is a payment for environmental services, providing financial rewards for efforts to reduce deforestation and improve forest management.<sup>21</sup>

REDD+ can refer to two distinct types of efforts. The first – jurisdictional REDD+ – refers to the institutional architecture negotiated under the UNFCCC by states to promote financial incentives for developing countries to reduce deforestation and forest degradation (and consequently, their carbon emissions) through national projects and international financing. The second type – project-based REDD+ – refers to specific and voluntary projects and actions to reduce deforestation and forest degradation implemented by non-governmental actors, such as non-governmental organizations, private companies, local communities, and other entities. These governance processes involve non-state actors playing a more prominent role in negotiations and implementation, with a shift in power relations to transnational and local actors.

Voluntary projects are conducted based on their own initiatives and can follow different criteria and methodologies, potentially generating carbon credits to offset emissions. Project-based initiatives may be linked to certifiers with varying levels of requirements regarding the demonstration of additionality, measurement methodologies, and the assessment of social and environmental impacts of the projects. Therefore, there is a significant variation in the value of carbon credits resulting from REDD+ projects, depending on the recognition and reliability of the certifiers involved.

Brazil boasts a significant number of REDD+ projects: 23% of all REDD+ projects worldwide, according to Sylvera, a company operating in the voluntary carbon market,<sup>22</sup> and 66 projects and 11 programs, according to the Redd Project Database.<sup>23</sup> Brazil possesses a well-established national REDD architecture compared to other states. It has developed its institutional and normative structures, with a focus on SISREDD+, a national system created to coordinate and promote the implementation of REDD+ in Brazil; the National Strategy for REDD+; and the National Commission for REDD+, established by Decree No. 10,144/2019.

Regarding safeguards, the National Commission for REDD+ approved Resolution No. 09/2017 in July 2017, which establishes the interpretation of the Cancun safeguards in the Brazilian context. Among the points of interpretation, we highlight item 'c', which addresses the recognition and respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples, traditional communities, and family farmers in the implementation of REDD+ actions, and item 'd', which concerns free, prior, and informed consent, as well as the effective participation of the involved populations.<sup>24</sup>

However, Brazil still lacks a defined regulatory framework for voluntary carbon markets, as emphasized by Wenzel,<sup>25</sup> and it is in this absence that many projects involving indigenous peoples and traditional communities have been carried out, with the participation of major credit-buying corporations and intermediary institutions. This is because REDD+, by creating the framework for payment for results in reducing emissions from deforestation, has inadvertently encouraged actors in the voluntary market to invest in such projects. Mesquita<sup>26</sup> mentions the proliferation of forest carbon projects between 2010 and 2013 in small areas, involving 30 ethnicities, including the Munduruku and the Cinta Larga. The negotiation conditions often violated the rights of indigenous peoples, national legislation on indigenous lands, and international norms.<sup>27</sup>

HOWEVER, BRAZIL STILL LACKS A DEFINED REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTARY CARBON MARKETS, AS EMPHASIZED, AND IT IS IN THIS ABSENCE THAT MANY PROJECTS INVOLVING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT.

Although Resolution No. 3/2020 of CONAREDD recognizes the voluntary forest carbon market, it does not validate its projects, methodologies, traded emission volumes, or any other aspects of voluntary projects.<sup>28</sup> Thus, in Brazil, there is no precise information on the number of REDD+ projects linked to the voluntary market, nor is there centralization of records, facilitating the actions of companies and organizations interested in associating with projects that generate forest carbon credits without, however, adhering to the international norms and guidelines of REDD+.

According to Chief Osmarino Manhoari Munduruku,<sup>29</sup> in the case of the contract with Celestial Green Venture PLC, only a few indigenous representatives and councilors signed contract No. 473531-11-PV01, in a hotel, together with the company. According

to the terms of the contract, the Munduruku were not allowed to make any changes in the territory without the company's consent and reference to the territory use methodology established by it.<sup>30</sup> As Chief Osmarino Manhoari Munduruku expressed in an interview with the Humanitas Unisinos Institute: 'In my opinion, this project is bad because for the next 30 years, we won't be able to hunt, plant, fish, pick fruits from the forest, or cut wood when needed'.<sup>31</sup>

Due to variations in the reliability of projects (whether regarding methodology, additionality, and compliance with safeguards), their governance structure, and the economic rationale involved, various organizations and forest peoples express opposition to REDD+ projects (such as the Global Alliance of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities on Climate Change against REDD and for Life).<sup>32</sup> This is because the proposed strategies to mitigate potential social and environmental risks of REDD+, and generate benefits for the involved communities, may not actually yield the outcome that forest peoples and their advocates strive for.<sup>33</sup>

Critiques of REDD+ revolve around three aspects: i) REDD+ projects reflect a neoliberal rationale that promotes the commodification of nature, as even projects that do not involve the generation of tradable carbon credits weaken the relationship with the forest through an economic logic, transforming the relationship of the peoples with the forest into a monetizable, quantifiable, and tradable service; ii) projects result in the appropriation of forest peoples' lands by external actors, as decision-making capacity over the territory is transferred to third parties; iii) projects may violate the self-determination of peoples by not conducting free, prior, and informed consent, using mechanisms and strategies that hinder understanding of what is being negotiated and creating mechanisms to discourage refusal by these populations.<sup>34</sup> The contract between Celestial Green and the Munduruku leaders is not an isolated case and highlights a weakness in the voluntary market for carbon credits related to REDD+: the diversity of actors involved, of regulations, methodologies, criteria, and forms of compliance verification, and the various interests of the parties require the entire process to be anchored in the reliability of the actors involved and their reputation. Reputation analysis in the carbon market is challenging for credit buyers, but even more so for the communities receiving REDD+ projects, as they need to navigate unclear and complex languages, regulations, and practices.

To this point, we highlight the Munduruku Consultation Protocol, developed in 2014 based on the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169. According to the document, the Munduruku people from all villages must be consulted on any matter affecting their territory because there is only one Munduruku people, and decisions are collective.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the consultation must be conducted within the villages and not outside the territory. Consultation mechanisms like this protocol become relevant tools for bridging different worldviews, languages, rules, and practices, as was the case in the negotiation of forest carbon credits.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE CASE THROUGH THE LENSES OF THE EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE PROJECT**

The lenses of the Earth System Governance (ESG) scientific plan allow for an examination of the case of the carbon credit sales contract between Celestial Green and representatives of the Munduruku people within a mainstream perspective of global climate governance. Additionally, they help raise new questions and research agendas based on particular aspects of this case.

