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Marjan SVETLIČIČ*

THE IMPLICATIONS OF TRUMP'S SELF-DEFEATING 2025 TRADE WAR ON THE GLOBAL ECONOMY**1

Abstract. The biggest problem facing the world economy today is the intensification of neomercantilist policies reinforced by aggressive industrial policies. The USA has declared a trade war on the whole world, and most aggressively on China. The main objective of this article is therefore to find out what the consequences of this trade war for the countries attacked and the US economy are in view of the theory of tariff protection, claiming that in trade wars there are no winners, that all states lose, including the economy of the country that began the war. Among the countries attacked, we are particularly concerned with China and the EU and which policy options they may have available to react to, this trade war. Since this is not the first trade war in history, given that we already had one during the Great Depression in the 1930s, it is necessary to determine whether we have learned from these wars or are merely repeating the mistakes made at that time. It is clear that history has not taught us much. Although this trade war heralds tectonic shifts in the world economy, we conclude that better than reacting in panic is to design a wise, long-term reaction strategy. This is supported by an evaluation of the negotiation profile of the trade war's initiator, President Trump, characterised by initial dramatizing and blackmailing. The analysis provides arguments concerning why the trade war is not expected to be carried out in such a dramatic way as it was started. All the negative consequences and unrealised objectives for the initiator's economy will eventually become the basis for the gradual watering down of the most aggressive policy elements.

Keywords: *Trump, tariffs, trade war, effects, retaliation, Great Depression, negotiations, European Union, China, USA.*

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s, Mao Zedong is claimed to have said, “There is great disorder under heaven; the situation is excellent”. Today, we are also facing great disorder in the world, albeit the context is different. Humankind is fractured by poly crises, ecological exhaustion, persistent inequality, multiple wars, and the dismantling of the world order. US President Trump’s announcement of absurdly high, draconian reciprocal tariffs on 2 April *Tariff Day* or *Liberation Day*, as he calls it, are namely the biggest trade shock in history and the most foolish² tariff policy in history. Nothing like this in terms of the size and type of reciprocal tariffs has occurred in our lifetime. Not least because the calculation of ‘reciprocal tariffs’ was based on the wrong formula and incorrect calculations³. The new tariffs are also consistently higher than what would be required to achieve genuine reciprocity (Conteduca et al. 2025).

The mentioned disorder is now being intentionally created, ignoring the existing world order all so as to Make *America Great* and *America Rich*. One similarity with Mao Zedong’s disorder is that Trump is in fact launching a *Cultural Revolution*, like Mao did 67 years ago. Mao Zedong did so in order to erase the memories of the failure of Great Leap Forward (1958–1962), whereas Trump’s efforts have been to support his antidemocratic, extreme-right policy by a *new McCarthyism* (pardoning the rioters at the Capitol, the forced repatriation of immigrants contrary to the rule of law⁴, LGBTIQ, and the white supremacy policy, termination of the Ministry of Education, the withholding of financing to particular universities and public media etc.)

At that time, China was hardly integrated into the global economy. Its influence on global affairs was marginal. The situation today is quite different. Its influence is growing while that of the USA is fading. H. Brands (2025) claims that “if D. Trump follows this destructive path, the US will become less globally engaged but more aggressive, unilateral, and illiberal. It will not be an absent superpower but a renegade one—a country that stokes global chaos and helps its enemies break the U.S. led system”. The instrument for creating such disorder is his “impulsive, ill-prepared, unethical, and bullying, arm-twisting transactional negotiation style” (see Shell 2019). While it might sometimes be effective in business, it is “ill-suited for complex policy decisions that require more persuasion and problem solving”

² The battery of tariffs already outpaces the stifling Smoot-Hawley law the USA introduced in the Great Depression (GD). »This is to economics what creationism is to biology, astrology to astronomy,“ former Treasury Secretary Summers posted on X”.

³ The formula applied for determining tariffs was: the US trade deficit with a country divided with its export of goods to the US divided by 2. The formula used the wrong figures. While Trump’s chart claims that China imposes a 67% tariff on American products, World Trade Organization (WTO) data shows China’s average tariff in 2024 was just 4.9%. These calculations conveniently exclude services trade in which the USA runs a surplus with most of its trading partners (see Prasad 2025).

⁴ The brain drain from the USA may have started after Trump’s attack on the autonomy of the universities (Harvard etc.). “More than 1,200 scientists who responded to a *Nature* poll — three-quarters of the total respondents — are considering leaving the US following the disruptions prompted by Trump” (Nature 2025).

(Latz 2018). As Schifferes argues (2025), “the worst of the pain from this era of tariffs will likely be felt by the countries that have historically backed free trade most enthusiastically. Such approach is making the situation deliberately unpredictable” (Carlsson-Szlezak et al. 2025). Apocalyptic emergencies are being created that normalise Trump’s ‘shock treatment’ policies all so as to populistically portray himself as the only possible saviour from all such threats.

After presenting the the theoretical framework, we shall: i) assess whether we have learned from the GD; ii) evaluate whether Trump’s policy is the outcome of his negotiation style or ignorance of trade policy; and iii) consider who will pay the costs of Trump’s *strategic neomercantilism*, concentrating on the economies of China, the EU, and the USA.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The implications held by Trump’s neomercantile imperialistic policies are economic, political and security due to factors like the: i) importance of imports in the economy; ii) context; iii) policy instruments; and iv) actors launching and implementing such policies.

Trade policy theory is clear; tariffs hurt home and host economies and are finally paid by consumers. Still, by setting the optimal tariff⁵ a large country able to influence international prices can maximise the country’s welfare without causing foreign producers to stop trading with it. Blanchard et al. (2025) nevertheless found that decoupling policies from global value chains (GVCs) with China would increase the optimal tariff on Chinese exports.

Like any other tax, tariffs are transferred as a cost to consumers as well as producers/suppliers. They redistribute incomes from domestic consumers to the domestic producers of protected commodities, leading to inefficiencies. The implications are however different in the case of large (due to a change in the terms of trade) or small countries. There are no winners in trade wars. All countries lose from such a beggar-thy-neighbour policy. US Senator E. Warren labelled Trump’s trade war “the dumbest trade war in history”. It would finally turn into a bagger thyself policy with devastating results for the world economy, bringing about a redistribution of power among the major actors with all associated instabilities and unpredictabilities. In her statement on 9 April 2025, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, director-general of the WTO, warned that dividing up the global economy into two blocs could cause a long-term decline in global real GDP of almost 7%. The Aston University Business School calculated the total cost around the world could amount to USD 1.4 trillion as trade is diverted and prices rise (Islam 2025). However, this calculation underestimates the total costs since it does not include geostrategic shifts costs (insecurity of supply, uncertainties⁶,

⁵ In practice, it is very hard to set such tariffs because they require precise information on global demand and supply elasticities, which are difficult to measure.

⁶ Penn Wharton University of Pennsylvania calculated that the rise in economic uncertainty after Trump’s Liberation Day will reduce investment in the USA by about 4.4% in 2025 (Boller et al. 2025).

dependencies, global governance costs, relocation of industries...), which is major deficiency of trade theory when it comes to evaluating the implications of trade wars.

When tariff rates escalate into a trade war, traditional trade policy theory is insufficient for explaining all of the implications held by such a war. New theories are attempting to include such issues. Blanchard et al. (2025) posited that tariff setting with GVCs depends on the nationality of the value-added content embedded in home and foreign final goods. Their approach predicts that discretionary tariffs will be decreasing in the domestic content of foreign-produced final goods and the foreign content of domestically produced final goods.

More complex geo-economics, a combination of economics and political science, focusing on how governments use their country's economic strength to exert influence on foreign entities in interdependence should be a necessary addition to trade theory (see Clayton 2025). The fact that economic and security issues are so strongly intertwined means that a convergence is required between economics, politics (including security and defence issues), technology, and strategic affairs not only on the international scale but also the national one. A country's ability to materialise its interests depends strongly on its economic statecraft, which is limited by its position in the global distribution of technology, as well as its market power. The need for comprehensive assessments of the methods governments use to weaponise trade (including "offensive" and "defensive" strategic industrial policy particularly controlling technology export) is emphasised (see Aggarwal and Cheung 2024, 1). Crises and wars nowadays set different priorities and ways of achieving development by ensuring peace and security (Jaklič 2024). In uncertain, volatile and trust-absent conditions, security of supply is becoming crucial⁷. Uncertainty is becoming costly. Countries want to become more resilient and less dependent in the interdependent world by lowering the supply uncertainty by reshoring, nearshoring or friends-shoring policies (Jaklič et al. 2020).

The theory of tariff protection demonstrates that tariffs spoil market efficiency⁸, raise production costs and prices for consumers (in turn stimulating inflation!). It increases profits for the businesses protected behind tariff walls, shrinks the range of available products, destimulates innovations, reduces productivity as an outcome of more expensive import components⁹ and, finally, bring

⁷ *Where things are made may matter more than how much they cost* is the logic of national security policies as posited by Georgieva, the managing director of the IMF (2025a).

⁸ Tariffs result in societal losses, stemming from reductions in: (1) production efficiency as inefficient producers expand at the expense of other sectors in the economy; and (2) consumption efficiency as some consumers are priced out of goods they would otherwise choose to purchase (see Clausing and Lovely 2024).

⁹ Steil and Harding found that productivity in the US steel industry tanked while productivity in other sectors rose after Trump imposed 25% tariffs on steel imports in March 2018 (Froman 2025). K. Russ and L. Cox estimated that for every new job created in a US steel mill benefiting from tariff protection 80 workers in downstream industries that use steel will now be hurt (Bown and Irwin 2025).

GDP growth down in all the *fighting* countries. People, especially the poorest, can no longer afford to buy the more expensive imported products. Unemployment and poverty rise. Protectionism also inhibits the flow of knowledge, thereby reducing innovation, which is otherwise stimulated by the diversity of ideas that open borders allow to flow. The result will be political and economic instability and socio/political conflicts, including xenophobia.

Although the countries initially targeted¹⁰ are hurt more, in the end so too is the initiating country. The distribution of tariff costs depends on the importance of exports and imports relative to GDP in the countries concerned and their structure. In addition, whether it allows for substitution with alternative suppliers (elasticity of import substitution) or no such room is available, and similarly in the case of exports. Small countries with a very high share of imports or exports in their GDP are according to such a calculation hurt more and have fewer chances of avoiding Trump's arm-twisting. The share of imports in GDP in Slovenia in 2023 for instance was 77% compared to 48% for the EU generally and a much smaller share in the case of large countries (14% in the USA and almost 18% for China).

Trump's protectionist measures and countervailing duties are in breach of the WTO rules, its most-favoured nation non-discrimination principle.¹¹ In so doing, the USA is violating an even more profound principle: the rule of law. By refusing to approve new judges, during Trump's first mandate the US administration froze the WTO dispute resolution system, a step that J. Biden did not reverse. Even Bandow (2020), a senior fellow of the right-wing Cato Institute, claims that "the tariff idea is simply idiotic, chiefly punishing Americans, creating political tensions and triggering off fundamentalism/inflame nationalist sentiments". The raising of tariffs by one country triggers retaliatory tariffs by other countries¹², even though under the WTO rules these are now illegal against certain foreign companies, or they use a national security argument as a blanket justification.

There are in addition long-term effects like the erosion of US firms' competitiveness not only because of rising intermediate input costs¹³, but also in the development of green technologies (leaving the Paris Accord, the World Health

¹⁰ Winchester's scenario without retaliation (2025) demonstrated that GDP for the rest of the world decreases by USD 155 billion, more than twice the corresponding decrease when there was retaliation. This indicates that the rest of the world can reduce their losses by retaliating. At the same time, retaliation leads to a worse outcome for the USA.

¹¹ J. Clark, former EU trade negotiator and Head of the EU Delegation to the WTO (2025), claims "the joint litigation of several countries in the WTO is necessary because the US tariffs breach GATT Articles I and II on respectively non-discrimination and tariff bindings – because the US decapitated the WTO Dispute Settlement System and the rules are not enforceable". The WTO defines the limits on the costs for new tariffs, allowing changes for the 'right' reasons (market failures or local externalities), but not to shift its costs onto trading partners.

¹² "When the US, China, or the EU put in place a subsidy measure, there is a 73% chance that one of the other countries will retaliate within 12 months", warned deputy director of IMF G. Gopinath (2023).

¹³ Tariffs on inputs namely reduce the competitiveness of outputs and make the existing economic structure sclerotic.

Organization¹⁴) and increased energy prices, and the *drill baby drill* or *keep coal alive* policies.

Contrary to standard protectionism theory, Trump is obsessed by tariffs as the ideal policy instrument. For him, tariffs are politically a form of vengeance driven by grievance based on the “Grievance Doctrine” as a mythic tale and ‘placebos’ which fail economically, yet succeed politically” (Baldwin 2025). He sees tariffs as a fix-all instrument for what is troubling Americans, including:

- raising tax revenue from foreigners to replace domestic taxes;
- eliminating the trade and fiscal deficit¹⁵, and using the trillions of dollars saved to lower taxes;
- ensuring reciprocity¹⁶ on the level of tariffs;¹⁷
- bringing manufacturing jobs back home to the USA;
- protecting national security and ending dependence on suppliers from adversarial countries; and
- punishing countries for unrelated sins like failing to stop migration.

Such ideas are taking the USA back to the 19th century (Clausing and Obstfeld 2025). In reality, tariffs can only exceptionally achieve some of these objectives and are almost never the best policy to tackle them. It is not the rest of the world that pays them, but importers, whether consumers or local producers who rely on imported *inputs*. They do not improve the trade deficit. Exports tend to deteriorate (due to retaliatory tariffs applied by target countries) and often appreciate the currency by reducing the demand for foreign currency to pay for imports (see Steinberg 2025), which is contrary to Trump’s goal to depreciate the value of the dollar so as to make the USA more competitive. Overall, you have some reduction in imports, but also a reduction in exports. Clausing and Obstfeld (2025) claim that it is very unclear that you will obtain a big reduction in the trade deficit, if any at all. A stronger dollar raises the relative international price of US goods, encouraging global consumers and firms to shift away from US exports.

Trump is forgetting that a trade deficit with the world is a macroeconomic phenomenon, the result of an equation between the national level of savings and investment. Americans simply spend too much and produce and save too little. With a trade deficit, a country is spending more money on imports than it makes from its exports.

¹⁴ Trump also imposed a 90-day pause on the delivery of all US foreign aid and ordered a sweeping 180-day review of all international organisations, including the World Bank and the IMF.

¹⁵ In such a way, the USA is trying to coerce other countries into a “Mar-a-Lago Accord” whereby they would agree to depreciate the US dollar and lend long term to the USA by buying US Treasuries. This argument received a lot of attention in the financial markets, but it is very hard to see how it would ever work (Beattie 2025).

¹⁶ The principle of reciprocity implies having the same tariff rate on imports from another economy as it puts on its imports from the US. Thus, a reciprocal tariff for Vietnam would be about 9.4 percent, not the 46 percent as the arbitrarily calculated rate Trump announced on 2 April” (Hendrix 2025).

¹⁷ It is true that some countries have a higher average tariff on imports than the USA. America’s average external tariff was 3.3% in 2023 compared to 3.8% for the UK, 5% for the EU, 7.5% for China, and 17% for India (Chu 2025).

To fill the gap country can either borrow money from foreign lenders or permit foreign investment. Rather than reviving U.S. manufacturing, Trump's extreme tariffs and erratic foreign policy are likely to instead scare off foreign investors altogether and undercut the dollar's global role. That would indeed shrink the trade deficit – but only by eroding the very pillars of the country's economic dominance, U.S. dollar, at a steep cost to American firms and families, explains Professor Hassan (2025).

Finally, the idea of balancing trade with each country as a basis for reciprocal tariffs is crazy¹⁸ because you buy and sell different things you need and they are produced according to the international division of labour and comparative advantages. Balancing trade with each partner separately is therefore a no-go. Tariffs setting should thus take the different factor endowments of countries into consideration. Many countries for instance export raw materials and agricultural goods that the USA does not produce domestically. Such production cannot be moved to the USA. It is not tariffs for balancing trade but a duty of the market based on the division of labour which international trade is about.

A very intriguing question is why, despite the theory's predictions Trump is *putting so much money* into his tariff masterplan¹⁹, if there is one²⁰. Is it ignorance, as we have claimed (Svetličič 2025a), the hidden private interests of specific lobbies (including himself²¹) or just the phenomenon whereby today bad ideas often drive out good ones, as paraphrasing Gresham's law would imply in the case of money. Perhaps the most important factor is that historically when starting to lose their economic/technological dominance developed countries always began to implement protectionist policies to defend their dominant global position. They have also frequently misused the security explanations for such measures so as to remain, at least very loosely, within the WTO rules.

Following the theory, it may be expected that the tariff-obsessed arguments cannot prevail in the very long term. The costs of the tariffs will convince even today's strong supporters of neomercantilist policy that the trade war is unsustainable²² and that stepping back and changing the policy of the absurdly high

¹⁸ Not least because huge the transaction costs implied whether tariffs are negotiated with each country individually.

¹⁹ Krugman (2025) is very critical of his tariff policy, claiming that: "Trump gone full-on crazy and making false claims about our trading partners – not sure, in this case whether they are lies, or because he may be truly ignorant. Many of the numbers in Trump's graph of countries' tariff rates are complete fabrications – including the supposed 39 percent tariff the EU places on U.S. goods since the average tariff it charges on US goods is less than 3 percent".

²⁰ "Increasingly, it has become obvious that there is no plan, or at least no coherent plan with a single target and a way of hitting it. Instead, Trump's tariff policy reflects a mixture of competing and often flat-out contradictory aims and a misunderstanding of the power of the crude instruments he is using" (a comment by A. Beattie from the Financial Times 2025).

²¹ By speculating in the stock market, it is possible to earn a lot of money by inside trading. It is hard to imagine that Trump's techno friends did not know that he would postpone the implementation of reciprocal tariffs.

²² As said by S. Bessent, US Treasury Secretary, on 23 April 2025.

tariffs and self-harming trade war is necessary. “Sooner or later, Trump will recognize that producing goods in the US raises costs, hurts consumers, and erodes the competitiveness of American exports”, Professor Hausmann states (2025). Turnarounds in his policy, such as the postponement²³ by 90 days of the new tariffs announced on Liberation Day, was the first crack in this policy.

HAVE WE LEARNED FROM THE GREAT DEPRESSION?

Almost 100 years have passed since the GD. The context has changed tremendously. In any case, there are important lessons to be learned. The 1929 depression was so wide, deep and long because the international economic system was made unstable by the inability of the British and unwillingness of the USA to assume responsibility for stabilising it. These days, the USA is also unwilling to cooperate with other great powers on stabilising the global system and is turning to an inward-looking, self-centred sovereigntist techno-nationalism policy. Becoming aware that their national power is diminishing relative to rivals, the elites have started to implement neomercantile defensive policies, as also happened in the past.

The lack of readiness to coordinate policies is another lesson that has not been learned. While the USA's hegemony is now slipping away, neither the EU nor China (at least officially) are in a position to take on this role. In any event, Trump's policy is not just opening doors for an increasing role for China, but also for the EU. “In just a few weeks, the Trump administration has done more to strengthen the EU than Europeans themselves achieved over the last two decades” (Merritt 2025), and reinforced national cohesion in China.

The ineffectiveness of protectionist trade policies and the retaliation of other countries that saw international trade decrease threefold (what happened to world trade 1929–1933 – Search Images) forced the USA to alter its policy by launching bilateral trade negotiations upon the adoption of the Trade Agreements Act in 1934. Lowering tariffs or exempting individual countries from such measures became a bargaining chip, just like they are today.

The GD demonstrated what the theory of trade wars has been teaching for a century; namely, that protectionism is like a boomerang, that the tit-for-tat policy turns into a policy of beggar-thyself. The unanswered question is what will be the effects of contemporary strategic neomercantilism aggressively combined with industrial policy, including restricting exports of high technology or goods with American intellectual property content. This is what Trump is doing today, even a policy of picking the winners. We saw many of them, *techno feudalists*, Trump's camarilla oligarchs, at his inauguration, which might even be a sign of the *crony capitalism eroding long-term accountability* that comes with private influence over public policy.

²³ This postponement was announced in a face-saving way. Similarly, also his claim that Xi Jinping 'had called' him, which China denied.

The political lesson has not been learned either. Extreme political right politicians, even fascists, are occupying leading political positions now in many countries just like they did in the 1930s using similar xenophobic slogans and imperialist aspirations. Also today, governments are disoriented. It is difficult to reach consensus on what to do in the climate of discontent, insecurity, despair and fear.

TRUMP'S NEGOTIATION PROFILE

Contrasting Trump's *hair-pulling* arguments with hard economics alone, and ignoring his personal negotiations profile that has such a strong influence on his policy, can lead to erroneous conclusions. Among the three tools that tariffs can be used for macroeconomic, bargaining and punitive purposes, Trump is mostly applying a bargaining and punitive tool (some say '*mafia-like*' tactics). He is in fact creating a *bargaining-based international order* built on an unstable network of bilateral transactions.

By evaluating Trump's first presidential mandate along with his past negotiating record, one may safely conclude that chaos and unpredictability is partly a result of his threat-based trade policy ignorance and his negotiation tactics of:

- a) anchoring, *blackmailing*, seeking leverage over others by making outrageous demands; and
- b) creating disorder to be able to implement policies not "accepted in normal situations" (Klein 2017).

Experts, not simply those on negotiations, agree that Trump is very competitive, a bully, an intimidator and a humiliator, a win-lose oriented, impulsive, ill-prepared, unethical, empathy-lacking, ruthless, 'hard ball' player, manipulating, cunning, and willing to bluff. In short, he could be a pupil of Machiavelli (the ends justifies the means). Since he himself possesses the traits of an autocrat, he appreciates such negotiators on the other side of the table. Such a style creates fake, perceived urgencies²⁴, compelling the other side to act quickly, often making concessions to avoid losing the deal in such a disrupted context. He is leveraging unpredictability, undermining the opposition's ability to prepare properly.

All of this is conducted with the use of public platforms and megaphone politics. Trump is a self-centred narcissistic performer, likes to bravado himself,²⁵ and is very good at creating his brand name. His emphasis on (perceived) power, his often empty threats and ineffectual bluffing, even his lying, demonising, intimidating and belittling of his political opponents (and his allies), making enemies out of his counterparty, and eroding trust, has been and will probably prove to

²⁴ Announcing reciprocal tariffs, he stated that there is a "national emergency that threatens our security and our very way of life".

²⁵ It means that we must not focus on his provocative rhetoric, but on his actions.

be ill-suited for complex policy decisions that call for more persuasion and problem-solving (see Kogan 2019; Ross 2008²⁶; Shell 2019; Latz²⁷ 2018).

It seems obvious that Trump's personal characteristics while strongly influence his policies and past negotiation record indicate that the period lying ahead of us in his mandate will be full of:

- uncertainties and volatilities, jumping from one 'urgency' to another;
- ruthless, 'hard ball' win-lose negotiations, threats and bluffing; yet also
- withdrawing from the initially made, not so infrequently irrational, demands and threats.

This approach will only contribute to the uncertain, unpredictable, confusing and chaotic geostrategic world landscape. Transformational shifts may be sudden and hard to predict. What is obvious is that the weight of economic issues will tend to be dominant and cause quite unimaginable and very costly uncertainty²⁸, creating enormous instability. Trump is in fact weaponising uncertainty. Trust, so crucial in international cooperation, is lost. The assessment that his bark is worse than his bite may prove to be correct in the long term!

Negotiation literature heavily emphasises that an experienced negotiator must prepare not only for the issues on the table but also with respect to the persons on the other side of the table. In this regard, Sun Tzu's thought is inspiring: "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles".

The few instruments available to successfully deal with an assertive, aggressive and competitive negotiator like Trump with strategic patience are:

- to be aware of the fact that win-win, collaborative *principle negotiations* (for more, see Fisher et al. 1983) do not work with such a negotiator;²⁹
- to praise and ego-stroke them;
- to be prepared to take the first blow³⁰ and fight back in a controlled atmosphere of confrontation;
- by showing your strength and cunning potential³¹;
- hard arguments are not the most convincing; stories and power-based arguments are better than moral appeals;
- choosing a strong, charismatic negotiator for your side;
- creating alliances; show him your (combined) power!; and

²⁶ He was executive vice president of the Trump Organisation. His book: *Trump-Style Negotiation: Powerful Strategies and Tactics for Mastering Every Deal*, 2008, is a very critical assessment of Trump's negotiation style.

²⁷ M. Latz's book *The Real Trump Deal: An Eye-Opening Look at How He Really Negotiates is based on over 100 of Trump's deals* – determining which strategies caused him to prevail and which caused him to fail.

²⁸ Handley and Limão (2017) demonstrated that trade policy uncertainty can hurt investment as much as actual tariffs.

²⁹ When Zelensky appeals to democratic principles, territorial integrity and international law, he speaks a language that Trump does not understand.

³⁰ Following Sun Tzu's advice: "Let the storm pass; don't lose face or control!" (Krause 1996).

³¹ "Win by not engaging directly", Sun Tzu.

- use humour: respond in a light-hearted way like: “Are you joking”³².
With such ways, one can better influence the outcomes of such tough negotiations in all fields, including economic.

THE EFFECTS OF TRUMP'S TARIFFS ON THE ECONOMIES OF CHINA, THE EU, AND THE USA, AND THE RESPONSES OF THE COUNTRIES TARGETED

General Framework

The starting point when evaluating any trade war is first knowing the level of tariffs imposed on specific countries, regions, and the world economy. Second, what are the sizes of the economies and the policies the target countries are implementing to neutralise the negative effects. Such policies are also strongly embedded in their cultural background. As we know, cultures have different approaches to, among others, time, a long- or short-term orientation, risks, truth/lies, decision-making, the communication style, and pride. Some are more inclined to a competitive approach to negotiations, others value greater harmony and good relations. It is necessary to know these cultural types.

By concentrating this chapter on China and Europe as targets, according to Lewis' classification of cultures (2006) we are dealing with reactive cultures where pride and harmony are very important (China) and linear-active and multi-active cultures (Europe) where facts are decisive (linear-active like Germany) and more emotional (multi-active, like Italy). On this basis, we can expect a more fact-based, cool and planned approach from the EU and a tough, proud yet amicable style from China. America should know that as such an old and proud civilisation, now also a major global economic power, China cannot be pushed around.

Countries can apply five major types of policies, provided they do not opt for capitulation or litigation in the WTO: i) retaliation; ii) negotiations; iii) redirecting trade; iv) wait, prepare and see; and v) a combination of the previous strategies.

Countries typically combine different policies as the development of the trade war demands. They also depend on the factor endowments as well as the negotiation strength and style (culture) of the country concerned. For most of them, retaliation is a solution for reducing the supply and demand shock. The elasticity of demand, the dependence on imports of certain strategic products, is narrowing the room for manoeuvre while possessing some strategic goods, enhancing it.

The first challenge faced by target countries is predicting how Trump's schizophrenic policy will develop. It is even hard to establish which tariffs are

³² “On April 11, China dismissed Trump's moves as a ‘joke’” (Kong 2025).

applied at different moments in time, not just in terms of the general rate but also with respect to sectors/products. Target countries should also consider Trump's: i) underestimation or lack awareness of how countries are interdependent; ii) belief that China's economy is very fragile and the EU with the states' heterogeneous interests is very dependent on the USA; iii) underestimating of the reach and scope of the geographic trade reorientation; and iv) arrogance and presumptuousness³³.

The interdependence of economies is the argument leading to the policy of avoiding confrontation, inclining to the 'wait, prepare and see' strategy. It implies negotiations, based on the argument that the elimination of new tariffs would be in the interest of the USA and not just the country concerned. This argument can be applied to most cases, but especially China and the EU.

Trump's policy also demonstrates the presumptuousness of the big powers so characteristic of empires in relative decline. His policy overlooks that short-term-oriented American customers are not ready to make sacrifice today for the future, and not prepared to bear the costs of his tariff policy for long. In contrast, the Chinese are ready to absorb the short-term damage and pressure, being historically used to weathering multiple storms, enduring pain³⁴ and, "sparked by the trade war that has strengthened national cohesion" (Zhao 2025), can tolerate them longer.

Perhaps the major and most effective response of the *attacked* countries has been to diversify their trade flows. Countries will start trading *around* the USA. It has also been a consequence of Trump's trade war in his first term in office. The effectiveness of such a policy is however now limited because tariffs have been imposed on almost every country (including islands mostly inhabited by penguins).

The redirection of trade will also be one of the major responses to the present USA-initiated trade war. Targeted countries have already started hedging against Trump's impulsive and wildly erratic tariff policy by diversifying their trade ties: China mainly in Asia but also in Africa³⁵, the Arab countries³⁶ and Latin America. Meanwhile, Mexico is turning to the EU and Latin America, Canada to Europe, and the EU to Japan, ASEAN, South-East Asia, and Australia.

Conteduca et al. (2025) empirically prove³⁷ that tariffs hurt all economies and the world economy³⁸, just as theory predicts. Contrary to Trump's expectations,

³³ It is largely based on P. Navarro, the White House's senior counselor for trade and manufacturing, ideas who has no competence in economics. In his writings, he frequently quoted someone named 'Ron Vara' (an anagram of his own last name) as his invented fake expert source.

³⁴ Xi is not so sensitive about public opinion as American politicians and the public is not ready to endure Trump's self-imposed economic pain for too long.

³⁵ China is the biggest exporter to most African countries.

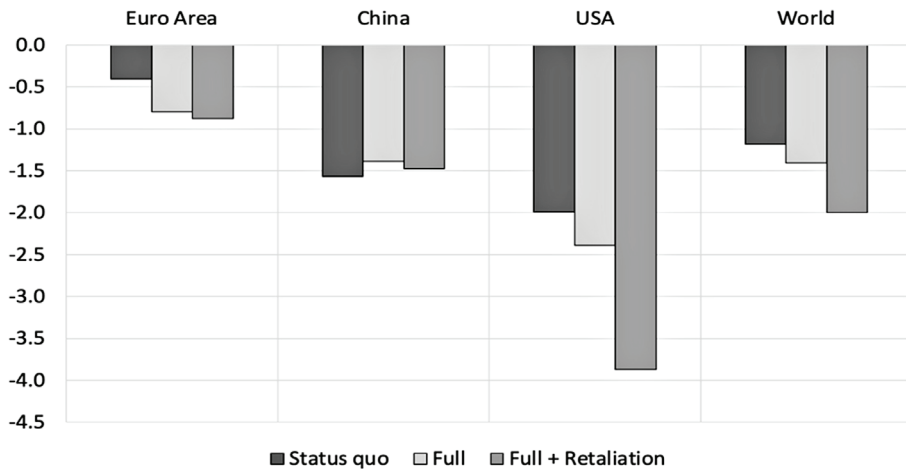
³⁶ It has accelerated negotiations on a free-trade agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council.

³⁷ They applied Bagae and Farhi's (2024) model calibrated to 33 countries and 18 sectors using 2023 input-output data.

³⁸ Even assuming that the grace period results in a permanent suspension of *reciprocal tariffs* that would lead to a global welfare loss of 1.2% (Conteduca et al. 6).

the worst hit will be the US economy, particularly due to the retaliation measures taken by the target countries, followed by the Chinese and (at the least) the euro area. They calculated that US welfare would fall under all three scenarios³⁹ (2% in status quo and 4% in full + retaliation one⁴⁰). This is much higher than compared to the euro area where welfare would drop by less than 1%. China is in between with a drop of 1.5% in all scenarios (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: CHANGES IN WELFARE BY REGIONS AND COUNTRIES (IN PERCENT)



Notes: The figure plots the change in welfare across different scenarios.

Source: Contenduca et al. 2025.

World trade would contract by between 5.5% and 8.5% relative to the pre-shock economy, depending on the scenario. Supply chains would be wildly disrupted, notably in the electrical, electronics, and transport equipment.

OECD modelling (2025) shows that efforts to localise supply chains could decrease global trade by over 18% and reduce global real GDP by more than 5%. The result would be a substantial reallocation and the fragmentation of international trade costing up to 7% of GDP, as estimated by Gopinah (2023). After Trump's recent trade war, such costs will rise dramatically. The IMF forecasts global growth slowing to 2.8% in 2025 from 3.3% last year, reflecting the Liberation Day tariffs and initial responses. The rest of the world can reduce their losses by retaliating. At the same time, retaliation leads to a worse outcome for the USA. Carlsson-Szlezak et al. (2025) calculated that in the event of retaliation

³⁹ They are: status quo, full implementation of reciprocal tariffs, and full implementation with retaliation.

⁴⁰ A calculation by Ignatenko et al. 2025 shows similar results. If trading partners optimally retaliated against the USA's tariffs, US welfare could fall by over 3.7%, while cutting the welfare losses for other countries in half from 7.2% to 3.1%.

in 2025 the GDP of US trade partners' growth would drop by between -0.1% to -0.3% . Yet, for countries that received exceptionally high tariffs and have large exports to the USA, such as Vietnam, the impact of the April 2 rates could prove devastating at more than -6% of GDP. Finally, the new tariffs will hold important long-term implications for the competitive advantages of individual countries, subject to the different levels of tariffs attributed to each of them. This could lead to a substantial restructuring of international trade flows.

China

The framework of China's reaction to the USA's escalating tariff war should be the Chinese philosophy, namely, a combination of Confucius patience, harmony, being calm under pressure, wisdom, avoiding confrontation together with Sun Tzu combativeness (for which there is perhaps more evidence in recent China policy) to meet the short-term American logic seeking instant gratification and quick wins. The Chinese are a forward-looking culture for which time is eternal. It is easier for them since "China, the surplus country, is giving up only sales, which is solely money; while the US, the deficit country, is giving up goods (strategically needed, op. author) and services it does not produce competitively or at all at home" (Posen 2025). It broadens Beijing's arsenal to fight back against Trump's wrecking policies, all inspired by the wish to never repeat China's "hundred years of humiliation". They have been preparing for a confrontation with the USA since 2018. Apart from retaliatory tariffs, this includes redirecting trade, reducing investment in US Treasury bonds, weaponising the control of strategic materials and preventing their export, and not least by stimulating domestic demand.

After postponing the implementation of reciprocal tariffs, Washington imposed a 145% tariff on Chinese imports on 4 April together with export controls on semiconductors (integrated circuits and manufacturing equipment) and the foreign direct product rule, blocking China from acquiring US technology. These tariffs are more than 40 times higher than before the US-China tariff war began in 2018, and already 6 times higher than the average US tariff on China (20.8%) when the second Trump administration commenced on 20 January 2025 (Bown in PIIE 2025). China, on the other hand, imposed 125% tariffs on US imports.

Both countries soon realised that such tariffs are unreasonable and began to renegotiate. They agreed on 12 May to: i) suspend their tariffs for 90 days; ii) that the USA would reduce the tariff on Chinese imports to 30% from the current 145%; while iii) China would lower its import duty on American goods from 125% to 10% (starting 14 May); and iv) to continue negotiations. The IMF (2025b) forecast China growth in 2025 and 2026 at 4%, a 0.6 of a percentage point reduction, while inflation was revised down by about 0.8 of a percentage point.

Such forecasts and bilateral renegotiations reveal how much Trump has underestimated the interdependency of the US and Chinese economies. China

is dependent on the USA for high-end technologies, food, and energy security, whereas the USA is increasing its dependence on China for many strategic goods at the same time as China's dependence on exports to the USA has decreased substantially (from 19.8% in 2018 to 12.8% of China's total exports in 2023). By 2022, the USA was reliant on China for 532 key product categories – nearly four times the level in 2000 – yet China's reliance on US products was cut in half in the same period. China supplies roughly 72% of rare earth⁴¹ imports into the USA, and accounts for about half of US soybean exports (although the share has today decreased from 40% to 20%) and nearly 10% of American poultry exports (see Kong 2025). Restricting exports of such strategic goods as a retaliation strategy would hurt the USA terribly. Accordingly, the potential for such retaliation policy is very high and already been put into practice. China has restricted exports of key minerals such as gallium, germanium and antimony, as well as more recently rare earth magnets and six heavy rare earth elements vital for aerospace, defence, and semiconductor manufacturing. China's "unrivalled supply chains have made China a formidable foe in this trade war" (Koh 2025). US firms cannot substantially reduce that without serious damage. The position held by China is further enhanced by the fact that countries upset by America's new tariffs will start to align themselves with China against the USA. "Beijing with its large market is an alternative" (Chang 2025). The tariffs may well further prompt China to accelerate its "domestic demand expansion" and in turn try to neutralise the negative effects of the new tariffs.

Trump and the West generally have frequently overestimated the Chinese economy's fragility in view of the country's proven ability to overcome many of such problems and underestimated its advantages in the economic conflict. Overconfidence of this nature and the confrontational style have led to serious miscalculations, underestimating Beijing's capacity to react resolutely and the consequences held by a major disruption to the supply of vital goods from China that cannot be replaced any time soon or made at home without the costs being prohibitive. Fighting the current war before doing it is a recipe for almost certain defeat, at enormous cost" (Posen 2025). It was thus no surprise when CNN's F. Zakaria concluded that "China will clearly be the big winner in this new world economy because it will position itself as the new centre of trade". *The Wall Street Journal* even declared: "Trump's global trade war is a strategic gift to the Chinese president". The result of Trump's first-mandate trade war with China, which many observers think China won in the long run, may serve as an example.

A very effective neutraliser of the negative effect of tariffs is trade reorientation and a lowering imports from the USA. China is strengthening its ties in Asia⁴²,

⁴¹ They are critical of the production of iPhones, chips, for the US defence industry (sonar and communication equipment for missiles and jet engines, magnetic resonance) etc... The USA is also dangerously dependant on China for drug supply. Import restrictions could be a threat to the health standard of Americans.

⁴² ASEAN has become the top destination for Chinese manufacturing. The trip by President Xi to

partly for reasons of long-term economic and security, a strategic orientation to reinforce its dominant position in Asia, and to circumvent the US tariffs by indirectly exporting to the USA. Under the full+ retaliation scenario, over half of Chinese value-added exports reaches the USA via Mexico and 21% through Asian countries (Contenduca et al. 2025, 5). The large share of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as importers of goods like petroleum also enables China to effectively reduce its imports from the USA, as happened during Trump's first term in office.

On top of this, China is seeking to introduce the yuan into these transactions, to displace the sliding role of the dollar in the last 20 years from 70% to around 60% of the global foreign exchange reserves.⁴³ By developing an alternative financial institution, China is weakening the USA's influence on world trade. Still, that does not mean leaving the existing liberal order, but it acts more as a safety net to improve its position in the global economy. This is ringing alarm bells on the American side. "We are going to require a commitment from these seemingly hostile countries that they will neither create a new BRICS Currency, nor back any other currency to replace the mighty U.S. Dollar or, they will face 100 percent tariffs. Similar is the threat to hit countries that buy Venezuelan oil by 25% tariffs", declared Trump.

In reality, his policy is endangering the dollar's traditional dominance. The only true threat to the dollar is the euro. The share of global export invoicing in euros is almost equal to that of the dollar. The problem, however, is the lack of military backing of the euro to shore up its long-term credibility that investors are seeking. Fishman et al. (2025) are clear: "Combined with Trump's attacks on the rule of law, his clumsy, erratic attempts to weaponized Washington's economic advantages pose the greatest threat so far to the dollar's status as a reserve currency". This is especially so because China possesses strong bargaining power by weaponising the sale of US Treasury bonds, of which could considerably damage the dollar's role in the global system (for more, see Svetličič 2025b).

The European Union

Before postponing the reciprocal tariffs of 20% for the EU in May 2025, they remained as a 10% as well as a 25% tariff on EU steel, aluminium, copper, cars and pharmaceutical imports (Tompkins 2025). The EU responded by announcing EUR 26 billion in countermeasures to the USA's tariffs, and that it was open to negotiations. Trump is threatening to impose 50% tariffs on EU imports and has delayed taking such a step until 9 July 2025. The EU has obviously opted for

several Asian countries in April and the signing of almost 100 trade agreements shows that such trade diversification efforts are still underway. However, this possibility is losing power since other Asian countries are also facing the highest tariff levels, ranging from almost 50% to 33%.

⁴³ Aiming to substitute the dollar as the global reserve currency, in 2015 China established the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) as an alternative to the Society of Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT). By 2024, China's central bank had signed 40 bilateral swap agreements.

a cool head, *to wait, indirectly demonstrating its strengths*⁴⁴, to use a *prepare and see* strategy, and *not to flinch at Trump's first move*.

The impact of such tariffs must be evaluated in the context of the interdependency of the two economies. The EU and the USA are the most integrated economies in the world, having the world's largest bilateral trade and investment relationship. The EU's trade balance in goods with the USA is positive, but negative in services. US exports of goods and services to the EU indirectly support 2.3 million jobs in the USA, while EU firms' investments employ 3.4 million people in the USA (EU Commission 2025). The EU is a source of critical supplies to the USA, including medicinal ingredients, pharmaceutical products, advanced machinery and equipment, and aerospace parts and components. At the same time, the EU is the largest buyer of the USA's natural gas and oil. Energy has become a bargaining chip in the bilateral negotiations on tariffs on cars; Trump is said to be ready to exempt the EU from tariffs on cars provided the EU buys energy from the USA for USD 350 billion.

The EU holds strong *cards* for negotiating with the USA in the long run, provided that successfully resolves many of the problems it is facing⁴⁵. The European market is extremely important for the USA. The combined GDP of European countries is comparable to that of the USA. All of this should add to the EU's self-confidence and make it less shy and feel weak or put itself in a subordinate position in the negotiations with the USA.⁴⁶

The reaction to Trump's Liberation Day has thus far been much better than the late-response EU policies seen before. For instance, the warning signals about a worsening of transatlantic relations were already clear in the first Trump mandate. In 2019, E. Geranmayeh and M. L. Rapnouila warned that the USA could carry out economic aggression against the EU. They suggested the EU should prepare to respond aggressively. The idea was not taken seriously⁴⁷ at the time and now it has happened.

The EU quietly and thoroughly started to prepare its reaction plan, without dramatising problems in public too much to avoid escalating the relations. Retaliation measures were designed to be kept in stock and be activated if required. The first priority was to invest more in its defence and security. Such a policy can nevertheless be problematic if not balanced with enhancing the Union competitiveness (see Strategic Agenda 2024–2029) and improving the welfare of the population. Damijan (2025) lucidly notes that the EU's focus on armaments

⁴⁴ In a similar way as the Chinese do, demonstrating it has the power (a sword) but keeping it in its scabbard.

⁴⁵ Like a lack of military power, weak competitiveness, unclear industrial policy priorities, too strong band-wagging on US neoliberalism, too long and inefficient decision-making processes etc.

⁴⁶ Mrak emphasised that if the EU had started negotiating in a subordinate position, it would be always treated in that way (Jenko 2025).

⁴⁷ The report was a reaction to the German Minister of Foreign Affairs H. Mass' essay proposing a EU payment channel independent of the USA. This was too radical for A. Merkel, dismissing it as an »expression of opinion«. Nevertheless, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the French one, later commissioned a report to the European Council of Foreign Affairs (Farrel and Newman 2023, 124).

and underestimating its competitiveness is wrong. The military threats coming from Russia are, he claims, smaller than the threats of economic weakness and impending associated social unrest in the member states. Arming the EU will not significantly improve its geostrategic position, nor, as he argues, will it buy security and peace. However, by strengthening the Union's competitiveness and concluding trade and investment agreements, it can.

Among the arsenal of possible retaliation instruments, implementing tariffs on services where the USA is a leader and maintains a surplus with most countries, or taxing the US service firms dominating the digital sector in the EU, could prove to be the most effective. Countries will soon begin to wonder whether the system protecting America's most valuable economic assets – its intellectual property and the global mechanisms that allow it to be monetised – is still serving their interests. "If the same reciprocal tariffs formula were to be applied to services, the EU ought to impose an 18% tariff on US services, China a 22% tariff and South Korea a 20% tariff, to cite only a few examples" state Feás et al. 2025, adding that:

It may be necessary for the first time that EU resort to the Anti-Coercion Instrument, approved at the end of 2023, which enables drastic non-tariff measures to be taken, although it would be wise to use it cautiously with services and financial transactions, given that dependency on the US (in strategic services, for example) is considerable.

There are two problems here. First, the different interests of EU members. Some countries like Ireland and Luxemburg are against such a digital tax. Another problem is high level of dependence in the EU, including public services, on US digital multinationals. All European transactions made using Visa, MasterCard or PayPal go through the USA. Nevertheless, Hausmann may be proved to be right while positing that "when those protection (of services, note SM) begin to be eroded, maybe – just maybe – Trump and his acolytes will come to see that the multilateral order wasn't so unfair after all, and perhaps not worth tearing down" (2025).

The third policy option entails the redirection of trade especially, apart from the booming Asia, to India (in the few years the 'next China?'), Australia (talks have restarted), to Latin America (the Mercosur agreement is awaiting ratification), and Africa, a continent of the future. J. Clark (2025) has suggested⁴⁸, "The EU must rapidly conclude a plurilateral Free Trade Agreement between affected economies. The minimum should be to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership, a Free Trade Agreement grouping several ASEAN countries, Japan and Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Canada, Mexico, Costa Rica and others. China should be persuaded to join".

⁴⁸ As well as former Australian Prime Minister M. Turnbull.

The fourth option for reacting is to create strategic autonomy vis-à-vis the USA by enhancing cooperation with China and many other countries. In this, the EU can strengthen its bargaining power as concerns the USA, add to its sovereign autonomy and strengthen its global geostrategic position. “Even Europe, concerned about Russia and so openly abandoned by the US, will seek a friendlier relationship with China”, M. Wolf claimed recently (2025). The barrier is the deep-seated European scepticism and fears about China’s long-term geopolitical ambitions in Europe. China is also contemplating such an option (see ISPI 2025) not least because the EU is becoming a more attractive model for other countries. Many around the world view the EU as a highly relevant global actor, appreciated for championing human rights and sustainable development, although its credibility has been waning due to its hypocrisy (see Veron 2025).

By expanding its cooperation with China, the EU can help itself gain economic and geopolitical influence at the same time. Engaging with China can strengthen the EU’s autonomy in key industries. The biggest challenge of strategic autonomy strategy vis-à-vis China and the USA concerns how to hedge against the risk of too strong economic dependence (entrapment) on China while maintaining the transatlantic relations and all the differences among the member countries regarding these issues. Why, for instance, should the EU not consider reviving the agreement on investment (CAI), as China has also suggested? Godement from Institute Montaigne even talks about a “reverse Deng” strategy for the EU.

It implies that EU would do what Deng’s China did in his time stimulating FDI in order to acquire foreign technology and in such a way stimulate its development. Chinese firms could become joint venture partners in Europe, which involves, as was the case in China that their European partners could absorb a good deal of the technology and processes for which Chinese firms have become more advanced. China guiding motto for FDI in China – “in China for China” could be matched by “in Europe for Europe” policy, /.../ with rules that guarantee technology sharing or, alternatively, a high percentage of locally sourced supplies and components. (Godement 2025)

The first challenge with such a strategy is whether China would submit to the demands and risks involved. It might also imply the EU’s economic overreliance on China, a flood of Chinese products into the EU market⁴⁹, a deterioration of transatlantic relations⁵⁰ and the erosion of the EU’s soft power based on its respect for human rights and other civilisational values, which China frequently violates.

⁴⁹ Conteduca et al. (2025, 9) calculated that China’s exports to the euro area and the UK would rise by 9%.

⁵⁰ Although it would be naïve to expect that *yesterday’s* transatlantic friendly relations could be fully restored any time soon.

Effects of the Tariffs on the USA

Trump started the trade war devoid of any clear strategy, without anticipating many of the potential (negative) consequences, including for the US economy. A reasonable description of the present trade war is that USA is now “attacking” the whole world, not just particular countries. It is not a bilateral war but a multilateral one. It is a “trade war on all fronts—a 360° trade war. The U.S. may receive global and cumulative blowback, while other countries will only see an impact on their trade with the U.S. Fighting on all fronts accumulate supply and demand shocks” (Carlsson-Szlezak et al. 2025).

Theory is clear; consumers, not other countries, pay tariffs. Prices for consumers and producers rise, lowering the standard of living, growth rates go down, while non-price effects are induced (insecurity, uncertainty, discontent, fear). Such negative effects were visible in Trump’s first mandate⁵¹ (Caliendo and Parro 2022; Svetličič 2020, 13). Notwithstanding the substantial changes in the context and particularly the much more aggressive tariff policy, by analogy a similar yet stronger and wider spread of effects can also be expected now.

- a) **Effects on GDP growth.** The cumulative effect of these tariffs calculated before Liberation Day can be expected to reduce US real GDP by 0.54 in 2025 to 1.53 percent in 2028. That would mean a total cumulative loss of US economic output of USD 1.4 trillion by the end of 2028 (Steil and Harding 2025). Under the 2 April tariff rates, GDP growth is anticipated to fall much more –1.4% in 2025 (Carlsson-Szlezak et al. 2025). McKibbin and Noland estimated that by the end of the second Trump administration, US GDP will be USD 432 billion lower than it would have been without the tariffs. Australian Prof. Winchester (2025) showed that the effects of reciprocal tariffs would lower US GDP by USD 438.4 billion or USD 3,487 per household annually). That is larger than the corresponding decreases in any other country. The costs of tariffs are distributed differently between consumers and producers. Taking account that they are split 50/50 (a reasonable assumption since approximately 50% of US imports are intermediate products), Boller et al. (2025) estimated that the US growth rate would decrease by 0.6% in 2030, with the decrease reaching 1.8% in 2039 and as much as 6.3% in 2054.
- b) **Recession.** US consumption will fall more in 2030 (by 2.8%) and rise steadily to 9.8% by 2054 (ibid. 2025). Prices and inflation will increase, making the US economy going into recession more likely. “There is the probability of a recession over the coming year surging to 45%” (IMFa). Posen estimated the probability of the US going into recession at 60% (PIIE 2025).
- c) **Distribution of costs.** Instead of Making America Great, people, notably poor ones, are going to be worse off. J. Stiglitz has predicted that the cuts in

⁵¹ The trade balance has deteriorated. Manufacturing jobs increased only slightly, but more went abroad than came back to the USA. The welfare of Americans generally and blue-collar Americans in particular has been reduced. The USA’s reputation around the world has been undermined.

health protection and restrictions on trade unionism will lead to even greater stratification and a fall in the well-being of Americans, “especially of the bottom 60% of households” (Clausing and M. Lovely 2025). The techno feudalists (Varoufakis) are also losing money due to the precipitous fall in the stock market, not least of Tesla, and the even more serious drop in bond prices. At the same time, they may be earning money by speculating on Wall Street by buying cheap when shares drop in panic and after the announcement of draconian tariffs (based on insider information about the pausing of such measures from those close to the president), reaping enormous earnings in the longer run.

- d) **Reindustrialisation.** The idea of bringing manufacturing back home to the USA is misleading and utopian⁵² given the relative declining share of this industry globally and especially in the USA as an irreversible historical trend. “In the US, the service sector where the American power is, especially the digital and internet multinational giants, now employs 80% of all employees, compared to only 8% in manufacturing” (Steinberg 2025). “The US runs a sizable surplus in services, totalling \$278 billion in 2023, driven by industries like finance, telecommunications, digital trade, high-value business services, and the licensing of American patents and copyrights” (Hausmann 2025). A strategy of reindustrialisation would not create new jobs, but inhibit the economy’s transformation to inclusive development. Forcing industry to return home while hindering work and investment abroad would stimulate the (further) automation and robotisation of American industry and replace low-paid labour abroad⁵³. The instability and uncertainties created by his *executive orders* will prevent, not stimulate, foreign investments in the USA. “Americans and foreigners alike would no longer trust the U.S. government to live up to any deal, making a negotiated settlement or agreement to deescalate difficult to achieve. As a result, U.S. productive capacity would decline rather than improve” (Posen 2025).
- e) **The USA’s image around the world.** The volatile policies are eroding the USA’s soft power, image and reputation in the world. This already happened during Trump’s first term in office. Consumers might become reluctant to buy American products, as is already occurring now with Tesla cars. The *executive orders governance* also implies an erosion of US democracy. In an interview for Slovenia TV, Fukujama was clear: “Trump is behaving like a king”, like an arbitrary despot far back in history. In terms of his attitude to his associates, he resembles King Henry the 8th’s ruthlessness by not tolerating disobedience

⁵² “Jobs and factories will come roaring back into our country...We will supercharge our domestic industrial base”, Trump claimed.

⁵³ S. Jobs’ answer to Obama’s question of »why he didn’t produce iPhones in the USA“ back in 2012 nicely illustrates this: “Those jobs won’t come back, not only because foreign workers are cheaper, but also because foreign industry has surpassed U.S. industry in flexibility, diligence, and industrial skills. Reshoring could only be profitable if machines replaced workers” (Steinberg 2025).

and disloyalty⁵⁴. The US “administration is embarking on an economic equivalent of the Vietnam War—that will soon result in a quagmire, undermining faith at home and abroad in both the trustworthiness and the competence of the US—and we all know how that turned out” (Posen 2025).

A general conclusion is that the present trade war with multiple countries will obviously not achieve the US administration’s objectives, but will harm US interests more than it will benefit them. After taking direct and indirect costs into account, many studies have demonstrated that in the end the US economy will suffer more than China’s economy will. Trump’s tariff regime “is shooting oneself in the foot, or maybe rather in the head (because it is stupid) and the heart (because it is cruel, especially to smaller African and Asian economies”, Foroohar states (2025).

The Trump administration may think that it is acting tough, but in fact it is placing the US economy at the mercy of Chinese escalation because the US economy is entirely reliant on Chinese sources for vital goods⁵⁵. It is wildly reckless not to arrange alternate suppliers or adequate domestic production *before* cutting trade. The supply shock arising from drastically reducing or zeroing out imports from China would mean stagflation, that macroeconomic nightmare seen in the 1970s and during the COVID pandemic (see Posen 2025).

The intensity of the effects listed above depends crucially on their size and duration of the war. The critical question thus is whether such a policy can stay for a longer period or will be watered down. The scientific arguments provide some cause for optimism that Trump’s measures cannot survive for long. No US government can work against Wall Street and the bonds markets for any length of time. Americans hate nothing more than losing money, claims the German financier T. Schüßler (see Brächer 2025). An internal backlash has already temporarily frozen Trump’s tariff plans. Postponing the Liberation Day tariffs, the mid-May suspension of the restrictive tariffs for 90 days between the USA and China (the USA lowered the current tariffs on China imports from 145% to 30%, and China did so from 125% to 10%), or the US–UK trade agreement illustrate this⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ The bitter war between Trump and Musk after he left the administration is a good illustration of this.

⁵⁵ It relies on China for industrial inputs—base chemicals, generic drugs, rare earths, and low-end chips. The USA will face shortages of critical inputs, ranging from basic ingredients for most pharmaceuticals to inexpensive semiconductors used in cars and home appliances to critical minerals for industrial processes, including weapons production.

⁵⁶ R. Armstrong from The Financial Times captured the essence of Trump’s policy in a humorous way as “TACO” (Trump Always Chickens Out), later supported by many other experts (like T. Friedman and M. Wolf). It would be better to call it TABBAL (Trump Always Bullies and Backs Away Later).

CONCLUSIONS

The trade wars that have been initiated will have devastating effects for the global economy and all countries, including on the country that started them: the USA. Small ones have been hit harder and have fewer options available to respond. The mistake made in the GD has not been learned; beggar-thy-neighbour turning into beggar-thyself and the absence of the coordination of policies also prevail today. The negative reactions shown by Wall Street, the negative effects of the trade war on the US economy including the downgrading of US Treasury ratings, coupled with internal pressures from his supporters (just 40% of Americans support his tariff policy⁵⁷), including the gradually disappointed techno elite, has and in the end will induce a watering down of his extreme measures. China's wise, patient and non-nervous wait, prepare and see negotiating strategy, carefully deciding on the time to strike back, has already forced Trump to retreat, as we predicted even before the 90-day moratorium was announced (see Stepišnik 2025).

The portrayal of Trump's policy as an apocalyptic, seismic transformation of the existing world economy system⁵⁸, like what happened during the financial crisis in 2008 and the COVID-19 crisis, is really *blowing Trump's horn*. His goal was, according to Baldwin (2025), "to *hack* the world trade system, not reform it". Trump wants to create panic. In this way, apocalyptic emergencies are created that normalise his "shock treatment policies, not accepted in normal situations" (see N. Klein 2017).

In spite of all the unpredictability and contradictory policies, it is more realistic not to expect that the system will be completely broken and to instead expect a watering down of his draconian policies, a return to a more *conservative old normal* not based solely on the neoliberal *invisible hand* but on the *visible hand* of protectionism/mercantilism combined with a strategic industrial policy. This is far from "the so needed new Bretton Woods compromise for the 21st century" (Nahtigal 2019, 443). Most probably, the apocalyptic policies will finally lead to a gradual resetting of the system to the *new very old 19th century neomercantile normal* (for more, see Svetličič 2025b). The rumbling tsunami will finally ease and turn into an ordinary storm also because the transaction costs of the *bargaining-based order* will force all actors into more institutionalised arrangements.

Our analysis has shown that the initially targeted countries will be hit the hardest, but in the long run and when taking all of the indirect effects (on reputation...) into consideration also the USA. The USA's trade balance is not going to be substantially improved since the "US cannot launch a trade war against the whole world and at the same time expect the world to finance its debts"

⁵⁷ If history is anything to judge by, Trump could lose supporters even among republican senators, as happened when [Smoot-Hawley] put on their tariff in the early 1930s, when republicans lost the House and the Senate for 60 years, Newsweek reported.

⁵⁸ See Mrak and Avbelj 2025.

(Schüßler, in Brächer 2025, 25). On the contrary, the dominant role of the dollar will ultimately come under threat.

All countries must prepare themselves for the worst scenario, not by jumping up and down in panic following his populist demands and seeing them as the agenda for negotiations, but by trying to change the agenda in the direction of more reasonable issues in line with common interests. It is not only hard power deciding the outcome of the negotiations but also negotiating skills. In the short and medium run, neutralising of the negative effects of the tariffs either by retaliating with tariffs and similar measures, negotiating with the US administration, redirecting trade flows to other countries, or a combination of all these measures can be effective. Among others, a very promising measure is attacking the service surplus of the USA and taxing services.

The position of small and large countries/blocs as rivals are nonetheless different. Large ones like China and the EU can ban the exporting of certain strategic goods and retaliate strongly in some sectors (the EU particularly in services). China, the biggest target of trade war, can and is retaliating fiercely, based on its hard power.

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POSLEDICE TRUMPOVE SAMOUNIČUJOČE TRGOVINSKE VOJNE LETA 2025 ZA SVETOVNO GOSPODARSTVO

Povzetek. *Največji problem svetovnega gospodarstva dandanes je krepitev neo-merkantilistične politike, okrepljene z agresivno industrijsko politiko. ZDA so napovedale trgovinsko vojno vsemu svetu, najbolj napadalno pa Kitajski. Glavni cilj članka je ugotoviti, kakšne so posledice te trgovinske vojne za napadene države in za ameriško gospodarstvo, skladno s teorijo carinske zaščite, ki pravi, da v trgovinskih vojnah ni zmagovalcev. Med napadenimi državami se posebej ukvarjamo s Kitajsko in z EU. Ker to ni prva takšna trgovinska vojna v zgodovini – odvijala se je že med veliko depresijo v tridesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja –, je bilo nujno treba ugotoviti, ali smo se iz teh vojn kaj naučili ali pa le ponavljamo že storjene napake. Očitno je, da nas zgodovina ni dosti naučila. Čeprav ta trgovinska vojna naznanja tektonske premike v svetovnem gospodarskem sistemu, ugotavljamo, da je bolj kot panična reakcija primeren preišljen dolgoročen pristop, kar podkrepljujemo tudi z analizo pogajalskega profila njenega pobudnika, predsednika Trumpa, katerega značilnosti sta namerno dramatiziranje in izsiljevanje. Ugotavljamo, da ni pričakovati tako drastičnega poteka trgovinske vojne, kot je bil njen začetek, saj se bodo sčasoma izkazale njene negativne posledice tudi za ameriško gospodarstvo in konkretne nosilce te politike.*

Ključni pojmi: *Trump, carine, trgovinska vojna, učinki, povračilni ukrepi, velika depresija, pogajanja, Evropska unija, Kitajska, ZDA.*

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V SENCI NAPREDNE ZAKONSKE UREDITVE: KAZNIVA DEJANJA IZ SOVRAŠTVA ZARADI SPOLNE USMERJENOSTI IN SPOLNE IDENTITETE – PERSPEKTIVA ŹRTVE**¹

Povzetek. Članek obravnava neskladje med naprednimi predpisi, sprejetimi s ciljem odprave diskriminacije in izključevanja posameznikov LGB-TIQ+, in družbo z globoko ukoreninjenimi homofobnimi in transfobnimi sentimentami in predsodki. Kljub sprejetju vključujočih predpisov na podlagi odločb slovenskega ustavnega sodišča je pojavljanje homofobnih in transfobnih napadov vsaj enako pogosto kot v preteklosti, če ne intenzivnejše. V članku orišemo najpomembnejše zakonodajne spremembe na obravnavanem področju, kar dopolnimo s pregledom literature ter z izvirnimi rezultati kvalitativne terenske socio-pravne raziskave, izvedene na podlagi 22 intervjujev – 10 z Źrtvami napadov in 12 s strokovnjaki. Rezultati kažejo izzive na področju prijavljanja incidentov, neučinkovitost kazenskega pregona in pomanjkljivo podporo Źrtvam.

Ključni pojmi: Slovenija, kazniva dejanja iz sovraštva, spodbujanje sovraštva, nasilja ali nestrpnost, diskriminacija, policija, homofobija, transfobija.

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** Izvirni znanstveni članek.
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UVOD

Članek se ukvarja z neskladjem med predpisi, sprejetimi s ciljem odprave diskriminacije in izključevanja pripadnikov skupnosti LGBTIQ+ (Rios idr. 2023; Jones 2024),² in družbo z globoko ukoreninjenimi homofobnimi in transfobnimi sentimentimi in predsodki. Slovenija je nenavaden primer države, ki je izkusila tektonske premike v svoji pravni ureditvi, spodbujene z naprednimi odločbami ustavnega sodišča, hkrati pa se zdi, da je pojavljanje homofobnih in transfobnih napadov dandanes vsaj enako pogosto kot v preteklosti (Kuhar 2006; Perger 2018; Kuhar in Švab 2024) ali celo intenzivnejše. Mediji o napadih poročajo predvsem v času dogodkov, povezanih s parado ponosa v mesecu juniju (Društvo Parada ponosa 2023; Gračanin 2024), medijska poročila pa zbuja vprašanja, ali se javnost seznanja z vsemi takšnimi dogodki, ali žrtve dogodka prijavljajo pristojnim organom, kakšen je odnos organov preiskovanja in pregona kaznivih dejanj do tovrstnih kazenskih ovadb, kako so žrtve v pravnih postopkih obravnavane in kakšni so končni rezultati teh postopkov. Na vsa navedena vprašanja verjetno ni mogoče celovito odgovoriti, prek uporabe različnih metod raziskovanja pa lahko pridobimo uvid v nekatere vidike navedenih vprašanj.

V članku, v katerem prepletamo sociološko in pravno disciplino, zato najprej spomnimo na najpomembnejše zakonodajne spremembe na obravnavanem področju, kar dopolnimo s pregledom literature ter z izvirnimi rezultati terenske raziskave, ki je bila izvedena z intervjuji (z žrtvami in s strokovnjaki,³ ki se z žrtvami srečujejo pri svojem delu) in s pomočjo fokusne skupine s predstavniki nevladnih organizacij, ki nudijo podporo osebam LGBTIQ+.⁴ Namen članka ni celostno obravnavati diskriminacije oseb LGBTIQ+ na vseh področjih družbenega življenja, temveč je osredotočen na razkorak med progresivno zakonodajo in pojavnostjo kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva (angl. *hate crime*), na razloge za neprijavljanje in odzivanje institucij na prijave. V tem pogledu članek dopolnjuje vrzel v novejši znanstveni literaturi, ki se s tem specifičnim vidikom redko kvalitativno ukvarja.⁵

² Kratica pomeni lezbijke, geje, biseksualne, transspolne, interpolne in queer osebe, znak + pa prestavlja odprtost za druge spolne identitete, ki jih kratica izrecno ne zajema. Kratica je mednarodno uveljavljena v strokovni in znanstveni literaturi (glej npr. Rios idr., 2023; Jones, 2024).

³ V članku zaradi lažje berljivosti uporabljamo moško slovnično obliko za vse spole.

⁴ Raziskava je bila izvedena v okviru projekta »ENACT – *Enhancing the capacity of civil society organisations to support victims of anti-LGBTQI hate crimes*«, ki ga je delno finančno podprla Evropska komisija na podlagi javnega razpisa CERV-2023-CHAR-LITI v okviru programa Državljeni, enakost, pravice in vrednote.

⁵ Ta članek je bil pripravljen v okviru raziskovalnega projekta »Enakost in človekove pravice v dobi globalnega vladovanja« (P5-0413), ki ga vodi dr. Mojca Pajnik, in raziskovalnega projekta »Sovražni govor v sodobnih konceptualizacijah nacionalizma, rasizma, spola in migracij« (J5-3102), ki ga vodi dr. Veronika Bajt. Program in projekt finančno podpira ARIS – Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije.

NACIONALNA PRAVNA UREDITEV PRAVICE DO ENAKEGA OBRAVNAVANJA IN PREPOVEDI DISKRIMINACIJE TER SOVRAŽNEGA GOVORA

V Sloveniji ni posebne pravne ureditve, ki bi se nanašala posebej na pravico do enakega obravnavanja skupnosti LGBTIQ+ ter na prepoved diskriminacije in kazniva dejanja iz sovraštva na podlagi spolne usmerjenosti, spolne identitete in spolnih znakov. To področje je zajeto v splošnih pravilih protidiskriminacijskega in kazenskega prava, ki inkriminira kazniva dejanja, storjena z diskriminacijskim motivom v povezavi z različnimi osebnimi okoliščinami. Krovni predpis na tem področju – Zakon o varstvu pred diskriminacijo (ZVarD, 2016) – prepoveduje vse oblike diskriminacije, tudi diskriminacijo zaradi spolne usmerjenosti in spolne identitete. Vsebuje odprt nabor osebnih okoliščin, torej zajema tudi spolne znake kot osebno okoliščino, s tem pa pred diskriminacijo varuje tudi interpolne ljudi (Zagovornik načela enakosti 2020, 29).

Kaznovalno pravo

Na področju kaznovalnega prava sta relevantna dva predpisa. Prvi je Zakon o varstvu javnega reda in miru (ZJRM-1 2006), ki v 20. členu določa strožje kaznovanje za nekatere prekrške zoper javni red in mir, če so ti prekrški izvršeni z diskriminacijskim motivom. Drugi pa je Kazenski zakonik (KZ-1 2008), ki v 297. členu inkriminira javno spodbujanje sovraštva, nasilja ali nestrpnosti. Med osebnimi okoliščinami, relevantnimi za ta članek, je navedena tudi spolna usmerjenost, nista pa navedeni osebni okoliščini spolne identitete ali spolnih znakov. Slednji bi morali biti priznani kot upoštevni v generalni klavzuli »drugih osebnih okoliščin«, ki jo vsebuje navedena kazenska določba. Kazenski zakonik vsebuje tudi nekaj drugih določb, ki so relevantne za diskriminacijska kazniva dejanja, kot so 131. člen (kršitev enakopravnosti), člena 116 in 135a (ki zajemata prepoved umora ali mučenja z diskriminacijskim motivom), členi 158–162 (ki omogočajo kazenski pregon na zasebno tožbo zaradi razžalitev, obrekovanj ali groženj zoper čast in dobro ime) in členi 197, 198 in 202 (ki inkriminirajo neenako obravnavo na področju zaposlovanja in socialnih storitev), vendar pa so ti členi v praksi le redko uporabljivi in še redkeje uporabljeni.

Nedavno je bila v Kazenski zakonik po dolgotrajnih opozorilih mednarodnih organizacij (ECRI 2019) dodana novost, in sicer je bil leta 2023 z zakonsko novelo v 49. člen Kazenskega zakonika (KZ-1J 2023), ki določa olajševalne in oteževalne okoliščine (te mora sodišče upoštevati pri določitvi kazenske sankcije), dodan novi tretji odstavek, po katerem se diskriminacijski nagib za storitev kaznivega dejanja pri določitvi kazni obvezno upošteva kot oteževalna okoliščina.

Osrednja določba za pregon kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva je 297. člen Kazenskega zakonika, ki prepoveduje javno spodbujanje sovraštva, nasilja ali nestrpnosti. Mnogi avtorji so že opozorili na neustrezno izvajanje te zakonske določbe (Završnik in Zrimšek 2017; Kogovšek Šalamon 2018; Korošec, Filipič in Zdolšek 2018; ECRI 2019; Rajgelj 2024), ki je razvidno predvsem iz nizkega števila

kazenskih pregonov in obsodb, izrečenih pred sodišči (Zagovornik načela enakosti 2024, 102). Razlogi za to so mnogoteri. Izvirajo iz dejstva, da ni vsako družbeno nesprejemljivo sovražno ravnanje tudi kazensko pregonljivo (Vehovar idr. 2020), pa tudi iz neustrezne tožilske in sodniške razlage določbe 297. člena KZ-1. Ta je dolga leta temeljila na zahtevi, da je dejanje spodbujanja sovraštva, nasilja ali nestrpnosti kaznivo le, če je povzročilo konkretno nevarnost za javni red in mir (Završnik in Zrimšek 2017; Kogovšek Šalamon 2018). Leta 2019 je Vrhovno sodišče v prelomni sodbi odločilo, da je taka razlaga zakona napačna ter da za pregon in obsodbo zadostuje že potencialna nevarnost za javni red in mir, kar se oceni glede na vsebino, naravo, kraj in druge okoliščine izražanja, ki naj bi pomenili takšno javno spodbujanje (Sodba VSRS št. I Ips 65803/2012 z dne 4. 7. 2019, 2019). Zaenkrat ni mogoče potrditi, da bi imela sodba Vrhovnega sodišča učinek na način, da bi se število obsodb po 297. členu Kazenskega zakonika povečalo, saj število pregonov in obsodb ostaja nizko. V desetletnem obdobju 2014–2023 so sodišča za kaznivo dejanje po 297. členu KZ-1 izrekla 16 obsodb in 13 kaznovalnih nalogov (Zagovornik načela enakosti 2024, 102), torej v manj kot treh primerih na leto.

V tem kontekstu obstaja naslednja pomembna ovira za učinkovit kazenski pregon. Kaznivo dejanje po 297. členu Kazenskega zakonika šteje za kaznivo dejanje zoper javni red in mir, zato oseba, ki se identificira kot žrtev takega dejanja, ne more prevzeti kazenskega pregona kot zasebni tožilec v primeru, če se tožilstvo odloči, da bo kazensko ovadbo zavrglo. Velja namreč, da to kaznivo dejanje ni izvršeno proti posamezni žrtvi, temveč proti skupini ljudi z določeno osebno okoliščino, pri čemer posamezniki iz te skupine niso določljivi. Varuh človekovih pravic (2021, 89) je za razrešitev te ovire predlagal možnost, da bi reprezentativne ali krovne nevladne organizacije, ki delujejo na posameznem tematskem področju, v takih primerih lahko prevzele kazenski pregon kot subsidiarni tožilec (Rajgelj 2024, 1026).

Zakonska ureditev na področju partnerskega in družinskega prava

Ko govorimo o pravici do enakega obravnavanja ne glede na spolno usmerjenost in spolno identiteto ter o zmanjševanju socialne distance do skupnosti LGBTIQ+ (Smerdelj in Kuhar 2024a), ne moremo spregledati predpisov na področju partnerstev, zakonske zveze in družinskega prava. Prvi poskusi sprejema zakonske ureditve, ki bi odpravila izključenost istospolnih parov na teh področjih, segajo v pozna osemdeseta in devetdeseta leta prejšnjega stoletja. Nekateri osnutki zakonov niso nikoli dočakali zakonodajnega postopka (Rajgelj 2015), je pa v zadnjem desetletju prišlo do bistvenih sprememb na tem področju. Predstavitve vseh zakonodajnih korakov in referendumov na tem področju presega namen tega članka, ključen mejnik pa je pomenil sprejem Zakona o partnerski zvezi leta 2016 (ZPZ 2016), s katerim je zakonodajalec uredil pravice in obveznosti istospolnih partnerjev na skoraj enak način kot za heterospolne poročene pare, razen pravice do sklenitve zakonske zveze in pravice do kandidiranja za skupno

posvojitev otroka. Leta 2022 je Ustavno sodišče Republike Slovenije odločilo, da je glede na skoraj enak nabor pravic in obveznosti izključitev istospolnih parov iz pravice do sklenitve zakonske zveze protiustavna ter da je protiustavna tudi izključitev iz možnosti skupne posvojitve otroka (USRS 2022). Na podlagi te zavezujoče ustavne odločbe je zakonodajalec sprejel novelo Družinskega zakonika (DZ-B 2023), s katero je položaj istospolnih partnerjev uredil na enak način, kot velja za heterospolne partnerje, s čimer je Slovenija postala prva država nekdanjega vzhodnega bloka, ki je legalizirala istospolne zakonske zveze. Pred kratkim je slovensko Ustavno sodišče odločilo še, da je ureditev, ki določa pogoje za dostop do oploditve z biomedicinsko pomočjo na način, da izključuje samske ženske in lezbijke, ki živijo v istospolni skupnosti, protiustavna (USRS 2024).

Pravno priznanje spola

Podobnih progresivnih ustavnopravnih in zakonodajnih premikov na področju pravnega priznanja spola ni zaslediti. V Sloveniji ta postopek ni zakonsko urejen. Postopek za spremembo ali popravek označevalca spola oziroma enotne matične številke občana (EMŠO) je določen zgolj z zastarelim podzakonskim predpisom. V slovenski pravni ureditvi niti še ni vsebovan pojem pravnega priznanja spola, temveč podzakonski predpis v kontekstu spremembe spolnega označevalca v matičnem registru uporablja termin »sprememba spola«. Po določbi 37. člena Pravilnika o izvrševanju zakona o matičnem registru (MNZ 2005) se sprememba spola vpiše na podlagi odločbe pristojnega organa o spremembi vpisanega podatka, podlaga za izdajo odločbe pa je »potrdilo pristojne zdravstvene ustanove ali zdravnika, iz katerega je razvidno, da je oseba spremenila spol«. Pravilnik ne vsebuje dodatnih napotkov o vsebini tega potrdila in ne določa, kdo je pristojen za njegovo izdajo. Z leti se je razvila praksa, po kateri se kot ustrezno in upošteveno šteje potrdilo, ki ga izda psihiater, član interdisciplinarnega konzilija Univerzitetne psihiatrične klinike v Ljubljani (Zagovornik načela enakosti 2021, 24). To običajno pomeni, da mora oseba predhodno pridobiti diagnozo transseksualizem. To pa tudi pomeni, da v Sloveniji trenutno ni mogoče izpeljati postopka pravnega priznanja spola brez medicinske intervencije, na podlagi samoopredelitve, kar danes velja za najustreznejši pristop (Peter 2014; Szydłowski 2016; Ashley 2024). Iz opisanega je razvidno, da je obravnavano področje, ki se nanaša na osebno okoliščino spolne identitete, v Sloveniji manj pravno razvito kot področja, ki se nanašajo na spolno usmerjenost. Ob tem se zastavlja vprašanje, ali to pomeni tudi manjšo vidnost transspolnih oseb v družbi, njihovo večjo stigmatizacijo in posledično večjo izpostavljenost (transfobnim) napadom.

EVROPSKA PRAVNA UREDITEV NA PODROČJU VARSTVA PRED KAZNIVIMI DEJANJI IZ SOVRAŠTVA

V okviru Sveta Evrope je najbolj relevanten pravni vir za obravnavano področje Evropska konvencija o varstvu človekovih pravic in temeljnih svoboščin (Svet Evrope 1950). Vprašanja v zvezi s spolno usmerjenostjo in spolno identiteto

se pred Evropskim sodiščem za človekove pravice (ESČP), ki je varuh omenjene konvencije, najpogosteje obravnavajo v okviru 8. člena, ki zagotavlja varstvo zasebnega in družinskega življenja, v povezavi s 14. členom, ki prepoveduje diskriminacijo. ESČP v primeru napadov na posameznika zaradi njegovih osebnih okoliščin od držav pogodbenic zahteva, da taka dejanja v okviru svojega kazenskega prava ustrezno preiščejo in sankcionirajo. Če države ukrepanje opustijo, so odgovorne za kršitev 14. člena v povezavi z 8. členom konvencije, poleg tega pa tudi 13. člena konvencije, ki zagotavlja pravico do učinkovitega pravnega sredstva, kakor na primer izhaja iz zadeve *Beizaras in Levickas proti Litvi* (ESČP 2020a). Varstvo v okviru Evropske konvencije je zagotovljeno tudi v primeru homofobnega sovražnega govora. Določba 10. člena konvencije sicer varuje svobodo izražanja, vendar pa je iz 2. odstavka tega člena razvidno, da ta pravica ni absolutna. V primeru, da države homofobni sovražni govor preiščejo in sankcionirajo na način, ki je sorazmeren izvršenemu ravnanju, tako sankcioniranje države prestane presojo Evropskega sodišča, kakor izhaja iz zadev *Vejdeland in drugi proti Švedski* (ESČP 2012) in *Lilliendahl proti Islandiji* (ESČP 2020b).

V okviru Evropske unije (EU) ni posebnih predpisov, ki bi se nanašali na varstvo pred homofobnimi napadi. Medtem ko na področju sovražnega govora in kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva zaradi rasizma in ksenofobije obstaja poseben pravni vir, ki so ga države članice EU dolžne prenesti v svojo nacionalno zakonodajo,⁶ takega ukrepa na področju homofobije in transfobije na ravni EU ni. Deloma je za obravnavano področje relevantna Direktiva 2012/29/EU o pravicah žrtev kaznivih dejanj (Evropska unija 2012), ki jo je Slovenija v nacionalno zakonodajo prenesla z novelo Zakona o kazenskem postopku (ZKP-N 2019).⁷ Z novelo so bile žrtvam kaznivih dejanj priznane dodatne pravice, poleg tega pa je bila v zakonu razširjena tudi opredelitev žrtve oziroma oškodovanca kaznivega dejanja na način, da sedaj ta vključuje tudi določene družinske člane žrtve, ki je preminila zaradi kaznivega dejanja (Bučar 2019). Dopolnjena zakonska ureditev izrecno ne omenja žrtev kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva, vendar pa je zanje relevantna nova določba, ki se nanaša na »oškodovanca s posebnimi potrebami po zaščiti«. To je oseba,

čigar osebna ali premoženjska pravica je s kaznivim dejanjem znatno prekršena, pa zaradi njegovih osebnih značilnosti ali ranljivosti, zaradi narave, teže ali okoliščin kaznivega dejanja ali zaradi ravnanja obdolženca ali oškodovanca v predkazenskem oziroma kazenskem postopku in izven njega obstaja posebna potreba po varstvu oškodovančeve osebnostne celovitosti pri posameznih dejanjih v predkazenskem in kazenskem postopku (7. alineja 144. člena ZKP).

⁶ Okvirni Sklep Sveta 2008/913/PNZ z dne 28. novembra 2008 o boju proti nekaterim oblikam in izrazom rasizma in ksenofobije s kazensko-pravnimi sredstvi.

⁷ Pred sprejemom direktive je to področje na ravni Evropske unije urejal Okvirni sklep Sveta z dne 15. marca 2001 o položaju žrtev v kazenskem postopku (2001/220/PNZ). UL L 82, 22. 3. 2001, str. 1–4.

Pristojni organi so poleg tega zavezani upoštevati tudi ranljivost oškodovanca (18.a člen ZKP), in sicer morajo policija, državno tožilstvo, sodišča in drugi državni organi, strokovnjaki, izvedenci, sodni in drugi tolmači ter mediatorji »med predkazenskim in kazenskim postopkom še posebej skrbno in obzirno ravnati z oškodovanci, osumljenci, obdolženci in obsojenci, kadar je to potrebno zaradi njihove ranljivosti, kot na primer starosti, zdravja, nebogljenosti ali druge podobne okoliščine«.

Z namenom prenosa direktive v slovensko nacionalno zakonodajo je bil leta 2019 dopolnjen tudi Zakon o socialnem varstvu (ZSV-I 2019). Dodan mu je bil novi 14.a člen, s katerim je bil opredeljen nabor novih socialnovarstvenih storitev, in sicer strokovna podpora in strokovno svetovanje osebi, ki ji je bila s kaznivim dejanjem neposredno povzročena kakršnakoli škoda. Zakon sedaj določa, da strokovna podpora zajema »prepoznavanje stiske upravičenca, seznanjanje in usmerjanje«, izvaja pa se z namenom, »da bi žrtvi kaznivega dejanja omogočili ustrezno psihološko, socialno in finančno izboljšanje položaja, nastalega zaradi storjenega kaznivega dejanja«. Iz zakonske ureditve, ki je sicer splošna, je razvidno, da do te podpore lahko dostopajo tudi žrtve homofobnih ali transfobnih napadov.

Kot smo pokazali, je v zadnjem desetletju prišlo do obsežnih zakonskih sprememb na obravnavanem področju, iz katerih bi bilo mogoče sklepati, da se je družbeno sprejemanje oseb LGBTIQ+ povečalo, socialna distanca zmanjšala, število napadov upadlo, v primeru napadov pa da žrtve lahko dostopajo do ustrezne pomoči in podpore. Nenazadnje nova zakonska ureditev na predstavljenih področjih pomeni tudi večjo vidnost pripadnikov te skupnosti, pogostejše srečevanje državnih organov z njihovimi specifičnimi potrebami, s tem pa tudi zmanjševanje stigme in marginaliziranosti.

ZNANSTVENA IN STROKOVNA LITERATURA O STANJU NA PODROČJU HOMOFBIJE IN TRANSFOBIJE V SLOVENIJI

Kljub napredni zakonski ureditvi na mnogih področjih položaja skupnosti LGBTIQ+ znanstvena in strokovna literatura ter poročila mednarodnih organizacij kažejo na številne izzive. Število homofobnih in transfobnih napadov se ne zmanjšuje (Kuhar 2006; Perger 2018; Podreka, Smrdelj in Kuhar 2019; Kuhar in Švab 2024), temveč se v zadnjih letih celo povečuje, saj nasilne napade izkuša vse več pripadnikov skupnosti (Agencija Evropske unije za temeljne pravice (FRA) 2014; 2020; Urek, Jurček in Poglajen 2020, 11). Po zadnji raziskavi Agencije EU za temeljne pravice iz leta 2024 je osem odstotkov respondentov navedlo, da so bili napadeni v zadnjih petih letih, trije odstotki pa v zadnjem letu pred raziskavo, medtem ko 45 odstotkov poroča o nadlegovanju v zadnjem letu pred raziskavo (Agencija Evropske unije za temeljne pravice (FRA) 2024).

Po drugi strani pa Slovenija sodi med države z najmanjšim deležem prijav pristojnim organom zaradi homofobnih in transfobnih napadov. Večina tovrstnih napadov je neprijavljenih (Kuhar in Švab 2014; Perger 2018). Že študija iz leta

2017 je pokazala, da je neprijavljanje incidentov povezano z nepoznavanjem specifične kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva in homofobije pri organih pregona, kar žrtve izpostavlja novim oblikam homofobne obravnave, poleg tega pa prijava homofobnega napada zahteva razkritje žrtvine spolne usmerjenosti, kar zaradi seksualne stigme zbuja občutja nelagodja (Magić 2017, 233). Na področju transfobnih napadov je položaj še težji, saj po podatkih študije iz leta 2015 69 odstotkov transspolnih oseb dnevno doživlja diskriminacijo in nasilje (TransAkcija 2015), leta 2019 pa je v študiji o nasilju poročalo 41 odstotkov vprašanih transspolnih oseb (Koletnik 2019). Problem neprijavljanja tovrstnega nasilja se sicer pojavlja po vsem svetu, pa tudi vzroki za neprijavljanje so podobni, kot jih zaznavajo avtorji v Sloveniji (Kuhar in Švab 2014; Perger 2018; Shields 2021; Weise, Courtney in Strunk 2023; Trickett in Bryan 2025).