### **ARCHITECTURE AND AGENCY**

This lens enables the observation of a governance process – voluntary markets for forest carbon credits – in which the State is not necessarily the central actor but shares space with private companies, intermediary institutions, and local actors. However, even though it encompasses other actors as an analytical lens, since the scientific plan itself extensively acknowledges the advancement of research in this direction, the distribution of power is still quite unequal, consequently influencing the agency of these actors. Therefore, a relevant aspect for understanding the case is the role of norms and institutions for the protection of indigenous peoples as crucial to its outcome (contract annulment). To a lesser extent, negotiation and carbon credit trading are also highly important, as the unclear and evolving rules of the voluntary market were unable to prevent negative socio-environmental impacts on the Munduruku people. However, it is noteworthy that there have been advancements in principles, institutions, and practices for protecting vulnerable actors at the international and national levels in REDD+ processes after this occurrence.

Nevertheless, there is a constant critique of the development of REDD+ projects with indigenous peoples and traditional communities, which often need to resort to alternative instruments within the governance system for their own protection. The architecture of global governance conditions the actions of climate global governance agents, but it does not determine them,<sup>36</sup> and these agents turn to different spaces of normative production to get involved and produce diverse results. In this context, local judicialization, forming networks with other actors such as international non-governmental organizations, and influencers (artists) are examples of possible responses.

### **DEMOCRACY AND POWER**

This lens, by illustrating how the exercise of power occurs is not restricted to formal and traditional negotiation spaces, allows us to focus on how democracy and power can be constructed and understood in various ways by different social groups – which does not necessarily imply positive outcomes. In the case under analysis, a greater protagonism by non-state actors in the negotiations and the implementation process was expected, and while this shift from the State to these other actors did indeed take

place, it did not do so in an altogether positive way. The power imbalance among the actors involved in the negotiation process for carbon credit rights on the lands of the Munduruku indigenous people is expressed in who had the information, who drafted

THE POWER IMBALANCE AMONG THE ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS FOR CARBON CREDIT RIGHTS ON THE LANDS OF THE MUNDURUKU INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IS EXPRESSED IN WHO HAD THE INFORMATION, WHO DRAFTED THE CONTRACT TERMS, AND WHO SIGNED THE CONTRACT.

the contract terms, and who signed the contract. The regulation of REDD+ and voluntary carbon markets in Brazil made significant advances in the period following the case. The mechanism of free, prior, and informed consent of the indigenous people also came afterwards. Therefore, there is a need to devise efficient mechanisms to address the material and discursive

power disparity and ensure the implementation of the advancements already made. There are still questions concerning the insecurity of an unregulated scenario, such as in Brazil, where local communities have few resources to engage in the process and require intermediaries.<sup>37</sup>

The Munduruku cosmology also prompts consideration of power relations between humans and non-humans. The inclusion of foreign (non-indigenous) conditions, as expressed in the contract, potentially impacts the relationship between humans and non-human entities (other animals), which has a disruptive power for the Munduruku.<sup>38</sup> Thus, locally establishing an institutionally and internationally legitimized mechanism may have unforeseen consequences if different worldviews and their distinct scopes are not taken into account or are intentionally made invisible. The quality of deliberative processes plays a fundamental role in this regard.

## JUSTICE AND ALLOCATION

The lens of justice and allocation allows us to reflect on the unequal nature of relationships between actors in environmental governance, as well as on the diverse expressions of justice. The perspective of intersectoral justice stands out in the case under analysis, primarily between private groups and indigenous peoples. The Munduruku cosmology also evokes a proposal for justice between human and non-human species. The historical difficulty of acknowledging the rights of indigenous peoples, highlighted by the struggle for land demarcation, is an obstacle to achieving justice and allocating impacts and benefits in this case. The demarcation of Munduruku indigenous lands only took place in 2001, but the struggle for the recognition of their rights is ongoing. To this day, the Munduruku indigenous people continue to face injustices regarding their territory, such as illegal mining and the construction of hydroelectric dams impacting the Tapajós River.<sup>39</sup>

The scientific plan of the ESG project draws a connection between democratic processes and fair outcomes in terms of allocation. Regarding this, like in the 'Munduruku' case, there is a need to also consider the diffusion of alternative agency norms and processes

beyond the conditions of national regimes and governance system architecture. Governance through networks of solidarity can be explored as an alternative for outcomes based on justice concepts founded in the diversity of worldviews, taking into account both human and non-human actors.

#### **ANTICIPATION AND IMAGINATION**

In this binomial, the meeting of distinct perspectives on time, territory, and the relationship between human and non-human groups acquires renewed prominence. The concepts of anticipation and imagination vary according to each society's concept of future and the actors involved. There is also the possibility of conflicting encounters between a hegemonic vision and marginalized worldviews.

Even if they do not generate credits, projects such as the 'Munduruku' case are linked to a set of symbols involving preservation, sustainability, and respect for biodiversity, making investments in REDD+ projects attractive for the image of funders/buyers. They represent the promise of a different future, even as practices of destruction reproduction persist. When projects involve traditional communities and indigenous peoples, they unintentionally transfer part of a highly desired symbolic capital to these funders/buyers: the possibility of coexistence with the maintenance of the standing forest, even if, at their core, buyers do not really change their practices.

#### **ADAPTATION AND REFLECTION**

This lens allows us to focus on how different societies have dealt with the challenge of changing economic, social, and political practices due to ongoing climate change and other environmental transformations. As REDD+ is primarily a mitigation initiative, a critical approach to change and reflexivity requires questioning how governance architectures and proposed solutions can reproduce hegemonic patterns of sustainability practices and values. For instance, forest carbon projects imposing a carbon-centric focus on forest use may hinder other possible values and uses. Creating environments for co-production of learning that are receptive to diverse worldviews can enhance the necessary response capacity in a more just and effective manner.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Although the ESG contributes to advancing research on global governance by recognizing actors seen as vulnerable, there are few indications on how to do so in each of the lenses. Thus, indirectly, they overshadow the possibility of studying the agency of such actors, issues of justice, adaptation, and power, whose consequences are interpreted based on concepts constructed in a context very different from the Munduruku worldview. Therefore, the case may be 'captured' by governance lenses based on institutional responses produced in traditional research spaces. In other words, the lenses do not indicate how to advance research that encompasses other normative and worldviews that escape the logic of formal spaces.