V Sloveniji je homofobno in transfobno nasilje v zadnjih letih običajno bolj prisotno v obdobju festivala Parada ponosa. Leta 2023 je v času festivala prišlo do izrazite eskalacije nasilnih in zaničevalnih incidentov, pristojni državni organi pa so bili deležni očitkov o neukrepanju (Amnesty International Slovenije 2023). Izkušnji je sledila vrsta srečanj nevladnih organizacij, ki delujejo na področju položaja oseb LGBTIQ+, s pristojnimi organi, kar je vodilo k višji ozaveščenosti pristojnih organov o potrebi po zaščiti udeležencev tovrstnih festivalov, boljši prevenciji in hitrejšemu ukrepanju v času naslednjega festivala (Društvo Parada ponosa 2023). Ti ukrepi sicer niso povsem preprečili napadov med festivalom leta 2024, je pa bilo teh napadov manj kot leto prej in tudi odziv policije je bil boljši (Gračanin 2024).

METODOLOGIJA TERENSKÉ RAZISKAVE

Navedena literatura in statistika kažeta na splošno stanje izkušenj skupnosti LGBTIQ+ z nasiljem. S kvalitativno socio-pravno terensko raziskavo smo želeli preveriti, ali je – glede na sprejem vključujoče družinske zakonodaje leta 2022 – zaznati kakšne nedavne spremembe na tem področju, in globlje preučiti trenutni položaj skupnosti prek beleženja osebnih izkušenj žrtev kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva z nasiljem, organi pregona in postopki s prijavo kaznivega dejanja. Kvalitativna raziskava je bila izvedena v obdobju od junija do septembra 2024.

Opravili smo 22 intervjujev, od tega 10 z osebami, ki so doživele sovražna kazniva dejanja v petih letih pred izvedbo raziskave. Štirje od desetih intervjuvancev so se identificirali kot geji, ena oseba kot lezbijka, ena kot lezbijka in hkrati interpolna oseba, ena kot queer, ena kot biseksualna oseba in ena kot heteropolna oseba. Poleg tega smo opravili intervjuje z 12 strokovnjaki in strokovnjakinjami, ki delujejo v samostojnih poklicih (odvetnik, strokovnjak za področje nediskriminacije), različnih državnih institucijah (državno tožilstvo, ministrstvo, organ za enakost), nevladnih organizacijah ali neformalnih samoorganiziranih iniciativah, ki se ukvarjajo z osebami LGBTIQ+. Nato smo izvedli še fokusno skupino s predstavniki nevladnih organizacij, ki nudijo podporo osebam LGBTIQ+. Intervjuvance smo povabili k sodelovanju z neposrednim kontaktiranjem

žrtev, s kontaktiranjem organizacij civilne družbe ter s t. i. metodo snežne kepe. Nekatere državne institucije (policija, sodišča in centri za socialno delo) se niso odzivale ali niso mogle zagotoviti sogovornika.

Polstrukturirani intervjuji so bili izpeljani s pomočjo vnaprej pripravljene vodnika za izvedbo intervjujev ter okvirnega vprašalnika. Metodo polstrukturiranega intervjuja smo izbrali, ker omogoča poglobljeno razumevanje posameznikovih izkušenj, stališč in doživljanj. Ta metoda je med skrajnostma popolnoma standardiziranih in popolnoma nestandardiziranih intervjujev, saj vključuje številna vnaprej pripravljena vprašanja, vendar omogoča dovolj fleksibilnosti, da raziskovalci lahko prilagodijo vprašanja glede na odgovore intervjuvancev (Berg in Lune 2017). Polstrukturirani intervjuji omogočajo intervjuvancem, da se bolj svobodno izražajo, s čimer raziskovalci pridobijo bogatejše in podrobnejše odgovore, kar je še posebej koristno za raziskovanje subjektivnih izkušenj (Kvale 1996; Bryman 2016), kot je npr. izkušnja sovražno motiviranega napada. Ta pristop združuje strukturiranost in odprtost, kar omogoča, da se raziskovalci osredotočijo na specifične teme, medtem ko ostajajo odprti za nepredvidene informacije, ki so ključne za razumevanje raziskovanega fenomena (Kvale in Brinkmann 2009; Denzin in Lincoln 2011; Bryman 2016). Polstrukturirani intervju je torej ustrezna izbira metode, kadar želimo raziskati osebne izkušnje in mnenja, saj omogoča raziskovalcem, da pridobijo poglobljeno razumevanje konteksta in pomenov, ki jih intervjuvanci pripisujejo določenim temam (Morse in Richards 2007; Cohen, Manion in Morrison 2018).

Pred začetkom intervjujev so raziskovalke intervjuvancem pojasnile namen raziskave in jih opozorile, da lahko kadarkoli prenehajo sodelovati, če bi jim vprašanja povzročila stisko ali nelagodje. Intervjuvanci so prebrali informacijski list in pred začetkom intervjuja podpisali informirano soglasje, da so pripravljene sodelovati v raziskavi. Polstrukturirani intervjuji so bili izvedeni v mirnem prostoru, brez tveganja, da bi jih kdo poslušal, intervjuvancem pa smo tudi zagotovili anonimnost. Izvedeni so bili osebno ali prek spleta, zvočno posneti (ter nato kodirani, transkribirani ali povzeti). Trajali so povprečno eno uro. V nadaljevanju v analizi za posamezna stališča intervjuvancev navajamo vire s kodami, pri čemer V (*victim*) z zaporedno številko pomeni stališče ene od žrtev kaznivih dejanj, P (*professional*) z zaporedno številko pa stališče enega od strokovnjakov. Identitete intervjuvancev zaradi zagotavljanja anonimnosti ne razkrivamo.

REZULTATI TERENSKE RAZISKAVE

Izkušnje intervjuvancev, ki so doživeli homofoben ali transfoben incident, ter strokovnjakov, ki delujejo na tem področju, je mogoče razvrstiti v več tematskih sklopov. Za namen tega članka je najbolj relevantnih pet sklopov ugotovitev: a) izkušnje z odzivom policije in razlogi za neprijavljanje incidentov; b) posledice napadov pri žrtvah; c) obseg ozaveščenosti in znanja o kaznivih dejanjih iz sovraštva pri žrtvah, č) izvirne rešitve za prevencijo in izboljššan odgovor na

incidente, d) odprta vprašanja in problemi na področju obravnave homofobnih in transfobnih incidentov.⁸

Izkušnje z odzivom policije in razlogi za neprijavljanje incidentov

Skoraj vsi oškodovanci, ki smo jih intervjuvali, so imeli vtis, da policija njihove prijave ni jemala resno. Nekateri so tudi navajali, da incidenta iz različnih razlogov niso prijavili. Večina se jih je obrnila na organizacije civilne družbe po podporo ali pa zato, da bi jih obvestili o incidentu.

S partnerko sva se izjemoma držali za roke, ker sva mislili, da to počasi postaja varen prostor. On [storilec] pa naju je začel verbalno napadati. Takrat sva poklicali policijo, vendar je bila izkušnja zelo slaba [...] bili so popolnoma nesposobni. (V3)

Intervjuvanka je pojasnila, da se s partnerko nista počutili ogroženi, a sta napad hoteli prijaviti zaradi zavedanja, da je prijavljanje pomembno. Vendar pa ju je policist od prijave odvrnil rekoč, da bo nemogoče odkriti storilca, saj na tistem območju ni bilo kamer. V3 se je obrnila na nevladno organizacijo LGBTIQ+, ki jo je povezala z drugim policistom. Ta ji je zagotovil, da bo njena prijava vzeta resno in da bo posredovana vodji policijske postaje. V3 ni nikoli prejela povratne informacije o prijavi, izid postopka ji ni znan, zaradi česar ni več motivirana za prijavljanje incidentov.

Intervjuvanka V2 je opisala več homofobnih napadov na knjigarno, do katerih je prihajalo v času festivala Parada ponosa junija 2024. Incidenti so vključevali trganje mavrične zastave, pljuvanje na zastavo, vpitje homofobnih žaljivk in nacistične pozdrave. Zaposleni v knjigarni so šestkrat poklicali policijo, ki je sprva incidente obravnavala kot prekrške zoper javni red in mir in ne kot kazniva dejanja. Policija jim je tudi povedala, da jih ne more zaščititi zaradi pomanjkanja patrolj.

Intervjuvanec V5 je delil izkušnje o treh homofobnih napadih iz svojega življenja. Zadnji se je zgodil leto dni pred intervjujem, ko ga je na poti domov z dogodka, ki je potekal v okviru Parade ponosa, napadla skupina najstnikov:

Potiskali so me in suvali, me brcali, poškodovali so mi rebra [...] urgencia in te stvari, prijava policiji, seveda [...] Ko te napade 15- ali 16-letnik, otrok... Ko vidiš ta obraz, ga ne moreš udariti [nazaj]. (V5)

Mesec dni kasneje je V5 prejel klic očeta enega od mladoletnih napadalcev, ki mu je povedal, da se njegov sin želi opravičiti. Intervjuvanec V5 se je strijnal, saj je razumel pogum, ki je bil za to potreben. Ko so se srečali, je bil eden

⁸ Vsi rezultati raziskave, ki segajo onkraj rezultatov, predstavljenih v tem članku, so podrobno in celovito popisani v raziskovalnem poročilu projekta ENACT (Vučko, Kočkovska Šetinc in Ladić 2025).

od najstnikov nezainteresiran, drugi pa je bil videti skesan. Trdila sta, da napad ni bil homofoben, ampak da sta oškodovancu le hotela vzeti zastavo. Policija je oškodovanca vprašala, ali ne bi umaknil prijave, saj bi prijava lahko vplivala na kartoteki najstnikov. Oškodovanec se je uklonil, saj sta se opravičila. »Fantoma nisem hotel uničiti prihodnosti.« (V5) Po drugi strani je imel isti intervjuvanec dobro izkušnjo s policijo, zlasti z višjim policijskim inšpektorjem, ki je bil profesionalen, dobro obveščen in izobražen. Vendar pa ga pri nobeni od njegovih interakcij s policijo nihče nikoli ni vprašal o njegovem počutju ali potrebah, glede na to, da je bil žrtev kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva.

O nezainteresiranosti policije je poročal tudi intervjuvanec V8. S partnerjem sta bila žrtvi napada pred nekaj leti v času festivala Parada ponosa. Obkrožila ju je skupina mladih moških, ki so bili videti kot *obritoglavci*:

Poklicala sva policijo, vendar se ni zgodilo nič. Bila sva pretepena v centru Ljubljane. [...] na tisti ulici so morale biti kakšne kamere. Policija je bila videti popolnoma nezainteresirana. Prišli so skupaj z reševalci. Mojega partnerja, skoraj nezavestnega, so peljali na urgenco. Tistega dne je bilo napadenih kakšnih pet ljudi. Mediji so poročali o tem. (V8)

Najbolj pogosto so tveganju sovražnih kaznivih dejanj izpostavljene transspolne osebe, hkrati pa te doživijo tudi zelo hude oblike napadov:

To je bila skupina moških srednjih let (sicer brezdomcev in odvisnikov), ki so nekako ugotovili, da sem trans – ne vem, kako, ker o tem nisem govoril z njimi. Ne vem, zakaj jih je to tako motilo. Prikazali so se nekega sobotnega večera, ko je bila kavarna prazna in sem delal sam. Bili so kakšni štirje, morda pet. Vstopili so, jaz sem bil za pultom. Razporedili so se tako, da nisem mogel oditi, in eden od njih je izrekel [žaljivke]. Rekli so mi, da so me prišli opozoriti in da naslednjič, ko pridem delat, ne bom odšel domov živ. Istega večera sem na spletu naročil električni paralizator in ga začel vsak dan nositi s sabo. (V6)

Resnost položaja, ki je razvidna iz opisane izkušnje, sovpada z oceno intervjuvanca, strokovnjaka P2, da imajo policija, centri za socialno delo, šole in druge institucije, zdravstveno osebje in splošna javnost najmanj razumevanja za transspolne ljudi.

Nekateri intervjuvanci so priznali, da groženj in napadov niso prijavili policiji, še zlasti če napadi niso bili fizični, ampak samo verbalni. Poleg splošnega nezaupanja policiji so kot razlog za neprijavljanje incidentov navajali strah in sram pa tudi empatijo do napadalcev, ne glede na to, ali so bili sorodniki ali neznanci. Transspolni ljudje pogosto poročajo o slabih izkušnjah s policijo in se največkrat raje izognejo stikom z njo. Intervjuvanec V6, ki je transspolna oseba, se je po dvotedenskem premisleku odločil, da incidenta ne prijavi:

Že sama misel, da bi šel na policijo in govoril z njimi, mi je povzročila velik stres. [...] Ta občutek, da bi šel na policijo in da bi moral razlagati znova in znova, da mi je nekdo hotel škodovati, mi je povzročil nenadzorovano tesnobo in veliko sramu. (V6)

Razlogi, povezani z intersekcionalnostjo, prav tako postajajo vedno pomembnejši dejavnik neprijavljanja. Intervjuvanec V10 je omenil, da je še posebej velika težava s prijavo incidenta prepričati oškodovanca z migrantskim ozadjem, še zlasti, kadar so pri njem prisotna verska prepričanja, ki obsojajo homoseksualnost, ali pa ga je strah povračilnih ukrepov v lastni etnični skupnosti. Ti dejavniki povzročajo globoke notranje in zunanje konflikte, ki preprečujejo oškodovancem, da bi poiskali podporo.

Posledice napadov pri žrtvah

Intervjuvanci opisujejo različne vrste posledic, ki so jih na njih pustili sovražni incidenti, te pa so odvisne od resnosti napada, ki so mu bili izpostavljeni. Različne vrste fizičnih posledic v obliki telesnih poškodb so razvidne že iz prej navedenih pričevanj, respondenti pa navajajo tudi psihološke posledice:

Še vedno se čutim prizadet. Ko grem ven, se počutim, kot da bom koga srečal in imel težave. Postal sem nedružaben, večino časa preživim v svoji sobi. Včasih se kdo oglasi in me pride pozdravit, vendar jim rečem, naj odidejo in naj ne pridejo več. Tega pač enostavno ne prenesem. Počutim se, kot da mi je za vse vseeno. (V1)

Drugi intervjuvanec se po napadu ni mogel znebiti občutka, da mu nekdo sledi:

Bilo je globoko zaskrbljujoče. S partnerjem sva celo poiskala psihološko pomoč. Ko dejanja druge osebe vzbudijo tak strah – da se lahko ponovi – to ostane s tabo. [...] Ko je napadeno osnovno bistvo človeka, to pusti trajne brazgotine. Potrebovala sva kakšno leto, da sva premagala te težave. (V8)

Tisti, ki so izkusili resne napade, so poročali o poslabšanju tako svojega fizičnega kot tudi mentalnega zdravja, ter opisovali težave, kot so nespečnost, napadi panike in astma. Intervjuvanec V5 je povedal, da je po napadu ostal globok občutek strahu in ranljivosti. Omenil je, da se počuti nelagodno vsakič, ko gre zvečer sam domov:

Zdaj se morda zdi smešno, saj vem, da je to za mano in da mi ni pustilo nobenih posledic. Razen tega da – in to je pomembno – da nikoli več ne zapustim doma brez solzivca in noža v žepu. (V5)

Obseg ozaveščenosti žrtev in njihovega znanja o kaznivih dejanjih iz sovraštva

Skoraj vsi intervjuvanci izmed oškodovancev so izkazovali dobro poznavanje svojih pravic, predvsem zaradi informacij in podpore, ki so jim jih ponudile nevladne organizacije. Izkazali so poznavanje koncepta diskriminacije, utemeljene na predsodkih, in kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva. Nekateri so imeli to znanje že pred izkušnjo z nasiljem, drugi pa so z vsakim sovražnim incidentom, ki so ga doživeli, pridobili več znanja o tem. Nekateri oškodovanci so še posebej izstopali zaradi svojega poznavanja tega področja in motiviranosti, da se bojujejo za svoje pravice. Intervjuvanka V3 je navedla, da bi tudi danes poklicala policijo in prijavila homofobni incident, vendar pa ne bi več dopustila, da jo »25-letni policist« odvrne od vložitve uradne kazenske ovadbe. Podobno se tudi intervjuvanec V5 zaradi svojih življenjskih izkušenj, pedagoške izobrazbe in aktivizma počuti opolnomočenega ter verjame v smiselnost prijavljanja vsakega sovražnega incidenta, saj meni, da mora biti s svojim ravnanjem zgled za druge. Poudaril je pomen znanja in ozaveščenosti, ki sta potrebna za ukrepanje v takih situacijah, ter prepričanje, da bi morali biti posamezniki LGBTIQ+ bolje vnaprej pripravljeni na potencialno nasilje, kot pa da informacije začnejo iskati šele po napadu. Intervjuvanka V2, ki je visoko usposobljena in angažirana aktivistka, je o napadih obvestila državne voditelje, varuha človekovih pravic in medije, odločena ozaveščati in bojevati se za enake pravice vseh.

Pristopi za izboljšanje prevencije in odgovora na incidente

Rezultati intervjujev z dvanajstimi strokovnjaki kažejo na številne izvirne rešitve, s katerimi je mogoče okrepiti preprečevanje nasilnih incidentov in izboljšati odzive nanje, tako v smislu pravnih in kazenskih postopkov kot tudi onkraj njih. Nevladne organizacije obravnavajo nasilne incidente proti osebam LGBTIQ+ z različnimi metodami, od neposredne podpore do predlogov za izboljšanje odzivanja sistema na prijave. Njihovi pristopi obsegajo ukvarjanje z nujnimi situacijami, izvajanje svetovanj na podlagi polstrukturiranih protokolov, pravno podporo in zagovorništvo (P1, P5). V primeru incidentov najprej ocenijo, za kakšno vrsto diskriminacije ali nasilja gre, opredelijo potrebe žrtve in ponudijo spremstvo na policijo ali v urad (P5, P6). Medtem ko spodbujajo prijavljanje incidentov, pa se zavedajo neučinkovitosti sistema in kazenskega pregona. Sodelujejo tudi z drugimi podobnimi organizacijami in včasih same pristopijo k oškodovancem in jim ponudijo pravno podporo (P1, P8).

Intervju z državno tožilko (P4) je ponudil uvid v način delovanja organa pregona, ki pa je povsem drugačen. Pristop državnega tožilstva do kaznivih dejanj proti osebam LGBTIQ+ se, po navedbah intervjuvanke P4, ne razlikuje od pristopa k vsem ostalim primerom, se pa tožilstvo zaveda, da je v teh primerih treba upoštevati določene občutljivosti. Na državnem tožilstvu deluje posebna delovna skupina državnih tožilcev, ki obravnava ovadbe zaradi kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva in sovražnega govora. Ti državni tožilci se udeležujejo izobraževanj s tega

področja, izmenjujejo izkušnje in imajo boljši vpogled v specifikke teh primerov, vključno s prepoznavanjem predsodkov, razumevanjem učinka kaznivih dejanj na oškodovance in identifikacijo učinkovitih strategij kazenskega pregona. V občutljivih primerih lahko tožilec zahteva, da se na zaslišanjih oškodovanca zasliši brez navzočnosti obdolženca, da bi se oškodovancu zagotovil občutek varnosti. Državni tožilec sme voditi tudi neformalne razgovore z oškodovanci pred sodnimi obravnavami z namenom spodbude in motivacije pred zaslišanjem, vendar pa po besedah intervjuvanke P4 to ni običajna praksa. Splošna tožilska usmeritev je, da se tožilci z oškodovanci ne bi smeli ukvarjati.

Po drugi strani pa nevladne organizacije po navedbi intervjuvanca P6 potrebe oškodovancev obravnavajo prednostno, pri čemer se prilagodijo individualnim potrebam posameznika glede na njegov položaj in želje glede nadaljnega ukrepanja. Ustvarjajo varne prostore, v katerih oškodovanci lahko spregovorijo o svojih izkušnjah, jih podpirajo in vodijo skozi možnosti ukrepanja, vendar brez pritiska, ob spoštovanju njihove avtonomije. Nevladne organizacije spodbujajo k prijavljanju incidentov, čeprav je prijava anonimna, tudi zato, da so incidenti dokumentirani, saj lahko to prepreči nadaljnje nasilje. Intervjuvanka P1 je poudarila, da v primeru, če oškodovanec ne želi podati kazenske ovadbe zaradi nezaupanja v kazenskopravni sistem, organizacije predlagajo alternativne prijave poti, kot sta na primer Varuh človekovih pravic in Zagovornik načela enakosti. Sodelujejo pa tudi z drugimi organizacijami, ki lahko povežejo oškodovance s terapevti ali odvetniki, pri tem pa je mogoče upoštevati tudi interseksionalne dejavnike, kot sta brezdomstvo in odvisnost.

Intervjuvanci strokovnjaki na splošno poročajo, da številni oškodovanci še vedno neradi vzpostavijo stik s policijo zaradi nezaupanja, strahu in izpostavljenosti, pa tudi zaradi slabih izkušenj z neučinkovito obravnavo njihovih prijav nasilja. Intervjuvanci P2, P6, P11 in P12 so navedli, da oškodovance še vedno skrbi, da bo v postopku javno razkrita njihova spolna usmerjenost ali spolna identiteta, da se bodo v postopkih osvetlili tudi z incidentom nepovezani vidiki njihove zasebnosti, da bodo izpostavljeni dodatnemu nasilju organov pregona, da bodo v postopku ponovno, sekundarno viktimizirani in travmatizirani, ali pa dvomijo, da bodo kaznovalni postopki smiselno zaključeni. Ob tem sta bila kot dodatna dejavnika, ki prav tako odvrčata oškodovance od prijavljanja, navedena dolgotrajnost in zapletenost kazenskih postopkov (P9).

Nekateri intervjuvanci so sicer poudarili, da je mogoče zaznati izboljšanje občutljivosti policije do teh vprašanj, zlasti na policijski postaji Ljubljana Center in pri Generalni policijski upravi, kjer so bili z namenom olajšanja komunikacije posamezni uslužbenci policije določeni za posebne kontaktne točke (P6). Intervjuvanci so potrdili tudi ugotovitve pregleda literature (Gračanin 2024) o pozitivnih rezultatih enoletnega sodelovanja skupnosti LGBTIQ+ s policijo, ki je bilo vzpostavljeno po Paradi ponosa 2023. Izražena je bila tudi ocena, da je sodelovanje s policijo bolj pozitivno kot sodelovanje z drugimi državnimi organi pri obravnavi incidentov, hkrati pa je bilo poudarjeno, da policija potrebuje

še več usposabljanja, izobraževanja in proaktivnosti na tem področju (P1, P5 in P9).

Odprta vprašanja in problemi na področju obravnave homofobnih in transfobnih incidentov

Eden največjih problemov, ki ga je izpostavilo več intervjuvancev (npr. P1, P9, P11), je pomanjkanje storitev psihosocialne pomoči. Medtem ko določeno podporo ponujajo nevladne organizacije, so njihovi programi omejeni zaradi nezadostnega financiranja. Problem je tudi zaprtje varnega prostora za krizno namestitvev (za primere, ko mlajši ljudje zaradi razkritja doma ostanejo brez podpore staršev (Švab 2016)), ki pomeni velik korak nazaj pri podpori žrtev (P9). Poleg tega so storitve podpore centralizirane in na voljo predvsem v večjih mestih, kar za osebe LGBTIQ+ iz oddaljenih podeželskih območij pomeni oviro, zlasti če so ob tem prisotne tudi ovire socio-ekonomske narave (P9). Poleg pomanjkanja psihosocialne podpore so intervjuvanci poudarili potrebo po izobraževanju skupnosti LGBTIQ+ na področjih komunikacije s policijo, razlikovanja med prekrški in kaznivimi dejanji ter večšin za samozaščito (P8). Pravniki, ki so sodelovali v raziskavi, so opozorili na novosti, ki jih prinaša Direktiva o pravicah žrtev kaznivih dejanj, na podlagi katere sta bili na okrožnih sodiščih v Ljubljani in Mariboru leta 2021 ustanovljeni službi za podporo oškodovanim s kaznivimi dejanji, ki pa sta pretežno namenjeni oškodovancem, ko že poteka kazenski postopek pred sodiščem (Bajt in Bervar Sternad 2024, 37).

Sklepno so nekateri intervjuvanci iz vrst nevladnih organizacij izrazili ostro kritiko kazenskopравниh vidikov pravne ureditve kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva. Opozarjajo, da je zaradi neustreznih pravnih opredelitev teh kaznivih dejanj, pomanjkanja pravne pomoči in pomanjkanja sredstev zanjo (P8) ter drugih dejavnikov v okviru kazenskopравниh predpisov izpeljanih izjemno malo postopkov po Kazenskem zakoniku. Kot pozitiven je bil ocenjen premik, da se na državnem tožilstvu spise o kaznivih dejanjih, izvršenih z diskriminacijskim motivom, sedaj označuje z oznako »SOV«, kar omogoča lažjo identifikacijo in pravo statistike, vendar pa je primerov kot takih izjemno malo. Intervjuvanci so v tem kontekstu kritizirali institucije – tožilstvo, sodišča in zagovornika načela enakosti – kot preveč birokratske in neučinkovite (P6, P8).

UGOTOVITVE IN SKLEPI

Glede na vsebinske rezultate je mogoče ugotoviti, da se kljub sprejemu nove vključujoče družinske zakonodaje položaj glede pojavnosti homofobnih in transfobnih incidentov ni izboljšal. To gre pripisati t. i. *backlashu*, tj. negativnemu odzivu v družbi, do katerega prihaja zaradi intenzivnejših zahtev skupnosti po zagotavljanju enakih pravic ter zaradi njihove večje vidnosti v javnosti (Jones 2024; Smrdelj in Kuhar 2024b, 33). Tudi na področju prijavljanja kaznivih dejanj bi v zadnjem desetletju morali storiti več, saj še vedno obstajajo močne subjektivne in objektivne ovire, ki zavirajo prijavljanje kaznivih dejanj (Magić 2017;

Perger 2018; Ferbežar in Gavriloski 2023). Vedno bolj so izražene tudi potrebe po konkretnih spremembah v sistemu na način, da bi se okrepilo zaupanje v smiselnost prijav. Primer je potreba po vzpostavitvi obveznosti obvestiti oškodovanca in/ali prijavitelja o izidu kazenskega ali prekrškovnega postopka. Raziskava je pokazala, da so pomanjkanje komunikacije med žrtvami in državnimi organi, razlage procesnih pravil in obveščanja o izidu prijav ključni razlogi za nezaupanje do pristojnih organov. Te vidike razmerja med oškodovanci in policijo bi veljalo izboljšati.

Rezultati raziskave potrjujejo tudi, da še vedno obstaja potreba po psihosocialni pomoči in podpori za žrtve. To pomeni, da se na ukrepe, ki so bili sprejeti zaradi prenosa Direktive 2012/29/EU o pravicah žrtev kaznivih dejanj (Evropska unija 2012), ne sme gledati kot zgolj na formalnost, ki jo je bila država dolžna izpolniti zaradi zavez prava EU, temveč da za te ukrepe obstaja resnična družbena potreba (Bučar 2019, 8). Ni videti razloga, da ne bi služb za pomoč oškodovancem kaznivih dejanj ustanovili tudi na drugih sodiščih zunaj obeh največjih slovenskih mest. Med oškodovanci homo- in transfobnih kaznivih dejanj je sicer mogoče zaznati tudi skupino visoko opolnomočenih posameznikov in organizacij, ki se zavedajo pomena prijavljanja kaznivih dejanj, jih nejasnost izida postopkov pri tem ne ovira ter jim vrednoto predstavlja že sam proces prijave in sodelovanja z organi pregona in drugimi državnimi organi, ne glede na izid posameznega postopka. Videti pa je, da so ti oškodovanci bolj izjema kot pravilo.

Na področju kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva proti osebam LGBTIQ+ osebam je opaziti tudi različne učinkovite postopke tako na strani preprečevanja incidentov tudi kot tudi na strani odzivanja nanje, ki niso vedno primerni (C. 2025). Glede na rezultate terenske raziskave je najvidnejši dosežek v zadnjem obdobju intenzivno sodelovanje nevladnih organizacij z organi pregona, ki ima večplastne spremljevalne učinke, saj izboljšuje odnos med akterji, zmanjšuje socialno distanco med skupnostjo in državnimi organi ter krepi znanje in ozaveščenost vseh sodelujočih o vlogi in poslanstvu vsakogar od njih, hkrati pa odpira prostor za nove izvirne zamisli za zmanjšanje števila incidentov in za ustrežnejše odzivanje nanje. Drug prav tako pomemben dosežek je stopnja razvoja nevladnega sektorja na področju položaja oseb LGBTIQ+, vključno s podporo žrtvam. Ta dejavnost nevladnega sektorja pomembno dopolnjuje pomanjkanje javnih podpornih storitev za žrtve kaznivih dejanj.

Iz rezultatov raziskave je razvidna razlika med vlogo pa tudi pristopom državnih institucij in nevladnih organizacij do obravnave žrtev kaznivih dejanj. Razlike v pristopu do oškodovancev so pogojene z institucionalnimi značilnostmi represivnih državnih organov na eni strani in civilne družbe na drugi strani, hkrati pa ni mogoče spregledati dejstva, da ni bila ponotranjena zamisel (in zdaj zakonska obveznost), da morajo tudi državni organi žrtvam kaznivih dejanj v kazenskih postopkih ponuditi podporo in pomoč. To bo mogoče zagotoviti samo z nadaljnjimi institucionalnimi spremembami, tudi tistimi na področju socialnega dela, v smeri podpore žrtvam kaznivih dejanj (Ljungwald in Svensson

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2007; Bajt in Bervar Sternad 2024, 37), ali pa na način sistemske krepitve nevladnega sektorja, ki mu žrtve – glede na rezultate raziskave – najbolj zaupajo. Resneje je treba pristopiti k praktičnemu izvajanju obveznosti, ki jih je država prevzela na osnovi Direktive o pravicah žrtev kaznivih dejanj. Zdaj je videti, kot da je prenos določb direktive izveden pretežno na formalni ravni, medtem ko je treba zagotoviti tudi dejansko implementacijo določb, kar pa je glede na dejanske potrebe žrtev tudi res smiselna.

Če sklenemo, kot enega pomembnejših izzivov velja znova izpostaviti izredno nizko število primerov, ki se obravnavajo v okviru kazenskega postopka, zlasti primerov po 297. členu Kazenskega zakonika. Dejanja, ki jih ta določba inkriminira, so glede na poročila o pojavljanju tovrstnih kaznivih dejanj realen problem, torej razlog za neuporabo tega člena ne more biti v »pomanjkanju« incidentov. Prijav kaznivih dejanj oziroma vloženi kazenski ovadb je glede na razpoložljivo statistiko dovolj za uporabo navedenega člena. Kaže se stalna potreba po nenehnem izboljševanju kakovosti dela vseh kazenskopravnih akterjev, udeleženih v obravnavanih procesih, kar je pomembno predvsem zaradi potrebe po dvigu zaupanja oškodovancev v kazenskopravni sistem.

Izkušnje, ki so jih v raziskavi posredovali intervjuvanci, kažejo, da sicer pretežno napredna nacionalna zakonodaja za varstvo enakosti skupnosti LGBTIQ+ v vsakdanjem življenju ni polno zaživela in je vključeni akterji niso popolnoma ponotranjili. Drži, da nasilnih incidentov ne bo nikoli mogoče povsem odpraviti, pa tudi vzrokov zanje ne – ti so povezani s širšim družbenim problemom tolerance do nasilja (Kuhar in Švab 2024, 3299; Smrdelj in Kuhar 2024b), vendar pa so pristojne institucije po zakonu in ustavi dolžne ustrezno odreagirati na prijave nasilja ter izpeljati postopke po pravilih kaznovalnega prava. Raziskava kaže, da na tem področju obstaja še veliko prostora za izboljšave.

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IN THE SHADOW OF PROGRESSIVE LEGAL REGULATION: HATE CRIMES BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY – THE VICTIM’S PERSPECTIVE

Abstract. *The article addresses the gap between progressive regulations adopted to eliminate discrimination and the exclusion of LGBTIQ+ individuals, and a society deeply rooted in homophobic and transphobic sentiments and prejudices. Despite the adoption of inclusive legislation based on Slovenian Constitutional Court rulings, homophobic and transphobic attacks occur at least as frequently as in the past, if not more often. The article outlines the most significant legislative changes in this field, complemented by a literature review and original findings from qualitative socio-legal field research based on 22 interviews – 10 with victims and 12 with experts. The results point to challenges in the area of reporting crimes, the ineffectiveness of criminal prosecution, and the insufficient victim support.*

Keywords: *Slovenia, hate crimes, incitement to hatred, violence, or intolerance, discrimination, police, homophobia, transphobia.*

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DEPOLITICISATION VIA EUROPEANISATION? THE CASE OF CROATIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE**

Abstract. The Croatian security intelligence system's historical development was shaped significantly by politicisation, which has laid the foundations for many of the intelligence community's current issues. In order to corroborate this assertion, different political impacts as well as politicised security intelligence practices are presented in the article using a historical-institutional approach, where both determined the periods before and after the 1990s, the key demarcation point being the attainment of independence in 1991. Over a decade after joining the European Union (EU), it is argued that the multidimensional Europeanisation process is one of the central factors in the depoliticisation of national security intelligence in Croatia.

Keywords: Politicisation, Croatia, security, intelligence, Europeanisation.

INTRODUCTION

The politicisation of intelligence is a problematic phenomenon as old as intelligence itself. In Sherman Kent's ("classical") understanding, intelligence includes the organisations forming an intelligence community, the processes represented by the intelligence cycle, and the resulting intelligence assessments (Scott and Jackson 2004; Aldritch 2013). Politicisation may thus at first connote a specific structural design flaw, an activity problem or an intelligence error, caused by political interferences and predispositions, respectively.

Although it has become a custom in the intelligence practice, as well as it being a notorious term in public discourse, intelligence politicisation is obviously a complex phenomenon that when reduced to its "best-known" form, or "pathology", namely decision-makers' "overt or subtle pressure on intelligence

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analysts and managers to produce intelligence estimates that support current political preferences or policies” (Wirtz 2006, 139), does not do it justice. Instead, following Jackson (2010), along with acknowledging the importance of Kent’s previously mentioned three-dimensional definition of intelligence, analytically the most fruitful way of conceptualising the politicisation of intelligence seems to be to divide it into systemic, top-down and bottom-up types.¹

Systemic politicisation refers to ideological biases that determine the coordinates of the ideational framework within which policymakers and analysts alike operate. Top-down intelligence politicisation may be conceptualised as comprising both the mentioned ‘pathology’ of policymakers actively, and more or less forcefully, trying to shape the intelligence process and its products according to certain political or policy preferences (the overt kind), and the influence of bureaucratic or personal incentives on the estimates of analysts (the subtle kind) (Wirtz 2006, 144). Yet, the two types need to be more differentiated in terms of the direction of influence (top-down vs. bottom-up). In that way, the autonomy of intelligence analysts would be appropriately acknowledged; members of the intelligence community do not lack individual agency and are not mere instruments of political power. Another reason for the proposed bottom-up/top-down division refers to the fact that top-down politicisation may include the “use of intelligence to implement, rather than guide, policy” (Jackson 2010, 460), the most (in)famous practices being covert actions of various kinds. Finally, overt as well as subtle intelligence politicisation subtypes may equally refer to systemic, top-down and bottom-up types. By applying this typology, a more nuanced picture of intelligence politicisation can be presented.

Since no intelligence system or community is exempt from politicisation given its fundamental importance for national security politics and policymaking, qualitative differences between various types of intelligence politicisation become evident when comparing a certain state’s historical periods marked by different political systems (Hague et al. 2019, 3) and/or policy regimes (Wilson 2000). However, without belittling the so-called “Gates model” of “actionable intelligence” (Wirtz 2006, 140) named after former CIA director Robert Gates, which implies that intelligence analysts must be aware of policymakers’ needs as well as the importance of useful intelligence to consumers that analysts are required to provide, the Kentian approach to the politicisation of intelligence as an undesirable phenomenon guides the considerations in this article.²

¹ Since the politicisation of bureaucratic intelligence, namely the “intrusion of bureaucratic politics in the intelligence process” most commonly “produced by competition between ministries or departments for political influence, for greater resources” is extremely hard to measure due to the lack of relevant data and reliable information on inter-community rivalries, it is also possible to account for various instances of bureaucratic distortions as manifestations of bottom-up politicisation and it will therefore not be considered separately (see Jackson 2010, 459).

² The actionable intelligence model may thus be seen as self-evident because of the political nature of intelligence use and the inseparability of intelligence and national security policy.

The historical development of the Croatian security intelligence system was significantly shaped by politicisation. Politicised development has also provided the grounds for many of the nation's intelligence community's problems today. These facts serve as timely reminders of the need to modernise security intelligence based on (a) superior intelligence culture(s). The Croatian case is in many respects similar to cases of other post-socialist European countries like Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Poland and (the then) Czechoslovakia which had similar security intelligence problems linked to a totalitarian past and fashioned long-term reforms of their intelligence systems on West European and allied (international) examples (Martin 2007; Watts 2004). The Croatian case may therefore be seen as a relevant case for reviewing the potential of security intelligence modernisation by way of (soft) Europeanisation.

The goal of this article is to list examples of well-known politicisation practices, analyse them comparatively with regard to a proposed typology of intelligence politicisation, and suggest the logics of a possible change towards a desirable, European-like institutional design. To that end, we present an explorative account of the multi-decade security intelligence evolution based on a historical-institutional approach (Steinmo 2008) due to its 'real-world' empirical and historical orientation as well as the idea that institutions, including political ones, shape actors' behaviours and outcomes but are also shaped in return. A historical-institutional-inspired intelligence culture path dependence model is acknowledged as particularly useful for basic explanatory purposes. Secondary sources are mainly used.

“THE SWORD AND THE SHIELD OF THE PARTY” (1944–1990)

The history of security intelligence in Croatia, at least if its rudimentary forms connected to monarchist law enforcement and military intelligence from the Austro-Hungarian (Maksimović 2019) and royalist Yugoslav (Janković 1988) periods – as well as the extreme nationalist/fascist one during the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) (Kovačić 2009) – are left to one side, started in 1944 with the formation of the first Yugoslav, and therefore Croatian, security intelligence agency OZN (Department of Public Protection – *Odeljenje za zaštitu naroda*) (Klinger 2014). The agency originated from the people's village and partisan guards initially established for the purpose of performing intelligence and counterintelligence work for the national liberation (partisan) movement led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). During the war and up until 1952, it operated under the military before transitioning to a nominally civilian Secretariat (ministry) of Internal Affairs. Its name changed from OZN (May 1944) to the State Security Administration (*Uprava državne bezbednosti* – UDB) (March 1946). Since 1946, it has been part of the Yugoslav Ministry of Internal Affairs – except for one department that remained within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of People's Defence, thereby becoming a specialised military security (counter-intelligence) service – and in 1966 was again renamed the State Security Service

(*Služba državne sigurnosti* – SDS). Beginning in 1967, its status was changed. The once federal provenance service took on multi-republican features. It nevertheless dealt primarily with the tasks of protecting the CPY through the collection of data and other information for the purpose of discovering organised and secret activities aimed at undermining or overthrowing the political order. Notorious not only for its methods of information gathering, which ignored basic human rights, such as making threats and blackmailing citizens to become security intelligence informers and collaborators (Akmadža 2021), the service also carried out assassinations of the regime’s enemies abroad. Nationalist political emigrants, mostly Croatian, were seen as especially dangerous because the Yugoslav authorities recognised them as remnants of the CPY’s defeated enemies (‘fascist collaborators’) from the Second World War or as their post-war successors (Nielsen 2020).

The Yugoslav security and intelligence services were divided by federal, shared federal-republican, and republican jurisdictions, and accordingly attached to foreign, interior and defence ministries, as well as in other nominally separate instances to bodies such as Yugoslav National Army General Staff. The military intelligence service (Second Directorate of the Yugoslav People’s Army General Staff) and the aforementioned military security service were established in 1947 whereas the ‘civil’ foreign intelligence, the Service for Informing and Documentation (*Služba za istraživanje i dokumentaciju* – SID) under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs came into being soon after that. The shared federal-republican jurisdiction was related to internal security intelligence services (republican SDSs), while jurisdiction over all the republics was reserved for domestic law enforcement/police forces, except for the federal Ministry of Internal Affairs (Žunec and Domišljanović 2000, 33–41). Democratic intelligence oversight did not exist by default due to the regime not being democratic while responsibility for the intelligence community’s coordination and its political oversight was reserved for members of the Party’s upper echelons acting through the Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (*Savjet za zaštitu ustavnog poretka*).

Systemic ideological bias greatly politicised intelligence conduct and was present in an overt way in the strict code of conduct, which corresponded to the ideas of the original Cheka-style vigilance that formed a foundation for the Yugoslav “counterintelligence state” (Dziak 1988). Systemic politicisation in terms of ideology as well as top-down politicisation visible in ways of leadership and bottom-up politicisation reserved for methods used in intelligence work predated the Second World War, but were ‘imported’ more seriously from the USSR in 1944. Categories of “internal enemies” (“old class structures” and various groups: “clerical”, “nationalist”, “Informburo”, “liberal”, “anarcho-liberal”, “bureaucratic-dogmatic”) and “political emigration” according to different nationalities and political goals established the dominant framework informing the actions of the intelligence community (Žunec and Domišljanović 2000, 43–44).

Given that traditional categories of national security risks were not fully integrated into the systemic rules of intelligence conduct, the subtle kind of politicisation pertained to security intelligence officers' absolute allegiance to and identification with the Communist Party's ideas, who thus acted as the "sword and the shield of the Party" (Akrap 2010). The most indicative example of the fusion of Party and state is that top communist politicians as well as intelligence officers held identical views, chiefly due to the nature of the communist constitutional order, about the "special war(fare)" of certain hostile groups being waged against Yugoslavia at all times (Šušvar 1988, 130; Vilić and Ateljević 1983, 214–15).

The lines between the overt and subtle kinds of top-down politicisation were quite blurred because the total obedience of SDS to the Party's interests led to the former executing orders and delivering to the latter information impaired by the need for their strict adherence to the ideologically crafted lists of probable and possible threats to the regime. Overtly, politicians often meddled in the intelligence apparatus, especially as regards targeted assassinations, but subtly the intelligence officers were directed to hire criminals to carry out covert actions not stipulated by law, e.g., the murder of the Croatian immigrant Stjepan Đureković (Nielsen 2020; Nikolić and Petrović 2022).

Bottom-up politicisation was usually entwined with the top-down type since the field agents and analysts of SDS were party members; with Lenin's original dictum of a "good Communist" being also a "good Chekist" (cited in: Leggett 1981, 351) losing none of its original importance. The overt kind of bottom-up intelligence politicisation entailed intelligence officers pampering politicians and policymakers with intelligence input in order to execute orders in a straightforward way and therefore continuously prove their loyalty to the Party and the regime. One of the most (in)famous examples of this was when the director of Croatian SDS delivered information, court witnesses and confidential documents to the state prosecutor's office concerning the war-crime-related trial of former NDH minister Andrija Artuković in 1986 (Babić 2005, 103). Being aware of other (sub)types of politicisation during socialist times, one may still presume this meant analysts and intelligence field officers providing subtle cues on preferences on certain operational aspects of task execution. For example, preferring information hailing from informers as opposed to wiretapping since the former would provide more damaging information on subjects of interest (e.g., dissidents) on purpose than compared to acquiring relatively unbiased information via wiretapping. Intelligence officers sometimes even made information up so as to conform with the (un)stated expectations of their superiors.³

³ See dossiers and information stored in the Croatian State Archive: HR-HDA 1561 – SDS RSUP SRH.

NATION-BUILDING AND THE POST-COMMUNIST TRANSITION (1990–1999)

During the war-stricken post-communist transition, the intelligence community of the new independent Croatian state (Republic of Croatia) acted as a trusty tool of nation-building and statecraft. Security intelligence cadres of the communist *ancien regime*, including the future ministers of interior and directors of intelligence agencies, as well as politicised organisational structures stayed in place, albeit under a new insignia (Miškulin 2017, 203–204). Faced with a violent Serbian internal insurgency after the summer of 1990 as well as an insurgency combined with Yugoslav external military aggression after the autumn of 1991, along with factional struggles within the new ruling party, the Croatian intelligence community was formed inadequately, that is, “unsystematically” and “partly outside of the institutional design”, especially since separate Croatian military intelligence and foreign affairs intelligence departments did not then exist (Žunec and Domišljanović 2000, 31, 52). Throughout the 1990s, a new form of politically inspired conspiracy logic of internal and external enemies acting united against the new ‘national’ constitutional order, which may be labelled ‘post-Bolshevik’, quickly became a staple of state politics. It therefore greatly influenced intelligence matters and national security policy in a negative way (Udovičić 2006, 650, 654, 659, 675–676).

Some authors managed to list a total of 12 acting security and intelligence services or departments existing at one point during the decade (Hatzadony 2002). The Croatian SDS retained its name until mid-1991 when it was restructured to become the Service for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (*Služba za zaštitu ustavnog poretka* – SZUP). Although nominally under the Ministry of the Interior, it reported directly to the Office of the President. Its duties gradually changed from being an all-encompassing intelligence, counterintelligence and security service to having a strictly internal security focus. The civilian intelligence service (*Hrvatska izvještajna služba* – HIS) with a precisely defined foreign intelligence function and some coordination tasks was established in 1993. Croatian military intelligence services slowly formed given that the new Croatian army was also in a rudimentary stage of development at the time of the regime change. Established just prior to the start of the Croatian war of independence in 1991, the military security agency (*Sigurnosno-informativna služba* – SIS) under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence worked alongside a military intelligence service named the Directorate of Intelligence Affairs (*Obavještajna uprava* – ObU) of the Croatian Army Headquarters (Akrap and Tuđman 2016). The Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also maintained departments linked to security for consular posts and gathered intelligence through diplomatic corps abroad. Coordination of the intelligence community was first a matter for the presidential Office for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (*Ured za zaštitu ustavnog poretka* – UZUP) established in 1991, and after that its successor institution the National Security Office (*Ured za nacionalnu sigurnost* – UNS)

established in March 1993. The latter was reformed 2 years later following legislative amendments to become the Croatian government's executive body with a mandate not simply to coordinate, but also to direct and control the work of the security intelligence services (Hatzadony 2002).

Members of the political opposition along with oppositional journalists and other actors such as lawyers, social scientists, and civil society organisations persisted in documenting and publishing examples of the politicisation of security intelligence throughout the 1990s and sometime thereafter. Despite being well publicised, these findings should not be taken at face value, principally because alternative accounts do not exist, and not least since the sources of the journalist involved come from individuals linked to Croatian politics and the intelligence community. Possible future studies in this respect should systematically explore collected primary data, e.g., based on the study of parliamentary transcripts, indictments, declassified documents, and other sources.

Overt systemic politicisation was again seen in ideological bias, which shifted from communist to national(ist). Protection of the new 'constitutional order' hailing from the first democratic constitutional changes in 1990 became the norm of the day. The new constitution was the outcome of politicians and experts closely connected to the ruling party, while even though SZUP was filled with politically loyal cadres it did not transform into a political police force. Hence, by safeguarding the constitutional order, SZUP also *de facto* safeguarded the political regime embodied in the ruling party that previously had opted for the state's independence. The subtle kind may be seen in the 'strategic' reorientation toward new threats (Serbian, Montenegrin and Yugoslav at first, Bosniak Muslim afterwards). Further, the presence of certain ethnic and religious groups, especially Serbs and other non-Croat populations, within the services was tacitly labelled as unwelcome due to being politically suspicious and thus dangerous. Following the creation of the intelligence community, the Croatian political leadership "recommended" that new employees should be "young people loyal to the new democracy, those who did not have a communist past, the Homeland war-proven patriots, and those who were ready to learn and to share their knowledge and experience with future generations" (Akrap and Tudman 2016, 72).

Overt top-down politicisation was most apparent in the 'political privatisation' of the intelligence community and the national security system. In the words of one intelligence service director, "the effect of the [ruling] party [HDZ] on the authority and cadre policy of the services" was "clear", the "mechanisms of administration, coordination, and oversight of the work of the services" were "under the direct leadership of individuals from the HDZ, without any effective parliamentary control", while the "Committee for Internal Politics and National Security of the House of Representatives of the Croatian State Assembly" acted as an "ineffective body" serving "only to satisfy form" (cited in: Lefebvre 2012, 116). Moreover, the ruling party even had loyal field informers. This practice represented overt top-down politicisation at its worst since parallelism bred inefficiency.

Combined with politically guided intelligence leaks to chauvinistic and sensationalist newspapers and press figures as well as intra-community rivalries, the new Croatian intelligence community faced detrimental development problems to do with professionalism, adherence to the law, respect for human rights, and others (Žunec and Domišljanović 2000, 53–54; Lefebvre 2012, 115–16). In a move that harkens back to rudimentary forms of political corruption, the president's own son, even though a successful information science professor with professional knowledge of intelligence studies and a 2-year career stint in intelligence affairs, became the head of the new foreign intelligence service (HIS) in 1993. He later described the intelligence community in the 5-year period when he was director of HIS as “successful” (Tuđman 2000, 48), which it definitely was with respect to the achieved wartime goals, but not a single account of intelligence politicisation was put identified.

Subtle top-down politicisation was mainly manifested in cadre selection of varying professional value; favouritism of friends and family members seen as politically reliable and loyal individuals further broadened the scope of the initial cadre politicisation (Udovičić 2006, 677). ‘New’ democratic actors with a nationalist and thus an anti-communist orientation initially had to cooperate with the former communist SDS employees who possessed the skills necessary for ‘doing intelligence’. The political balance was initiated by directives from the state authorities. After the Croatian war of independence ended in 1995, the former communist cadres were sacked or retired.

Overt bottom-up politicisation was visible in allegiance to the party and obedience to political figures. In time, it became a significant trait of success in the intelligence profession. While things were certainly much less rigid in comparison with the socialist period, the ‘post-Bolshevik’ intelligence model operated logically in the same vein as its predecessor. This was mostly apparent in practices by which the old (‘communist’) cadres tried to gain the loyalty of the new (‘nationalist’) decision-makers and the new (‘emigrant’ and domestic) cadres struggled to prove themselves in action. From the harassment of those in political opposition and journalists to participation in intra-party conflicts, the intelligence and security services supported the push towards unprofessional conduct for political reasons.

SZUP abused power both institutionally and individually: the unauthorised use of methods and means limiting the fundamental laws and liberties of citizens, cover-ups of criminal acts, the stealing and unauthorised use of documents, use of the service for political struggles with dissenters, kidnappings and physical abuse of those kidnaped and arrested (Žunec and Domišljanović 2000, 76–87). SIS even had greater freedom to act than SZUP. It often acted unconstitutionally and unlawfully akin to a political police force (Žunec and Domišljanović 2000, 93). With its military counterintelligence focus, SIS did much more than was expected of it: in 1994, SIS allegedly used flats, money and positions to turn members of the Croatian Parliament away from voting against the ruling

party and thus leadership of the state; allegedly falsified dossiers, hailing from communist times, on opponents of the ruling party; supplied arms and money to Bosnian Croat forces during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina; participated in faction struggles within the ruling party; spied on opposition parties' members and 'disloyal' journalists; and interfered in the parliamentary elections in 1999, among others (Kuljiš 2005, 72, 285; Lefebvre 2012).

The subtle bottom-up subtype concerned the unwritten, silent rules of 'choosing sides' early on in one's career and basically not 'speaking truth to power'. For example, after the imprisonment and severe beating of a commander of Vukovar's defence, Mile Dedaković, by SIS and the military police due to the city's fall to the combined Yugoslav-Serbian attack in December 1991, namely, after having been accused of treason (Babić 2005, 90), politicisation via human rights violations was tolerated as a means to achieve national security. Finally, by stealing intelligence service transcripts, dossiers and wiretapping equipment, intelligence officers subtly sided with their political patrons instead of serving national security (Udovičić 2006, 655–57).

DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION (2000–2024)

Following President Franjo Tuđman's death, the 2000 Croatian parliamentary and presidential elections brought an oppositional coalition to power as well as a new president hailing from one of the coalition parties. With reforms geared toward EU and NATO membership, including cooperation with the ICTY, security intelligence became a focal area for modernisation. Depoliticisation by way of the "reorientation of intelligence preoccupations toward non-political domestic and external threats" as well as through the "development of effective control and oversight mechanisms that would prevent abuses of authority from occurring" (Lefebvre 2012, 117) was underway.

In 2002, for the first time Croatia statutorily regulated its national security notion and in a special law the intelligence system's functioning (Bilandžić 2019, 240). The new law on security services and the new national security strategy envisioned Croatia as having three services (a foreign intelligence service – *Obavještajna agencija* – OA; a security/counterintelligence service – *Protuobavještajna agencija* – POA; and a military security service – *Vojna sigurnosna agencija* – VSA) while a new national security office (National Security Council – *Vijeće za nacionalnu sigurnost* – VNS) would be set up to replace UNS. Criminal involvement in the process of privatising publicly-owned companies as well as in the economic system came under scrutiny, the search for intelligence related to war crimes was in full force while the investigation of individuals capable of conducting terrorist actions in Croatia for ethnic or social motives also became a standard practice (Lefebvre 2012). Coordination and oversight bodies were modernised, particularly with the forming of the Council for the Coordination of the Security and Intelligence Services (*Savjet za koordinaciju*

sigurnosno-obavještajnih agencija – SKSOA) and the Office of the National Security Council (*Ured Vijeća za nacionalnu sigurnost* – UVNS). Still, critics stressed that the change in the services' names and almost complete loss of coordination within the intelligence community made it less efficient after this reform (Akrap and Tuđman 2016).

In 2006, the security intelligence system was reformed and structured by a new law. This led to a model that was out of harmony with the Council of Europe's recommendations since the security and intelligence agencies had merged, creating a system in which only one civilian (*Sigurnosno-obavještajna agencija* – SOA) and one military (*Vojna sigurnosno-obavještajna agencija* – VSOA) security intelligence agency existed. Even though intelligence system regulation and oversight were nominally improved, future malpractices were inevitable given that the creators of the mentioned law were the security intelligence services themselves (Margaletić 2014).

Systemic politicisation in this period started to loosen its grip on the intelligence system overtly and subtly in the absence of a strict communist or nationalist ideological framework. Further, a split between national and post-national identities (NATO and EU) caused a depoliticised stalemate. This meant that both the overt and the subtle effects of the systematic bias in this period became somewhat absent as this was a time of the national-international dilemma of Croatia's security intelligence with the national orientation being confronted with a more fluid, 'shared' and unifying ideology (Petrović 2015).

Examples of overt top-down politicisation made the headlines with the start of community infighting and questionable appointments at the helm of the services in the 2000s (Lefebvre 2012). Although definitely to a smaller extent than before, the overt and subtle top-down subtypes were marked by political corruption and an unacceptable pace of cadre professionalisation. For instance, the international search for wartime Croatian generals after the ICTY warrants for their arrests had been made public became another example of the politicisation of security intelligence as the generals suspected of war crimes presented no real threat to Croatian national security and were not labelled as such by the Croatian security intelligence services themselves. The action was instead a political imperative due to the need to conform to a specific EU accession requirement: cooperation with the ICTY. Subtle top-down politicisation continued in cadre selection but on a lower scale than before due to the increased institutional oversight scrutiny characteristic of the pre-EU accession times.

Dysfunctional intelligence community governance in this period was a shared responsibility of policymakers and intelligence officers. Still, the former, as always, should be seen as more to blame due to the powers they wield. Namely, a crucial aspect of politicisation is corruption. Even though it has been listed as a challenge to national security since SOA's first public report was published in 2014, the intelligence agencies did not view systemic political corruption (Grubiša 2009) as a threat or risk to national security. The inability to detect threats

to national security outside the dominant political discourse became a serious example of the politicisation of intelligence. Politicised abuses of power and corrupt practices in intelligence persisted, although they were fewer in number compared to the previous period.

Bottom-up overt and subtle subtypes were not as apparent as before since no strict ideological or political allegiance was needed, and analysts continued to address threats to national security in liaison with the government. From abuses in interior politics at the time of the 2005 Croatian presidential campaign and the police treatment of the heads of the intelligence agencies for suspicion of an alleged connection with criminal circles in 2012 to criminal prosecution of the head of VSOA for an abuse of position and jurisdiction with regard to the embezzling of state funds in 2013 (Udovičić 2013, 126–28; Akrap and Tuđman 2016; Bilandžić 2019, 240), politicisation remained the intelligence system's *modus operandi*, albeit less than ever before. Present-day politicisation troubles with cadre selection, doctrinal orientation, the education of future professionals, and others generally stem from the clashes between opposing actors of state executive power, the President and the prime minister, yet never to the point of a systemic stalemate. Certain politicisation practices may be listed and compared by historical periods and (sub)types of intelligence politicisation (see Table 1 in the Appendix). The criteria used for deeming these episodes the most infamous, and therefore the most illustrative, are their significance, the availability of evidence, and publicity.

THE EUROPEANISATION OF SECURITY INTELLIGENCE

Numerous definitions of Europeanisation have emerged to date, from it simply meaning European integration (Siger 2014), to it being “a process reorienting the direction and form of the national political order so that the economic and political dynamics of the Community becomes a component of the organisational logic of the national politics and policy-making” (Ladrech 1994, 69) through to it representing a “process by which important areas of national policies become moreover subject of the European decision-making process” (Börzel 1999, 574).

Europeanisation can drive changes across subareas of national security intelligence, and hence a closer look at potential supranational influences is necessary. Some authors propose a ‘soft’ causality of indirect European influence, which may be used as a useful conceptual tool when security intelligence changes are concerned. Knill and Lehmkuhl (1999) speak of European integration that occurs through the mechanism of changing the beliefs held by domestic actors by cognitive “framing”, whereby adaptation is measured by the degree of mobilisation of support for domestic reforms without the direct involvement of supranational actors in the domestic institutional order. Following David Dolowitz and David Marsh, Pasquier (2005, 296) endorses cognitive Europeanisation as an “interactive policy transfer process” in which “knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used

in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place” without directly implementing EU legislation. Finally, Guillén and Álvarez (2004, 286) define cognitive Europeanisation with respect to social policy as the “shaping and reshaping of the perceptions of and attitudes towards social problems and the way to tackle them”, which is applicable to intelligence affairs if “social problems” are simply replaced by “threats to national security”. These definitions unambiguously underline the explanatory potential of soft variables inducing change from within but without acknowledging the wider framework of institutional evolution: culture.

The term culture remains useful while discussing ‘soft’ policy traits and transfers. By defining intelligence culture as “ideas, responses and behaviours acquired by intelligence communities and conditioned by history and geography” (Pythian 2014, 34), one can account for eventual future changes to the Croatian security intelligence system and policies arising from European influence through ‘soft’, cognitive, that is, cultural, means. Therefore, the broadly imagined European intelligence culture may serve as an indirect, but by no means a weak, factor of the depoliticisation of domestic intelligence. If Europeanisation is to be understood as a modernisation mechanism for security intelligence depoliticisation in Croatia, it has to address the different types of politicisation according to its ideal-typically constructed dimensions. These may be listed as follows: orientation towards common European security goals and threats; supranational intelligence coordination and cooperation; effective democratic oversight; respect for human rights; and a professional ethos encompassing neutrality and objectivity. A combination of these features, and possibly others, presents an antidote of sorts to the politicisation of intelligence in Croatia.

Even though Croatia has managed to synchronise its intelligence community with European standards in a systemic sense, the top-down and bottom-up types of intelligence politicisation may yet prove to be resolvable ‘softly’ by the real-life application of systemic depoliticisation. Policymakers and decision-makers, as well as intelligence officers, are expected to adapt to the supranational conditions in which the threats, national interests, and security issues are common, which makes politicised domestic intelligence generally become costly and unwelcome. More specifically, top-down modernisation would mean gradually raising awareness of the need to eliminate the political influence of decision-makers and policymakers on intelligence officers, which makes doing intelligence more costly in terms of the expected returns. Bottom-up modernisation would represent intelligence officers acting not only with regard to the systemic framework of ‘how things are done’ but also bearing in mind that politicised practices oriented to decision-makers will not prove beneficial in the context of the cooperation-based Europeanised intelligence architecture.

Notwithstanding that the soft, cognitive, cultural or ideational drivers of change do not entail material sanctions or benefits intended for a certain type of security intelligence behaviour, it is possible to present the need for change

in a utilitarian way. Namely, the common European intelligence culture may act as a catalyst for depoliticisation if the benefits exceed the costs of adopting new ways of thinking and talking about intelligence, which hopefully, over time, would translate into 'doing intelligence' more rationally. Even though European countries share threats as well as values (Lledo-Ferrerand and Dietrich 2020), in the absence of a pan-European ideology, and its unity-in-difference approach, the common European intelligence culture may be interpreted as being based on mutual benefit achieved through cooperation. The issue of national security intelligence autarchy vs. security intelligence cooperation based on an interest-defined common security intelligence culture somewhat resembles the classical reiterating Prisoner's dilemma of European actors: rational choice connected with security intelligence non-cooperation leads to suboptimal outcomes for all actors involved (Elster 2007, 317–31).

Several soft, cognitive examples of intelligence depoliticization through cooperation stand out which point to the utility of Börzel and Risse's (2003, 61, 73–74) "goodness of fit" Europeanization model emphasising the adaptational pressure exerted by the European level on the domestic level with regards to the degree of compatibility between European and domestic processes, policies and institutions, as well as Vink and Graziano's (2008, 7–8) "venue of change" model by which broadly envisioned Europeanization is not restricted to EU adaptation but is rather simply understood as "domestic adaptation to European regional integration". Since its inception in 2019 and initial academic validation in 2020, the Intelligence College of Europe (ICE) may be legitimately thought of as a definitive case of supranational intelligence convergence in Europe by way of culture (Puyvelde 2020) because it "generates professional and academic views on a wide range of intelligence-related topics and disseminates those in order to contribute to the development of a strategic intelligence culture in Europe, without being prescriptive" (ICE 2025). Acting as a kind of a "community of practice" (Bicchi 2011, 1115), namely a group that communicates regularly and aims at "developing and sharing practical knowledge" through collective learning, it represents a chance for the supranational integration of national security systems. This is especially true due to the significance and effectiveness of the informal multilateral and bilateral cooperation formats existing outside of institutionalised structures. Dover (2010, 256) thus rightfully claims that "the development of bilateral relationships and coordination across police forces and intelligence agencies has been positive in as much as an informal Europeanization is developing in these areas". Countering Islamic terrorism and organised crime are good examples of this, while "more exchange on practices of, studying issues related to, and training in intelligence analysis at EU loci like INTCEN [European Union Intelligence and Situation Centre]" serve as reminders of how things might be done (Lutsch 2020, 501; Cross 2013). The Counter Terrorism Group represents not only a good example of cooperation but of depoliticisation since the services related to it are "supportive of the principle of national

oversight and supportive of oversight bodies working together to increase the effectiveness of their oversight techniques” (Labasque 2020, 495). In fact, the EU has become a major counter-terrorism actor in the two decades since 9/11 although European cooperation of this kind, which includes intelligence issues, dates back to the 1970s (Kaunert et al. 2022). Besides it being a “hard” influence, the activity of the European Court of Justice indicates that the intelligence services of each member state of the EU will most probably have to “adhere to the regulations of European law more closely and thus even increase their cooperation” in the future, and thereby implies the latent development of a European legal culture concerning intelligence in the ‘soft’ sense (Lledo-Ferrerand and Dietrich 2020, 444). Since there is a long way to go before mutually beneficial cultural uniformity is established through cooperation, the European security intelligence landscape will most definitely remain a battleground of conflicting ideas and influences for the time being.

CONCLUSION

It was once said that “the word politicization may not be felicitous, especially off the tongue, but it is an indispensable word to any faithful account of the present age” (Nisbet 1989, 73). The history of Croatian intelligence, denoted by systemic, top-down and bottom-up political influences, underscores ‘politicisation’ as a defining characteristic. This conclusion points to the idea that the institutional path dependence of intelligence in Croatia represents a significant explanation that may be subsumed under the term “intelligence culture”. Given that no administrative reform concerning particular aspects of the politicisation of the intelligence system may induce positive changes in the long run due to the cultural determinants that stubbornly ‘lurk’ behind its formal structure and development pathway, a fairly reasonable prospect is the gradual replacement of the current national culture of intelligence politicisation with corresponding, quite depoliticised features of an ideal-typical European intelligence culture. The emerging EU-wide professional regulatory framework is without doubt a construct that can serve as a role model to be emulated by countries arising from the post-socialist transition and lacking in international cooperation, democratic oversight, respect for human rights and professionalism due to the politicisation of intelligence.

By being “fundamentally a political activity”, intelligence politicisation “cannot be eradicated” as that would require “either producers or consumers to step outside their individual ideological perspectives”, meaning they would have to “approach intelligence without the frame of reference required to comprehend it” (Jackson 2010, 461). However, even though it cannot be eliminated, it still can and should be reduced since “intelligence becomes better to the extent that it becomes less politicized” (Pillar 2010, 483). This Kentian imperative is best understood not as a call for security intelligence autarchy but as signifying the need to eliminate the politically shaped cultural traits, namely, the

aforementioned “ideas, responses and behaviours” that have proven detrimental to the intelligence system’s success in dealing with threats to national security. The Kentian model of “political and policy detachment” may indeed act as a barrier to politicisation and might produce other problems such as “organisational pathologies” (Wirtz 2006, 141–42). Yet, for Croatia, it in any case presents a much better alternative to a politicised intelligence culture. After the authoritarian or totalitarian and transitional periods, the shift of European post-socialist countries, including Croatia, towards liberal-democratic organisational traits and practices associated with EU accession represents a reduction in the influence of both systemic-ideological politicisation and politicised intelligence practices. The very existence of a common supranational, and thus a softly unifying, intelligence culture backed by past arrangements of allegiance to security alliances and support for professionalism, presents a valuable opportunity for intelligence modernisation by way of depoliticisation. These changes are yet to be seen and warrant further scholarly research. To that end, a more detailed exploration of data for the 2000–2024 period and beyond will be needed in future research, such as by considering internal regulations, transcripts of oversight committees, records of participation in the ICE, and others.

Alternative explanations of Croatia’s move towards depoliticised security intelligence are not within the scope of this article, but deserve consideration. They possibly include domestic party competition by which the influence of a political monopoly on security intelligence diminishes with the rise of pluralism, defence capacity-building by NATO as a globalised military role model, the unifying presence of Europol, as well as anti-corruption campaigns linked to international developmental organisations like the IMF and the World Bank.

Finally, seen in realist terms: does Europeanisation present a genuine opportunity for intelligence depoliticisation or is it an ideological concept itself supported empirically by rare examples of a common security practice that seeks to use security intelligence to serve EU power at the expense of national self-sufficiencies, under the guise of common threats and dangers such as the rise of authoritarian tendencies in Central and East Europe as well as echoes of the Russo–Ukrainian War? This also remains to be seen and could possibly become a research subject of its own.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: THE MOST (IN)FAMOUS EXAMPLES OF POLITICISATION OF THE SECURITY INTELLIGENCE IN CROATIA, 1944–2024

Period / (sub) types of politicisation	Systemic		Top-down		Bottom-up	
	Overt	Subtle	Overt	Subtle	Overt	Subtle
Socialism/ Communism (1944–1990)	Ideological enemy categories (Bolshevik-inspired)	State-party fusion (“special warfare”)	Ordering unlawful targeted killings (emigrants)	Tacit support for hiring criminals (covert actions)	Pampering state officials and party members with intelligence input (Artuković trial)	Making up damaging information (HUMINT vs. TECHINT)
Nation-building and the post-communist transition (1990–1999)	Ideological bias shift (communist to nationalist)	Threat re-orientation and cadre selection signalling bias	‘Political privatisation’	Favouritism according to personal ties and political loyalty	‘Post-Bolshevik’ intelligence model (new insignia, old methods)	Culture of silence with respect to human rights violations
Democratic consolidation and international cooperation (2000–2024)	Dilemmas of allegiance (national vs. international)	Adaptation and adherence to the new realities of international cooperation	Community infighting and questionable appointments	Dysfunctional intelligence community governance	Involvement in criminal and politically corruptive practices	Non-recognition of systemic political corruption

Source: the authors.

DEPOLITIZACIJA Z EVROPEIZACIJO? PRIMER HRVAŠKIH VARNOSTNIH OBVEŠČEVALNIH SLUŽB

Povzetek. *Zgodovinski razvoj hrvaškega varnostno-obveščevalnega sistema je pomembno zaznamovala politizacija, ki je sprožila in odprla številna aktualna vprašanja obveščevalne skupnosti. Da bi to trditev potrdil, članek predstavlja različne politične vplive in politizirane prakse varnostno-obveščevalnih dejavnosti z uporabo zgodovinsko-institucionalnega pristopa, ki je določal obdobja pred devetdesetimi leti prejšnjega stoletja in po njih, pri čemer je bila ključna razmejitvena točka doseganje neodvisnosti leta 1991. Več kot desetletje po vstopu v Evropsko unijo (EU) naj bi bil večdimenzionalni proces evropeizacije med ključnimi dejavniki za depolitizacijo obveščevalnih dejavnosti nacionalne varnosti na Hrvaškem.*

Ključni pojmi: *politizacija, Hrvaška, varnost, obveščevalne dejavnosti, evropeizacija.*

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THEORIES ABOUT PURE SOCIAL COORDINATION WITH EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE FROM SLOVENIA**¹

Abstract. The article presents a discussion of the results of laboratory experiments on social coordination that allowed various forms of reasoning to be used. The experiments were conducted in the TIG laboratory at the University of Primorska. We investigate the type of reasoning the participants used while making decisions in the laboratory. In particular, two contemporary theories of coordination are tested, the first describing a team-oriented and the second an individual-oriented type of thinking. The participants' coordination behaviour shows that young people hold the potential to develop both some form of cooperative reasoning and a more individualistic, boundedly rational focus on their own success, such as referred to in cognitive hierarchy theory. Instead of team reasoning, we find evidence in support for a simpler, albeit less profitable odd-one-out heuristic.

Keywords: coordination problems, team reasoning, individual-oriented reasoning, bounded rationality, experimental decision-making.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of how multiple partners coordinate their decisions fundamentally influences people's everyday behaviour as well as the way institutions, the economy and politics function (Chisholm 1989; Camerer and Knez 2010). Mooney (1947) defined social coordination as "the orderly arrangement of group efforts to provide unity of action in the pursuit of a common purpose". It encompasses the mental and behavioural alignment of people in shared social situations. Successful coordination is necessary for the emergence and existence of harmonious

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interpersonal relationships and the fruitful cooperation of people who have problems and tasks in common (Janssen 2003). It is also a necessary condition for the successful management of groups/organisations and forming of constructive collective intentions, even for successful interpersonal communication in everyday life that leads to mutual agreement and trust (Becker and Murphy 1992; Noe 2006; Vlaar et al. 2007). Various disciplines dealing with human social behaviour investigate the questions of what coordination is and how to achieve and maintain it, such as social psychology, behavioural economics, organisation theory, operations research, computer science etc.

In the literature, one can find very different and conflicting opinions on the key factors of social coordination (Tomasello 2009; Axelrod 2011; Colman and Gold 2018). Some researchers distinguish the term “concatenate coordination” from the concept of “mutual coordination” (Klein and Osborn 2009). The former only involves the integration of the actions of several individuals to establish some orderly group action. The latter, broader term encompasses all forms of mutual cooperation and correspondence in the functioning of people in a common social situation. The focus in this article is on mutual coordination.

Mutual coordination problems are social scenarios in which individuals must independently make decisions that align with the choices of others so as to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome. These problems are ubiquitous in social, economic and organisational contexts where the actions of multiple agents must coincide to achieve an outcome that is beneficial for all (Camerer and Knez 2010). A classic example is the problem of choosing a meeting time or location when the communication between two individuals breaks down, such as when one person’s telephone runs out of battery. Even though both people would like to meet in the same location, there may be many locations to choose from and thus they might be waiting at different ones. The main problem is not to choose the *best* location, but to choose the *same* one.

One way of resolving mutual coordination issues is by exploring elementary social situations featuring a limited and transparent set of situational challenges and possible responses to them. Game theory can then be used to model these with games of coordination (Camerer and Knez 2010). Using such games, the causes, reasons, extent and manner of coordination among actors become clearer. Further, it is possible to experimentally test various hypotheses regarding the origin, methods and processes of coordination that may extend to social dilemmas and team problems (Ule and Živoder 2018). This type of research is particularly developed in contemporary experimental economics, animal and human behavioural psychology, ecological studies etc. (Noë 2006; Schram and Ule 2018; Crawford 2019). One way of gaining insight into the processes lying behind cooperation and coordination is to compare experimental behaviour across different cohorts and different societies (Thöni 2019).

One element shown to affect interactive behaviour is the scope of social and market integration in a given society (Baldassarri 2020; Kuzminska et al. 2022).

The industrial, and especially informational, modernising of developed societies has led to a rapid rise in various forms of social disintegration and fragmentation. These processes induce ever more feelings of insecurity and disorientation or, as Zygmunt Bauman states in his analysis of the consequences held by globalisation, a “liquid modernity” that is increasingly dissolving the foundations of social solidarity, interpersonal bonds and social institutions (Bauman 2007). A situation like this makes achieving social coordination and cooperation such a growing problem on all levels of social life that the very concept of society is coming under question (Mavelli and Cerella 2024). Exploring the basic forms and modes of coordination between people from societies with varying levels of market integration may help with understanding its effect on various forms of sociality. Velkavrh and Ule (2022), for instance, found significant differences in the choices made by Slovenian and Dutch experimental subjects in a series of experimental games that modelled a range of social challenges. The higher levels of solidarity, honesty and generosity observed for Slovenian subjects are consistent with Bauman’s (2007) interpretation, noting that Slovenia is among the collectivistic and the Netherlands the individualistic societies in the classification proposed by Hofstede et al. (2010). Whether the impacts of a culture of individualism extends to coordination is a question that remains unanswered.

In this article, we present the results of an experimental study of social coordination, conducted with student subjects in the TIG laboratory at the University of Primorska. To investigate the role of societal individualism, the results of a related experimental study on coordination by Bardsley et al. (2010) carried out in England (UK) and the Netherlands, two highly individualistic societies, were compared. Slovenian participants were found to have exhibited similar coordination behaviour to those participating in England where the experimenters employed similar procedures to ours.

We next investigate which type of reasoning is used by participants in Slovenia using the deductive method described in Bardsley et al. (2010). In particular, we test two contemporary theories of coordination, one describing a team-oriented and the other an individual-oriented type of thinking. Our hypothesis that Slovenian subjects are more likely to apply team reasoning is not supported by the results. Indeed, not a single subject in Slovenia consistently applied the team reasoning heuristic. A significant number of subjects in Slovenia, like in England, applied the more individual-oriented cognitive hierarchy theory instead.

Finally, we explore whether the subjects in Slovenia used a partly team-oriented heuristic that increases the chance of coordination, rather the expected payoff of a team. While this heuristic was postulated, it was not tested in Bardsley et al. (2010). We find that a minority of subjects in Slovenia consistently made coordination choices with this heuristic. The Slovenian data can be fully explained by three behavioural rules, one individualist, the second collectivist and the third random choice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Coordination problems on the scale of a society range from which side of the road to drive on or which side of a corridor to walk to the choice of language to communicate with. A related problem in markets and organisations is often the choice of which technological platform to use, such as between email and social network communication, or between computer operating systems. These examples all belong to a particular class of “pure” mutual coordination problems in which individuals need to make decisions entirely dependent on aligning their choices with others, without any conflicts of interest (Mehta et al. 1994). Unlike other types of coordination problems, like those involving mixed motives (where participants have some conflicting preferences), pure coordination problems are characterised by the absence of disagreement over the best possible outcome. The challenge is hence not about choosing the best option, but assuring that every player selects the same option.

On the social level, while such problems are often solved with social norms, conventions and regulation, these might not exist in small everyday coordination problems between individuals. Understanding how people approach local coordination problems has been a central topic of research in behavioural game theory because classical game theory fails to solve it. Namely, although any outcome where everyone chooses the same action is a potential solution, there are many such outcomes, and the classic game theory, based on methodological individualism and assuming common knowledge of rationality, does not select any of them (Mehta et al. 1994). Two prominent contemporary theoretical frameworks that depart from these assumptions and address coordination problems are Cognitive Hierarchy Theory (CHT) and Team Reasoning. Both theories offer valuable insights into how individuals approach coordination problems, yet differ in their assumptions about human rationality and reasoning.

Cognitive Hierarchy Theory (CHT) was proposed by Stahl and Wilson (1995) and expanded by Camerer et al. (2004) as a framework for understanding how individuals reason in coordination problems when uncertain about the strategies of others. CHT suggests that players vary in the depth of their reasoning, which affects their ability to anticipate the actions of others. The theory posits that players of coordination problems can be classified on different levels according to how many steps ahead they think. Level 0 players choose randomly or use environmental hints such as prominent or salient labels. Level 1 players reason one step ahead, assuming others will choose randomly or act in line with some simple rule. Level 2 players reason two steps ahead, anticipating that others are reasoning on level 1, and so on. Two versions, CHTR and CHTP, have been proposed, distinguished by their assumptions concerning level 0 players. CHTR assumes that level 0 players select actions with uniform probability (Bacharach and Stahl 2000; Harsanyi and Selten 1988). CHTP is instead based on the assumption that level 0 players choose an action that commands attention, such as having a prominent label or yielding the highest payoff (Lewis 1969; Schelling 1960; Bordalo et al. 2022).

CHT provides a more nuanced understanding of coordination by accounting for the different ways people process and reason about the decisions of others. The theory suggests that coordination is possible even when players' reasoning abilities differ provided that they can adjust their expectations and adapt to the strategies of others. However, players reasoning too far ahead and expecting others to be more strategic than they actually are can lead to overthinking and sub-optimal outcomes (Coricelli et al. 2020).

In contrast to CHT, Team Reasoning contends that coordination problems can be solved via collective reasoning whereby individuals abandon their purely self-interested calculations and instead focus on the best strategy for the group as a whole (Mehta et al. 1994; Bacharach 1999; Colman et al. 2008; Bardsley et al. 2010; Bardsley and Ule 2017; Colman and Gold, 2018). In this view, individuals not only reason from their own perspective (methodological individualism) but may also engage in a form of reasoning that takes the shared interests of the group into account. The central idea of team reasoning is that people can identify with a collective goal and reason about what works best for their team. A foundation can be located in the idea of collective intentionality that leads agents to form shared goals and mutual expectations which guide their choices beyond narrow self-interest (Gold and Sugden 2007; Petersson 2016). This helps explain how norms and conventions emerge over time, stabilising coordinated behaviour and reinforcing collectively rational strategies. Through shared mental states and mutual commitments, collective intentionality serves as the bridge between individual reasoning and truly collective rational action (Ule 2008b).

Team reasoning helps explain how people can overcome coordination failures in complex social settings such as businesses or political negotiations where conflicting individual preferences might otherwise bring inefficient outcomes (Cimprič and Pavlin 2022). By framing decisions in terms of collective benefits and aligning personal actions with team objectives, individuals can achieve mutually beneficial outcomes even in the absence of explicit communication or enforceable contracts.

While both CHT and Team Reasoning provide solutions to coordination problems, they fundamentally differ with respect to how they conceptualise human decision-making. CHT emphasises that individuals reason at different depths and coordination arises from the interaction of players with varying levels of cognitive sophistication. It is a more individualistic theory that assumes people generally act in their own interest, adjusting their strategies based on their expectations of how others will behave.

In contrast, Team Reasoning stresses collective goals and shared outcomes. It suggests that individuals can move beyond self-interest and reason in terms of group welfare, making coordination more likely. This theory assumes a higher level of social cooperation and a stronger alignment of goals among players.

Empirical Evidence

Discriminating empirically between explanations of coordination is difficult partly because it involves making assumptions about how the subjects themselves perceive their options. For example, in a pure coordination game, if subjects have to coordinate on the same letter from the set {A, B, C, D} in order to earn a reward, one might predict that letter A is the option with the greatest primary salience since it is the first letter of the alphabet. CHTP would then predict that all players will choose letter A as higher levels anticipate the salient choice of level 0 players. At the same time, TR could also rationalise the choice of letter A if it were seen as a sufficiently clear favourite. It would suffice that subjects judge coordination as more likely if all players follow the “choose the prominent letter” rule. Bardsley and Ule (2017) test TR against CHTR and find support for TR, but do not distinguish between TR and CHTP.

To overcome the problem of empirically distinguishing general CHT from TR, Bardsley et al. (2010) propose an experimental game in which both the label and the coordination value vary between the choices. Consider the following coordination problem. Two players must individually choose between three cards with numbers {10, 10, 9}, presented to each in an independent random order. The number indicates the amount of money they earn if they both choose the same card, but they both earn 0 if they choose different cards. To earn money, they must choose the exact same card. For example, to earn 10 it is not enough that both choose a card with the number 10, but they must choose exactly the same card with the number 10. Given that payoff is the only salient feature, CHT_p would predict that level 0 players will choose one of the two cards with the number 10, level 1 players will anticipate this and also choose one of these numbers, and so on. CHT_r would also predict that cards with the number 10 will be chosen much more often. Level 0 players will choose randomly, so that any card will be chosen with a probability of $1/3$. For another player expecting a level 0 opponent, the expected return on choosing a card with 10 is then $10/3$, yet the expected return from choosing a card with 9 is only $9/3$. Level 1 players will therefore choose one of the cards with number 10, and so will all those on higher levels in anticipation of this play. TR theory predicts the card with number 9 will be selected, however. Players who think as a team would compare two possible rules, “choose the card with number 9” and “choose one of the cards with number 10” and consider which rule is better for the team if both players follow it. The first rule yields a certain payoff of 9, while the second rule yields a payoff of 10 with a probability of $1/2$, which is the chance that both players choose the same card with number 10. The expected payoff of the second rule is therefore 5, less than 9 for the first rule. Bardsley et al. (2010) find support for both CHT and TR in their experiment with this and similar games, depending on the game’s implementation on the computer screen. Nonetheless, varying results were obtained for different cohorts. Support for CHT was found among their subjects in England, whereas support for TR was found in the Netherlands. It is thus unclear

whether the validity of these theories of coordination is stable across the different cohorts. Moreover, all related experiments were completed on subjects from highly individualist societies and might not hold for participants with a collectivist experience, such as from Slovenia. In the sections below, we experimentally investigate the hypothesis that Slovenian subjects are more likely to apply team reasoning in pure coordination games than the subjects from England studied by Bardsley et al. (2010).

METHOD AND DATA SOURCES

To investigate the stability of coordination across cohorts, we investigated coordination strategies in a sample of students in Slovenia. In an experiment at the TIG laboratory at the University of Primorska, we implemented a series of pure coordination games that followed the construction described in Bardsley et al. (2010). In each game, a pair of anonymous subjects had to choose between cards showing various numbers. The numbers on each card were handwritten. While different cards showed the same number, each number was handwritten separately to provide subtle differences between cards with the same number. We thereby created a game of choice between cards, rather than between numbers, with two purposes in mind. First, handwriting meant there were subtle differences between cards bearing the same number, which made it clear to the subjects that two cards on their screen with the same number were not the same cards. Second, showing cards on the computer monitor in a circle in random order, that varied among subjects, enabled the explanation that there was no sense in applying heuristics that refer to the position on the screen.

Table 1: EXPERIMENTAL GAMES AND THEORETICAL PREDICTIONS

Games	CHT prediction	TR prediction
a. 10, 10, 10, 10, 9	10	9
b. 10, 10, 9, 9, 8	10	8
c. 10, 10, 10, 9, 9	10	9
d. 10, 10, 10, 9, 8	10	9
e. 10, 9, 8, 7	10	10
f. 10, 10, 1	10	10

Source: own analysis.

Six games with different sets of cards were played by each pair of our subjects and no information about the success/failure of coordination was provided between the games to avoid learning and ensure each individual participant provided an independent observation in our data. The games were related to those used in Bardsley et al. (2010) and designed, on one hand, to distinguish TR from CHT and, on the other, to catch violations of both theories. Table 1 shows which numbers were available in each game, with the CHT and TR predictions.

For each game, the CHT_P and CHT_R predictions coincided and were equal to 10, the highest available number. The TR prediction differed from CHT in the first four games and coincided in the last two games. We can use the first four games to distinguish between the two theories and the last two games to investigate deviations from both theories.

In each game, the two subjects saw the corresponding cards on their computer screen in a random circular order that varied from the order in which the cards were shown to the other subject. A subject made their choice by using their mouse to click on a card. The subjects were told that the order of cards on the screen was randomised for each subject separately. This was to prevent the subjects from coordinating on a card in a specific location on their screen, such as the one shown in the highest position. The experiment had 24 subjects, each trying to coordinate 6 times, matched with a different partner in each game. One game was randomly selected at the end of the experiment and each subject was paid their earnings for that game in euros, plus a small reward of 3 euros. In particular, if a subject chose the same card as their partner in that game, they earned the amount of euros equalling the number shown on that card, and otherwise earned 0.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We investigated the subjects' choices from two perspectives. The first result shows the behaviour in each game is indistinguishable from random choice. Nevertheless, this does not take into account that behaviour may be subject-specific. The second result reveals that a significant number of subjects made choices consistent with the CHT prediction, but no subjects made choices consistent with the TR prediction. Instead, post-hoc analysis shows that several subjects chose according to a related heuristic that maximises the chance for successful coordination instead of maximising the expected team payoff.