By recognizing, for example, that from the organization in the Pusuru Association of the Munduruku Indigenous people in the early 1990s to the formulation of the Munduruku Protocol in 2014, the indigenous Munduruku people's plea for the recognition and defense of their lands persists, this case becomes emblematic. If we consider them as an example of various other groups, this case invites us to move towards spaces where different worldviews meet, requiring a reflective effort from the consolidated hegemonic research framework to ponder over the governance of Earth systems, including the climate, with imagination and creativity. In light of this, we invite others to consider other binomials under the analytical lenses and starting from this experience. <sup>RJ</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> INOUE, Cristina Yumie A. – 'Governança global do clima...'. p. 105. This reference is used in a complementary manner to the scientific plan, as the author is a member of the scientific committee of the Earth System Governance Project.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 52.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 57.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 64–65.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 71.

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# BOOK REVIEWS



# THE STRANGE CASE OF STRATEGIC AUTONOMY<sup>1</sup>

Carlos Gaspar

The modern genealogy of the concept of autonomy demonstrates the extreme difficulty of stabilizing a consensual definition or even referring the concept to a circumscribed domain.

In fact, autonomy begins as the condition of the exercise of sovereignty on the part of emerging nation-states, whose independence calls for the capacity for choosing their own policies freely or, in any case, without subordination to undue constraints. In Rousseau's view, the freedom of the State excludes any form of external dependency which may condition the general will of the political community: those who depend on others and do not control their own resources cannot be free.<sup>2</sup>

Autonomy then became the condition for the exercise of citizenship, restricted to individuals who can guarantee their subsistence on their own means without being inhibited by external factors, since this is the only way they can ensure the necessary independence to their status as co-legislators. In Kant's formula, the autonomy of political will calls for the independence (*Selbständigkeit*) of citizens who owe their existence not to the discretion of others, but to their own rights and powers as members of a republican community.<sup>3</sup>

In the last century, autonomy emerged as the condition of non-sovereign entities

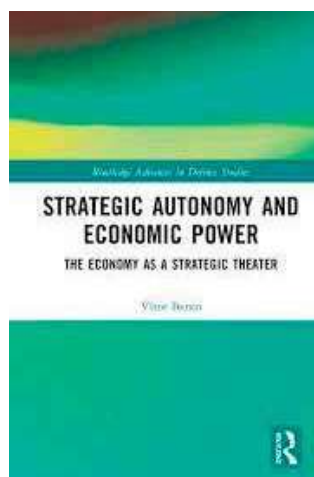
whose political independence is limited to domestic matters of federated states, associated states, colonial states or protectorates, those which do not have their own international personality. In Hannun and Lillich's definition, autonomy is determined by the degree of real or formal independence of the non-sovereign entity in its process of political decision making, which excludes foreign and defence policies normally reserved to central or national governments.<sup>4</sup>

Strategic autonomy, a benchmark in the contemporary national security doctrines

VÍTOR BENTO

**Strategic  
Autonomy and  
Economic Power.  
The Economy as a  
Strategic Theater**

London, Routledge, 2022,  
294 pages



of India, France or, more recently, Turkey, does not have stabilized conceptual, juridical or political definitions. Conceptual imprecision has increased in recent years, when European Union institutions decided to coopt the term to successively frame their defence policies, their health security and energy policies and their industrial policies.<sup>5</sup>

Immediately, ‘professional Europeanists’ invested deeply in the concept of strategic autonomy<sup>6</sup> and, subsequently, in the search for ‘European sovereignty’, when President Emmanuel Macron and later the German governmental coalition started using that term in their official rhetoric.<sup>7</sup> ‘European sovereignty’ is a semantic construction which is apparently necessary to give meaning to ‘European strategic autonomy’, the condition for the emergence of a supra-national entity with the legitimacy to prevail over the national sovereignty of the European Union member-states. This exercise was interrupted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and, clashing with reality, European strategic autonomy ended before it had even begun.<sup>8</sup>

As T. S. Eliot said in relation to democracy, when a term is universally sanctified it stops having meaning since it has too many meanings.<sup>9</sup> Vítor Bento decided to define and operationalize the concept of strategic autonomy of states in the first monograph published to date on this problem.<sup>10</sup>

Strategic autonomy is the condition that determines the degree of freedom of political decision making that is necessary to ensure the survival of the state in the anarchical order of the international system.

Vítor Bento begins by making a crucial distinction: strategic autonomy is not state sovereignty or national independence, but it does not cease to be the condition of existence of a sovereign political entity. Independence and sovereignty are binary situations, whereas autonomy is gradual and variable<sup>11</sup> – it is a matter of degree and, above all, a process of accumulation of the instruments of power that are indispensable to ensure the fulfilment of the achievable ends chosen by political decision making.

The author’s priority is to operationalize the concept of autonomy along five dimensions: power, which defines the field of possibilities of strategic action; resources, which place limits on available means; efficacy and efficiency, which condition the conversion of capacities into instruments of power; the circumstances imposed by the international system, which determine which means are more relevant; and the temporal horizon, which shapes existing opportunities and the state’s response capacity to external conditionalities. In these terms, strategic autonomy is the leeway of the state ‘to choose, adopt and pursue its goals in a relevant period, taking into account available capacities and its efficacy in existing circumstances’.<sup>12</sup>

This definition is supplemented by an additional distinction between strategic autonomy and political autonomy: the first is a set of goals which defines the frame of possibilities and limits available choices; the second is the freedom of choice on the part of political decisionmakers to guide the state according to their own priorities and preferences or, in Mearsheimer’s

formulation, which the author cites, the autonomy of the decision making process of the state.<sup>13</sup>

The most original part of this definition is the importance given to the temporal dimension, which is normally forgotten in strategic studies. Time is the most dynamic dimension in international relations – ‘the whole world is made of change’ – and decisively conditions the strategies of states. The author’s rule of thumb stipulates that, the shorter the available time, the greater will be the state’s dependency in relation to external circumstances; the longer the available time, the smaller will be its dependency in relation to external conditionalities and the greater will be its opportunities to accumulate resources.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, in the international system where uncertainty is the only certainty, the state must preserve the maximum amount of resources to guarantee its autonomy in the response to strategic surprises.<sup>15</sup>