We begin by comparing the distribution of choices in all six games to the distribution that would be obtained had subjects chosen a random card in each game. The left panel of Table 2 displays for each game the proportion of subjects who chose the TR option, the probability of such choice if all subjects were choosing a card randomly, and the statistical significance of the hypothesis that the observed TR choices are above the random benchmark. The right panel of Table 2 shows for each game the related information about choices consistent with CHT.

Result 1. *The distributions of choices cannot be distinguished from random choice for either the TR and CHT count in all games, except game e where both TR and CHT make the same prediction that the card with the highest value 10 will be chosen.*

Table 2: OBSERVED CHOICES CONSISTENT WITH TR AND CHT

games	TR			CHT		
	observed choices	random chance	significant	observed choices	random chance	significant
a.	33%	20%	x	67%	80%	-
b.	29%	20%	x	50%	40%	X
c.	35%	40%	-	65%	60%	X
d.	25%	20%	x	50%	60%	-
e.	67%	25%	***	67%	25%	***
f.	58%	67%	-	58%	67%	-

For each game, we check with the binomial test whether the observation is above the random benchmark. We indicate significance at the 0.05 level with ***, no significance with x, and an observation below the benchmark, in the opposite direction of the hypothesis, with -.
Source: own analysis.

This does not permit any conclusions about the relative success of TR vs. CHT in our data. Moreover, about one- third of our subjects' choices violated both theories by choosing a card with a number other than 10 in each control game e and f. Five subjects (21%) did this in both control games, suggesting that CHT and TR cannot even approximately describe the coordination process of the whole population. However, the analyses of separate games ignore the correlations in the decisions of subjects across all games. Next, we investigated whether the above results are due to random behaviour or if some subjects chose consistently the TR option or the CHT option.

Result 2. *Not a single subject consistently chose the TR option in all six games.*

Table 3 shows how often subjects chose according to one of the two theories. The top row indicates the number of rounds from 0 to 6 and the values below the count how many subjects chose according to one theory for precisely that number of rounds. The proportion of subjects (7 out of 24; 29.2%) who consistent with CHT chose 10 in all games is significantly higher than what one would expect (1.9%) if all subjects always chose a random card ($p < 0.01$, Binomial test).

Table 3: A COUNT OF SUBJECTS WHO CHOSE ACCORDING TO A THEORY FOR A CERTAIN NUMBER OF ROUNDS

	number of rounds						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
TR subjects	0	1	16	4	1	2	0
CHT subjects	1	6	1	3	4	2	7

Source: own analysis.

While the seven subjects who perfectly followed the CHT prediction lend substantial support for this theory, it is important to also understand the coordination approach taken by the remaining 17 subjects. First, we explore whether the distribution of their choices can be explained by random choice. Due to the small number of subjects in some categories, we pool the CHT counts for the numbers in rounds 3 and 4, which should be most common if choices were random, and pool all the other counts (for numbers in rounds 0, 1, 2, 5 and 6). We compare the resulting frequencies of subjects (7 for pool [3,4] and 10 for pool [else]) to those that would be observed if choices were random (10.5 and 6.5) and find a marginally significant difference ($p=0.07$, one-sided Fisher exact test). This indicates that random choice cannot strongly explain the coordination process of the 17 subjects who did not choose according to CHT.

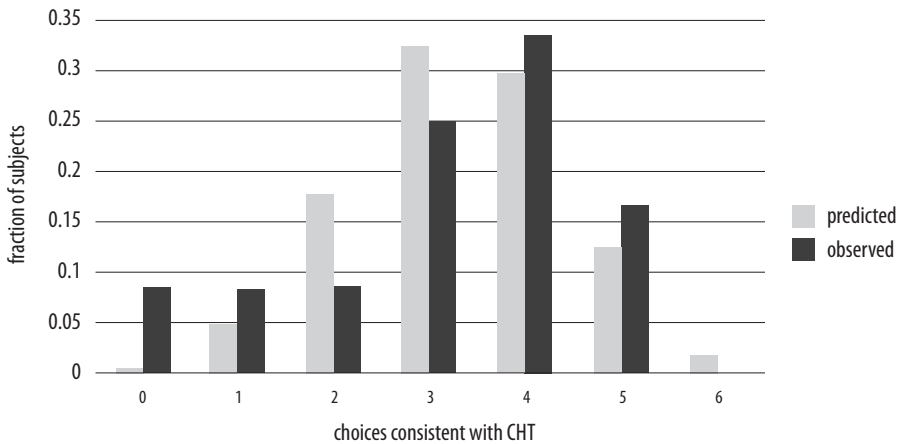
To uncover the process behind the coordination of these 17 subjects, we begin with two observations. In this post-hoc analysis, we extend the approach of Bardsley et al. (2010) to sequentially eliminate subjects choosing consistently in line with various theories until the choices of the remaining subjects cannot be distinguished from random choice. First, ten subjects chose the unique card with number 1 in game f, for which both TR and CHT predict the choice of card 10. Choosing 1 is rational only with a very high expectation that this will also be chosen by the partner, but is not rational in the presence of uncertainty about the partner's choice, which is why CHT predicts 10. Number 1 is no more prominent than number 10, which yields a 10-times higher payoff. However, it may be salient in the sense that it is the unique number in the set {10, 10, 1}, that is, the odd one out (Schelling 1960). The second observation was made by Bardsley et al. (2010) who speculate that some subjects use an odd-one-out heuristic when choosing the cards, even when this is not optimal for the team. Such a heuristic chooses the option that is in some way unique and easy to select. If both members of the team employ it, this assures successful coordination, but might not maximise the expected team payoff. For example, if both team members choose the unique card from the set {10, 10, 1} they coordinate with certainty, but earn a payoff of 1. This is less than if they both choose a random card 10, coordinate with a probability of 0.5 and earn the expected payoff $0.5 \times 10 = 5$. We next investigate whether some of our subjects may have been following this heuristic. For this, we need to specify its predictions in our six games.

Strictly defined, the odd-one-out heuristic always selects the only unique card when it is available. For instance, it chooses card 9 in game a, card 8 in game b and card 1 in game f, but its choice in games c (with no unique card), d (with two unique cards) and e (with all cards unique) is unclear. Five of our subjects chose according to this heuristic in games a, b and f. Further confirmation of their preference for unique cards is that each of them chose either the unique card 8 or the unique card 9 in game d.

Result 3. *Out of 24 subjects, 7 subjects chose consistently with CHT and 5 subjects consistently with the odd-on-out heuristics, while the behaviour of the remaining 12 subjects is indistinguishable from random choice.*

When we remove the 7 subjects who chose in line with CHT and the 5 subjects who followed an odd-one-out heuristic, we can test again whether the distribution of the number of CHT choices among the remaining 12 subjects is distinguishable from what we would observe from random choice. Figure 1 shows the similarity between the predicted fraction of subjects who would make the CHT choice for a certain number of rounds if the choice were random, and the corresponding observed frequencies. When comparing the pooled frequencies of subjects (7 for pool [3,4] and 5 for pool [else]) to those that should be observed if choices were random (7.5 and 4.5), we find no significant differences ($p=0.77$, two-sided Fisher exact test).

Figure 1: CONSISTENCY WITH CHT BY THE 12 SUBJECTS NOT CLASSIFIED AS USING CHT OR THE ODD-ONE-OUT HEURISTIC



Source: own analysis.

Analysis of the subjects' decisions indicates that at least some subjects make coordination choices in line with cognitive hierarchy theory, but provides no support for the standard utilitarian model of team reasoning that assumes that subjects maximise the expected payoff of a team as a whole. However, it does suggest that some of the subjects follow a related heuristic that aims to achieve team success by choosing the unique number and assure coordination instead of maximising its expected payoff. Just 1 out of 5 of these latter subjects chose the TR options in games c, d and e, suggesting the odd-one-out heuristic is not simply an extension of team reasoning, but a distinct approach to coordination.

Our conclusions can be compared to those for the Nottingham treatments in Bardsley et al. (2010), which used a static display, like we did in our Slovenian experiment. They found the majority of subjects (25 out of 44) consistently chose the CHT option, and a minority (8 out of 44) were attracted to the odd-one-out heuristic. They also found a minority (8) of subjects often chose the TR option but their results do not distinguish subjects following the TR from the odd-one-out heuristic, leaving open the question of whether the odd-one-out heuristic is just an extreme form of team reasoning, one that seeks to assure coordination, or an entirely separate approach to coordination.

We found a significant minority of subjects acting consistently with CHT and another minority consistently with the odd-one-out heuristic, yet no subjects consistently choosing the TR option. Although the primacy of CHT and evidence for the odd-one-out choice is consistent with the conclusions in Bardsley et al. (2010), the share of CHT subjects in our data is significantly smaller than that in Bardsley (2010) ($p=0.026$, one-tailed Fisher exact test). We thus provide evidence that coordination processes across the two cohorts are similar, with the higher level of individualism in the general social environment increasing the share of individualistic reasoning in the coordination.

Result 4. CHT is the modal mode of consistent reasoning in both the Slovenian and English experiments. CHT is more common among English subjects than among Slovenian ones, while there is no evidence of TR in the Slovenian experiment.

CONCLUSION

The results of the experiment reveal the complexity of the processes of social coordination and cooperation. Half the subjects did not appear to apply a consistent process for coordination, behaving in a way indistinguishable from random. Of the two prominent accounts of coordination in the literature, we only find evidence for the individualistic one: about 30% of the subjects' choices were fully consistent with CHT. We find no support for the other account: not even one subject's choices were consistent with the collaborative account of TR. Instead, we find that about 20% of the subjects chose consistently with the odd-one-out heuristic (OOO) that we did not postulate ex-ante. While this heuristic was proposed by Bardsley et al. (2010), it was neither thoroughly tested nor distinguished from team reasoning. It postulates that in coordination games of the kind considered in this article individuals choose the sole unique number when it exists. If the team members follow this heuristic, they assure coordination. This is in contrast with TR whereby team members strive to choose the options that maximise the expected payoff for the team. The behaviour of the remaining 50% of our subjects cannot be distinguished from random choice, suggesting it is likely they do not apply a consistent mode of reasoning in coordination games.

The results from Slovenia presented here vary from those in England in one respect. A significantly higher share of English subjects chose consistently with the individualistic cognitive hierarchy theory. However, this result might be an artefact of the large share of Slovenian subjects behaving unpredictably more than indicating a cultural difference. Since we found no team reasoning among the Slovenian subjects, our results do not support the hypothesis that subjects in Slovenia applied a more collectivist mode of reasoning than those in England. One could argue that the OOO heuristic is also a representation of collectivist reasoning since it assures successful coordination when a game offers a unique single option. In any case, our evidence in support of its application also does not provide support for the culture hypothesis. The share of subjects consistent with OOO in our Slovenian sample (20.8%) is roughly the same as the share of subjects (18.2%) identified as potentially OOO in Bardsley et al. (2010). Although further analysis of their data would be required for an exact comparison, it is noted that they did not investigate this heuristic in detail.

One caveat regarding the OOO heuristic is required. Namely, it does not provide a complete account of choice for all pure coordination games because it offers no rule of choice for games without a unique number (our game c) or with more unique numbers (our games d and e). Several extensions of the heuristic for such games are possible, including maximisation of the *chance* of coordination, or by relying on another account of saliency such as the largest number. Neither of these would be fully consistent with TR. Indeed, the subjects we identified as following OOO did not choose according to TR in games c, d and e. This shows that OOO is not just an extreme form of team reasoning but a different representation of collective reasoning.

Two limitations pertain to the presented results. First, the analysis of the odd-one-out heuristic was not postulated at the outset of the study and was post-hoc. In the absence of an independent replication, we cannot confidently claim that this is a significant new mode of reasoning in coordination games. Second, our sample was not as large as the sample in Bardsley et al. (2010), leading to limited statistical power. Still, our main results are not likely to change with a larger sample given that TR reasoning and significantly less CHT reasoning was found than in the English sample.

While the topic of social coordination is connected to the topic of collective intentionality, by focusing on mutual coordination we did not assume the unilateral primacy of the irreductionist above the reductionist concepts of collective intentionality (see Tollefsen 2002). It may be that both concepts implicitly presuppose some common and deeper considerations of basic social human nature (e.g., Kern and Moll 2017). Robert Sugden notes that partners do not develop team reasoning if there is no common belief among them that the necessary and best strategy for achieving common goals is cooperative (Sugden 1993). Such a belief, in turn, presupposes the joint willingness of the partners to cooperate on the realisation of common goals (Ule 2008a). Both team reasoning and

cooperation are based on the partners' conscious willingness to participate in a common event/task. The coordination behaviour of our subjects shows that young people hold the potential to develop some form of cooperative reasoning in the form of the odd-one-out heuristic, as well as a more individualistic, boundedly rational focus on their own success, such as that described by cognitive hierarchy theory.

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TEORIJE O ČISTI DRUŽBENI KOORDINACIJI Z EKSPERIMENTALNIMI DOKAZI IZ SLOVENIJE

Povzetek. Članek predstavlja razpravo o rezultatih laboratorijskih eksperimentov o družbeni koordinaciji, ki omogočajo različne oblike mišljenja in so bili izvedeni v laboratoriju TIG Univerze na Primorskem. Raziskuje, kakšno vrsto mišljenja uporabljajo udeleženci v naših eksperimentalnih situacijah odločanja. Ob tem primerjam predvsem dve sodobni teoriji koordinacije, od katerih ena opisuje timsko, druga pa individualno usmerjeno vrsto razmišljanja. Koordinirano vedenje udeležencev v poskusu kaže, da imajo mladi potencial za razvijanje tako sodelovalnega sklepanja kot tudi bolj individualistično, omejeno racionalno naravnost, usmerjeno v lasten uspeh – kot jo opisuje teorija kognitivnih hierarhij. Namesto timskega mišljenja se udeleženci poslužujejo enostavnejše, a manj dobičkonosne izbire opcije, ki ne sodi med ostale.

Ključni pojmi: problemi usklajevanja, timsko mišljenje, individualno usmerjeno mišljenje, omejena racionalnost, eksperimentalno odločanje.

Todor STOJČEVSKI, Victor CEPOI*

SHAPING THE PUBLIC IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE: SOCIAL FIELD ANALYSIS** FUZZY SET METHOD

Abstract. Communication is key to social interaction and people's socialisation. The interaction between people and institutions is based on strategic communication as a vital component for the survival of society. This strategic communication is used by agent-communicators on behalf of formal organisations, and intended for their target public. Moreover, every strategic communication is affected by invisible social forces (institutions, networks, cognitive frames), which 'manage' the process of communication with the public. We use the SOFIA approach to provide an analytical model of influence of the social forces during the shaping of the public. The aim is to combine theoretical and practical approaches of Communication and Social Field Theory. Further, using qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), the causal complexity of these relationships is examined, taking account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for particular outcomes to occur. Institutions and networks are necessary conditions, yet neither meets the criteria for sufficiency. However, the absence of these conditions does not necessarily indicate the absence of communication. Exploring the combinations of necessary conditions for communication reveals complexities such as the interaction between institutions, networks and cognitive frames. The absence of certain social forces, together with the presence of other forces, emerges as a relevant condition for communication. Accordingly, the fact that institutions in the social field exist is not all that is important, but also that they communicate and create networks of interactions for the public's better understanding. The strategic communication framework, navigated by the invisible social forces, actually improves the ability to shape the public in the desired direction.

Keywords: social institutions, social networks, cognitive frames, fuzzy set analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

Sociology is deeply interested in the study of communication, which is a fundamental aspect of human life and society. It is the foundation of social interaction and plays a crucial role in the processes of primary and secondary socialisation. Sociology is considered as a key component of various social institutions such as education, politics and religion. Moreover, it is linked with the issues of power and inequality, thus making it an integral part of society. Cultural symbols, language, media and discourses cannot be studied without referring to communication. The interconnected processes of globalisation and technological revolutions have increased communicative abilities and the contribution made by communication to immense social changes.

The study of communication hence provides insights into social structures, relationships, and the dynamics shaping societies. It is therefore not surprising that communication appears in the work of some of the most important authors in sociology, such as: George Herbert Mead and his symbolic interactionism, emphasising the role of symbols and gestures in communication; Talcott Parsons and structural functionalism, focused on the role of communication in maintaining social order; Jurgen Habermas and his theory of communicative action; Stuart Hall and his exploration of how communication shapes and reflects cultural identities; Mark Granovetter and his work concentrated on the strength of weak ties in social networks and the role of communication in information diffusion; Erving Goffman and a dramaturgical approach that views social interaction as a form of performance; Marshall McLuhan, in his work on the impact of media on society; and Jean Baudrillard, who explored the hyperreality created by mass media and communication technologies.

On top of these foundational contributions to theoretical sociology, we should acknowledge the attempts made in sociology to solve societal problems, successfully or not (Turner 2019), taking the form of public sociology (Burawoy 2005), clinical sociology (Fritz 2021), community engaged sociology (Smith 2022), dialogical sociology (Hanafi 2024) etc., and with any of these, communication is an important aspect of exploration and practice.

The research presented in this article seeks to define the ways and categories of social forces with which agents (communicators) are shaping public opinion on behalf of formal actors. Namely, this is the way that Beckert's social forces – social institutions, the social network and knowledge frames – influence the shaping of reality. The social field's complexity from the aspect of communication is obvious. German sociologist Beckert (2010) explains that social forces are, in fact, an accelerator of the dynamics and economic behaviour of the actors (Beckert 2010). In our work, the dynamics in the social field among social actors creates the process of communication and the intertwined intentions to shape the public according to the communication goals of a formal actor in the social field.

The sharing of information is not a simple process of exchange as it includes a complex set of activities for coding, decoding and interpreting information

(McLuhan and Lapham 1994). In the 21st century, these processes are simplified and sometimes complicated by the creation and use of various technological assets, and globalisation. The establishing of digital platforms and social media has enabled a new communication landscape; namely, new communication channels. Considerable amounts of mis- or wrong information often pass through these channels, often leading to erroneous communication between the agent (communicator) and the public. This raises the question of the role of the agent-communicator and the possibility of certain categories of social forces being misused that then influence the social field in the direction of wrongly shaping the public.

Strategic communications include all aspects of communication with a view to provide for the existence or prosperity of a formal actor in the social field. This term assumes deliberate communication from a formal actor, via the agent-communicator, in order to realise given goals. Specifically, strategic communication is the purposeful use of communication by an entity to engage in conversations of strategic value for its goals (Zefrass et al. 2018). Entities here refers to different types of organisations, e.g., corporations, government or non-profit establishments, various social movements, and well-known individuals. Accordingly, the influence of the agent on the personal level, transcends to the organisational level, from the level of a formal actor aware that through communication and the use of social forces it is shaping the public and thereby the actor's defined strategic communication goals are accomplished.

Therefore, strategic communication, as defined by Zefrass et al. (2020), is imperative for reaching the goals of communication by shaping the public. In such communication, the agent-communicator has a special role that distinguishes them from other message creators like writers or scientists (Carey 1965): to create key messages for communication that will be separated from their own thoughts and perceptions. By examining the communication process in the social field (while considering certain communication theories and concepts), in this article the authors attempt to reveal the role of the social forces influencing the communication process. In this process, the presence and absence of strategic communication profoundly influences social structures and social dynamics.

Zefrass et al. (2018) refer to the debate on the new role of communication in companies as strategic and decisive, as opposed to the previous role of being tactical and supportive. According to these authors, organisations are defined by way of specific interests, particular structures, the realisation of processes, the organisational culture, and decision-making methods on the micro and macro levels.

Relying on their professional capacities, all agent-communicators follow an internal organisational process of creating information within the framework of the formal actor. This article defines an agent-communicator as a professional who: (1) speaks on behalf of the entire organisation; (2) acts in the social field

equipped with a set of information; and (3) strives to have an impact on shaping the public. In truth, the agent-communicator is a professional who controls the formal actor's internal information while also creating possibilities and ways to market the information and make it effective with respect to the public.

In the presented study, the authors stress the sociological characterisation of the multiple forces influencing the process of communicating for shaping the public. Namely, the communication process is impacted by several social forces (social institutions, social networks, cognitive frameworks) that define the formal actor's communicative performance. Thus, in this article we categorise the formal features found in Southeast European countries, while providing a comprehensive view of how the public is shaped via social forces – social institutions, social networks, and cognitive frameworks. In addition, the SOFIA approach (Roncevic et al. 2021) is used to provide an analytical model of the influence of social forces during the communication and the shaping of the public. The aim of the article is to combine the theoretical and practical approaches of Communication and Social Field Theory with Ragin's (2005) Fuzzy-Set Analysis. The mentioned approach facilitated the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the empirical research.

THEORY AND CONCEPTS

In any given social field, one can find active formal actors that wish to establish and shape the relationship between themselves and the public. The notion that this relationship forms the basis for the dynamics of the social field is confirmed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), whereby every field is an arena in which formal actors are working to add value on their own. The relationship is established and maintained via communication realised by the formal actors through agent-communicators under the influence of Beckert's social forces, which are definitively in the centre of communication. Therefore, via communication the public receives information that creates motion, relations, competition, and shaping. The right to communication is a basic human right. The idea of communication as a basic human need is vital in the contemporary world where so much of the social interaction of a private and public nature is mediated technologically (Calabrese 2017). The public is shaped by the choice of information that is via the choice of opportunities. "The public is collection of people that have common interest for certain entity" (Tanta 2007). Assisted by technology, public communication is becoming more private and the framing of the public as a mass concept enables microtargeting and communication and/or manipulation. Splichal proposes the creation of a "public knowledge algorithm" as a way for researchers to detect techniques that manipulate public opinion (Splichal 2022).

In the social field, formal actors are structured with regard to five spirals that employ strategic communication to influence the public. Carayaniss et al. (2012) refer to the 'five-helix' model: State actors (state institutions and political parties)

– the political helix; the international community (embassies, institutions, organisations) – the international helix; the academic community (faculties, institutes, other educational institutions) – the educational helix; civil society (non-governmental organisations) – the public as a whole; and the business community (companies, including communication agencies and the media) – the economic helix.

Agent-communicators (Stojčevski 2024) define the participation of the following social institutions categories (language, value of information, rules of communication, literacy of the communicator, leadership) in the communication process for shaping the public. Participants in focus groups (FGs) accept that language has an influence on forming the public, although this influence is limited by language standards. However, agent-communicators from all countries agree that language should be adapted after identifying the public with whom it is to be communicated in terms of the manner of communication, the characteristics of the various target publics, the channels or media for communication and, of course, who is doing the communicating.

Language is the most common tool of communication. It plays a vital role in helping people build a bridge of relationships. At the same time, language acts as a destroyer of bridges of human relations because it separates people from each other (Ahmad 2019). In our interconnected world, language persists as a significant barrier to conveying messages clearly. Regarding the quality of language used by agent-communicators, focus group participants believe that the contents should be clear, easy to grasp, and simple to communicate. All of this should ensure synergy between adaptation and language quality, framed as it is between language norms and the reality of harnessing language as living matter.

When it comes to the value of information, agent-communicators from various countries in South-East Europe agree that the recipient determines its value. Simultaneously, the agent-communicator should consider the possibility of evaluating the information's value by eliminating potential difficulties with verifying it, and establishing a matrix for verifying the source and its competence (trust). Three challenges are entailed in obtaining reliable information from institutions and organisations. First, there is no central place where all relevant information is available. Second, the proper management of information is clearly lacking (Bessick 2016). Third, there are insufficient policies in place. Considering these challenges, the worth of information reflects its correctness, the intensity of its reach (effects, changes), information synthesis, and the quantity of repetition of the same information. This reflects a fundamental principle that communicators should take responsibility for evaluating the information they disseminate and ensure transparency and credibility to build trust with their audiences.

The agent-communicator's experience with the public in reality produces a sense that specific information has a value as well as the possibility of avoiding and recognising attempts at manipulation. Differing attitudes and experiences of communication norms are held by FG participants, with views ranging from

“rules facilitate” to “rules limit”. Scientists define various rules for communication, which sometimes can prove challenging for the agent-communicator. It is nevertheless important that every agent-communicator determines communication rules they will respect so as to assure that the strategic communication is effective. Good communication is not an exact science (Percy 2018). The structuredness, as in the flexibility, of the rules in communication is affected by the type and development of the sector or organisation, the market, the topic, and urgency of its communication, together with knowledge about the public with whom it is to be communicated. An improved quality of communication between agent-communicator and the public fosters excellent relations and trust, but only if the communication norms are regularly checked and tested. In practice, such guidelines aid with learning about the information source, along with its legitimacy and reputation as a source that publishes information in line with the stated criteria.

How literate the agent-communicator is another important factor for success with communication, education, and understanding the public. If language is the key to understanding the world, then literacy is the doorway to effective communication. Literacy impacts the agent’s reputation by either building or confirming his trust. In contrast, a lack of knowledge leads to sensationalism in communication, which limits the ability to shape the audience. “Communication and language skills are key to literacy, but many children can struggle” (Wood 2017). The formal actor’s leadership role, which frames the agent-communicator’s operations, also influences the moulding of the public. Specifically, because the leader is the first to have the opportunity to market (convey) information to the public, his/her leadership position determines the information’s potency. “Leadership cannot be separated from communication; research reveals organizational leaders spend 70%-80% of their time communicating” (Wajcman & Rose, 2011). The leader’s position influences both the public’s reaction (response) and its readiness to be controlled by the formal actor. Agent-communicators, on the other hand, agree that communication produces a leadership role. They argue that the position is not important, and instead the truth and attractiveness of the information given to the leader are, coupled with his/her quality, expertise, reputation, and public trust.

Agent-communicators have also evaluated the participation of social networks (such as the leadership structure of a formal agent in the social field, media as a system, communication agencies as a system, the social capital held by the formal actor, and group position). The organisation’s orientation as a social network category already defines the mutual interweaving and dependency in the process of moulding the public. Leadership is not a place, but a process (Kouzes and Posner 2007). The focus group participants (representatives of media, academia, political parties, international institution and a few others – who were part of focus group = as representatives of different agent-communicators) holding a leadership position of a social institution claim that factors influencing the

formal actor's positioning are the communicator's expertise, the quality of the information, trust in the agent and the formal actor, the actor's reputation, activity, size, and budgeted funding. The formal actor's ability to inform the audience is a positive component of their positioning, while the ongoing struggle for position (maintaining or gaining a higher position in the social field) is a negative aspect. Of course, success in shaping the public depends on the formal actor's internal structure (placement) for the realisation of internal and external communication. Quality communication with the public is possible with a clear framework and a set of communication guidelines. That is, the lack of a clear structure, and spontaneous and flexible communication, leads to an inability to recognise the value of particular information, difficulty with identifying the agent-communicator, their inexperience, and the low level of culture in the organisation, uncertainty, and low-quality information filtration. According to the focus group respondents, the structure of communication with the public is determined by the content of the material. The skill of the agent-communicator and their colleagues, in comparison, allows considerable freedom in the internal structure. Given that the organised method influences the production of information, its impact on the public, the speed and quality with which information is built, its efficacy, the building of trust and cooperation with the public etc., the primary way to persuade or affect people is via communication (Kolzow 2014).

The theory the media environment diverges from the reality. Changes are made in the media's capital independence and the commercialisation of information, along with the effect of populism and sensationalism in public communication and tabloid journalism. The etymological sense of the media should not be neglected, which in addition to its historical and technological genesis, according to Williams (1983), is capitalist and developed when media became profitable enterprises – at once, a means of making money and a means of communication. Luhman (2000) described the importance of the media as a system that mass media are the primary source of our understanding about our own society and the world at large. The media's role in shaping the public is also influenced by public relations specialists who promote their own information, the proliferation of social media, the shortage of professional journalists, and the academic community's apathy regarding the production of excellent media messaging. In fact, the media does not tell us what and how to think because the public receives the messages with a certain criticality. Still, their function is vital in agenda-setting and concentrating public interest on chosen topics (Happer and Philo 2013).

In contrast, the role of communication agencies is determined by the placing of various points of view on specific themes. Formal actors provide credibility for the process of moulding the public via collaboration with professional communication firms. They thus advocate the formation of internal teams to facilitate communication between the formal actors and professional agencies involved in shaping the public. There are substantive reasons for public relations to shape and manipulate public opinion (Izryadnov 2023). Of course, social

networks round them off with the formal actor's social capital. "Social capital" is a prerequisite for the survival of all social areas (Furst et al. 2001). According to Focus Group participants, creating this type of capital is a long-term process that allows for cooperation to be strengthened, as well as own 'media' and 'social networks' for communication, interesting and quality information to communicate with the public via media, and content able to be marketed to the public (with or without payment) to be created.

Modifying a public image of an organization requires an extensive study to be performed, one that involves analysis of the current situation, which will pool together all the facts and, in a sense, describe how members of the organisation breathe'. Such analysis leads to a better understanding of the public's view on a given topic of interest, and so that it may be approached to re-create that view. According to research participants, shaping (changing) the public's perspective is a challenging process determined by the defined target-oriented communication with the public, a correct definition of reality, and the preparations made for the communication.

The limited capacity of the human senses means that perceptions of reality are imprecise and the brain works things out after having stored information (Broadbent 1958). Without understanding the agent's perceptions, the communicator will merely be 'will stand still and improvising while shaping the audience. Aside from perception studies, the agent-communicator must be intimately familiar with a variety of procedures. For example, being media-literate and educating the public about the role of the media. It is only in this manner that information will not be superficial or misinterpreted, there will be no information overload, unprofessional comments, or disinformation. It should, in other words, be the result of streamlined information and communication operations. The agent-communicator must be intimately familiar review specific material before it is published.

Knowing the perception and knowledge of communication as a process adds to understanding of the general public, which entails coexisting with the general public, receiving feedback, and developing a correct communication model. The agent-communicator will provide multiple methods for 'listening' to the public through continuous communication, relationship-building, and understanding since they are aware that misunderstanding with the public can damage a reputation. Understanding of the public can help to cause a shift in the public's perception of given events, organisations, individuals etc.

Understanding the different aspects of reality assists with establishing relationships, leading the public to evaluate the previously held knowledge and revise it in the direction of a fuller understanding of reality (Soltirovic and McLeod 2004). Understanding also builds trust between the agent-communicator (the formal actor) and the general public. Although trust is difficult to establish, it is extremely easy to destroy. Building trust is a long-term and patience-demanding process (Kiousis 2001), one based on constant research and reputation

maintenance, flexibility in reacting to changes in beliefs, sensitivity to others, the creation of reasonable information, honesty, consistency, the fulfilment of promises, expertise, responsibility, and providing accurate and verified information. The formal actor, on the other side, can rebuild audience confidence by engaging in rebranding processes, admitting fault, accepting responsibility for any mistakes made, rapidly responding to blunders, and taking a transparent and creative communication approach. All of this, most of the time, can result in public behaviour being changed (shaped) by allowing organised formal actors at leadership positions to affect such confidence.

OPERATIONALISATION, METHODOLOGY, AND DATA COLLECTION

In order to answer the research question “How can social forces (social institutions, social networks, cognitive frame) use communication to shape the public as a social field in Southeast Europe?”, we conducted research that included agent-communicators from six countries in Southeast Europe. The agent-communicators who participated in the research were selected according to several criteria: success as an actor in communication with the public in the social field; knowledge concerning how to communicate; having moral and ethical standards to represent a group; respecting the laws and rules of communication; being an individual representative of a certain group; and having the opportunity, desire and time to engage in the research.

In everyday experience, we build our knowledge of the general through knowledge of the specific. The data was collected through online focus groups. In these FGs, representatives of formal actors, namely, agent-communicators representing special formal groups answered questions from a questionnaire containing three sets and five questions for each separate variable: Social Institutions, Social Networks, and Cognitive Frames. Communications was identified as the outcome.

To answer the mentioned research question, we used Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) for several reasons. First, because our data set only consists of six cases (Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Croatia), thus we were unable to employ any mainstream statistical analysis. With the help of QCA, we tested the causal complexity of the relationship between the phenomena under study. The causal complexity may be seen as falling within the framework of necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of a certain outcome in the case of small-N situations (Schneider 2009; Reik et al. 2015). Finally, QCA also helps determine the presence or absence of necessary and/or sufficient conditions for a given outcome.

Using set theory and formal logic, each indicator has a membership ranging from 0 (non-membership) to 1 (full membership) (Ragin 2000, 2008). For example, if a case has a membership score of 0.3 for a certain indicator, we may say that it is more “out” than “in” for that indicator. Further, when there is a score of 0.9, in that case we can be certain that the membership is almost full.

The assignment of scores occurs via the process of calibration, for which the research relies on the theoretical framework along with software (Ragin 2000; Schneider 2009). It is important to stress that QCA encourages the use of a theoretical framework and empirical data to answer the research problem and the conditions (independent variables) leading to the selected outcome (dependent variable) (Mendel and Korjani 2012). This means that both the theory and the empirical data are in constant communication.

Within the analysis, the researcher relies on the fit parameter (consistency and coverage) to highlight the important conditions among a set of conditions that are necessary and/or sufficient for an outcome to occur (Ragin 2006; Goertz 2006; Schneider and Wagemann 2007 cited in Schneider 2009). Therefore, as Ragin (2008, 44) notes, consistency “gauges the degree to which the cases sharing a given combination of conditions agree in displaying the outcome in question. That is, consistency indicates how closely a perfect subset relation is approximated”. As such, like with the case of other statistical analyses, both consistency and coverage have a threshold that determines if a condition(s) is relevant for the outcome. As Wagemann and Schneider (2007) emphasise, the setting of this threshold depends on several aspects such as the number and knowledge of cases, the quality of the data, and the research design. Following this line of argument, in this study we set the threshold for consistency at 0.75, and that for coverage at 0.5, for a condition to be considered necessary and/or sufficient. As the mentioned authors state, this threshold is enough to secure causality from the perspective of the closeness of the approximation and the empirical relevance of the conditions.

The categorising of formal features into these eight areas (appearing in five categories) in six different Southeast European countries (Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosna and Hercegovina, Serbia, North Macedonia) provides a diverse professional view of the process of shaping the public through 3 social forces with 15 different categories. For each question, the agent-communicators in the FGs provided a narrative, an explanation and an attitude (qualitative description), and these results were used to define the groups. At the end of each question, following a debate, they agreed on a numerical common group expression. This numerical expression was only reached with complete complexity and acceptance by all group participants. In contrast to conventional crisp set theory that classifies data strictly as either belonging or not belonging to a set, Ragin’s fuzzy set theory accommodates varying degrees of membership within sets (Ragin 2000). This bivalent affiliation makes it impossible to include other inter-expressions, that is to say, to include other potential expressions in this space. All agent-communicators had to reach a consensus on each social force separately, in turn selecting one rating for each separate category. The theory of fuzzy sets was used to determine how and in which way language as a social institution is necessary for communication to shape the public in Southeast Europe. Apart from necessity, with this method it was determined how much

is enough to influence the public with the use of language, namely, the level of sufficiency to form a cause-and-effect relationship. The same principle of necessity and sufficiency was applied to the other social institutions we have already defined (value of information, rules of communication, literacy of the communicator, and leadership). Then, sufficiency and necessity were also used in social networks (leadership structure, media as a system, communication agencies as a system, social capital of the formal actor, and group position). The cognitive frameworks determined the necessity and sufficiency of five social forces: perceptions, knowledge, understanding, trust, and behaviour.

ANALYSIS

Following the threshold set with regard to consistency and coverage, we observed that to have Communication it is necessary to have Institutions (see Table 1). In addition, Networks also met the minimum criteria and so they may also be considered to be a necessary condition. When it comes to sufficiency, none of the conditions met the set threshold. Still, we observed that the absence of the conditions does not constitute necessary or sufficient conditions for Communication.

Table 1: NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS FOR THE PRESENCE OF COMMUNICATION

	CONS.NEC	COV.NEC	CONS.SUF	COV.SUF
Institutions	0.764	0.599	0.599	0.764
Networks	0.732	0.589	0.589	0.732
Cognitive Frames	0.580	0.511	0.511	0.580
~ Institutions	0.576	0.641	0.641	0.576
~ Networks	0.609	0.654	0.654	0.609
~ Cognitive Frames	0.717	0.690	0.690	0.717

Source: The authors' own calculations.

At the same time, we tested the necessary and sufficient conditions, showing that at the moment we have an absence of Communication. This might offer us additional insights, especially when noting that the initial analysis only stressed two results. Following this line of argument, the absence of Institutions is a necessary condition for the absence of Communication. This result complements the results shown in Table 1.

Table 2: NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS FOR THE ABSENCE OF COMMUNICATION

	CONS.NEC	COV.NEC	CONS.SUF	COV.SUF
Institutions	0.576	0.641	0.641	0.576
Networks	0.609	0.654	0.654	0.609
Cognitive Frames	0.717	0.690	0.690	0.717
~ Institutions	0.764	0.599	0.599	0.764
~ Networks	0.732	0.589	0.589	0.732
~ Cognitive Frames	0.580	0.511	0.511	0.580

Source: Authors' own calculations.

If we look at the combination of necessary conditions for Communication (see Table 3), several interesting groups of conditions are worth highlighting. First, we can mention that the absence of Institutions with the presence of Networks is a necessary condition for the presence of Communication. Second, the absence of Institutions and Cognitive Frames was shown to be a relevant combination. Third, at the moment we do not have Networks and Cognitive Frames, which could constitute a necessary factor for Communication. Finally, the presence of Networks and the absence of Cognitive Frames is also considered as a condition for Communication. These results revealed that the phenomenon of Communication was more complex than we initially believed. In particular, these results are quite intriguing as they point to the absence of the other two social forces (Networks and Cognitive Frames), which in the initial analysis and individually did not meet the threshold.

Table 3: THE NECESSARY COMBINATION OF CONDITIONS FOR COMMUNICATION

	INCLN	RON	COVN
~ Institutions + Networks	0.946	0.348	0.541
~ Institutions + ~Cognitive Frames	0.804	0.733	0.687
~ Networks + ~ Cognitive Frames	0.804	0.765	0.714
Networks + ~ Cognitive Frames	0.946	0.322	0.532

Source: The authors' own calculations.

Moreover, when the focus is on the necessary conditions for the absence of Communication (see Table 4), we observed several combinations composed of both absent and present conditions. For example, we noticed that each condition is involved in a combination where it is either present or absent. Namely, such conditions are Institutions. In one case, we noted the absence of Institutions and presence Networks, the presence of Institutions and absence of Networks, and

lastly a combination between the absence of Institutions and absence of Networks that are seen as necessary for the absence of Communication.

Table 4: THE NECESSARY COMBINATION OF CONDITIONS FOR THE ABSENCE OF COMMUNICATION

	INCLN	RON	COVN
~ Institutions +~ Networks	0.762	0.669	0.679
~ Institutions + Networks	0.972	0.382	0.642
Institutions +~ Networks	1.000	0.428	0.672
~ Institutions +~ Cognitive Frames	0.762	0.601	0.637
~ Institutions + Cognitive Frames	0.972	0.382	0.642
Institutions +~ Cognitive Frames	1.000	0.536	0.717
~ Networks + Cognitive Frames	1.000	0.395	0.660
Networks +~ Cognitive Frames	1.000	0.504	0.703

Source: Authors' own calculations.

Finally, in the case of a sufficient combination of conditions for Communication, we can only refer to the case of Slovenia and note that for Communication it is sufficient to have Institutions, Networks, and the absence of Cognitive Frames. The unique interaction with the presence of social institutions and social networks, coupled with the absence of cognitive frameworks, is enough to explain the communication process.

Table 5: A SUFFICIENT COMBINATION OF CONDITIONS FOR COMMUNICATION

Institutions	Networks	Cognitive Frames	OUT	N	INCL	PRINT	CASES
1	1	0	1	1	1.000	1.000	SL
0	0	0	0	2	0.637	0.163	MG, NM
1	1	1	0	3	0.567	0.184	BH, CR, SR

Source: Authors' own calculations.

CONCLUSIONS

Communication is a foundation for creating relationships between various stakeholders – formal actors in the social field. Social dynamics are created in this way, and the capacity for the strategic communication of various formal actors in the field is shown. If there is no strategic communication, there is a high probability of a communication process without effect or a communication that leads to confusion. With the help of strategically targeted communication, formal actors, via their agent-communicators, influence the shaping of the

public, in turn achieving their primary communication goals. The dynamics of the social field are established because each formal actor emits a different type of key message to the public and, subject to various factors (social categories) they have a certain effect on shaping the public. This study delves into the complex interplay of communication processes and the influence of social forces (social institutions, social networks, cognitive frames), using theoretical models to provide a comprehensive understanding of formation of the public in Southeast Europe (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia).

Using Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), the study examined the causal complexity of these relationships, considering the necessary and sufficient conditions for particular outcomes. Institutions and networks were identified as necessary conditions, and none met the sufficiency criteria. However, the absence of these conditions does not necessarily indicate the absence of communication. Exploring the combinations of necessary conditions for communication reveals complexities such as the interactions between institutions, networks, and knowledge frames. Interestingly, the absence of certain social forces, together with the presence of other forces, appears as a relevant condition for communication. For example, the absence of social institutions together with the presence of social networks is seen as a necessity for communication. Similarly, various combinations involving the absence or presence of institutions and networks were identified as necessary for the presence or absence of communication. These findings emphasise the complex nature of communication dynamics; namely, the interdependence between categories of social forces in the region.

These results permit us to offer several recommendations. For instance, formal actors within the social field should invest in developing adaptable communication strategies that account for the diversity of social forces at play. In line with this argument, stress should be placed not simply on the presence of institutions and networks but on their specific configurations and interactions as well. Tailored communication approaches must be grounded in the contextual realities of each country in Southeast Europe. By addressing the varying levels of institutional trust, network densities, and the influence of informal channels, different actors can significantly improve the effectiveness of public engagement efforts.

Nonetheless, this study should be seen as an initial attempt to explore the qualitative mechanisms behind the phenomenon of communication. Future research should focus on in-depth case studies to better understand how communicators navigate these complex configurations in real-time practice. It is particularly important to examine how the absence of formal institutions may be offset by the strength of informal networks in shaping public discourse as this could produce valuable insights into grassroots-level communication strategies.

In addition, a comparative longitudinal approach is needed to deepen understanding of how communication dynamics evolve in response to political,

economic or technological changes. Such studies could offer important insights into the resilience and adaptability of communication strategies over time. Ultimately, these findings would help formal actors more effectively anticipate and respond to shifts within the social field.

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JAVNOST V JUGOVZHODNI EVROPI: ANALIZA MEHKIH MNOŽIC

Povzetek. *Komunikacija je ključna za družbeno interakcijo in socializacijo ljudi. Interakcija med ljudmi in institucijami temelji na strateški komunikaciji kot ključni komponenti za preživetje družbe. Slednjo uporabljajo agenti komunikatorji v imenu formalnih organizacij pri naslavljanju svoje ciljne javnosti. Na strateško komunikacijo poleg tega vplivajo nevidne družbene sile (institucije, omrežja in kognitivni okviri), ki »upravljajo« proces komunikacije z javnostjo. Da bi zagotovili analitični model vpliva družbenih sil pri oblikovanju javnosti, uporabljamo pristop SOFIA. Želimo namreč združiti teoretične in praktične pristope teorije komunikacije in socialnega polja, ki jih podpira analiza mehkih množic. Z uporabo kvalitativne primerjalne analize preučujemo tudi vzročno kompleksnost teh odnosov, pri čemer upoštevamo potrebne in zadostne pogoje za specifične rezultate. Institucije in omrežja predstavljajo potrebne pogoje, a ne prve ne druga ne izpolnjujejo meril zadostnosti. Vendar pa odsotnost teh pogojev ne pomeni nujno odsotnosti komunikacije. Raziskovanje kombinacij potrebnih pogojev za komunikacijo razkriva kompleksnosti, kot je interakcija med institucijami, omrežji in kognitivnimi okvirji. Odsotnost določenih družbenih sil se skupaj s prisotnostjo drugih izkaže kot pomemben pogoj za komunikacijo. Ni torej pomembno le, da institucije na socialnem področju obstajajo, ampak tudi, da komunicirajo in ustvarjajo mreže interakcij za boljše razumevanje z javnostjo. Strateški komunikacijski okvir, ki ga vodijo nevidne družbene sile, dejansko izboljšuje sposobnost oblikovanja javnosti v zeleno smer.*

Ključni pojmi: *socialne institucije, socialna omrežja, kognitivni okvirji, analiza za mehkih množic.*

REFLECTIONS ON POLITICAL ECOLOGY II

Blaž VREČKO ILC*

EDITORIAL

The thematic section “Reflections on Political Ecology II” is a continuation of work in the wider field of political ecology by members of the Centre for Political Theory at the University of Ljubljana. It consists of 5 scientific articles that from a range of perspectives and theoretical frameworks consider various crucial issues broadly related to the present ecological crisis and its interrelationship, mutual influence, and co-determination with other crises of the wider polycrisis. Given the happenings in the last few years, the polycrisis is gradually intensifying in many of its dimensions, while the political focus is less and less pointed to the ecological dimension of the crises, reflections on and tackling them. This is simultaneously interesting and telling of how political, economic, social and intellectual elites misperceive the polycrisis as clearly visible in the now dominant political agenda specifically in the West that relegates the climate and ecological concerns to a less relevant status compared to geopolitical, economic and security concerns. Despite its less prominent character in political agendas, the ecological dimension of the polycrisis remains a crucial dividing line in politics. The right-wing forces are paradoxically becoming bolder and less compromising, while the centrist political forces are doubling down on policies that obviously are insufficient to properly address the crises yet crucial for limiting the possibilities of alternatives in thinking and acting. This situation also reveals the stark discrepancy between the political and the environmental as the ecological crisis and specifically the climate crisis is becoming exponentially worse in the form of annual ‘historic’ extreme weather events and also according to numerous scientific studies, long-term modelling of climate change, and remeasurements of greenhouse gas emissions, species die-off, average temperatures etc. It appears that as the climate and ecological crisis is intensifying and our scientific understanding of the situation is improving, expanding and turning ever less optimistic, modern societies, elites, structures, institutions are not only doubling down on the status quo, but adopting policies that even further undermine our capabilities of mitigating and adapting to the polycrisis. Reformist positions and policies are re-evaluated as alarmist in the context where they actually represent a dangerous form of “hopium” in face of imminent climate chaos that, as it seems, will be normalised up until the point when this facade will be brutally crushed by the reality of radically deteriorating living conditions. In addition,

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the societal ideological fantasy of magic technological solutions to the climate and other dimensions of the polycrisis not only remains strong, but has even grown with the advent of technologies such as generative AI that ultimately cannot and will not lead to a more sustainable world, and instead a world that is even less sustainable, more authoritarian, less adapted to the effects of the polycrisis, given that it is already producing not only higher emissions, and putting breaks on the green transition, but is also having a generally negative effect on people's capabilities for critical thinking. Critical thinking capacities are not only under threat by technological but also political means as right-wing/far-right forces have not only intensified their denial in societies facing a climate emergency, but begun actively dismantling and silencing scientific insights, analysis, research on the climate and wider ecological crisis, creating further obstacles to tackling the polycrisis.

The five contributions in the thematic section may be considered an intellectual antidote to these processes of the erosion of capacities for critical thinking. In the spirit and wide-ranging scope of political ecology, in an innovative, insightful, lucid and complex manner they tackle novel alternative concrete visions of future societies, the foundational issues of the existing order that need to be overcome, the structures, institutions, practices and relations of power that strive to consolidate the existing unsustainable order and silence and obfuscate alternative visions and policies, and, finally, the political forces that not only stand in the way of alternative sustainable, caring, emancipatory society but are struggling for the establishment of an authoritarian, hyper-capitalist, environment and a people-destroying system.

An innovative alternative vision of a sustainable future society is offered in the first article in the thematic section. **Žiga Vodovnik's** innovative contribution entitled *Pū'olo of Hope: The Politics of Care from The Shores of Hawai'i to the Streets of Europe* is namely focused on re-imagining our socio-political and economic system in an ecologically sustainable way by building upon the native Hawaiian concept of care/mālama. This simultaneously static and dynamic principle is part of the contemporary revival of the so-called Native Hawaiian world or Kanaka Maoli. He argues that this principle has potential beyond its immediate geopolitical context as it can be a fruitful foundation on which to build a vision and ultimately a reality of an emancipatory, solidaristic, emphatic and caring society. As he observes, the latter has an existential urgency considering the convergence of various crises to create an unprecedented polycrisis that is unprecedented and irreversible in the sense that the *old normal* is gone. Existing visions and models are insufficient and structurally incapable of properly addressing our unprecedented challenges. He argues that caring/palliative politics, the politics of care, empathy and solidarity, built around the concept of care/mālama offers us a much-needed framework for thinking and acting that inoculates us from despair and harmful survivalist logic and profoundly shifts our political vision. Drawing from Hawaiian scholars and analysing local

Slovenian expressions of caring politics, Vodovnik posits that the new political vision can only be formulated in dialogue between various contexts, traditions and notions, and that this dialogue must rest on a practice of reciprocal obligation and be grounded in respect and relationality, not appropriation and containment. The dialogue is crucial for connecting related concepts and struggles and enhancing our joint understanding of common challenges and possibilities. This novel vision of caring politics also necessitates the genesis of novel forms of political organisation that are at once more localised and more global than the existing forms.

The article that follows focuses in an innovative way on the foundational issues of the existing order that need to be overcome in order to fashion an alternative sustainable society for all living beings. **Cirila Toplak's** contribution *Forest Politics: (Post)Foucauldian Subjectivity, Genealogy of Resistance and Arborism* takes us in a non-anthropocentric post-humanist direction by contemplating on the forest not as a passive backdrop of human history but a specifically active subject that has shaped our history in a number of ways. She argues that forests have historically conditioned our governance, resistance and ideologies. Fruitfully drawing on posthumanist, ecological and decolonial thought, and specifically Foucault's concepts of biopolitics, governmentality and counter-conduct, she looks at the way forests have functioned as heterotopic spaces of insurgency, of thinking and acting differently. On the other hand, she analyses the way that forests were made the targets of biopolitical interventions and draws an interesting novel comparison with the management of human populations. Here she introduces the concept of arborism that is analogous to the biopolitical racism against the abnormal (part of) populations, where specific tree species have been celebrated, nurtured or ruthlessly cut down depending on their place in the tree-hierarchy of particular human societies. Finally, she persuasively argues for a non-anthropocentric imagining of subjectivity and its opening to also include in a non-exclusive manner other living beings, which is, as she stresses, essential to reposition forests as vital subjects of political ecology and multispecies justice. The latter is crucial for developing and implementing proper emancipatory visions of our future sustainable system.

The following two articles represent a complex and innovative utilisation and upgrade of the Foucauldian eco-governmentality approach to dissect the structures, institutions, practices and relations of power that in the context of EU and its member states strive to consolidate the existing unsustainable order while silencing and obfuscating alternative visions and policies.

Marinko Banjac's contribution *Governing Through Engagement: European Climate Pact Ambassadors and the Post-Political Green Transition* critically considers one of the concrete mechanisms launched by the European Commission within its flagship European Green Deal framework. The latter is not just the paramount framework for addressing the climate and ecological crisis but is also central as a status-quo-reaffirming vision for a more sustainable socio-economic

development of the EU and the member states. He innovatively and productively combines a Foucauldian eco-governmentality approach with the concept of post-politics on which he builds his discursive analysis. This analytical framework enables him to clearly demonstrate the complex ways in which specific *prima facie* neutral and benign policy tools can be understood as a mechanism of power wielded by the centrist political forces and institutions to reaffirm the *status quo* and prevent thinking and acting that would transcend the unsustainable logics and imperatives of the existing socio-economic system. As he persuasively argues, this consolidation of the status quo is undertaken through innovative mechanisms that are part of a post-political form, where via their utilisation of specific environmental and climate problem-solution frameworks the so-called European Climate Pact Ambassadors seek to reinforce neo-liberal economic rationalities and thoroughly depoliticise the green transition. This depoliticisation, in turn, helps to systematically constrain alternatives to mainstream, status-quo-reaffirming ecological activities that would inevitably challenge the dominant governmental rationality and the unequal relations of power. He thereby points to pressing challenges that emancipatory struggles for achieving a sustainable future society face from political forces, structures and institutions that appear to be contributing to tackling crucial issues, but can be understood not as distractions but as difficult obstacles to be faced head on.

Luka Zevnik Tomazin critically interrogates another dimension of eco-governmentality on the EU level that innovatively complements the lucid insights of Banjac's contribution concerning how the latter is functioning as a specific intricate regime of power that is continuously hindering the articulation, popularisation and implementation of alternative visions of a sustainable future order that would move beyond capitalism. In his contribution entitled *Governing the Responsible Self: EU Climate Policy and the Production of Green Subjectivity*, he employs an innovative Foucauldian analytical framework that combines in a fruitful and incisive manner approaches – governmentality and the hermeneutics of the self – that in most existing Foucauldian scholarship remain isolated, and puts them into a productive conversation with each other. This enables him to demonstrate the intricate way in which the individual as a self-forming subject not only contributes to the macro-level eco-governmentality of the EU, but that this relationship is co-determined and co-dependent. The consolidation of this neoliberal regime that depoliticises and individualises the climate crisis and its tackling is performed not only on the level of policies and practices, on the level of subjectivisation, but also on the level of subjectivation of individuals that together contribute to defending the capitalist social form by asserting there are no alternatives. Both Banjac and Zevnik Tomazin show the truly expansive, complex and intensive, continuous ways that the existing status quo is being actively defended regardless of the intensification of the polycrisis and the inadequate nature of the policies, logics and imperatives that direct how it is addressed on the EU, member state, and individual levels.

Blaž Vrečko Ilc's contribution rounds up the thematic issue with a focus on a phenomenon that from a political ecology standpoint is essential for understanding the forces and ideologies that not only stand in the way of the much-needed novel emancipatory visions of a caring, nurturing environmentally sustainable society (see Vovodnik's contribution), and a radical rethinking of the foundations of the existing order (see Toplak's contribution), but are striving to undermine even the inadequate status quo reformist structures, mechanisms, policies, practices and subjectivities (as addressed in Banjac's and Zevnik's contributions).

In his article entitled *The Intensification of the Polycrisis and the Rise of Techno-Oligarchic Ideology in the USA*, Vrečko Ilc employs a materialist-neo-Luddite approach to analyse the rise of a specific potent far-right ideology and the political forces that are promoting it in the USA during the 2nd Trump Administration. He argues that the techno-oligarchic ideology is a novel far-right political ideology of the US techno-oligarchy, whose rise was predicated on intensification of the polycrisis that has destabilised the status quo. He claims that its central purpose is the expansion of the techno-oligarchy's influence, power and wealth and to squash opposition to its dominance and alternative visions and policies that critically interrogate the existing ecologically unsustainable capitalist model of growth and technological development. By critically interrogating the core characteristics of this far-right ideology, its re-imagining of the state and political institutions via the introduction of AI and in the context of Israel's genocide of the Palestinians, he demonstrates its novel unsustainable and oppressive nature and its devastating implications for solving the ecological crisis and the wider polycrisis. Ilc claims the novelty of this ideology stems from the centrality of specifically framed technological development and technology(ies) that establish the basis for its oligarchic, anti-democratic, repressive, neo-imperial, eugenic, hyper-capitalist, extractive and destructive vision of society. He concludes that any emancipatory vision and movements to achieve an ecologically sustainable future society must also focus on delegitimising the techno-oligarchy's authoritarian control over the direction and nature of technological development and their visions of future society that are properly dystopian and will ultimately lead to an uninhabitable earth.

Žiga VODOVNIK*

PŪ‘OLO OF HOPE: THE POLITICS OF CARE FROM THE SHORES OF HAWAI‘I TO THE STREETS OF EUROPE**1

Abstract. The convergence of multiple crises – from deepening economic inequality and deteriorating public health to climate collapse and the rise of authoritarian regimes – reveals the ever pressing need to reimagine our social, political and economic models. The dominant frameworks we continue to rely on – our concepts, ideals, metrics, institutions, and practices – are not just insufficient, but they are structurally incapable of addressing the depth, breadth, and complexity of the challenges we face. In response, the article explores care/mālama as foundational principles for a necessary paradigm shift. It examines the resurgence of Kanaka Maoli, or the Native Hawaiian world, exploring its relevance and transformative potential beyond its immediate context. Finally, the article shows the need to interpret and connect distinct, yet interrelated concepts and struggles so as to foster deeper understanding of our shared challenges and collective possibilities.

Keywords: Hawai‘i, Kānaka Maoli, politics, care, mālama, non-state spaces, pu‘uhonua.

INTRODUCTION

In 2008, only a few semesters after completing my PhD, I was invited to participate in a major conference hosted by the University of San Francisco commemorating the 40th anniversary of the events of 1968. Entitled *The Great Rehearsal*,

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the conference spanned a week of roundtables, lectures, discussions and other events focused on the global events of the long '68 and their lasting legacies. During the Q&A session following a lecture I gave on the intellectual and political legacy of Yugoslav praxis philosophy, Immanuel Wallerstein acknowledged my contribution but raised concerns about the use of neoliberalism as a framework for analysing contemporary political and economic trends. He argued that neoliberalism had become a “zombie concept”, no longer relevant in the light of the evolving political and economic dynamics. Wallerstein also suggested that capitalism itself might be approaching an end, calling on us to confront an essential, if not the most crucial, question: are we capable of recognising the emergence of new social, political and economic forms among the existing social, political and economic conditions?

Although I did not fully grasp his argument at the time, later events clarified its importance. On one hand, Wallerstein's question stresses the need to denaturalise the hegemonic political and economic paradigm, highlighting its contingent and dynamic nature, and pointing to the constant flux and unpredictability that define social, political and economic systems. On the other hand, Wallerstein's intervention resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's argument that the social conditions of our time necessitate the creation of a new form of utopianism, one grounded in present-day social forces. As Pierre Bourdieu (in Bourdieu and Grass 2002, 67) contended, “We need to invent a new utopianism, rooted in contemporary social forces, for which – at risk of seeming to encourage a return to antiquated political visions – it will be necessary to create new kinds of movements”. This notion calls on us to reconsider the possibilities of social transformation in the context of the current realities. It requires a shift from the realm of the inconceivable to the realm of the possible.

The idea of possibility is inherently speculative since it involves thinking about something not yet fully visible or realised, but on the way to emerging. In Western philosophy, as Ernst Bloch argues, most ideas focus on *All* (Alles) and *Nothing* (Nichts), whereby everything is either already complete or non-existent, leaving no room for possibilities (Bloch 1986; Bloch 2000). Bloch critiques this framework and introduces a new way of thinking – *anticipatory consciousness* – that challenges the static nature of Western philosophy and politics, which tend to overlook the idea of the possible. He claims the possible is frequently ignored, even though it holds the key to understanding new developments and opportunities in the world. To explore and contemplate possibilities, Bloch provides two valuable concepts: *Not* (Nicht) and *Not Yet* (Noch Nicht). These concepts are essential tools for identifying and reflecting on potential futures that have yet to materialise but remain possible. *Not* refers to the absence of something and the desire to overcome that absence, whereas *Not Yet* is more complex. It refers to something that exists as a potential or tendency – not fully formed, but moving toward becoming. *Not Yet* is the way in which the future is inscribed in the present. It is not an undefined or endless future, but a concrete

possibility that is unfolding. Or as Bloch succinctly summarises: “The Not in origin, the Not-Yet in history, the Nothing or conversely the All at the end” (Bloch 1986, 306).

The article begins with the premise that the convergence of crises – namely, the connection between economic inequality and deteriorating health, coupled with the links between climate collapse and the rise of authoritarianism – shows the urgent need to reimagine possibilities, such as new social, political and economic models. This entails a profound and unprecedented intellectual and political challenge given that conventional frameworks and criteria, i.e., our ideals, concepts, measures, institutions and practices, no longer align with the complex and urgent issues of today, failing to address the magnitude of the crises unfolding around us. Continuing to rely on these outdated standards simply adds to our failure to effectively address the profound existential threats and challenges we face. In his examination of palliative theory, Jairus Grove (2023) underscores the need to confront a difficult truth: we are entrenched in an unprecedented and irreversible planetary crisis. Precisely for this reason, he argues, palliative politics becomes not only relevant but essential. Rather than a mere stopgap, it represents a strategic and tactical shift that enables resistance to despair and the pull of survivalist logics. As such, palliative politics should be understood as a vital element within a broader project of social transformation. It fosters spaces of refuge – sites where care, empathy and solidarity are able to not just emerge but be meaningfully sustained.

In this context, the concept of care and/or *mālama* is introduced as a foundational principle and practice of the emerging political, social and economic models. The article examines the resurgence of Kanaka Maoli, or the Native Hawaiian world, exploring its relevance and transformative potential beyond its immediate context.² In doing so, it offers a more nuanced exploration of the epistemological differences between modalities of care and forms of self-governance in Hawaiian and European contexts. We highlight the necessity of interpreting and connecting distinct yet interrelated concepts and struggles in order to foster a deeper understanding of our shared challenges and collective possibilities. Finally, we explore how the concept and practice of care call for the emergence of new political forms that exist both beyond and beneath the traditional state structures.

To conclude this introduction, it is necessary to briefly explain and contextualise the title. We draw on the metaphor of the *pū'olo*, or a leaf-wrapped bundle, from George Terry Kanalu Young's exploration of the complexities of the Native Hawaiian past. In his analysis of the epistemological differences between the 'Ōiwi Maoli (Native Hawaiian) worldview and Western frameworks that have sought to interpret – and, at times, marginalise – it, he writes:

² The diacritical mark *kahakō* is used in Kānaka Maoli and Kānaka when referring to Native Hawaiian people, but is omitted when Kanaka Maoli is used as an adjective.

The ‘Oiwi Maoli past can be thought of as a pū‘olo or “leaf- wrapped bundle.” All the bygone eras that comprise that past are held in the pū‘olo. Memory stored the pū‘olo’s contents as ‘ike or “knowledge.” ‘Ike was shared based on specific tasks. It was passed from one generation to another through the constant medium of practice. ‘Ike could be spoken, chanted, or expressed through gestures as with hula. Consequently, to look and listen were the primary ways to learn. (Young 1998/2012, 13)

We view it as a meaningful metaphor in its original sense, with the past as a bundle that encompasses diverse forms of knowledge and expression. Moreover, it serves as a fitting metaphor in another context since the *pū‘olo* is the traditional way gifts are presented in Hawai‘i. The ideas explored here are, in many ways, gifts – received through ongoing encounters and dialogues with Kanaka Maoli scholars, activists, community leaders, and other community members whose perspectives critically inform this study. To reflect this dialogical perspective, each section has two parts, addressing the concepts and practices of care, as well as places of refuge, in both European and Hawaiian contexts.

DIALOGUE: THE RECIPROCAL OBLIGATION

In engaging with the politics of care across its various modalities and contexts, we align with the argument presented by Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua and Kenneth Gofigan Kuper (2024), who assert that amid the global climate crisis dialogue should be approached as a practice of reciprocal obligations. The authors argue that this strengthens our collective capacity to confront the existential challenges encountered by both humanity as a whole and specific communities. By drawing connections across diverse epistemic frameworks and distinct social, political and cultural contexts, we aim to open up possibilities for dialogical politics and collective transformation. Importantly, this effort does not centre on the naive and romanticised notion of “cross-cultural exchange”. Instead, it calls for a profound and shared reimagining of decolonial futures – plural, yet inclusive. In so doing, we seek to deepen our understanding of shared struggles and amplify “these small pockets of good” (Kotubetey in Hitt 2015, 11), weaving them together in pursuit of more equitable, sustainable and just futures.

Aware of the inherent challenges of translation – particularly theoretical translation – and especially of the ways concepts and practices may ‘escape translation’, we regard seriously the cautionary insights of Kanaka Maoli scholars who warn against approaching the Hawaiian world via the frameworks imposed by *haole* (non-native) writers and translators; namely, frameworks that have frequently led not merely to misrepresentation and mistranslation, but to efforts to contain and domesticate Hawaiian ways of being (Osorio 2021; Kuwada 2009). Accordingly, we resist the inclination to define Kanaka Maoli concepts and practices, recognising that such efforts often “create the illusion of capturing the fullness” (Osorio 2021, 36) of their articulations. Our refusal to define stems not

simply from the linguistic differences between 'ōlelo Hawai'i and English but, more importantly, from recognition of the epistemic violence that such translation practices can enact. Nevertheless, we seek to initiate a conversation that too often has been missing – one grounded in respect and relationality, rather than appropriation or containment. In this respect, the article builds on the assumption that meaningful dialogue between European and Native Hawaiian political traditions is not only possible, but valuable.

Similarly, David Graeber (2001; 2004; 2007; 2020; 2024) contends that dialogue is a collective effort to reconcile divergent perspectives within practical situations of action. Graeber's "commitment to carry on the conversation", to organise (thinking) around the concept of dialogue in order to "patch together a shared sense of humanity", is the guiding thread connecting different strands of his political theory. Graeber makes this argument clearer while stating that "questions of cultural difference only become relevant when there's already some sort of conversation going on. There is no reason to ask oneself how and whether one is to sit in judgment on another person's cultural universe unless you have some idea what that universe is; and that means that people are, to some degree at least, already communicating" (2007, 288). With this in mind, following Graeber we turn to the idea of dialogical politics as a "mutual recognition of, and respect for, difference founded on the recognition of an even more fundamental similarity (hence, equality) that makes such recognition possible" (ibid., 289–90).

In his widely referenced essay on communism, Graeber uses language to reinforce his argument for "baseline communism" where communication is inherently cooperative, implying a shared responsibility toward one's interlocutor. While such an idea may provoke strong reactions, Graeber seeks to move our attention away from abstract and theoretical discussions toward a more practical, accessible engagement with the concept. He contends that, over time, collective thinking and dialogic practice have been replaced by the isolated, monastic self, maintained by scholars and activists alike. In contrast, Graeber argues that knowing things together is a direct outcome of doing things together. Some of these ideas we already find in *Fragments of Anarchist Anthropology* in which he elaborates on exilic spaces as communities of purpose and not of definition, i.e., they are defined by practice, which revolves, in turn, around the "dialogical principle".

At the very heart of dialogue is the reciprocal obligation and thus an effort to figure out, collectively, how to reconcile different, even incommensurable perspectives in a practical situation of action. Dialogic politics makes it possible to start from a common commitment to action, not a shared definition of reality. Much like feminism, in a dialogical and consensual process, the general is brought to serve the purpose of the specific, with people from radically different realities creating pragmatic unities over particular courses of action. In politics, dialogue is a primary building block, it is a form of emergence of thoughts that are collective.

The mentioned epistemological and political obligation becomes even more critical when placing diverse forms of care and politics of care into dialogue. Within the colonialism context, the ambivalent nature of care becomes particularly evident as it was frequently entangled with the colonial logics of domination and exploitation. More specifically, Narayan (1995) notes that care discourses were strategically used to justify colonial practices, sometimes masking their exploitative nature under the guise of benevolence. She points to the “self-serving collaboration between elements of colonial rights discourses and care discourse” (ibid., 133), suggesting that the “care discourse runs the risk of being used to ideological ends where the ‘differences’ are defined in self-serving ways by the dominant and powerful” (ibid., 136). In her analysis of contemporary Hawai‘i, Haunani Kay-Trask (1999, 143) stresses how Kanaka Maoli values, including the principle of *mālama*, remain vulnerable to ongoing exploitation and commodification. For instance, she observes: “The phrase, *mālama ‘āina* – ‘to care for the land’ – is used by government officials to promote new projects and convince locals that hotels can be constructed with an emphasis on ‘ecology.’ Hotel historians, like hotel doctors, are stationed on-site to pacify visitors, feeding them fabricated myths and tales of the ‘primitive’”.

Her argument echoes Said’s (1978) assertion that colonial exploitation was not solely reliant on military and administrative power, but also perpetuated by a wide range of institutions, techniques, practices and discourses that extended far beyond the repressive apparatus. This network included philanthropists, educators, medical professionals, social workers, and clergy, who at times passively, other times actively, collaborated in the destructive colonial project. They played an integral part in the (re)production of colonial power, shaping the identities, bodies and minds of the natives in ways that served colonial interests and desires. Their efforts to “help”, “develop”, “civilise” or “socialise” indigenous populations had crippling effects, rendering the natives more governable while simultaneously eroding their connection to their ancestral lands, cultures and histories.³ This historical backdrop explains why care (especially care from outside) continues to arouse scepticism and distrust among indigenous communities worldwide. For example, Kānaka Maoli continue to resist occasional efforts to regulate hand-pounded *poi* or *pa‘i‘ai* (undiluted, hand-pounded taro) on the guise of health and hygiene concerns. Similarly, the Zapatistas have respectfully rejected “pink stilettos” – both literally and metaphorically – seeing them as symbols of care that patronises and fails to recognise the realities of Zapatista communities living in the mud of the Lacandon jungle.

In exploring how the concept of care travels, Joan Tronto (2020, 181) asks a crucial question: “Can the conceptual framework of ‘caring democracy’ be

³ The colonial project, often cloaked in the discourse of humanitarianism, was ultimately driven by the subjugation of indigenous peoples. It employed a range of violent strategies, including genocide, terricide and epistemicide. See Toplak (2025) and Vrečko-Ilc (2025).

applied beyond the time and place where it first emerged?”. This rhetorical question has served as a critical intervention in the growing debates on care in recent years. Tronto challenges the tendency to apply care ethics across diverse cultural contexts without sufficient attention to local idiosyncrasies and historical traditions. In the absence of such reflexivity and an understanding of the broader contexts in which care relations take shape, “they can end up being harmful or counterproductive if they give in to categories that appear universal or neutral but are not so” (ibid., 189).

Similarly, Graeber (2024, 304–306) points out the conceptual ambiguity of care, emphasising that it can take many forms – not all of which are benevolent. He argues that even prisons, which provide food and shelter to prisoners, can be seen as institutions that ‘care’ for them, but asks whether it is appropriate to regard institutions of this sort as spaces of care. Emejulu and Bassel (2018, 117) also caution against the ambivalence of care, describing it as “a double-edged sword of domination and resistance”, adding that care is “a politics of becoming”. Specifically, the mechanisms, policies, discourses, practices, institutions and technologies related to care can reinforce different modalities of care and politics. These range from care for others (including self-care) as “a posture of mutual respect, responsibility and obligation” (Brown and Woodly 2021, 891), to careless care, or what Harris (2021) refers to as the “pantomime of care”. Namely, care can be viewed as palliative on one hand, and as an investment, business opportunity, or even a form of domination on the other.⁴

WAYS OF CARING

In the aftermath of the transformative social and political upheavals of the long '68, truly innovative feminist approaches to care began to take shape in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Their ethical frameworks departed from conventional moral theories and liberal political philosophies, which traditionally had been rooted in abstract principles, rationality, and individualistic notions of justice. In contrast, feminist scholars and activists drew attention to a more relational and contextual understanding of justice, emphasising the importance of emotions, interconnectedness, and the practice of care (cf. May 2023, 41–42).

Academic exploration of the concept of care gained significant momentum with foundational works by Ruddick (1980), Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984), which are often viewed as pioneering works in the field. These early inquiries into care primarily situated the concept within moral philosophy and normative political theory. However, it is important to recognise that the initial discussions surrounding the ethics and practice of care emerged from within the context of

⁴ Sevenhuijsen (2003, 141) asserts that power and conflict are intrinsic to every stage of the care-giving process, as well as in the broader societal discussions on how social institutions should care for individuals. In this regard, Tronto (1993: 171) argues that the theory and politics of care must be grounded in a theory of justice, emphasising that care should be inherently democratic in nature. She warns that without such a foundation, “[i]t would be very easy for nondemocratic form of care to emerge”.

second-wave feminism, which brought with it distinct theoretical frameworks and political objectives. Feminist scholars and activists were instrumental in critiquing the invisibility and privatisation of care work, which had long been relegated to the domestic sphere and was often seen as a natural, unacknowledged duty, notably for women. The distribution of caring tasks between men and women was seen as deeply asymmetrical, with women shouldering the majority of caregiving responsibilities both within the household and in broader social structures. Alongside addressing these gendered inequalities, feminist theorists also stressed the central role played by reproductive labour in the functioning of contemporary capitalist economies. Reproductive work, including caregiving, child-rearing, and domestic labour, was ever more recognised as foundational for the reproduction of the workforce and the broader economy, yet remained largely undervalued and unrecognised.

Discussions about care were further encouraged by the entrenchment of neoliberalism and considerably redefinition and redistribution of the state associated with it. The effects of these processes have been fatal for the welfare state and public care systems because they have led to 'endemic care deficits'. As Care Collective (2020, 10) notes, the neoliberal policies of privatisation, liberalisation and fiscal discipline have proven disastrous for care systems (both state and private) as profit-making has been posited as the fundamental guiding principle: "While enabling certain models of market-mediated and commoditized care, neoliberalism seriously undermines all forms of care and caring that do not serve its agenda of profit extraction for the few". We should not forget that the economic innovations of the last four decades have actually had more important political than economic impacts. Graeber (2013, 281) states that the attack on regular forms of employment does not make workers more productive, whereas precarisation successfully tames and depoliticises labour. Similarly, the extension of working time, which adds little to productivity and does much more to limit political activity, organising and, as we will see below, time for democracy and time for care.

In recent years, considerable social, political and economic changes have driven a noteworthy conceptual expansion and repoliticisation of care. These shifts have led scholars and activists to increasingly recognise care not merely as a private or personal concern but as a central political and ethical issue. As a direct result of these changes, the politics and ethics of care have been explored via a variety of new lenses, each offering fresh perspectives on how care can be re-envisioned in response to evolving needs and challenges. For example, care has been explored as mutual aid (Spade 2020), underscoring the importance of collective responsibility and community support; as accompaniment (Farmer 2013; Lynd 2012), which emphasises solidarity and shared experiences in addressing social inequities; as friendship (May 2012; Schwarzenbach 2009), which shows care's role in cultivating emotional and relational connections; or as camaraderie (Dean 2019), focusing on solidarity and shared goals.

To be precise, the social dimension of care has been present ever since the first discussions on the care ethics, as Gilligan (1982/2003, 62), for instance, understands care as “an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connections so that no one is left alone”. And yet, in recent decades we have witnessed slow shifts in discussions on care, and we could also say its (re)politicisation, given that the focus has moved from domestic care and childcare to the new scales and structural conditions of care. According to Brown and Woodly (2021), “[t]he present moment invites a re-engagement with care as a political theory, an ethic and a political praxis that reorients people toward new ways of living, relating, and governing”. In the late 1980s, Tronto (1987) conceptualised care in the context of the decline of the welfare state, the crisis of representation and social security systems and, finally, the inherent contradictions of neoliberalism.

But what does care really mean? Fisher and Tronto define it as “a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web” (Fisher and Tronto 1990, 40). What is novel about their reconceptualisation is the processual and holistic dimension of care, which identifies four analytically distinct, but interconnected phases of the care process: caring about, caring for, caregiving, and care-receiving. Even though the theoretical expansions of care outlined above have significantly enriched political thought, they remain largely embedded within epistemological and ontological frameworks shaped by Western liberal tradition. The following discussion engages with Native Hawaiian articulations of *mālama*, drawing attention to key differences in how care is conceptualised, approached and practised.

In Hawaiian tradition, the story of Hāloa, which traces the beginnings of the Hawaiian people, underlines the deep bond between humans and the natural world. *Wakea*, the Sky Father, and *Papa*, the Earth Mother, creators of the Hawaiian islands, had a daughter named *Ho'ohokukalani*, meaning “the heavenly one who made the stars”. After *Ho'ohokukalani's* first pregnancy ended in miscarriage, her stillborn son *Hāloa* was wrapped in *kapa*, placed in a woven *lauhala* basket, and buried in the *āina*. Overcome with grief, *Ho'ohokukalani* mourned deeply, crying and chanting, watering the grave with her tears. From this burial site, a delicate yet resilient plant began to grow. With broad, heart-shaped leaves, this plant came to be known as *kalo* (taro). As the plant matured, it produced an *'oha*, or corm, which could be harvested and replanted to initiate a new life cycle. The *kalo* plant thus symbolises not just the cyclical nature of life, death and rebirth, but the concept of *'ohana* (family) as well.

When *Ho'ohokukalani* conceived again, she gave birth to a healthy son, whom she also named *Hāloa* in memory of her firstborn. The *kalo* plant nourished and fed her second son, who became the first Hawaiian *ali'i* (chief) and it is from him that Hawaiians trace their lineage. In Hawai'i, the native people are understood

as *keiki o ka ʻāina* or *kamaʻāina*, meaning “children of the land”, while the taro plant, seen as the elder sibling, serves as both a metaphor and a reminder of the need to nurture the land and its resources (in return, the land sustains and nurtures the people). Namely, taro is not only the staple crop of Hawaiian people, but also a symbol of the profound, sacred connection between the people and the land, a relationship that demands care.⁵ This *moʻolelo* or story underscores key values within Hawaiian culture: *aloha* (love, affection, kindness), *laulima* (collaboration) and *mālama* (care or stewardship), all of which are essential for the survival and well-being of Kānaka Maoli. In line with Osorio (2021), it may be important to reconceptualise these terms as active verbs, thereby stressing their practical and transformative nature. Specifically, *aloha* should be understood as “loving and respecting”, signifying an ongoing, relational process that fosters solidarity and the creation of relationships; *laulima* as “working with others”, highlighting the collaborative effort essential to Hawaiian life; and *mālama* as “caring” or “nurturing”, pointing to the responsibility to protect and sustain the land, people and culture.

Illustrating the profound interconnection between these values, a recent example stands out: the protection of Mauna Kea. To gain a deeper understanding of the broader issue, we begin by considering the personal story of a young Hawaiian activist, which offers insight into the larger context and struggles at play. The cover of the November 2019 issue of *FLUX Hawaiʻi*, a prominent publication focused on arts, culture, and current affairs in Hawaiʻi, featured a photo of Pumehana Lā, a young Kanaka Maoli student activist. Mauna a Wākea, also known as Mauna Kea, is regarded as a sacred mountain for Native Hawaiians, yet the construction of the Thirty-Meter Telescope (TMT) had been set to begin on its peak earlier that year. Pumehana journeyed to the *Puʻuhonua o Puʻuhuluhulu* sanctuary on the Mauna, joining the *kiaʻi mauna* (protectors of the mountain) to defend their ancestral connections to the mountain, while simultaneously defying outsiders’ expectations concerning how indigeneity should be performed – i.e., how it should look, sound, or behave. Dressed in a military jacket, cut-off denim shorts, wearing work boots and, while on stage, performing *na mele paleoleo*, a contemporary form of Hawaiian music that cuts and mixes hip hop with the traditional Hawaiian mele, she revealed the cultural and political terrain that mostly goes unnoticed or, at best, is ignored. Pumehana’s approach to both music and activism shows the complex and evolving nature of Indigenous identity in contemporary contexts, challenging narrow stereotypes and expanding the ways in which Indigenous youth engage with and express their cultural and political values.

⁵ For an in-depth exploration of the enduring cultural significance of taro in relation to the performativity of Kanaka Maoli indigeneity, see McGregor (2007), Kanehe (2014), Aikau (2019), Fujikane (2021) and Hobart (2023).

Put differently, today Native Hawaiian activists, scholars, cultural practitioners, artists, writers, designers, and community organisers draw upon the past to (re)invent alternative frames of reference. This makes it crucial to detect the immanent possibilities within Native Hawaiian indigeneity where the regeneration of connections with sacred places, ancestors and traditions is not merely a means of preserving cultural heritage but also a way of prefiguring alternative, decolonial futures. Kay-Trask (1999, 42) argues that the rejections of Hawaiian cultural assertion, by claiming it is a spurious invention for political ends only, implicitly suggest that Native Hawaiians do not in fact know their culture well enough to assert, let alone develop, it. This raises several important questions for our understanding of the Native Hawaiian idea and practice of care: Where and how are these articulations expressed and understood? How can we approach the complex processes of (re)articulating Native Hawaiian indigeneity, its performativity and care?

To address these questions, a “transversal” approach is necessary. To fully understand how the practice of *mālama* (care) and *kuleana* (responsibility) is integral to nurturing relationships with the land, community and ancestors, it is vital to move beyond Western conceptions of care. In particular, it is important to map out various forms, contexts, and time periods, encompassing not just the main domains of Hawaiian cultural revitalisation and politics, but also performances “on the fringe”, as Teves (2019) describes indigeneity (re)articulated in countercultural or alter/native spaces. We should thus engage with the wide range of concepts and practices that embody *mālama*, which have contributed to the “resurgence of a Hawaiian world” (Silva 2017), including music and seafaring, design and literature, chant and taro cultivation, lei and hula, as well as memory, vision, stories and rituals. Engaging with the cultural dimensions of Hawaiian politics and collective action, together with the politics embedded in Hawaiian culture, the study of Native Hawaiian practices of *mālama* should examine its simultaneous stasis and change, presupposed compliance and persistent disobedience, as well as their traditions and fluidity. We should also explore how the resurgence of Kanaka Maoli political, social and economic models, rooted in practices of generosity, sharing, and reciprocity, can inform political, cultural and economic transformations elsewhere. In other words, we should analyse how Native Hawaiian values and practices of care can help us transform the way we live and work, consume and produce in response to the magnitude and scope of global environmental challenges.

More than 125 years after the imposition of external rule, the practice of *mālama* not only endures but continues to thrive as a vital source of cultural and political resilience. In the context of global climate collapse, practices of *mālama* – and more specifically, *mālama ʻāina* (to care for the land) – offer critical insights that extend far beyond the shores of Hawai'i. Here we should stress that the Western notion of land is insufficient to fully capture its meaning in the Hawaiian context. Literally meaning “that which feeds”, the Hawaiian

term *‘āina* encompasses not simply land but the ocean, waters and sky as well. It resists being reduced to Western, land-centric epistemologies since it is not merely soil or earth, nor simply a place or commodity, but a dynamic process – at once a relationship and a source of life. Emphasising the ontological connection between Native Hawaiians and their environment, Ingersoll (2016) introduces the “seascape epistemology” concept to underscore the ocean’s role in Kanaka epistemology and ontology. This approach “builds upon these concepts and provides a decolonizing methodology for Kānaka by revealing hidden linkages between water and land that speak to Indigenous ways of knowing and being, as well as to historical strategies for political, social, and cultural survival” (Ingersoll 2016, 20).

Today, Native Hawaiian scholars, activists, and community leaders claim that it is their *kuleana* (responsibility or obligation) to share these lessons with the global community, affirming Osorio’s (2021, 25) argument that “Kanaka understandings of self-determination are rooted in interdependence rather than independence”. One of the most powerful examples of this ethos is the Polynesian Voyaging Society (PVS) that launched the *Mālama Honua Worldwide Voyage* in 2013. Over the course of six years (2013–2019), this educational initiative undertook a global voyage with the double-hulled canoes Hōkūle‘a and Hikianalia to promote Indigenous knowledge, foster cultural renewal, and advocate ecological sustainability. Practising the ancient art of wayfinding – “On board, there is no compass, sextant, or cellphone, watch, or GPS for direction. In wayfinding, the sun, moon, and stars are a map that surrounds the navigators. When clouds and storms make it impossible to see that map, wave patterns, currents, and animal behavior give a navigator directional clues to find tiny islands in the vast ocean” (PVS 2013) – the crew travelled more than 60,000 nautical miles, visited over 150 ports, and engaged with more than 100,000 people across eighteen nations. Ten years later, the PVS launched *Moananuiākea: A Voyage for Earth* (2023–2027), Hōkūle‘a’s 15th major voyage in her 50-year history. This journey reaffirms and expands the commitment to *mālama ‘āina*, sharing Indigenous knowledge not only as a mode of cultural survival but as a model for planetary stewardship, too.

At the core of Hōkūle‘a’s creation was exploration – to uncover, recover, and reclaim. Reclaim our culture, traditions, and our relationship to home and our island earth. Moananuiākea is no different, but we are now guided by what the worldwide voyage told us – that we must deepen our values in the voyage and move from exploration and understanding to mālama, or caring, and kuleana, or taking responsibility. With those values, we must move discovery toward choices and actions that we believe will help build a future good enough for our children. This is our most difficult voyage yet because the destination is not ours. It will be the most difficult island yet to find, because it is the future of island earth. (PVS 2023)

Nainoa Thompson, President of the Polynesian Voyaging Society and a *pwo* navigator – in fact, the first Native Hawaiian since the 14th century to practise *wayfinding*, the art and science of ancient non-instrument navigation for long-distance ocean voyaging – offers a transformative perspective on the Kānaka Maoli–external world relationship. Despite the enduring impacts of colonial dispossession, Thompson suggests the outside world should be regarded as students, and Hawai'i as a school. As he often asks, “What if we taught them how we *mālama* Hawai'i, so when they go home, they can *mālama* their own families and places?” (cf. De Fries 2020, 87). While it is precisely the spatial dimension of care that plays a pivotal role in its recent rearticulations, this aspect is frequently underexplored in scholarship on the politics of care.