Vítor Bento’s constant concern is with small states, notably the asymmetrical relationships between a poor state and a rich neighbour state – besides Portugal, there are few states that have one larger state as their only neighbour. In this context, the distinction between ‘conditioned autonomy’ and ‘full autonomy’ is relevant: the former results from the need to rely on allies, not only to enhance available resources and expand the state’s strategic autonomy, but also to ensure survival in times of war; the latter pertains to sovereign control over all instruments of power which sustain the state’s strategic autonomy.<sup>16</sup>

The author’s main thesis is the crucial importance of the economy, not only to

guarantee the state’s strategic autonomy, but also as the main stage for the competition between states in the international system in times of peace. Strategic autonomy depends upon the size of the economy, usually measured by gross domestic product, its insertion in trade and technological networks and its financial quality – the sovereign debts crises highlighted the importance of financial stability, and the excessive burden of debt is a permanent constraint on a state’s strategic autonomy and its international credibility, even in the case of a nuclear power like France. In this context, economic growth is a permanent priority of the state, one which depends upon three levers: physical capital, human capital and productive efficiency.<sup>17</sup>

Vítor Bento’s assumption is that the central role of the economy in the definition of the balance of power tends to become permanent, given that nuclear weapons make it less likely that states will resort to war to solve their differences, and it is more likely – and wise – to concentrate competition in the economic domain, which thus replaces the primacy of the military domain.<sup>18</sup> In this context, the return of war has two consequences, with the sidelining of the economic dimension of state competition, which tends to be subordinated to the logics of war in a state of exception, and with the changes in the nature of conflict, a duel whose result has existential consequences for the contenders.

The book ends with the analysis of two paradigmatic cases – the postwar national strategies of Germany and China.<sup>19</sup> Vítor Bento underscores the elective affinities between the two continental powers: two processes of reconstruction of countries

whose strategic autonomy was drastically reduced in the Second World War; two states divided by the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War; and two economies focused on exports. In both cases, beyond their political divergences and the differences in circumstances, Beijing's communist regime and the democratic regime of the Federal Republic converge in showing

the centrality of the economy to restore the strategic autonomy of two powers.

That history is not over yet. The rise of China can not only anticipate the moment when its economy overcomes that of the United States, but also make the main continental power of our time inherit the imperialist expansion programme that dominated Germany and Russia successively in the twentieth century. <sup>Rel</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> HANNUN, Horst; LILLICH, Richard – 'The concept of autonomy in international law'. In *American Journal of International Law*. Vol. 74, No. 4, 1980, pp. 860, 888–90; HANNUN, Horst – *Autonomy, Sovereignty and Self-Determination*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> One can identify 'four waves' in the development of 'European strategic autonomy', since the Saint-Malo summit to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. HELWIG, Niklas; SINKKONEN, Ville – 'Strategic autonomy and the EU as a global actor: the evolution, debate

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<sup>6</sup> The reference to 'professional Europeanists' should not be taken as pejorative, despite the overzealous approach of a minority who wants to reduce Europe to the European Union. Some of the best contributions are: ARTEAGA, Felix – 'Autonomia estratégica y la defensa europea'. Real Instituto Elcano. 11 October 2017. Available at: <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/ analisis/la-autonomia-estrategica-y-la-defensa-europea/>; FIOTT, Daniel – 'Strategic Autonomy. Towards "European Sovereignty" in Defence?'. European Union Institute for Strategic Studies. 2018. Available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/strategic-autonomy-towards-%E2%80%99european-sovereignty%E2%80%99-defence>; GREVI, Giovanni – 'Strategic Autonomy for European Choices. The key to Europe's shaping power'. Discussion paper, European Policy Center. 19 July 2019. Available at: [https://www.epc.eu/content/PDF/2019/190719\\_Strategicautonomy\\_GG.pdf](https://www.epc.eu/content/PDF/2019/190719_Strategicautonomy_GG.pdf); HOWORTH, Jolyon – 'Autonomy and Strategy. What Should Europe Want?'. Security Policy Briefs, Egmont Institute. 9 April 2019. Available at: <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/autonomy-and-strategy-what-should-europe-want/>; TOCCI, Nathalie – 'European Strategic Autonomy. What It Is, Why We Need it, How to Achieve It'. Istituto Affari Internazionali. 26 February 2021. Available at: <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/european-strategic-autonomy-what-it-is-why-we-need-it-how-to-achieve-it>;

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<sup>7</sup> 'INITIATIVE POUR L'EUROPE – Discours d'Emmanuel Macron pour une Europe souveraine, unie, démocratique'. Paris. 26 September 2017; *DARE MORE PROGRESS. Alliance for Freedom, Justice, and Sustainability. Coalition Agreement between the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), Alliance 90/The Greens, and the Free Democrats (FDP) 2021–2025*. Berlin: SPD, DE/GR UENE, DE/FDP, DE, 7 December 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Sten Rynning in DEMPSEY, Judy – 'Is European Strategic Autonomy Over?'. Carnegie Europe. 19 January 2023. Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/88838>.

<sup>9</sup> ELIOT, T. S. – *The Idea of a Christian Society*. London: Faber, 1939, pp. 14–15.

<sup>10</sup> BENTO, Vitor – *Strategic Autonomy and Economic Power. The Economy as a Strategic Theater*. London: Routledge, 2022. The book,

which results from the author's doctoral thesis, is the first non-collective volume published on the question of strategic autonomy that is not focused on European strategic autonomy.

**11** *Ibidem*, pp. 67, 218.

**12** *Ibidem*, p. 65.

**13** *Ibidem*, p. 67; MEARSHEIMER, John – *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001.

**14** BENTO, Vítor – *Strategic Autonomy and Economic Power...*, p. 73.

**15** *Ibidem*, p. 212.

**16** *Ibidem*, pp. 67, 214.

**17** *Ibidem*, pp. 79-80, 214-15.

**18** *Ibidem*, pp. 209-10.

**19** *Ibidem*, pp. 171-208.

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# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IS ALIVE AND WELL<sup>1</sup>

Paulo Vila Maior

Annette Bongardt and Francisco Torres have published a textbook of European Political Economy with Universidade Católica Editora. This is a praiseworthy book because it keeps alive the study of European Political Economy, which seems to have fallen into neglect in the national academic context, a tendency which is not in line with the attention the topic receives in academic publications in the United Kingdom and United States; it dares (in the good sense of the term) to publish a book in English for a national target readership; and, as a core textbook in a module taught by the authors themselves, it assumes head-on the option for the English language as *lingua franca*, an unquestionable option when among students (the cohort that is most interested in this work) the contingent of non-Portuguese speakers grows every academic year. In the 302 pages of the book, Bongardt and Torres do not hide their pedagogical goals, in the tradition of textbooks published by British and United States publishers. This is demonstrated by the careful way the material is presented. Each chapter begins with a review of the topics covered, and learning goals and key concepts are identified. Chapters include boxes that contextualize concepts or specific aspects

of the chapter, drawing on technically developed explanations. The 11 chapters seek to theoretically enlighten the readers, providing further reading and research recommendations for those who wish to deepen their studies. The case studies enable the authors to articulate theoretical aspects with a practical dimension, making the book a living work that does not get bogged down in theory. The scientific-pedagogical options of the authors are presented in a crystal-clear

ANNETTE BONGARDT  
AND  
FRANCISCO TORRES

## Lessons on the Political Economy of European Integration: Selected Topics

Lisbon, Universidade Católica Editora, 2022, 302 pages





form. Given that this work explores political economy aspects of the European integration process, the authors are faithful to their interpretation of the ontology of the process. They argue that the economic model of the European Union (EU) rests on three pillars: the Internal Market, the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the European Green Deal (EGD). This is an original vision, particularly the identification of EGD as the third pillar of the EU economic model. Given that this is the most recent pillar, one which was revived after the EU and the rest of the world had been impacted by the pandemic crisis and the ongoing geopolitical crisis (the war in Ukraine), some of its goals point towards the future and depend upon the interaction of the wills of several political actors, with some national governments being able to impose obstacles to the consummation of the EU's environmentalist ambition.

One can understand the intention of the authors when they highlight, in the environmental dimension, that if the EGD is fulfilled in its entirety, this will place the EU at the forefront of environmental protection. Given the evasions of other influential political actors, this is an opportunity to promote the international visibility of the EU, placing the latter as a reference to be followed by other countries. Another scientific-pedagogic option on the part of the authors is worthy of praise: while a markedly political economy work, it does not avoid transdisciplinarity when this epistemological option strengthens the chapters and contributes to a more holistic vision of European integration on the part of the readers. In addition

to an incursion into History, contributions draw inspiration from other social sciences, namely Political Science, International Relations and Law. The book is not epistemologically monolithic, and this is in line with the multidimensional nature of the EU. Readers are invited to transcend the borders that enclose each domain of knowledge in its own perimeter. This work stands out from the entrenched tradition in the Portuguese academic milieu, still besieged by scientific self-absorption that is not sensible to the cross-pollination of knowledges as a factor that provides for a richer knowledge of observable realities. Embodying the understanding held by the authors of the EU economic model, six of the 11 chapters advance knowledge about the three pillars of the latter. Chapter 6 focuses on the Internal Market and its natural extension, the competition policy. Chapter 7 focuses on environmental and energy issues, opening a window upon the EGD and how it can become the central vector of the Union's policies.

Chapters 8, 9, 10 and, partly, 11 analyse the EMU, recognizing it as the centripetal pillar of the EU's economic model. In Chapter 8, Bongardt and Torres seek to demonstrate that the political economy model of the EMU was permeated by the dominant economic ideas when the monetary union was configured. In Chapter 9, the EMU is analysed from the standpoint of costs and benefits, drawing inspiration from the theory of optimal currency areas and from the logical development of this theory, the theory of sustainable currency areas. In Chapter 10, the authors isolate the monetary policy of the European Cen-


tral Bank (ECB) so that readers can judge on the contribution of this policy to Eurozone performance, without shying away from the (politically sensitive) debate about the democratic legitimacy of the monetary authority, which has as its background the political independence given to this institution. Chapter 11 finishes the book with an assessment of the crises that have impacted upon the EU in the recent past. The authors follow the chronology of crises, beginning with the sovereign debt crisis, which threatened the survival of the EMU, and conclude with the most recent crises: the pandemic crisis and the geopolitical crisis affecting the present day (resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine).

The chapters exploring the three pillars of the EU's economic model are preceded by five chapters that frame European political economy, historically and theoretically. In Chapter 1, the creation of the European Communities and their subsequent evolution is framed from a historical perspective. Chapter 2 deals with theoretical aspects, in line with an analysis that is typical of Political Science (what is the EU as a political object?), looking at the Union's institutional system and the challenges to the democratic legitimacy of a multilevel governing system (or governance without government) like the EU. This chapter covers fundamental questions of the EU's juridical system. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on two sensitive topics to the development of European integration, which has gone through the various stages of economic integration (according to the Balassa scale). On the one hand, they con-

sider the optimal size of the EU. On the other hand, they look at the flexibility of the process, which encompasses the possibility that not all member-states will want to advance towards a particular goal, thus opening the door to differentiated integration. Finally, Chapter 5 shows how, initially, the advantages of integration were limited to the trade aspect, making an incursion on the new generation of trade agreements that the EU has celebrated with other partners.

Even though the high quality of this work cannot be questioned, some of the authors' options are not consensual. This occurs with the chronology of European integration (p. 22), which does not treat the eurozone crisis as autonomous (for the authors, the 2010–19 period corresponds to the economic crisis, the refugee crisis and the EGD). The recognition of the federal dimension of the integration process (p. 24) seems excessive, in that it clashes with deep-seated preconceptions regarding the (idea of) federalization of the EU. Perhaps it would have been more apt to recognize the purely supranational nature of the EU. On the other hand, considering the European Council as a decision-making body (p. 50) is at odds with the role and functions of this institution, something that, in fact, is recognized by the authors a few pages later (p. 57), when they clarify that the European Council does not approve legislative acts. The analysis of Brexit displays a punitive vision of United Kingdom's decision (p. 119), since it suggests that the departure of this country opened a window of opportunity for the deepening of European integration, with Brexit being seen

as the purge the EU needed. The authors show an excess of optimism when they assess the independentist ambitions of certain European regions (Scotland and Catalonia) against the background of the European integration framework. They see the EU as the common home where these regions (if granted independence) would be welcomed (p. 122), as if the states from which they separated did not continue to be member-states of the Union. Finally, EGD is presented as a ‘soon to be’ third pillar (p. 203), which contradicts the previously presented idea that this pillar is already functioning in full (p. 13).

I do not agree with the options of the authors in these excerpts, but this does not diminish the high quality and the invaluable didactic worth of the book. These differences result from different assumptions and interpretations of the EU. It is important not to forget that when looking at the EU the metaphor of the blind man and the elephant<sup>2</sup> applies, emphasizing the desirable subjectivity in the analysis of political economy matters in general, and of the EU in particular. This subjectivity enriches science. 