“SMALL POCKETS OF GOOD”

Julie Anne White (2020) argues that we are living in an era dominated by the ruthless prioritisation of “productive time”. In response, she calls for a fundamental redefinition of democracy – one grounded in a new conception of citizenship and care. This reimagining would require the establishing of a different ‘temporal regime’, shifting emphasis from ‘productive time’ to ‘caring time’. However, as we explore below, this also entails the emergence of new spatial forms of political membership and collective care. In the context of the decline of the welfare state and ongoing austerity, the burdens and possibilities of political engagement and care are unevenly distributed. Today, democratic participation and the capacity to care are shaped by the temporal logics of neoliberalism – available primarily to those with the financial means to afford them. This dynamic produces a ‘time deficit’ that is not just unequally distributed, but also systematically excludes many from both political and caregiving processes. As a result, democracy is ever more restricted to the privileged few while care is commodified, shaped by market forces, and reduced to an individual’s economic capacity.

People who care – *homines curans* – require more time for democratic participation and caregiving. They accordingly need new political, social and economic models grounded in alternative temporal and spatial regimes: *caring time* and *places of care*. This explains why Graeber proposed a new labour theory of value that begins with social production and caring labour. In his view, factory work is a secondary form of labour, whereas activities like education and nursing are central to the broader processes of mutual aid and care that make social life – and ultimately all other forms of work – possible. Such forms of relational labour are foundational, not peripheral. One of the most pressing intellectual and political challenges, Graeber argues, is to “get rid of the terms production and consumption as a basis for political economy” (Graeber 2020, 57). Instead of building new shopping malls and factories, he suggests we should focus on creating “museums of care” – spaces that “do not celebrate production of any sort but rather provide the space and means for the creation of social relationships and the imagining of entirely new forms of social relations” (Graeber 2024, 306).

As discussed in previous work (cf. Vodovnik 2021), democratic and caring politics has long held a complicated relationship with the state because it aligns more closely with the philosophical concept of praxis – understood as a free and creative activity in smaller, more autonomous spaces. Only in our present has politics been integrated into state-making projects and strengthened the belief that there is no distinction between the political and statist realms. One might even argue that political theory frequently interprets politics in overly literal terms, particularly when we consider the etymology of the word ‘real’, which derives from the Latin *regalis*, meaning royal or king’s. This historical connection suggests that, within much of traditional political theory, only what is deemed ‘royal’ – that is, what exists within the ontological framework structured by sovereign power – can be regarded as truly ‘real’. Consequently, alternative forms of political organisation, such as counter-hegemonic and autonomous politics, are often dismissed or marginalised as trivial, unrealistic or peripheral. This narrow conception of politics, privileging the state and sovereign authority as the only legitimate sites of power, reinforces a hierarchical understanding of political agency. It not only excludes non-state forms of political life but also delegitimises efforts to create spaces outside the reach of state sovereignty where alternative forms of care, governance, and social organisation can flourish.

In *The Art of Not Being Governed* – a work that has significantly reshaped the way we theorise state-making projects and non-state spaces – James C. Scott advances a provocative thesis. He contends that the production of what he labels “synoptic legibility” (Scott 2009; Scott 1998) lies at the heart of state-making projects. Central to this process are state efforts to render populations legible, thereby facilitating essential state functions like taxation, conscription, and the monopolisation of coercive power. These efforts have consistently relied on a range of strategies and policies aimed at sedentarising and exerting control over mobile or otherwise unruly populations, whose autonomy poses a persistent challenge to state authority. The places of refuge, or more aptly, exilic spaces, are often overlooked in discussions of politics, capitalist development, and societal change. Still, this neglect is unsurprising given that these places are chiefly understood as sanctuaries for marginalised groups. However, this view is a significant oversight. Exilic spaces must be recognised as integral to the economic structuring and reorganisation of the global capitalist system and the dynamics of political power.⁶

Similarly, in a brief albeit incisive outline of his monumental four-volume work *De l'État* (1976–78), Henri Lefebvre argues the modern state is fundamentally grounded in the “principle of equivalence”, a mechanism that ensures unity, identity, and political integration. In his pondering on the state of the modern world, he counters prevailing Marxist theorisations of the state that perceived

⁶ These spaces are not static; they are constantly in a process of being (re)constructed and (de)composed through a variety of, at first glance, seemingly unrelated tactics and strategies.

the state as a form of “heavenly life” in contrast to the “earthly life” of civil society where man “regards other men as means, degrades himself to a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers” (Marx in Lefebvre 2009, 75). Lefebvre notes:

Foundations of the modern State: The (forced) equivalence of non-equivalents: the (forced) equalization of the unequal, the identification of the non-identical ... The logic of homogenization and identity as the logic and strategy of State power. The State as reducer (of diversities, autonomies, multiplicities, differences) and as integrator of the so-called national whole. (ibid., 108)

This argument calls for further exploration of the paradox inherent in state politics – where the state operates as both forces of reduction and integration. More importantly, it shows the critical need to shift our focus to non-state spaces as essential arenas of political engagement. Grubačić and O’Hearn (2016), for instance, frame non-state spaces as “exilic spaces” characterised by communities attempting to (in)voluntarily escape both state regulation and the imperatives of capitalist accumulation. These exilic spaces can be understood as domains within social and economic life where individuals and groups actively seek to extricate themselves from capitalist processes – by either physically retreating to autonomous territories or striving to create structures that resist capitalist accumulation and social control. Such spaces are critical to the politics of care as they challenge state-sanctioned and capitalist frameworks of social organisation and offer alternative models of communal life and support. To flesh out this point, let us consider one example – although the list is extensive.

For instance, when the global assembly movement erupted onto the political scene in 2011 – sparking nearly 1,400 encampments around the world – the exilic nature of these camps was not immediately recognised. In Ljubljana, the sterile and uninviting plaza in front of the Ljubljana Stock Exchange (*borza*) was transformed into a permanent tent city – an act of reclaiming the commons and enacting new forms of political subjectivity and collective politics. During the 15 October 2011 (“15O”) protests – a global day of anti-austerity action – a symbolic *détournement* occurred: the letter “R” fell off the façade of *BORZA* and was replaced with an improvised “J” to form the phrase *BOJ ZA*, which in Slovenian means “a struggle for”. This transformation was more than linguistic and marked a shift in political logic. Whereas earlier protests were typically defined by opposition – crafting strategies in response to perceived adversaries – this emerging logic reoriented political action around its transformative potential for the participants themselves. Protest was no longer simply a struggle *against* hegemonic structures of power, but increasingly a struggle *for* new ways of living, relating and organising – politically, socially and economically.

Central to this and other encampments was not merely the visual and spatial manifestation of an alternative polity, but additionally the embodied practice of

care – where mutual support, solidarity, and collective well-being became founding principles. In these ‘small pockets of good’, a new form of political membership emerged that, among others, challenged private property, the fragmentation of domestic life, and exclusion of minorities. Reflecting on the “spatialization of global power projects”, Sassen argues that reclaimed spaces offer a unique political advantage, serving as “far more concrete space for politics than that of the nation. It becomes a place where nonformal political actors can be part of the political scene in a way that is much more difficult at the national level” (Sassen 2001, 19). Due to their immediacy and accessibility, these “museums of care”, as Graeber (2024) would call them, provide marginalised groups, outsiders, discriminated minorities, and other *etceteras* of neoliberalism with the opportunity to assert their presence – not only in relation to power but with each other as well. Rooted in mutual aid, such spaces signal the potential for a new type of politics, one centred on care, interdependence, and collective responsibility (*ibid.*).

Put differently, sufficiently autonomous and distanced from capitalist society, these spaces foster an alternative understanding of polity that moves beyond the vague concept of identity, regardless of its inclusivity, and instead stresses relationality and collective action. In the face of the escalating climate collapse and unprecedented global crises, the concept of exilic spaces emerges as a crucial response to the shortcomings of the current political frameworks. It points to decolonial futures that reimagine the organisation of social, political and economic life – futures rooted in care, reciprocity, and collective responsibility, as so urgently needed to confront today’s intertwined environmental and societal crises.

In examining the enduring impact of colonialism, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2010, 97) introduces a crucial analytical distinction between colonialism and coloniality. He argues that the concept of coloniality allows us to grasp how colonial forms of domination persist long after the formal end of colonial administrations. He distinguishes colonialism from coloniality as follows:

Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation ... Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience.

Within the Hawaiian context, Kanaka Maoli scholars and activists emphasise the cultivation of *pu‘uhonua* – places of refuge that offer protection from punitive authority and serve as sites of healing – spaces that transcend mere

physical or spatial dimensions. As Yamashiro and Goodyear-Ka'ōpua (2014, 5) explain, *pu'uhonua* are not just physical sites but vital practices of healing, protection and relationality:

Pu'uhonua. Critical to revaluing ourselves and our stories, to healing the pain within ourselves and communities, are concerted efforts to honor and create sacred and safe spaces. Pu'uhonua, or sanctuaries, are not limited to religious buildings. A person, a community, or a natural landform can be a pu'uhonua ... [T]he authors urge us to find and nurture pu'uhonua in unexpected places – in our food, our prisons, our schools, our cities, and our mountains. By renewing sacred connections between the health of the land and the health of our bodies we can create a safer and more resilient world for our children.

While the term's conceptual breadth is essential to assure a fuller understanding of Kanaka Maoli politics and projects, it should not be interpreted as minimising the importance of physical and spatial dimensions. Viewing Hawai'i via the lens of coloniality permits us to move beyond the superficial imagery of plastic leis, gleaming shopping malls, and resort façades designed for *malihini* (foreigners). This perspective exposes the ongoing dispossession of Hawaiian lands and the displacement of Kānaka Maoli, who are often forced to leave the islands due to the high living costs. The lands that remain are continually threatened by the tourist industry, settler colonialism, and militarisation.

In 2019, following the announcement that construction of the controversial TMT would proceed, *kia'i* assembled at the base of Mauna Kea to protect the mountain. As Kuwada and Revilla (2020, 518) argue, at the heart of the dispute was, in fact, a clash of ontologies. While the media dismissed Native Hawaiian cultural and environmental concerns as superstitious – reinforcing stereotypes of a static, ahistorical culture – protectors were actively asserting and defending their genealogical connections to the mountain in innovative ways (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2017; Arvin 2019). The protectors established *Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu*, where *kapu aloha* – a protocol of disciplined, non-violent resistance, “a commitment to act with aloha” (Case 2020), “a form of commitment to *pono*, or what is right and just” (Hulleman in Cornum 2021) – served as a foundational ethical and political framework. Ahia (2020, 609) argues that the *pu'uhonua* can be understood as “an autonomous zone, a social justice experiment in community empowerment, a *kauhale* [home] village, an *'ohana* [family]”. Abad and Gonzales (2020, 199) stress the exilic character of the *pu'uhonua*, highlighting its escape from both capitalist accumulation and state control:

[P]eople could see for themselves an orderly community functioning well under clear rules and inclusive roles. They saw how the community-resourced pu'uhonua provided free food, free health care, free education, free child care, free kupuna care, and shelter for all who were greeted warmly by its embrace.

The hundreds of thousands of dollars the TMT spent to blanket the airwaves with paid ads could not dampen what the community was creating out in thin air.

As previously discussed (Vodovnik and Grubačić 2015), we can analyse non-state spaces of this kind in a micropolitical sense, focusing on their infrapolitical character. The concept of infrapolitics helps illuminate politics that do not look like politics or, better, the often-overlooked political aspects of the *pu'uhonua*, which “like infrared rays” are “beyond the visible end of the spectrum”. These spaces, communities and practices are often “invisible... in large part by design – a tactical choice born of a prudent awareness of the balance of power” (Scott 1990, 201).⁷ Yet, in its macropolitical sense, the *pu'uhonua* should be understood as a process of creating place-based forms of decolonial politics within the cracks of the global capitalist system. It involves the production of autonomous, partially incorporated spaces, breaking from systemic processes of state and capital. As such, they are a predictable response to the enduring logic of exit and capture, deeply embedded in the unyielding resistance of the Kānaka Maoli against colonial domination. In her reflections on *Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu*, Goodyear-Ka'ōpua (in Cornum, 2021) points out new forms of Kānaka autonomy and governance:

The pu'uhonua is also a statement to the settler state about our authority as Kānaka. The Royal Order of Kamehameha declared that if anyone were being threatened by the settler state they could seek refuge in the pu'uhonua and they would be protected. The pu'uhonua is also significant because it is not just a temporary action; it will continue to exist under Kānaka authority for as long as the people of that place deem it necessary. So, it has the potential to continue for generations. I also think the Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu presents a powerful, living example of a self-organized, noncapitalist community that is based on Indigenous Hawaiian values, is led by Kānaka Maoli, and includes everyone who abides by the Kapu Aloha. It is an emergent alternative to settler-colonial ways of governing, of providing for peoples' needs, and of living in relation to the land. In my opinion, the blockades have only been successful because of the pu'uhonua.

Davis (2023, 1404) succinctly summarises how in the case of the Mauna Kea protest *pu'uhonua* functions as both a specific (infrapolitical) form of organising during the standoff with state authorities and a broader expression of exilic space beyond colonial control:

⁷ We suggest that it is necessary to shift our attention from institutional state politics to the diverse attempts at sustaining land and lifeways, which can be found in the “immense political terrain ... between quiescence and revolt” (Scott 1990, 200).

[D]esignating the site as a pu'uhonua is an expression of sovereignty on the part of the kia'i. It denotes that they, as opposed to the state, have the authority to create this special designation and to therefore dictate the social practices which occur at the site. At the pu'uhonua kia'i enacted cultural protocols several times a day. The protectors and visitors also participated in pule, mele, and hula (prayers, chants, and traditional dances) that centred on cultural practices meant to link participants to the landscape and spiritual power (mana) of the pu'uhonua and the adjacent Maunakea. The protectors also set up a free school at the site – Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu University – dedicated to Hawaiian educational perspectives on political sovereignty, land management, and cultural knowledges.

To conclude, this brief exploration of the *pu'uhonua* underlines the creative tension between past and future in performances of Native Hawaiian indigeneity – mapping practices and places where “defiant indigeneity” is both preserved and (re)invented (Teves 2019). Moreover, it reveals how core values like *aloha*, *laulima* and *mālama* are embodied within broader political, cultural and historical contexts where they continue to thrive and foster the decolonial struggle and the resurgence of a Hawaiian world.

CONCLUSION

What we aimed to articulate in this article was a profound shift in our political vision that is challenging the legacy of colonialism and the self-destructive ideologies which have shaped much of modern history. The crises we face – ranging from environmental degradation to political instability and the erosion of human dignity – demand radically new political, social and economic models. Simply put, they call for new ways of relating to each other, and new places of refuge that – which is becoming ever more obvious – are unable to emerge by merely tinkering with the existing structures. They require a radical redefinition of our core values, prompting a rethinking of the very principles guiding our social, economic and political systems. The challenge is clear: we must reconceptualise the relationships between life and work, production and consumption, as well as the individual and the collective.

We intervened in these discussions by exploring care/*mālama* as foundational principles for the necessary paradigm shift. We examined the resurgence of Kanaka Maoli, or the Native Hawaiian world, considering its relevance and the transformative potential beyond its immediate context. Engaging with the politics of care across diverse modalities and contexts, we followed Goodyear-Ka'ōpua and Kuper's (2024) argument that at a time of global climate crisis dialogue ought to be practised as a form of reciprocal obligation. We stressed the importance of interpreting and connecting distinct yet interrelated concepts and struggles in order to foster deeper understanding of our shared challenges and collective possibilities. In addition, we considered how the concept and practice

of care require the emergence of new political forms that simultaneously exist both beyond and beneath traditional state structures.

We argue that caring politics is not a retreat or surrender but a strategic and compassionate response to a world that is deeply fractured in which existing structures seem inadequate or are even becoming harmful. In the face of environmental collapse, political instability and escalating inequality, caring politics offers a new framework for prefigurative politics. It provides a way to cope, adapt and endure in the short term, while maintaining the possibility of long-term, transformative change. It is a form of politics that seeks to provide immediate relief, protection and care to those who are suffering, even as we continue to address the deeper structural causes of our global crises. In the meantime, caring politics allows us to build places of refuge where care, empathy and solidarity can flourish or be at least preserved. The point we are making here is simple and clear: caring or what Grove (2023) might call palliative politics does not offer bug-out bags for post-apocalyptic times, nor false hope, but provides a way to collectively face uncertainty and cultivate caring politics while we work toward transformative change.

We argue that caring politics is neither a retreat nor a form of surrender, but rather a strategic and compassionate response to a deeply fractured world – one in which existing structures often appear inadequate or are even becoming harmful. In the face of environmental collapse, political instability, and escalating inequality, caring politics offers a new framework for prefigurative politics. It provides a means to cope, adapt, and endure in the short term, while sustaining the possibility of long-term, transformative change. This is a form of politics that seeks to deliver immediate relief, protection, and care to those who are suffering, even as it remains committed to addressing the deeper structural causes of global crises. In the meantime, caring politics enables the creation of spaces of refuge, where care, empathy, and solidarity can flourish, or at the very least be preserved. The point we are making here is simple and clear: caring or what Grove (2023) might call *palliative politics* does not offer bug-out bags for post-apocalyptic times, nor false promises of salvation. Rather, it provides a way to collectively confront uncertainty and cultivate caring relations while working toward transformative change. In this sense, it indeed offers us the *pū'olo* of hope.

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PŪ‘OLO UPANJA: POLITIKA SKRBI OD OBAL HAVAJEV DO ULIC EVROPE

Povzetek. Srečevanje z večplastnimi krizami – od vse večje ekonomske neenakosti in slabšanja zdravja do podnebne zloma in porasta avtoritarnih režimov – razkriva nujnost vnovičnega premisleka o naših družbenih, političnih in ekonomskih modelih. Prevladujoči okviri, na katere se še vedno zanašamo – koncepti, ideali, merila, institucije in prakse –, namreč niso le nezadostni, temveč tudi neprimerni za spopad z izzivi pred nami. Da bi odgovoril nanje, avtor obravnava skrb/mālama kot temeljno načelo nujnega paradigatskega obrata. Proučuje revitalizacijo Kanaka Maoli oziroma havajskega sveta ter utemelji njegovo relevantnost in transformativni potencial onkraj njegovega neposrednega konteksta. Članek poudari tudi nujnost interpretacije in povezovanja različnih, a medsebojno povezanih konceptov in bojev, s čimer pripomore h globljemu razumevanju naših skupnih izzivov in kolektivnih možnosti.

Ključni pojmi: Havaji, Kānaka Maoli, politika, skrb, mālama, ne-državni prostori, pu‘uhonua.

Cirila TOPLAK*

FOREST POLITICS: (POST)FOUCAULDIAN SUBJECTIVITY, THE GENEALOGY OF RESISTANCE, AND ARBORISM**1

Abstract. The article proposes a Foucauldian genealogy of the forest as a political, ethical and ontological subject. By tracing the historical role of forests as active agents in human resistance in Slovenia, the discursive and institutional formations that govern them, along with the ideological system of “arborism” – a culturally embedded hierarchy among tree species analogous to carnism within speciesism – forests are reconceptualised in this article not merely as ecological spaces but as sites and subjects of power, resistance, and cultural-value production. Drawing on posthumanist, ecological and decolonial thought, an expanded view of subjectivity is called for that includes the forest as a co-constitutive agent in human and nonhuman histories.

Keywords: Forest Subjectivity, Governmentality, Biopolitics, Arborism, Environmental Political Science.

INTRODUCTION

In this article, a Foucauldian genealogy of the forest as a political, moral and biopolitical subject is proposed. Moving beyond traditional representations of forests as passive backdrops to human history, I argue that forests have actively shaped histories of resistance, governance, and ecological ideology. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s concepts of governmentality, biopower, and counter-conduct, I examine how forests historically functioned as heterotopic spaces of insurgency and resistance, from Celtic uprisings to medieval *silvatici* and guerrilla warfare in the 20th century. By way of case study, I primarily focus on Slovenian forest histories.

Simultaneously, I analyse the emergence of forest governmentality through scientific forestry, carbon markets, and conservation regimes, demonstrating

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how forests have been rendered legible, manageable and optimised as biopolitical populations. By introducing the novel concept of arborism – an ideological apparatus analogous to carnism – I address the internal hierarchisation of tree species across cultural, economic and aesthetic domains.

Synthesising insights from posthumanist ethics, Indigenous epistemologies, and environmental humanities, I seek to challenge anthropocentric notions of subjectivity. This text is a call to reimagine forests not simply as subjects of management or reverence, but as complex, relational agents participating in multispecies worlds. In this way, I hope to contribute to a decolonial and posthumanist forest epistemology, repositioning forests as vital subjects of political ecology and multispecies justice.

THE FOREST AS A FOUCAULDIAN SUBJECT

The epistemology of an autonomous subject holding emancipatory potential has determined modern history significantly. Ever since the Enlightenment, the self-reflective “subject” has been central to Western understandings of culture and society. Cartesian, Kantian and Hegelian theories of the subject addressed man as a rational and metaphysical being. Postmodernity has generated sociological and cultural theories of the subject, among which Michel Foucault’s remains the most influential.² It inspired Louis Althusser’s theory on the interpellation of the subject into existence and Judith Butler’s delimitation of the subject from others in gender studies, while Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri C. Spivak transposed it to postcolonial/subaltern studies (Wiede 2020, 3–9).

Although Foucault primarily studied human subject formation,³ post-Foucauldian theorists, eco-philosophers and posthumanists have expanded this framework to include nonhuman subjectivities. Among others, Cary Wolfe has explored biopolitics beyond the human, asking how animal and ecological lives are governed as “biosubjects” (Wolfe 2013, 22). Rosi Braidotti considered nonhuman subjectivities, arguing that subjectivity is a field of forces, not an exclusive human domain: “... posthuman ethics urges us to endure the principle of not-One at the in-depth structures of our subjectivity by acknowledging the ties that bind us to the multiple ‘others’ in a vital web of complex interrelations” (Braidotti 2013, 100). Val Plumwood critiqued the exclusive human focus of earlier subject

² According to Foucault, the concept of the self lends to “creating a history of the different ways in which people have become subjects in our culture” (Foucault 1997, 326). Foucault emphasises the duality of the constitution of the subject: subjects are subject to and subordinate to rules (subjectivation), but they also self-identify and emancipate themselves as subjects (subjectivisation): “There are two meanings of the word ‘subject’: to be subject to someone else through control and dependence; and to be bound to one’s own identity through awareness and self-knowledge” (Foucault 1997, 331). Foucault’s theory of subjectivity is not essentialist, but relational. Foucauldian subjectivity is constructed through power relations and discursive practices, historically contingent, and culturally produced. The essential issue here is thus through which mechanisms of power and knowledge (human) beings become recognisable and (self)identified as “subjects”.

³ Foucault, an urban intellectual, never referred to forests in his writings (Winkel 2012, 81).

theories and the human's conceptual hyper-separation from nature, pushing toward a dialogical interspecies ethics (Plumwood 2002, 27, 44).

Recent theories of subjectivity thus do not presuppose innate consciousness of the subject but explore how living entities are made into subjects through discourse, governance, classification, and systems of knowledge/power. If subjectivity is constructed via power and knowledge, it may and should be extended to nonhuman entities, such as animals, rivers, mountains, ecosystems etc. Enter forests.

Forests, especially in the modern era, have been governed through a network of scientific, economic, legal and bureaucratic mechanisms. These make the forest knowable and manageable and hence subject to governmental rationality. Following the emergence of modern scientific forestry (silvology) in Europe, forest trees were measured, counted and classified (e.g., in cubic metres, as biomass). Forests became plantations, carbon sinks, or economic assets. Their ecological complexity was reduced to legible data for the purpose of utilitarian control and progress of anthropocentric science.⁴ By way of enclosure, colonial forestry, and modern forest management, forests have been transformed from commons to a commodity.

At present, forests are chiefly considered economic instruments in terms of ecosystem services, carbon stocks, or development offsets. Carbon credits allow companies to “offset” emissions by protecting forested areas, turning the forest into a governable unit of climate accounting. Forest life is managed not just through rules, but through markets and incentives as well. Further, national parks, conservation zones, and biosphere reserves often involve strict spatial and behavioural regulations. Indigenous people are sometimes excluded from ancestral lands in the name of “wilderness” or “biodiversity protection”. This is an example of power that claims to ‘care for’ populations or nature but exercises authority over them by defining what counts as legitimate use. Forests are thus not just protected – they are subjectivised within rational regimes of care, development and surveillance. By extending biopolitics to forests, people treat the forest itself as a governed life system: It has vital cycles, productivity, health metrics, and epidemiological risks (like wildfires or disease vectors). States and corporations intervene in these processes by controlling pests, regulating biomass, enforcing fire regimes etc. “Forest wars” between environmentalists and corporations are being fought against the ideological background of conservationist romanticism and utilitarianist capitalism.

⁴ In 1831, the botanist Augustine P. de Candolle assumed that “a tree is a plant that is two things at once, an individual and a collective. Trees don't die of old age; rather, they eventually succumb to accidents – so it stands to reason that some have reached extraordinary ages. Scientists should endeavour to find and date such trees. Just as people preserve documents and coins from antiquity, they should preserve ancient trees, for evidence as well as sentiment. By determining the ages of the oldest living things, scientists might be able to fix dates on the “last revolutions of the globe” (Farmer 2022, 75).

Just as Foucault's state manages the human population's fertility, productivity or health (Foucault 2009, 83–110), the biopolitical forest is managed through satellite surveillance (e.g., deforestation maps), climate modelling, and eco-rehabilitation protocols. The forest is thus governed as if it were a population and therefore a community, not only a landscape.

In fact, forests are being governed as if they were alive, legible and rational, yet without being granted subjecthood. This opens space to re-politicise the forest not just as a resource or a risk, but as a sovereign terrain, a biotic subject, and perhaps even a threat, a counter-power to state authority.

THE FOREST AS A MORAL SUBJECT

When a forest is granted legal personhood, it is being constituted as a subject via juridical discourse. At present, several state legal systems recognise forests and forest ecosystems as legal persons. Half a century ago, legal scholar Christopher Stone (1972) was the first to argue that natural entities like trees possess legal rights.⁵ He did so in a controversial article entitled *Should Trees Have [Legal] Status? For the Rights of the Components of Nature*. Three years later, Peter Singer's (1975) *Animal Liberation* was published, representing a breakthrough in the biocentrisation of the rights of nonhumans. Stone's text challenged modern Western anthropocentrism in a novel way, i.e., as a scientific attempt to question the "natural" anthropocentric hierarchisation not only of animals, but of all living things, according to which the human species is the most important, and other species, including trees, are subordinate to it, serve human needs, and hence are only objects without rights. Stone based his reflection on three arguments that remain relevant today: the historical evolution of rights, i.e., the fact that the circle of rights' beneficiaries has been constantly expanding, even though at first each new expansion seemed 'unthinkable' (e.g., the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage etc.); the fact that inanimate entities, such as corporations or universities, already have legal rights, and the assumption that living components of nature also have the ability to unambiguously express their interests (agency). Contemporary enactments of the subjectivation of nature include Ecuador's 2008/2021 Constitution that bestows legal rights on Mother Earth, the attribution of legal personhood to the Whanganui River (Charpleix 2018) and the Taranak Mounga mountain (Corlett 2025) sacred to the Māori in New Zealand or the political experiment in Iceland where, by human proxy, the Snafellsjokull Glacier ran for president (Kassam 2024). In this article, the Te Urewera Forest in New Zealand is the most literal case in point: it had its status as a national park removed to allow it to be bestowed legal personhood with all ensuing rights and responsibilities as a sacred spiritual Māori site (Middleton 2024).

⁵ Not to be confused with »forest rights« such as the eponymous Indian legal act that only regulated human rights to manage and exploit forests (Rosencranz 2008).

In several South American countries, the status of a legal subject has been proposed for the Amazon rainforest. Ecuador made history in 2008 by becoming the first country in the world to recognise nature as a legal subject in its Constitution. Article 71–74 of the Ecuadorian Constitution declares that Pachamama (Mother Earth) “has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles”. It allows any person or community to go to court on behalf of nature, even if no direct human harm has occurred. The legal framework has been invoked multiple times in court cases involving mining, deforestation and pollution, sometimes with success. While not specifically identifying the Amazon rainforest as a person, the legislation applies directly to the Amazonian ecosystems within Ecuador. Bolivia then followed with the Law of the Rights of Mother Earth in 2012. In this law, Mother Earth is recognised as a collective subject of public interest and granted rights such as life, biodiversity, water, clean air, and restoration. The law also regulates the state’s responsibility to defend these rights. Although the latter remain symbolic in many respects, have failed to prevent exploitation and not been fully enforced (Muñoz 2023), the mentioned legal framework reflects Bolivia’s Indigenous cosmologies according to which the forest is alive and sacred. As a living system, the Amazonian forest is implicitly included within this framework, especially in Bolivia’s northern departments where large swathes of the Amazon basin extend. In 2018, Colombia’s Supreme Court recognised the Colombian Amazon as a legal entity with rights to be protected, preserved and restored (Eco Jurisprudence Monitor). The decision followed a lawsuit filed by 25 children and youth who claimed that deforestation violated their constitutional rights to a healthy environment. In its ruling, the Supreme Court cited the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and international environmental norms and ordered the government to create action plans to combat deforestation and mitigate climate change, acknowledging the Amazon’s agency and the need for intergenerational justice. Even though the case has become a global reference point for environmental constitutionalism and the legal personhood of ecosystems, the Colombian government has not enforced it (Dejusticia 2019).

Recognising the Amazon as a legal subject challenges anthropocentric legal frameworks by opening space for eco-centric jurisprudence and embeds Indigenous ontologies within state law, particularly those that consider forests and rivers as kin, ancestors or spirits. This recent legal shift reflects a growing ethical stance that forests may and should possess rights and responsibilities, and thus function as moral subjects in both philosophical and legal senses.

The trees act not as individuals, but somehow as a collective. Exactly how they do this, we don’t yet know. But what we see is the power of unity. What happens to one happens to us all. (Kimmerer 2013, 29)

A collective moral subject is an entity made up of multiple members that can have interests or goals, exhibit a form of autonomous agency, and be capable of participating in moral relationships. While this typically applies to governments, corporations and communities, I argue here along with ever more numerous authors that collective subjectivity can also be applied to nonhuman communities like forests. Even considering moral subjectivity where traditional moral philosophy requires the conscious intent of moral agency, some eco-philosophers claim that the human form of self-awareness might not be the only route to moral standing. In the biocentric viewpoints of deep ecologists such as Arne Næss, all living beings (individuals, species, ecosystems) hold inherent worth, not just an instrumental value. According to Næss (1973, 2), “the equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom. Its restriction to human beings is an anthropocentrism with detrimental effects upon the life quality of men and women themselves”. While Næss mostly focused on living individuals, his logic may be extended to forests as living communities. A forest is a living collective entity and therefore also possesses an intrinsic value and moral relevance.

Almost by rule, Indigenous traditions consider forests and other ecosystems as relational beings, not just resources. Forest trees to them are kin or relations as living, moral participants in a shared world in which we are all connected. In Indigenous ontology, forests act as collective beings, teaching reciprocity, balance and responsibility; they thus cannot be considered commodities. The Indigenous forest-dwelling communities have treated forests as moral subjects throughout their evolution as *naturecultures*. Landing this argument close to home, a recorded tradition from the Rezija Valley is telling: “Once upon a time they said that the forest was speaking. When people were about to cut down a tree, it said: “Not me, cut down another one!” ... Once upon a time, everything was speaking” (Pleterski 2015, 16). For members of the historical counterculture of the Nature Worshipers in the northwest of Slovenia, trees were co-dwellers and brothers; being in the forest, their communal treasure and neighbour, was like being in a sanctuary or “in the womb, while the wind howls outside” (Medvešček 2015, 188, 190). The Nature Worshipers clearly attributed agency to the forest: “Forest is the master of land that always triumphs over man ... [Forest] is the winner of the war it wages on [human-made] clearings” (Medvešček 2015, 62, 83, 49).

Posthumanists like Jane Bennett challenged the idea that only humans are moral agents and emphasised assemblages of matter and life – like a forest – as sites of agency and ethical significance. For Bennet, agency is not something humans possess and nonhumans lack. It is distributed across networks and assemblages: “The locus of agency is always a human-nonhuman collective” (Bennet in Khan 2009, 102). Thus, if one is willing to expand the understanding of subjectivity beyond human-centred ethics, acknowledge nonhuman agency, and embrace relational ontologies, a forest can be conceived of as a collective moral subject, a material collective with its own ethical vitality.

According to actor-network theory by Bruno Latour, agency is distributed across networks, including nonhumans like forests, rivers, and even technologies. Latour challenges the modernist divide between nature and society, exposing “nature” as a modernist historical construct aimed at separating humans from reality and determining who was allowed to speak for whom:

Nature is not a thing, a domain, a realm, an ontological territory, but a fully political way of distributing power. ... ecology seals the end of [conventional concept of] nature. (Latour 2004, 476)

Nonhumans are actants since alongside humans they co-construct the reality of the Latourian “Common World”. This collapses the idea that agency is a human monopoly. Suzanne Simard’s concept of the “Wood Wide Web” may be an overly anthropomorphising term that ignores the fundamental differences between organisms and machines⁶ but does ascribe a sort of decentralised agency to forests: A forest is “a web of interdependence, linked by a system of underground channels, where they perceive and connect and relate [into] a forest society” (Simard 2021, 9). Michelle Westerlaken and co-authors explored forests’ participation in environmental discourses and practices via forest organisms as bioindicators, decision-making algorithms raising questions about forest ownership, and the redistribution of subjectivities by Amerindian cosmologies in forest monitoring within Indigenous territories (Westerlaken et al. 2023).

Besides the controlling and objectifying silvology, scientific research can also reframe the forest as an agentic, communicative network rather than a passive resource. This knowledge production contributes to its subject-status in cultural imagination and translates into policy all the more easily when combined with the recognition of Indigenous ontologies.

Framed this way, a forest is not merely a background for moral action, but an actant in its own right. It does not require a human-like mind to participate in moral relationships. It participates through interconnection, care, balance and reciprocity – the very values supposedly lying in the centre of (human) ethics. A forest thus may be conceived of as both a governable and a moral subject. These forms of subjectivity are far from mutually exclusive – they intersect, co-construct each other, and sometimes conflict.

⁶ Through networks like mycorrhizal fungi, forests share resources, support younger trees, and even warn each other of threats (e.g., insect attacks). Further, forests regulate themselves in terms of nutrient cycles, population balance, succession etc., easily without any human interference. This anthropomorphising concept of ecological autonomy has been challenged by Sheldrake, among others: “Today, the study of shared mycorrhizal networks is one of the fields most commonly beset with political baggage. Some portray these systems as a form of socialism by which the wealth of the forest can be redistributed. Others take inspiration from mammalian family structures and parental care, with young trees nourished by their fungal connections to older and larger “mother trees” (Sheldrake 2020, 157).

A GENEALOGY OF (SLOVENIAN) FORESTS AS COUNTER-POWER

A Foucauldian genealogy is not a linear history; it is an archaeology of power. It seeks to uncover the contingent, messy and buried roots of present formations. It asks how certain truths, norms and subjectivities came to be by exploring the discontinuities, ruptures and power struggles that shaped them. “Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body” (Foucault 1991, 83). Could the body in question also be the body of a forest?

Connecting subjectivity and genealogy, Foucault also paid extensive attention to conduct and counter-conduct, the practices of transforming the way one conducts oneself and the way one is conducted by others, including the ways individuals resist being governed. The forest has historically functioned as a spatial condition of possibility for this sort of resistance. In medieval Europe, forests sheltered peasants, heretics and bandits who resisted feudal control. In Mughal and British India, forests provided hideouts for tribal insurgents and anti-colonial rebels. Enslaved Africans, like the Maroons in Haiti, fled into forests to build autonomous communities in the revolutionary Americas. “In contrast to the estates and towns, the forest was the antonym to the controlled domain of the colony; a marginal space inhabited by those inhabiting the margins of colonial society such as landless or unemployed” (Sioh 2004, 732).

In the Second World War, resistance movements across occupied Europe relied on forests for shelter and to prepare for confrontations with enemy military. In 20th-century guerrilla warfare from the jungles of Vietnam to Latin American *selvas*, forests became zones of asymmetric resistance. In these instances, the forest has been more than a backdrop to human action. It has become a necessary co-conspirator and a space that disrupts the legibility of the state, absorbs fugitives, shelters lawlessness, and refuses discipline. In this sense, forests have historically stood outside the episteme of order as heterotopias of resistance (Foucault 2007, 214–23).

The forest thus resists Foucauldian governmentality and allows for spatial counter-governmentality because it is difficult to map, it hides movement, and disrupts surveillance. For the powers that be, to govern a forest is crucial then to first make it visible through simplification and standardisation (Scott 1998, 15, 18–19). Unruly forests remain zones of opacity and a challenge for modern forms of power that rely on clarity, transparency and categorisation. Modern forest management has been oriented not only to the maximising of profit but also, in Scott’s terms, “legibility” achieved by the orderly plantation-like cultivation of forest monocultures, and to ensuring visibility and easy access.

For Slovenia, where at present almost 60% of the territory is covered by forest, one could claim that throughout history humans living here have shared their living space with the forest. There is no doubt that the history of these lands

would have been different had it been less forested, let alone an open plain.⁷

Owing to its geostrategic position at the juncture of Germanic, Latin and Slavic cultural worlds, Slovenian territory had constantly been colonised and subjected to various foreign powers. Forests played a vital part in its consequent history of resistance. Prior to the arrival of the Slavs in the early Middle Ages, the Celtic populations of these then predominantly forested lands were conquered by the Roman Empire. Forests, however, continued to be the domain of Barbarian “*silvatici*”,⁸ people of the forest, while the Roman legions and traders stuck mainly to river valleys, roads and settlements. From the start, early settlers here had to win the battle with the forest for arable land. The previously mentioned Nature Worshippers’ tradition included multiple testimonies of the hardships of the early settlement of forested hilly areas, particularly in the era of the medieval “highland colonisation”. Nature Worshippers not only respected but worshipped the forest and ritually thanked the ‘forest spirits’ for every clearing. The term for the basic territorial administrative unit of this secretive pre-Christian community, *hosta*, means a forest or thicket in vernacular Slovenian. Moreover, *hosta* has been synonymous with resistance throughout history. *Hostar* (a forest man) was for the Nature Worshippers a peasant rebel or a military deserter in hiding in the forest. Later, members of the partisan resistance in the Second World War were also called *hostarji* (Pl. of *hostar*). Even these days, the phrase “let’s go to the *hosta*” can still mean a call to guerrilla warfare.⁹

Aside from this etymological connection between the forest and resistance, Slovenian literary classics are an ample source of forest genealogies. In the Middle Ages, the forest was the sole refuge for those resisting forced conversion

⁷ I am keeping the focus on the forest genealogy of resistance, leaving out historical silviculture in Slovenian-speaking lands, the political economy of Slovenian forestry, and contemporary heritage discourses in silvology covered by numerous authors (e.g., Perko 2011, 2014 and 2021; Kordiš 1986; Panjek 2023; Kačičnik Gabrič 2023, Mastnak 2004, Anko 2004). To briefly resume them, Slovenia is understood to have a rich tradition of forestry, and Slovenians are presumably “a people of the forest”. People’s attachment to wood and forests is imprinted in numerous surnames and toponyms. Slovenians entertain the idea that forest management in Slovenia is an old tradition and has been exemplary and progressive for centuries (Batič et al. 2007, 32). Perko points out, however, that Slovenians tend to boast about early planned forest management and forget or omit that it was vital, due to the catastrophic destruction of forests before and during the slow introduction of forestry plans (Perko 2011, 135). Even the praised “sustainable” Austrian imperial forestry orders relied on clear-felling, yield maximisation and monoculture afforestation for a long time (ibid. 146). The worst exploitation of forests occurred in the first decade after the Second World War due to the reconstruction of war-devastated Yugoslavia: in that period, logging accounted for twice the natural annual growth increment and forest mass fell to one-half of what it is today (Perko 2011, 168–70). One may sadly conclude that this was how the authorities ‘thanked’ the forests for having made the resistance and thus the creation of the SFRY possible.

⁸ Roman historians like Livy and Pliny wrote extensively on the Romans’ horror with trackless gigantic forests, such as the Ciminian forest bordering on Etruria, or the Hercynian Forest in Central Europe stretching from today’s Schwartzwald in Germany to Bialowieza in eastern Poland (Sallmann 1987, 118–20). Although the goal is to only consider Slovenia as a case study here, it is worth mentioning that members of the anti-Norman resistance after the conquest of the British Isles in the 11th century were also called *Silvatici* or »green men« because they took shelter in forests.

⁹ Again, a comparison can be drawn with the similarly forested Estonia where the resistance movement against the invasion by the Soviet Union and later by the Nazi military was called the Forest Brothers (Laar 1992).

to Christianity by the Franks in the 9th century and for peasants who had nowhere else to flee (Bevk 1930).¹⁰ Peasants involved in failed peasant rebellions between the 16th and 18th centuries also hid in the forest (Pregelj 1927). Between the 17th and 19th centuries, extensive forests in the hilly north of Slovenia sheltered bandits called *rokovnjači*, bands of outlaws and deserters who purportedly stole only from the rich, married among themselves, and protected poor peasants who acted as their informers (Kersnik and Jurčič 1882; Holz 1996, 266). Although the Slovenian bandits were not explicitly referred to, *rokovnjači* greatly resembled the European banditry of the period as described by Eric Hobsbawm in *Bandits* (Hobsbawm 2000).¹¹

In the First World War, Austrian Slovenian deserters fled to the opposite side, but also into the forests, disillusioned by either the attitude of the Serbian military or the alliance with the capitulated Italy. Often, they were “soldiers, who were released on temporary leave, but did not want to return to the frontline” (Nećak and Repe 2005, 136). These included members of the Nature Worshipers’ community, which was emphatically pacifist and valued the life of the individual over the state (Medvešček 2015, 118). Soon, the deserters were joined by many farmers, frustrated by the wartime shortages. Mainly dwelling in forests, these paramilitary groups were tellingly called the “Green Cadres” and could be found across the entire Austro-Hungarian territory. In Slovenian-speaking lands, their presence was most prominent in the Trnovski Forest in the northwest (one of the areas where the Nature Worshipers survived the longest).