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## ■ ■ ■ ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> A previous version of this paper was published in Portuguese in the journal *Relações Internacionais*, No. 79, September 2023.

<sup>2</sup> PUCHALA, Donald J. – ‘Of blind man, elephants and international integration’. In *Journal of Common Market Studies*. Vol. 10, No. 3, 1971, pp. 267–84.

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# HUMAN SECURITY PROMOTION IN (THE GREY AREA OF) STABILIZATION<sup>1</sup>

Ana Carina S. Franco

Gilder's work consists of an extensive literature review on the evolution and issues pertaining to contemporary peace operations undertaken by the United Nations (UN). This work brings clarity to the debate in a moment when one still witnesses an impasse or the beginnings of a transition from the liberal peace paradigm.<sup>2</sup> This process was accompanied by the return to the concept of stabilization, which presupposes the absence of a peaceful resolution to the conflict, namely in intra-state conflict scenarios.

Gilder draws a relevant connection between the concepts of stabilization and human security. After elaborating on the historical evolution of UN peace missions and the conceptual framework (Part I), Part II focuses on three case studies, namely UN peace operations in Mali, the Central-African Republic and South Sudan. The book ends by problematizing current mandates of so-called stabilization operations,<sup>3</sup> including their growing militarization.

In fact, the return to the concept of stabilization was a pragmatic alternative to the liberal peace paradigm – largely based on statebuilding – which dominated the 2000s.<sup>4</sup> The concept of human security reflects a paradigm shift, from armed conflict to law, in an international context in which laws apply to the individual more

than the state.<sup>5</sup> In this context, despite the differences between the two approaches, Gilder argues that UN stabilization missions have the potential to aspire to human security, because they can reinforce existing norms and laws.

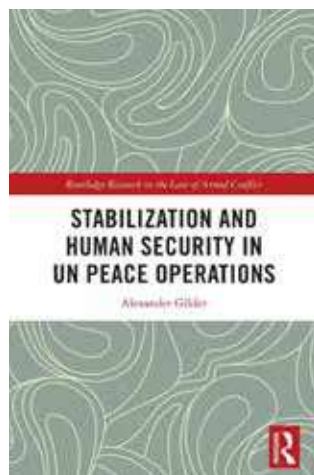
## STABILIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY UN PEACE OPERATIONS

In 1992, the report 'An Agenda for Peace' by UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali presented the instruments for the promotion of peace, prevention and conflict resolution, among which were peacemaking

ALEXANDER GILDER

### Stabilization and Human Security in UN Peace Operations

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org/10.4324/9781003131199](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003131199)



and peacekeeping operations. Nonetheless, the peacekeeping modality remained absent from the UN Charter. Reflecting the Brahimi Reform (2000), the UN Capstone Doctrine (2008) reinforced the non-linearity between the different types of peace operations, that is, the instruments stated in 1992, and aimed at safeguarding the principles of impartiality, consent and limited use of force.

Initially, at the end of the 1990s, 'stabilization' emerged as a political concept, and, to this day, it lacks a definition under the UN purview.<sup>6</sup> The Security Council authorizes peacekeeping missions under the framework of peaceful resolution of disputes (Chapter VI) and peace enforcement (Chapter VII). While not corresponding to any of these chapters, stabilization is part of the broader UN crisis management modality.<sup>7</sup> Gilder recognizes the implications of the robustness of stabilization mission mandates, placing these between peacekeeping and peace enforcement.

Among the attempts at reaching a definition, stabilization is conceived as a process in which military actors support a civilian leadership, for example, in the context of peace support or counterinsurgency operations.<sup>8</sup> In the academic literature, the concept sometimes corresponds to that which was developed by the British government,<sup>9</sup> and underpins the research of some authors.<sup>10</sup> These understand 'stabilization' as a provisional measure aiming at the establishment of a political framework and agreement for a stable state, crucial for the fulfilment of peace processes but not necessarily a concrete endpoint.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Gilder recognizes the

complexity that is inherent to these types of interventions, given that, while supporting the government of the receiving country, the UN becomes one of the parties in a conflict.

## **CIVILIAN PROTECTION AND HUMAN SECURITY**

Human security was increasingly institutionalized since the establishment, in 2003, of the UN Commission on Human Security, culminating in the 2012 Security Council resolution.<sup>12</sup> According to the author, the Council is in a unique position to mobilize this new approach, even though it is recognized that this is primarily the responsibility of states.

Gilder argues that the effects of stabilization operations can be looked at from the perspective of human security, namely in its civilian and development components, and in the priority given to individuals and communities. This approach is in line with the questioning of the liberal peace paradigm over the last two decades, namely through the development of new concepts and practices – for instance, the concept of 'positive peace' which brings together peace and development.<sup>13</sup>

The author has sought to identify the potential of integrating human security into UN peace operations. He engages with three fundamental principles of human security (the vital core, the recognition of vulnerability, protection and empowerment), analysing each in turn in the context of three case-studies. This is a markedly normative approach, currently overlapping with human rights,<sup>14</sup> and subject to the interpretation of international


law. The vital core implies the identification, on the part of individuals, of their own security needs, through a bottom-up approach. The concept of security is therefore analysed in a broad sense, presupposing a holistic approach in the context of different interventions.

Integrated or multidimensional missions<sup>15</sup> – known as third-generation – tend to include civilian protection and peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance or capacity-building of state actors. They imply close collaboration and coordination with other UN departments (among which those related to development and political issues). The concept of human security, as developed by Gilder, thus has a relevant basis for its operationalization.

The UN missions in Mali and the Central African Republic focused on restoring the authority of the state. Nonetheless, the author explains how the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali<sup>16</sup> had a prevention and dissuasion nature in the context of the civilian protection framework envisaged in its mandate. Moreover, he joins those voices that have alerted to the risks inherent to the direct or indirect collaboration with counterterrorism operations.<sup>17</sup> The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic<sup>18</sup> stood out by investing in the (re)establishment of the rule of law, which would be the second step of the stabilization process.

The selection of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) as a case-study is justified by the emphasis given to civilian protection and by its strongly militarized character. However, the conclusion is that in practice this mission displayed less robustness than the other two missions – which presented a more holistic approach – and moved away from a nature that required more prevention than response with a view to protecting civilians.

Finally, Gilder explains how the intervention of the UN favoured the implementation of the principle of civilian protection. It also presents recommendations towards a greater integration of human security in the totality of its principles. However, the contested application of the stabilization concept, at a moment when the liberal peace project is in need of transformation, implies an additional risk to the recommendations for the operationalization of human security in the UN framework.

In sum, this volume offers a comprehensive introduction of the complexity inherent to contemporary peace operations, including an explanation of their evolution, particularly since the 1990s. Furthermore, it brings an important contribution to the debate about the operationalization of a complex concept – human security – in UN interventions aiming at a rarely delimited goal – stabilization. 

## ENDNOTES

**1** A previous version of this paper was published in Portuguese in the journal *Relações Internacionais*, No. 80, December 2023.

**2** See, for instance, MOE, Louise Wiuff; STEPPUTAT, Finn – 'Introduction: peacebuilding in an era of pragmatism'. In *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 2, 2018, pp. 293-99; CHANDLER, David – *Peacebuilding. The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1997-2017*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

**3** The first UN mission encompassing 'stabilization' in its designation happened in 2014 in Haiti. The others were established in Africa: Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic.

**4** ANDERSEN, Louise Riis – 'The HIPPO in the room: the pragmatic push-back from the UN peace bureaucracy against the militarization of UN peacekeeping'. In *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 2, 2018, pp. 343-61.

**5** KALDOR, Mary – *Routledge Handbook of Human Security*. London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 65-75.

**6** The High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) confirmed the absence and the need for such a definition. Cf. UNITED NATIONS / GENERAL ASSEMBLY / SECURITY COUNCIL – 'Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People'. 2015. Accessed: 1 August 2020. Available at: [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2015\\_446.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2015_446.pdf).

**7** Taking the mission in Mali as an example, John Karlsrud mentions the alternative modality, which he terms as 'Chapter VII and a half'. See KARLSRUD, John – 'From liberal peace-

building to stabilization and counterterrorism'. In *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2019, pp. 1-21.

**8** CURRAN, David; HOLTOM, Paul – 'Resonating, rejecting, reinterpreting: mapping the stabilization discourse in the United Nations Security Council, 2000-14'. In *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, Vol. 4, No. 1: 50, 2015, pp. 1-18; MAC GINTY, Roger – 'Against stabilization'. In *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2012, pp. 20-30.

**9** As mentioned by the author, Security Council resolutions were influenced by the activism of Council members – namely the United Kingdom, the United States of America and France – involved in more complex conflict scenarios including counterinsurgency (for example, Afghanistan and Iraq).

**10** For example: AOI, Chiyuki; DE CONING, Cedric; KARLSRUD, John – 'Introduction. Addressing the gap between concepts, doctrine, and practice in UN peacekeeping operations'. In *UN Peacekeeping in a New Era*. London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 1-30; FRANCO, Ana Carina – 'External interventions in Mali and its borderlands – a case for stabilization'. In *Janus.net, e-journal of international relations*, 2021. Accessed: 15 November 2021. Available at: <https://observare.autonoma.pt/janus-net/en/janusnet/external-interventions-in-mali-and-its-borderlands-a-case-for-stabilisation>.

**11** AOI, Chiyuki; DE CONING, Cedric; KARLSRUD, John – 'Introduction ...'.

**12** The human security concept became known by the phrase 'freedom from fear and freedom from want'. The first component is limited, pertaining mostly to personal and physical safety; the second is broad, including

basic and essential needs (see, for example, HANLON, Robert J.; CHRISTIE, Kenneth – *Freedom from Fear, Freedom from Want: An Introduction to Human Security*. University of Toronto Press, 2016).

**13** The concept was spelled out in 2005 by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in the report titled 'In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all' (cf. UNITED NATIONS / SECRETARY-GENERAL – 'In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all'. 2005. Accessed: 1 August 2023. Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/543857>).

**14** In line, for example with the UN Human Rights Due-Diligence Policy – HRDDP.

**15** UN peacekeeping missions are multidimensional when they include at least the following dimensions: civilian, military, police, human rights, elections. Cf. HOWARD, Lise M. – *Power in Peacekeeping*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

**16** In French: 'Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation au Mali' (MINUSMA).

**17** BOUTELLIS, Arthur – *MINUSMA's 2021 Mandate Renewal in Uncertain Times*, 2021. Accessed: 1 August 2023. Available at: <https://effectivepeaceops.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/EPON-MINUSMA-II-Report.pdf>; CHARBONNEAU, Bruno – 'Intervention as counter-insurgency politics'. In *Conflict, Security & Development*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2019, pp. 309-14.

**18** In French: 'Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en Centrafrique' (MINUSCA).

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# MISSING WESTERN HEGEMONY, ALIAS LIBERAL WORLD ORDER<sup>1</sup>

Andrés Malamud

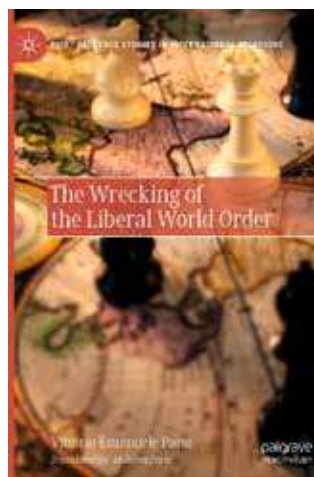
Vittorio Emanuele Parsi is no ordinary political scientist. A former rugby player, he is a commander (in the reserve) of the Italian Navy, having participated in international maritime security and peacekeeping missions. He is a Professor of International Relations at the Catholic University of Milan, where he heads the Alta Scuola di Economia e Relazioni Internazionali (ASERI). He actively participates in public debates in his country, in both television and the press. In his most recent book, and drawing on nautical metaphors, Parsi recounts the origins, the zenith, and the ‘wrecking’ of the liberal world order. He does it with extensive knowledge of the literature, and he has good reasons for it: not only he reads but he is also acquainted with its main authors, many of whom are his personal friends. Some, like John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno, Matthew Evangelista, Michael Cox and Joseph Grieco, visit ASERI every year as invited professors and endorse this book.

Parsi’s thesis is a simple one: the liberal world order is a global arrangement with a domestic base, which consists of the conjoining of democracy and the market economy. Soon, there will be no liberal world without liberal-democratic states building and sustaining it. According to his argument, the crisis derives from the

destruction of the balance to the detriment of democracy and in favour of the market. The collapse of the ‘social pact’ between capital and labour, which happened gradually from the 1970s, highlighted the internal contradictions of capitalism and gave rise to what Parsi terms the ‘neoliberal world order’. In his nautical imagery, this implied a change in course of the ship in which the West had been travelling since the end of the Second World War. He suggests that because of this change in course the liberal order hit a four-side iceberg, each of which would be able, on

VITTORIO  
EMANUELE PARSI  
**The Wrecking  
of the Liberal  
World Order**

London, Palgrave MacMillan,  
2021, 325 pages



its own, to sink the Titanic (the liberal world order in his metaphor). These four sides are the crisis of the international leadership of the United States, combined with the rise of authoritarian powers Russia and China, the fragmentation of threats stemming from jihadist terrorism, internal revisionism in the United States, and a general disenchantment with democracy, squeezed between populism on one side and technocracy on the other. He adds that this happened against the background of a European crisis and was worsened by the pandemic. One could say that the liberal world order hit a quadruple iceberg in the middle of a perfect storm. Parsi clarifies that the liberal world order was two things at once: a power structure and an ideologic project. The structure derived from the configuration of the postwar period, which was characterized by American hegemony. The project consisted in combining, as harmoniously as possible, state sovereignty and free trade – or, as mentioned previously, (national) democracy and (then international) market. In this way globalization was born, and this is how it went from its liberal origins to its neoliberal present. In this context, one is faced with a trilemma suggested by Rodrik, the Turkish-American economist who argues that it is not possible to achieve at the same time popular democracy, state sovereignty and free international trade, also known as globalization: reality forces us to choose between two of the three options.

### **THE LIBERAL WORLD ORDER AS A MASK OF AMERICAN HEGEMONY**

Parsi recognizes that the liberal world order is ‘the particular form which the

hegemony of the United States of America had assumed after 1945’, based on a political project which claimed Wilsonian principles (after President Woodrow Wilson, who led the United States during the First World War and the ensuing negotiations) and the whole of liberal thought. The immediate goal was the creation of an international arena ruled not by force but by law, even though the final goal was to make the international system similar to the democratic domestic system. This demanded the protection of the social order in each country from the disruptive influences coming from the outside, mainly from war. The five pillars of the new order would be: an open international market, able to contain the excesses of national sovereignty as well as those of international anarchy; using national sovereignty to curb the excesses of the market; erecting an international architecture to render interstate cooperation possible and advantageous; political, economic and cultural inclusion of the working classes, so as to strengthen the liberal institutions of the market economy and representative democracy; and, finally, creating a solid middle class, which would serve as the spine of the domestic political and economic systems. The expected result was a compromise, as imagined by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, between political realism and the transformative aspirations of liberalism.

If the liberal world order was North-American hegemony by other means, the domestic weakness and international withdrawal of the United States are the main causes of its crisis. The Donald

Trump administration fed both deficits, domestic and external. While pursuing a narrowly conceived national interest, the superpower gave up on the international system it had created. Parsi claims that this is where China comes in, its material infrastructure – the Belt and Road Initiative – overcoming the ideological infrastructure which sustained the world order. In this passage one can clearly see the idealist leanings of the author, who claims that the solidity or fragility of values allows for either the advancement or retreat of material interests. The rise of China thus happens as a consequence of Western errors of judgment, and not as a by-product of the development of its productive or material forces – nor, certainly, because of the superiority of its values.

This moment shows the difficulty, on the part of the West, to understand its relative decline. The book cites few non-Western authors, and does not make a substantial effort to understand how the liberal world order, overtly shaped by American hegemony, is perceived in other regions of the world. Therefore, even though the diagnosis gets it right when it comes to the Western front, it ignores a lot about the Eastern front – and everything about the Southern front. In the West, economic insecurity combined with cultural anxiety fed political extremism, weakening the pillars of the liberal world order: that is correct. But in the rest of the world, this order was never seen as a public good, only as a good of the club at the most. Whereas a public good benefits all who desire to consume it, regardless of whether they participated in its production, a good of

the club only benefits those who are accepted in the group – allowing therefore for the exclusion of those who are not desired by the governing board. A good number of Asian and African countries, and also some in Latin America, are not very interested in importing Western ideologies or accepting conditionalities imposed by supposedly common institutions. For many of these countries, the Western liberal order is in crisis – and that is a good thing, they add.

#### **THE FUTURE OF THE LIBERAL WORLD ORDER, BETWEEN DESIRES AND LIMITS**

Consciously or not, the association between liberal world order and the West is explicit throughout the book. Parsi believes that China does not reject ‘our’ globalization, as long as it can lead it. Therefore, ‘we’ are faced with the task of reconciling democracy with market economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ‘something that can only be achieved through a renewed transatlantic partnership’. A leading role on the part of Europe is thus in order, in tandem with American leadership. This analysis glosses over the structural causes of the ongoing power transition to the Asia-Pacific, namely demographic weight and economic growth. Disclaimer: lest the origins of the author of this review be seen as the cause of this criticism, I emphasize that the growing irrelevance of Europe in the international scenario only lags behind that of Latin-America.<sup>2</sup>

According to Parsi, the alternative to the reconstruction of the liberal order is the relaunching of a Chinese-style technological globalism, one in which liberalism

and democracy are trumped by national traditions in the name of a false common prosperity. The author does not envisage the possibility that the world order is replaced by several regional orders (or by a global disorder), but simply fears that the neoliberal order, the product of the wrecking of the liberal order, is eventually replaced by an illiberal order. It comes down to fighting for the adjective (liberal or not), given that the name (order) would be ensured. The wrecking of the liberal order would not lead to anarchy, but to its replacement by toxic nationalism – read ‘Trump’ – or by technocratic globalism – read ‘China’.

The main contribution of this book is its call for a reframing. Without denying the existence of interests and incentives, the author thinks – and speaks to us – on the basis of values. Parsi claims not only that it is possible to change the world, but that the direction of change depends upon us. According to him, intellectuals and academics have the duty, not only of helping to understand, but also, and above all, of calling for action: yes, we can! In Gramsci’s words, this work was not written with the pessimism of reason but with the optimism of the will – and the author would certainly agree. <sup>1</sup>

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## ■ ■ ■ ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup> MALAMUD, Andrés; SCHENONI, Luis L.; PAES, Lucas de Oliveira – ‘L’America Latina è diventata irrilevante?’. In *Vita e Pensiero*. No. 3, 2022, pp. 29–37.

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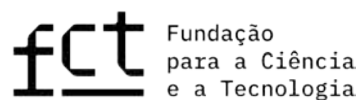
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