In the era between the world wars, the forests enabled contraband to be transported from the newly created Kingdom of Yugoslavia and its neighbours, as well as the movements and activities of the secret revolutionary resistance movement against Fascist Italy, TIGR. The history of the Second World War is particularly rich with evidence and testimonies about the connection between the forest and the Slovenian tradition of resistance. In the far northeastern region of Prekmurje occupied by the Hungarian Fascist regime in 1941, the organised armed resistance only commenced in 1944 in contrast to the almost instant reaction to the Nazi’s and Fascist occupation in other Slovenian regions. A partisan unit was supposed to operate in the area as early as in autumn 1941, but such plans proved to be unrealistic: “Prekmurje does not have mountains or dense forests and is also interwoven with roads. This meant that in the period under consideration, the occupier could reach every part of Prekmurje in a very short time. The Prekmurje partisans were constantly on the move. They only stayed in the same place for a day, two at most,

¹⁰ In this parable of the northwest of Slovenia under the Italian Fascist occupation between the world wars that focused on 14th century rebel paganism, France Bevk writes: »In those times, people felt like one with trees, they were living beings to them. Man watched them and listened to them. He saw and heard more than present man can see or hear for he was still connected with nature ... He knew he was part of nature. The tree was holy to him« (Bevk 1930, 13).

¹¹ Hobsbawm interprets the history of banditry as inseparable from the history of political power and class struggle. Even though he repeatedly locates historical bandit groups in forests and remote hilly areas, he does not pay forests any attention. The book was first published in 1969.

otherwise the occupier would have discovered it” (Dobaja 2024). Dobaja quotes the writer and resistance member Miško Kranjec’s indicative account: “The forests in Lower Prekmurje are not at all suitable for taking refuge in them. They are mainly small, so they were very easy to cross.... On top of that, people always walk through our forests, so it has happened to me many times that someone found me in them, if I had taken refuge there” (Kranjec in Dobaja 2024). In other parts of Slovenia, partisans of the resistance movement stayed in the forests even in winter and conducted their military operations from there. Forests were most prominent in the topography of the resistance (IZDG 1959). They provided early resistance activists and subsequent organised military units with precious shelter, besides water, food and fuel. Partisans built bunkers in forest ground or dwelt in caves and climbed up into the canopies when in need of a safe rest. Courier meeting points, printing presses and field hospitals were located in remote forest areas such as the practically unreachable Franja Hospital near the sub-Alpine Cerkno. According to local oral tradition, the hilly forest of Drnova nearby Cerkno was burned to the ground by the occupiers precisely to expose the partisans. As told by Silvo Močnik in an interview on July 1 2025 the partisans were attacked in the forest after their locations and movements had been revealed in an act of betrayal by the locals as happened to the Pohorski battalion (70 men and women) whose winter quarters in the vast Pohorje spruce forests had been encircled in January 1943 and every last fighter killed. The monument standing today at the protected forest site of the Pohorski battalion’s last battle refers to the whole woody hill range of Pohorje as their memorial.

Had Slovenia been a grassy plain instead of mostly forested land, the resistance would still have taken place like it did in the comparatively barren Malta or the Netherlands, but would needed to have been organised differently. Its scope and temporality were mostly made possible by the fact that Slovenians knew the forests and were willing to leave their homes in large numbers to go live in the forest for the time necessary to win the war, relying on forest-owning farmers for support. Collaborating paramilitary units were “legal”, enjoyed the occupying forces’ protection, and hence could remain in settlements. For the partisans to organise the resistance from the forest, complex logistics networks had to be put in place with the cooperation of local rural populations all the way down to a secret subsystem of underground creches for infants and toddlers whose parents had fled Ljubljana to join the partisan units in the forests (Štrajnar et al. 2004). The Slovenian resistance movement in the Second World War was accordingly largely made possible in conspiracy with the forest.

When the resistance cannot be enacted without the forest, or the presence of forest determines its form and sustainability, the forest must be recognised as a participant in the resistance and not merely as a setting for it. From the genealogical perspective, the forest in Slovenia is co-constitutive of resistance subjectivities because the forest helped produce and preserve the secret heretic, the fugitive rebel, the bandit hero, the desperate deserter, the defiant smuggler, the

partisan fighter, and not just sheltered them. It subverted norms, refused governance, and inscribed itself in the archive of resistance. As a form of nonhuman agency or a site of subjectivation, the forest enabled the counter-conduct of marginal subjects who were formed through their relationship with the forest.

Forests act as mnemonic anchors and arboreal agents of collective memory (Ibrišim 2023). Old forests are not only the living witnesses of centuries of Slovenian history of resistance; they took part in it. The initial war between the earliest settlers and the forest over arable and habitable land, which the forest started to lose following the human invention of the (chain)saw, had partly been subverted into a temporary alliance between people and the forest over the recurring issues of inequalities, landgrab and genocide affecting Slovenian society. Even nowadays, forests continue to provide a crucial locus of resistance to systemic oppression as a temporary haven for illegal migrants along the Slovenian-Croatian border or as symbolic enactment sites for political processes aimed at the remembrance and reconciliation of past collective traumas.

ARBORISM: A FOREST APPARATUS

Before I propose arborism as a Foucauldian apparatus¹² pertaining specifically to forests, I must first make a digression via speciesism. In a sentence, speciesism is the discrimination of living beings based on species. It permeates all aspects of human society and serves as a foundational underpinning of the capitalist economy. It also represents one of the greatest moral challenges of our time, revealing a glaring contradiction between human ethics and human behaviour.¹³

Ever since the 1970s, speciesism has been central to ethical debates concerning our treatment of nonhuman animals. To cite only the most influential

¹² Michel Foucault introduced governmentality to describe the way modern states exercise power not just through law or force, but by shaping the conduct of populations via knowledge, norms and institutions. "Governmentality" is the rationality of governing; it explains how life is managed, optimised, and regulated on a population level. For Foucault, power in modernity increasingly focuses on biopower, its mechanisms called *dispositifs* (apparatuses), and the normalisation of what is "healthy", "productive" or "sustainable" (Wiede 2020, 4–5).

¹³ Humanity's earliest relationship with animals was likely a mixture of reverence and exploitation; many Indigenous cultures still perceive certain animals as sacred beings. The Neolithic agricultural revolution introduced the domestication of numerous animal species, turning meat into a stable food source and animals a property and a resource. This process solidified an anthropocentric worldview. Philosophical justifications for the latter already appeared in Antiquity: Aristotle classified animals as lower beings due to their lack of reason, claiming they existed for human use. Similarly, Judeo-Christian traditions conferred upon humans the "dominion" over animals (Genesis 1:26). While Islam acknowledges animal welfare, it nonetheless maintains human superiority. In contrast, Hinduism and Buddhism reject the hierarchical ordering of species since animals are considered integral to the spiritual cycle (*samsara*). In the early modern era, René Descartes defined animals as "automata", i.e., machines without souls, emotions or reason. This view justified animal experimentation and harsh treatment. Whereas Immanuel Kant assigned moral worth exclusively to humans as rational beings, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was among the first modern Western thinkers to advocate for animal rights based on their capacity to suffer. Another one was Jeremy Bentham who inspired the utilitarian ethics in the last third of the 20th century. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution in the 19th century profoundly challenged human exceptionalism by revealing the deep biological continuity between humans and other animals. Despite this, many continued to defend human moral superiority by appealing to intelligence, culture and technology.

protagonists, the earlier mentioned Peter Singer argued for an equal consideration of sentience across species. If an animal suffers, its suffering should count morally the same as a human's. Although Singer did not equate animals and humans in all respects, he deemed their suffering to be equally significant (Singer 1975). Tom Regan contended that animals possess inherent rights because they are beings with experiences, desires and emotions. Killing or exploiting animals violates their rights, even if such actions benefit humans (Regan 1983). Jacques Derrida deconstructed speciesism in a militant plea for a new ontology of living beings that became a foundational text for animal studies (Derrida 2002). Contemporary animal ethicists such as Eva Meijer argue that animals can communicate with humans and clearly express their interests; humans therefore have no right to make unilateral decisions about them. Animals cannot be merely passive recipients of care since they speak, resist and negotiate (Eva Meijer 2019).

Another important notion for understanding speciesism is that of “arbitrary difference”. Granting moral value based on species membership is no less arbitrary than doing so based on race or gender. For instance, pigs and dogs possess similar cognitive and emotional capacities yet people would eat one and adopt the other. People may love cats while wearing the skin of cows, which also possess emotions and maternal instincts. The dominant speciesist claim that humans have greater moral value due to their higher cognitive abilities collapses when considering that not all humans possess high intelligence (e.g., infants or the severely cognitively disabled), yet we do not see their lives as morally negligible.

Humans unconsciously internalise speciesist hierarchies through carnism, a belief system that justifies eating certain animals while attributing other animals other (utilitarian) roles (Joy 2020). Some animals are thus treated as family members, others as food or clothing, while others are enslaved, neglected, persecuted or exterminated for presumed need or pleasure. Joy theorises this differentiation as institutionalised, systemic, and culturally conditioned violence that is supposedly “normal, natural, and necessary” (Joy 2020, 100–03). Carnist animal hierarchies vary across the globe, reflecting cultural constructs according to which animals are edible, sacred, dispensable or taboo. In some cultures, meat remains a status symbol historically affordable only by the wealthy. In modern, increasingly secular societies, religious dietary taboos play a diminishing role. People eat meat routinely today because it is cheap, widely available, and has (an acquired) good taste.

By analogy with carnism, I propose that the belief system by which human societies construct value hierarchies among tree species and particular trees be referred to as arborism. Over time, different communities developed affective, symbolic or utilitarian preferences for particular tree species, often holding significant ecological consequences for the species not in favour. For example, cedar in the Middle East was revered in Biblical and even pre-Biblical traditions as a symbol of immortality, whereas in South Asia the bodhi tree has been sacralised in Buddhism, treated with reverence, and protected by law as well as societal control. The implications here go beyond religious framing: “By nationalizing the

bodhi tree and its origin story – to the point of adding sacred fig leaves to the flag – the leadership of postcolonial Sri Lanka further marginalized minority Hindu Tamils and Tamil-speaking Muslims” (Farmer 2022, 60). The most straightforward symbols of ‘arbo-nationalism’, to borrow a Farmer’s term, are national flags that include representations of tree species, such as those of Canada, Lebanon or Sri Lanka (Farmer 2022, 134). On the other hand, monoculture spruces or eucalyptus forests were first de-sacralised in the colonial context, then reduced to economic units in industrial forestry, heavily planted before being clear-felled (Farmer 2022, 135–51).

Humans worldwide revere or protect some tree species, while others are felled without hesitation. Returning to the case study of Slovenian forests and paraphrasing Joy: why do Slovenians venerate the linden, play music on maple, and burn beech? Like carnism, arborism is highly culture-specific. Oak and linden were considered sacred in several European pre-Christian cultures. The Celts, Ancient Greeks and Slavs alike performed rituals in sacred oak groves. The Nature Worshippers of northwest Slovenia maintained that “every individual had an oak growing, and they feared cutting down oaks. It could have happened that they would cut down their own oak and consequently die on the spot” (Medvešček 2015, 188).¹⁴ The Slovenian national tree is, however, the linden tree; the linden leaf is a symbol of ‘our land’. The first currency of the independent Slovenia was almost named after the linden, *lipa*. Under the Najevska linden in Carinthia, the Slovenian mythical saviour King Matjaž sleeps, and Slovenian politicians traditionally gather next to it every year.¹⁵ Linden were ‘village’ trees under which premodern local collective authorities, the *dvanajstija*, met to rule; they were ‘judgment’ trees providing shelter for trials under their canopies, and ‘execution trees’ used to hang convicts. In the Middle Ages, linden were ‘Turkish’ trees planted to celebrate victories over the Turks. People planted linden on special occasions or important events as ‘memorial’ trees.

More than half the trees registered as dendrological heritage in Slovenia are linden (Jenčič 2004: 268) for good reason: attributing cultural value to the linden tree led to the planned planting of these trees, protecting and enabling them to grow to dendrological heritage standards. As a direct consequence of arborism, forest trees considered dendrological heritage account for just 13.5% of all protected trees (Jenčič 2004, 270). The heavily logged spruces among them are comparatively only a handful, allowed to grow to an extraordinary age and size mostly by coincidence (because they were growing in long neglected or hard to reach forests).

¹⁴ An identical belief, related to pipal trees, survived in Vedic practice (Farmer 2022, 61).

¹⁵ In fieldwork in the northwest of Slovenia, I came across a testimony on a linden tree in a village nearby Kanal ob Soči. During the Fascist occupation of this region in the mid-War era, the tree was secretly planted by Slovenian patriots as a symbol of anti-Italian resistance. It was destroyed by their ideological opponents yet replanted again twice in an act of rebellion. At the end, people were guarding the tiny linden tree at night to protect it from being cut. Purportedly, it is still growing in the middle of that village, and now over 100 hundred years old.

Just as speciesism arbitrarily values some animals over others, arborism arbitrarily ranks trees based on human needs, symbolic meaning, representations of desirable qualities, or historical association. These valuations become institutionalised via state policies, education systems, national identity, and economic structures. In addition to very old specific holy trees of various species, the Nature Worshipers revered medicinal, exceptionally hardy and fertility-promoting trees. Slovenians today attribute a special value to trees based on their extraordinary physical properties, rarity, age, cultural-historical and/or aesthetic function, with the exceptional height or thickness of trees receiving by far the most attention, fascination and recognition. The highest category of protection under the current Slovenian legislation is tree ‘monuments’, old *and* large trees (Anko 2004, 191–95). As stated, very few of such tree monuments were allowed to survive in the constantly logged forests. Only two native tree species are protected by law: the yew (*Taxus baccata*) and the holly (*Ilex aquifolium*). Both owe their protection to their near-extinct status in the forest following excessive extraction. There is no need to formally protect lindens; arborism protects them since “one never cuts down a linden”.

Arborism organises tree species into hierarchical categories of value, meaning, and treatment, thereby legitimising unequal relations of use, reverence, neglect or eradication. Just like carnism is based on cultural constructs around a carnivore diet, arborism is based on the symbolic, national, religious and economic value of trees species. When carnism masks violence through ideology, arborism makes us blind to ecocide by the internalisation of economic or cultural hierarchies. Arborism is enacted through silviculture, urban planning, forestry and rituals, just like carnism is enacted through food systems, preferred diets and national cuisines.

Arborism functions as an epistemic structure since it decides which tree species are “important”, itself often tied to nationalist, religious or colonial knowledge systems. It also translates into a material practice as it affects reforestation policies, tree planting programmes, urban landscaping, and biodiversity initiatives. Finally, it is an aesthetic regime because it cultivates values and taste regarding what a ‘proper’ tree looks like (majestic, native, ancient) vs. “common” or “invasive”. Like carnism, arborism works best when invisible, i.e., naturalised in forestry practices, overlooked in ecological ethics, and uninterrogated in environmental humanities. Arborism, then, is a bio- and silvo-political apparatus: it governs life not just by what is grown, but by what is allowed to grow. This positions the forest not simply as a subject of resistance or governance, but also as a site where ideological conflicts play out within its very body.

Implications of the arborism concept include the creation of intra-ecological hierarchies, not just human vs. nonhuman, but tree species against tree species. Arborism offers a novel critique of monocultures, invasive species discourse, and (post)colonial forestry, prompting us to rethink arboreal ethics: Should the diversity of tree-species be protected for its own sake? How do we mourn

a spruce forest that was cleared to make space for ‘native’ trees? Who decides which species are allowed to be restored in ‘restoration ecology’?

The current trend in forest governance entails a combination of extremes: intensive exploitation goes hand in hand with the strict isolation of forest from humans in forest reserves. Today, there are 170 such protected areas in Slovenia, including 14 “untouchable” primeval forests. Where deemed so by arborism, we protect the forest from ourselves. There is another way forward, however: the possibility of co-constituted systems, *silvo-human assemblages*, that transcend arboristic hierarchies. Just like carnism, arborism can be overcome when exposed as unnatural, abnormal and unnecessary instead of entrenched opposite. First, humans need to recognise the asymmetry of human partnership with the forest. The forest can survive without people, but people will not survive without the forest.

CONCLUSION

After analysing 39 scientific papers on Foucault and forestry, Winkel summarised the main findings on forest discourses and forest governance from around the world: the Foucauldian theory had largely been applied by Western scholars to forest case studies in the developing world, while forest studies from developing countries paid much more consideration to aspects of forest governmentality as opposed to the Western emphasis on discourse, revealing the effects of governmentality on forest science. Regarding subjectivity, Winkel’s explicit recommendation for forest studies was “to focus more on the role of subjects in terms of both constrained and marginalised groups that have been overlooked ... as well as power exerting, discursive elites” (Winkel 2012, 91). One could paraphrase Michel Serres’ argument on the absence of Gaia at the negotiations of the failed 2009 Copenhagen climate summit (Latour 2004, 478): what and where is the forest in current forest studies?

Forests are subjectivised by power: governed, measured, and surveyed, yet simultaneously recognised as ethical subjects within relational ethics, indigenous cosmologies, and multispecies assemblages. A forest can be simultaneously identified as a Foucauldian subject governed through discourses and technologies of power (science, law, economics), and a moral subject participating in reciprocal relations and possessing intrinsic worth, as well as a hybrid subject shaped by the interplay of biopolitics and ethics, never reducible to either.

This challenges traditional Western ideas that limit subjectivity to individual, conscious, rational humans. Instead, we arrive at a distributed, entangled and relational form of subjectivity, one in which forests qualify as collective subjects.

A Foucauldian genealogy of the forest is a grounded possibility that I hope to have demonstrated with the case of Slovenian forests. It allows us to reimagine forests not as static backdrops, but as active agents of historical processes. It traces how they have been constructed, governed and (how they) resisted. Ultimately, it enables us to recognise the forest as a subject, not just of ecology, but of history.

Within the conceptual framework of Foucauldian genealogy, the forest was constructed as “wilderness”, “a resource”, “a refuge”, and “a threat”. It was governed via forestry, enclosure, mapping and militarisation. It enabled subject-positions of resistance and has itself been subjectivised in relation to state power.

At present, forests are governed by environmental policies (e.g., protected areas, deforestation permits), carbon markets (assigning exchangeable value to trees as carbon sinks), and sustainable development frameworks. These mechanisms treat the forest as a subject of knowledge and power; as something to be measured, optimised, protected or exploited. The forest becomes legible through cartography, satellite imagery, and carbon data. It becomes knowable and therefore governable. The forest is no longer only a space; it is made into a manageable subject of power relations. Moreover, forests are discursive constructs, as “resources” in colonial/industrial discourse, as “biodiversity hotspots” in the scientific discourse of silvology or “living heritage” in arboreal humanities, as “sacred” by Indigenous cosmologies and as “carbon banks” in neoliberal environmental discourse.

The Foucauldian perspective shows how forests are constructed by systems of power: through policy, science and economics, while a moral perspective reveals forests as beings-in-relation, embedded in reciprocal, often sacred, relationships. These views can conflict, e.g., a carbon market may govern a forest, reducing its value to CO₂ metrics while ignoring its spiritual, ecological or cultural significance. However, with legal personhood for forests (e.g., Te Urewera, Ecuador’s Constitution) governance intertwines with morality – the forest is governed, but as a moral entity with rights and responsibilities. Whereas Foucauldian subjectivity focuses on governance, moral subjectivity centres on ethical agency and responsibility. In deep ecology, Indigenous ontologies and posthumanist ethics, forests provide, shelter, and care for other beings. They participate in reciprocal ecological relationships and have a great impact on human cultural and spiritual life. The forest cares for itself, and through its care, it cares for others. In the exploration of “caring politics” as a possible solution to the current poly-crisis (Vrečko Ilc 2025), the necessary “radical redefinition of our core values” (Vodovnik 2025, 359) may and should include not only the attribution of personhood to the forest but humans’ willingness to learn from the forest.

Roughly contemporarily to Foucault’s writings on subjectivity, Slovenian environmentalist France Avčín let the forest speak in a text entitled *Forest to Man*:

You, Slovenian, are my addressee today. Your farmers and intellectuals valued me as nowhere else around the Mediterranean. I cover over half of your homeland; I am still the greatest asset of your meagre land. I hid you and rescued you when foreigners, hungry for your land, flooded in from north and west. And I will be your saviour again, if they return. (Avčín 1980, 492)

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GOZDNE POLITIKE: (POST)FOUCALTOVSKA SUBJEKTIVITETA, GENEALOGIJA ODPORA IN ARBORIZEM

Povzetek. Ta izvirni znanstveni članek konceptualizira foucaultovsko genealogijo gozda kot političnega, etičnega in ontološkega subjekta. Z analizo zgodovinske vloge slovenskih gozdov kot aktivnih dejavnikov v odporu, diskurzivnih in institucionalnih oblik njihovega upravljanja ter ideološkega sistema »arborizma« – kulturno konstruirane hierarhije med drevesnimi vrstami, analogne karnizmu znotraj specizma – avtorica gozdov ne obravnava zgolj kot ekološke prostore, temveč kot kraje in subjekte moči, upora ter produkcije kulturnih vrednot. Članek, ki se opira na posthumanistično in dekolonialno teorijo, zagovarja razširjen pogled na subjektivnost, ki vključuje gozd kot sokonstitutivnega akterja v človeških in nečloveških zgodovinah.

Ključni pojmi: subjektiviteta gozdov, vladnost, biopolitika, arborizem, okoljska politologija.

Marinko BANJAC*

GOVERNING THROUGH ENGAGEMENT: EUROPEAN CLIMATE PACT AMBASSADORS AND THE POST- POLITICAL GREEN TRANSITION**

Abstract. The article critically examines European Climate Pact Ambassadors as a concrete mechanism launched by the European Commission as part of the European Green Deal framework. Through an analytical Foucauldian eco-governmentality approach and discursive analysis of 839 ambassador profiles, the study investigates two key aspects. First, it demonstrates how the ambassadorship does not merely function as a support tool, but as a mechanism of power that exercises governance through a post-political form. Second, the research reveals how the Ambassadors construct environmental and climate problem-solution frameworks that reinforce neoliberal economic rationalities, depoliticise the green transition, and systematically constrain alternative possibilities for ecological action.

Keywords: European Climate Pact, ambassadors, eco-governmentality, discourse, post-politics.

INTRODUCTION

Even though the European Union's green agenda may appear shaken and destabilised by the current geopolitical constellations, which are often used to justify a realignment toward economic competitiveness, the heightened security discourse, and increased militarisation, it nonetheless remains a key strategic framework for the European continent's continued development. A case in point is Ursula von der Leyen's reaffirmation of this commitment in the European Commission's recently published political guidelines for 2024 to 2029, namely: "We must and will continue to pursue the objectives set out in the European Green Deal" (von der Leyen 2024, 8).

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The European Green Deal was presented by the European Commission in December 2019 as a ground-breaking strategic framework aimed at delivering several transformations in the European space, with the central objective of creating a climate-neutral EU economy by 2050 while simultaneously driving economic growth and improving social well-being (European Commission 2019). At the outset, the Green Deal envisaged transformations in numerous areas through a set of policies and measures intended to restructure the economy and various industries to achieve environmental goals. As Samper, Schockling and Islar (2021, 8) critically assess, the Deal must be recognised as an effort to consolidate “the extension of the neoliberal hegemonic formation”, not only because it reinforces the dominance of market logic in addressing environmental and climate issues, but because it represents a continuous attempt to reconcile diverse political, economic and social values with environmental concerns. By building a consensus that this is a “just transition” to a more sustainable and resilient economy (European Commission 2019), a governing field is being formed on the European level “to assuage risks and devise roadmaps for the future” (Molek-Kozakowska 2024, 185).

As a manifestation and materialisation of the idea to democratise and promote collective ownership of the European Green Deal, the European Commission launched the European Climate Pact along with a call to “empower citizens for a greener Europe” (European Commission 2020). Thus, since its inception, the Green Deal has placed strong emphasis on public participation. It has positioned citizens’ participation as both a response to the growing significance and visibility of environmental concerns among the European population and an active strategy to enhance ecological awareness. Perhaps the most prominent and concrete mechanisms in place today are European Climate Pact ambassadors as a select group of individuals with diverse backgrounds coming from, for instance, NGOs, businesses, and local authorities who “inform, inspire and support climate policy and action in their communities and networks” (European Union 2025b).

The Ambassadors as well as the whole European Climate Pact framework exemplify what some scholars refer to as an expanding governance apparatus mobilised in the name of environmental sustainability and climate action (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2007; 2015). This development is symptomatic of a broader dispersal of power, exercised and negotiated through a “huge diversity” of actors, networks and institutional configurations (Marquardt 2017, 167). Governance in this context operates via an assemblage of knowledge forms, discourses, practices, technological in(ter)ventions and subjectivities, where each contributes to the construction of heterogeneous issues like environmental concerns and dominant climate mitigation imperatives (Machen and Nost 2021; Oels 2005).

Eco-governmentality is one of the most insightful critical analytical approaches for interrogating these emerging forms of power (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2007; Rutherford 2007; Valdivia 2015; Fletcher and Cortes-Vazquez 2020). Building on Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality, it holds a dual

meaning. On one hand, it refers to the operations of power – how power is exercised within and through nature-society relations. It examines the way environmental governance is enacted by way of an assemblage of techniques, institutions, and knowledge systems that mediate, shape and manage human interactions with the natural world. In turn, eco-governmentality provides an analytical framework, analytics of power, that interrogates how ‘the environment’ has been constituted as a rationality of rule (Luke 1995). Eco-governmentality critically examines how environmental issues are problematised and governed through (scientific) knowledge dispositions, discursive formations, institutional mechanisms, and technologies of power.

As highlighted just above, eco-governmentality focuses on problematisations of environmental and climate issues, which needs a little more explanation. Governing mechanisms are not neutral and are instead deeply embedded in historically and politically contingent problematisations – the way specific socio-environmental issues are framed as problems requiring intervention (Bacchi 2023). The process entailed not only responds to existing problems; instead, it actively constructs the conditions in which certain issues become governable (Foucault 2011; Deacon 2000). By structuring the field of possible solutions, eco-governmentality delineates what is permissible, desirable and meaningful in environmental governance while simultaneously marginalising alternative perspectives or systemic critiques.

The goal of this paper is to critically examine how the European Climate Pact Ambassadorship functions as a governing mechanism and a discursive framework that enables, co-constitutes and promotes specific forms of climate action, while reinforcing dominant narratives of the green transition and ecological solutions fundamentally tied to the European Green Deal. Two key aspects of the Climate Pact Ambassadorship are addressed via the lens of eco-governmentality.

The first aspect concerns the exercise of power through problematisation. It is contended here that the ambassadorship is not simply a mechanism designed to legitimise the green transition or foster public engagement, but profoundly and fundamentally a mechanism operating as a form of institutionalised post-politics. Following Swyngedouw’s (2010b; 2019; Swyngedouw and Wilson 2014) (drawing, among others, from Mouffe and Rancière) conceptualisation of the post-political condition, we argue that ambassadorship reflects a consensus-oriented, technocratic and expert-driven mode of climate and environmental governance. In this post-political framework, the space for contestation, and alternative imaginaries of green solutions and transition, is systematically narrowed.

The second aspect of the analysis pertains to the question of which specific environmental and climate problems and solutions in the green transition Climate Pact Ambassadors articulate and address. Employing a Foucauldian discursive analysis, an attempt is made to identify and critically reflect on how these issues and solutions are framed and discursively constructed in ways that both reflect and support the reproduction of neoliberal economic rationality within

the green transition framework of the European Green Deal. Another aim is to show that these solutions function within a post-political articulation of green governance: they contribute to a structured consensus on environmental measures, delineating the boundaries of what is permissible while silencing alternative possibilities.

The theoretical-methodological framework is elaborated in the following, integrating eco-governmentality as an analytical lens with discourse analysis to examine European Climate Pact Ambassadors. The first section locates the European Green Deal and Climate Pact within their broader economic-socio-political and institutional contexts. The next section explores how European Climate Pact ambassadorship is arranged as a governmental mechanism, functioning as post-political form of governmentality, shaping participation and other forms of activities through consensus-building, technocratic solutions, and depoliticised engagement. In the final analytical section, discourse analysis is used to examine the key problem-solution nexuses articulated by Climate Pact Ambassadors.

ECO-GOVERNMENTALITY, POST-POLITICS, AND DISCOURSE: A FOUCAULDIAN FRAMEWORK

Foucault introduced the concept of governmentality as part of his broader investigation into the mechanisms by which power operates in modern societies. He most extensively developed it in three of his lecture series: *Society Must Be Defended* (1975–1976) (Foucault 2003), *Security, Territory and Population* (1977–1978) (Foucault 2009), and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978–1979) (Foucault 2008). Applying genealogical methodology, which could be summarised here as a historical/philosophical practice of tracing contingent discursive and institutional regimes, Foucault delineates a shift from sovereign power, rooted in territorial domination and the right to take life or allow to live, toward a diffuse exercise of power oriented to managing populations.

Foucault labels this transformation the “governmentalization” of the state (Foucault 2009, 109; Dean 2010, 122). Rather than relying primarily on coercive or juridical forms and formats, this emergent mode of power is aimed at shaping and directing individual and collective behaviours by working through the desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs of subjects. As Foucault theorises it, governmentality is a modality of power that operates through and for the population, targeting not simply individuals but the overall biological, economic and social processes that constitute them as a governed collectivity (Foucault 2009, 70–71). Dean (2010, 18) encapsulates this idea when stating that government comprises any “more or less calculated and rational activity” undertaken by a multitude of authorities, employing various techniques and knowledges to regulate conduct. The “conduct of conduct” (Foucault 2001, 341) thus denotes the way power permeates institutions, discourses, and everyday practices in a diffuse, networked and capillary manner. Governmentality should therefore

be understood not as a monolithic or top-down apparatus but as an interplay of multiple elements, including traditional juridical frameworks and more dispersed technologies of power, whose effects both stem from and simultaneously target collective and individual levels.

For our purposes, it is vital to stress that Foucault's conceptualisation of governmentality operates in a dual register. Namely, it is both a modality of power and an analytical framework for critically interrogating the rationalities and techniques by which power permeates modern societies. As scholars like Dean (2010) and Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke (2011) show, this dualism allows governmentality studies to transcend the prevailing traditional descriptions of governance structures, instead interrogating, for example, the epistemic and normative presuppositions and regimes which render certain forms of governing thinkable and actionable. By foregrounding the *how* of power, along with its mechanisms, logics and contingencies, governmentality as analytics exposes the interplay of political rationality (the conceptual frameworks justifying the exercise of power) and political technology (the instruments that enact it).

This perspective proves particularly useful and analytically productive when applied to contemporary environmental and climate issues and concerns. Namely, Foucault (2003; 2009) also saw governmentality as being closely interwoven with what he called biopower (Erlenbusch-Anderson 2020). By situating the population as the primary target of government, biopower shifts the focus from individualised bodies to aggregated biological processes: birth rates, disease prevalence, resource consumption. In this sense, governmentality's analytical scope expands beyond human collectivities to encompass the governance of the natural environment, climate systems, and the broader entanglements of society–nature relations.

Broadly speaking, eco-governmentality (Luke 1995; Rutherford 2007; Valdivia 2015; Zevnik Tomazin 2025), as an extension of Foucault's analytics, views the environment as both a site and instrument of governing, directing attention to how certain ecological imperatives are enmeshed within broader matrices of power. This provides a starting insight that environmental concerns are not simply technical or ethical issues but are profoundly shaped by the rationalities and technologies that make them legible as objects of intervention. From a Foucauldian perspective, these expansions and materialisations of power in the human–environment relationship prove especially significant. By tracing how various knowledge systems and techniques converge to govern ecological as well as social domains, such an analytical framework allows for a critical perspective on the heterogeneity of the elements (discourses, institutions, practices, natural processes) encompassed by governmental rationality (Luke 1995; Wang 2015).

This means we may argue that a key analytical focus, particularly in the context of society–nature interactions, is examining how the apparatus of power, including discourses, forms of knowledge, mechanisms, technologies, and reflective practices, emerges and takes shape (Valdivia 2015). Here, Foucault's

(1997) concept of “problematization” offers a critical method for illuminating these processes, understood as the “development of domains of acts, practices, and thoughts” (Foucault 1997, 114), that define specific issues and prescribe practical modes of intervention. In this framework, environmental and climate challenges, for instance, do not manifest as purely objective phenomena and instead are constituted as governable terrains through policy frameworks, expert evaluations, and targeted discursive formations. What one must also bear in mind is that these problematisations are also anchored in what Dean (2010, 38) calls “particular regimes of practices of government”, each characterised by distinct techniques, languages, analytical schemas, evaluative grids, and bodies of expertise. Such regimes effectively transform ecological concerns into domains amenable to governance, shaping both how societies conceptualise environmental predicaments, and the strategies deployed to address them.

Now, the question is, if we adhere to eco-governmentality’s focus on the *how* of the government, in which way is power exercised? The concept of post-politics, as theorised by scholars like Jacques Rancière (1999) and Chantal Mouffe (2005), and critically applied to environmental governance by Erik Swyngedouw (2011a; see also Swyngedouw and Wilson 2014), provides an additional lens here for interrogating the strategies and solutions propounded within contemporary ecological and climate governance. At its core, post-politics denotes a mode of governance that evacuates, expels, and shies away from the political proper, understood as a space of antagonism, dissensus, and transformative possibility, by relegating contentious issues to the realm of techno-managerial consensus (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014). Swyngedouw (2010b) argues that under a neo-liberal hegemony crises like climate change are discursively constructed as existential threats demanding urgent yet depoliticised action, thereby shutting down debates about alternative socio-economic systems. This post-political framework hinges on the “perceived inevitability of capitalism and a market economy as the basic organisational structure of the social and economic order, for which there is no alternative” (Swyngedouw 2010a, 215). In this schema, environmental governance becomes a project of crisis management more than systemic transformation, reinforcing existing power structures under the guise of ecological necessity. Instead of a space where mixed viewpoints are allowed and produced, what we have is a framework in which issues such as climate change and resource depletion are recast as technocratic challenges to be managed by experts, with participatory processes confined to narrowly predetermined outcomes (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014).

These critical insights and approach intersect with Foucault’s (eco-)governmentality as analytics (Blühndorn 2014). Post-political eco-governmentality operates by framing, for example climate change, as a problem so vast and complex that it appears to necessitate apolitical, expert-driven solutions. Political contestation is supplanted through the production of specific knowledges, discourses and the setting up of concrete programmes, mechanisms and more

or less institutionalised agencies, by participatory rituals (like, for instance, stakeholder consultations, citizens' assemblies) that simulate inclusivity while circumscribing outcomes within preordained neoliberal parameters (Taskale 2016). This post-political rationality is among others sustained through what Foucault termed regimes of truth (Foucault 1977): the amalgamation of expert knowledge, institutional practices, and discursive norms that naturalise specific problematisations and establish knowable objects to be managed, controlled, directed, framed and governed.

The analysis proceeds by applying Foucauldian analytic premises to these observations, using them as a basis for critical inquiry into the configuration of power on the EU level. In particular, European Climate Pact Ambassadors are interpreted as a specific mechanism of what may be called post-political eco-governmentality.

As mentioned, not only established agencies, institutions and practices, but also concrete knowledges and discourses are part and parcel of the exercise of power in modern contexts. Therefore, the analysis of discourse (Cheek 2008; Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2017) must be seen as a central methodological manoeuvre in eco-governmentality as an analytical strategy (Pey and Islam 2017). To engage with Foucault's discursive analytics is to recognise that environmental governance operates not just through more or less visible and coherent legal instruments and policies that supposedly capture, address and resolve objectively given issues, but through the production of truth – regimes of knowledge, language, and subjectivity that render certain realities legible and actionable while limiting or even preventing others. Applying such a Foucauldian discursive framework aims at the critical interrogation of the circulation of narratives, terminologies and concepts act to limit which forms of 'green' intervention appear legitimate, urgent or feasible (Jäger and Maier 2015). These discourses do not simply exist alongside practical measures; they actively shape how environmental problems are defined, whose voices are recognised, legitimate and valued which strategies are held up as rational or inevitable.

We contend that as nodal actors on various levels within the green regime, European Climate Pact Ambassadors exemplify how power circulates by way of discursive formations that establish, co-construct and naturalise specific problem-solution frameworks, thereby influencing what is seen as ecologically possible. A central aim of the present analysis is to dissect the statements, terminologies and concepts used by the Ambassadors, especially as regards how potential actions are framed and directed. The Ambassadors themselves have a pivotal role in this process: they publicly articulate (and thereby help constitute) both the environmental issues deemed worthy of attention and the corresponding solutions that appear to be the most reasonable or effective. In this process of discursive articulation, climate-oriented problems are turned into areas of policy intervention, reinforcing certain responses while sidelining alternative understandings or approaches (see Vodovnik 2025).

To extend this inquiry to how post-political governmentality materialises in the European Climate Pact, we assembled a dataset derived from self-presentations of the Pact's Ambassadors. The dataset was systematically collected from the European Commission's official repository of Ambassador profiles (European Union 2024), retrieved on 7 September 2024. This corpus comprises 839 entries, each documenting an Ambassador's self-described responsibilities, activities and thematic focus. The dataset includes metadata such as names, nationalities, and institutional affiliations.

Following the data collection, the methodology entailed a systematic review and close reading of each Ambassador's self-presentation. The goal was not simply to discern the content of their messages but the ways in which problems are defined, solutions proposed, and specific terms of engagement laid out. In line with the approach proposed by Thoma (2017, 26–27) and Hajer (2006), focus was given to heuristic questions concerning four core dimensions of discourse: (1) the constitution of each issue/topic; (2) the explanations provided; (3) the categorisations employed; and (4) the solutions proposed to the articulated problems. By critically interrogating and interpreting these dimensions, we analysed how the Ambassadors' self-presentations set the boundaries of climate and environmental issues, assign responsibility or urgency, and act to support particular solutions.

THE GREEN DEAL AND THE EUROPEAN CLIMATE PACT

To fully grasp the way the European Climate Pact Ambassadors mechanism functions as a specific enactment of eco-governmentality on the European level, it is necessary to address, at least briefly, the broader socio-political and economic regimes that both enable and sustain such mechanisms while simultaneously relying on them for their own constitution. As Dean (2010, 32) argues, Foucauldian analytics of government seeks to “identify the emergence of that regime, examine the multiple sources of the elements that constitute it, and follow the diverse processes and relations by which these elements are assembled into relatively stable forms of organization and institutional practice”.

The European Green Deal (European Commission 2019) is the outcome of a long historical interplay of political, economic and cultural contexts, also emerging in response to various crises (see also Vrečko Ilc 2025) and as part of an search to justify continuation of the paradigm of constant growth and reproduction inherent to the capitalist mode of production. To point out just a few among numerous illustrative episodes: the initial, sporadic scientific, civil society, and political articulations of awareness concerning the broader dimensions of environmental degradation in the 1960s and 1970s (Carson 1962; Pruitt 2023) were followed by the breakthrough and imposition of the sustainable development concept (Brundtland 1985), and establishment of a more robust, globally oriented framework for governing environmental and climate matters (United Nations 1992).

On the European level, the formation of environmental and climate governance began soon after the end of the Second World War, although was initially characterised by sporadic and unsystematic developments (Delreux and Happaerts 2016; see also Toplak 2025). Crucially, these developments should be viewed as integral parts of the establishing of a broader power regime on the European level (Banjac and Pušnik 2025). A significant continuous framework consolidating environmental discourses and practices on the European level since World War II has been the European Environment Action Programmes (Hey 2007). From our perspective, these programmes, first adopted in 1973 and with eight currently in force, are integral source of issues being labelled a problem. They serve as strategic guidelines for defining programmatic foundations, constructing knowledge, and organising the concrete governance mechanisms by which European societies produce, manage, control, steer and ‘resolve’ environmental issues (Banjac and Pušnik 2025).

Further, the more immediate formative conditions which shaped the preparation, adoption and implementation of the European Green Deal and European Climate Pact can be traced and taken into account. One major influence was earlier attempts to establish a green “New Deal” as a strategic policy framework in certain countries, notably the United States and the United Kingdom (Bloomfield and Steward 2020, 772). These initiatives were directly inspired by the historical legacy of the original “New Deal” under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, which aimed to address economic crises through large-scale public investment and social reforms.

Another broader contextual factor is the rise of the “green growth” discourse (OECD 2011; Wanner 2015). Although already present in earlier European environmental policies, the green growth discourse was explicitly defined as the conceptual framework of the European Green Deal. It gained particular momentum in the European Union during the global financial and European debt crises, emerging partly in response to the perceived shortcomings of the Lisbon Treaty (European Council 2000; Benson and Adelle 2012) and the sustainable development agenda associated with it (European Commission 2001). Initially promoted by international organisations like the United Nations, OECD, and World Bank, this discourse was later adopted by the European Union (Jacobs 2013, 197). The OECD (2011) especially played a vital role in consolidating green growth within the dominant capitalist frameworks (Wanner 2015).

Another critical factor enabling the European Green Deal was the continued accumulation of scientific evidence on climate change (Haas, Syrovatka, and Jürgen 2022, 248), which has strengthened the perception that decarbonisation is urgently required and provided a scientific foundation for policy measures on different (also European) levels. At the same time, it is essential to critically acknowledge that civil society collectives, particularly NGOs and movements such as Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion, have consistently emphasised the need for ambitious policy measures on both national and European

levels (Blühdorn and Deflorian 2021, 259). It was also, at least in part, a response to such civil society pressure that the European Green Deal was articulated as an answer to the ever greater calls by the public for a far-reaching strategic framework.

Ursula von der Leyen first announced the European Green Deal as a central component of her presidential candidacy programme (von der Leyen 2019), presenting it in more detail to the European Parliament in July 2019. Since its inception, the Green Deal was articulated as both a strategic framework and an urgent call to action aimed at engaging all societal sectors and stakeholders. The Commission Communication (2019), which outlines the Green Deal's elements and framework, identifies several core objectives, either explicitly stated or implicitly embedded in the text. From our perspective, an important overarching goal of the European Green Deal is to realise a specific vision of transformation, one that stresses technological innovation, economic restructuring, and societal change. In this, we observe the strategic architecture of an approach designed to reshape, and thereby govern, Europe's economic and social systems in alignment with and in the name of ecological imperatives. A second key objective is the pursuit of decoupling "economic growth from resource use" (European Commission 2019). Importantly, this decoupling does not signify a departure from the growth paradigm. Instead, it reflects an attempt to reconcile continued economic expansion with the urgent need to address environmental and climate challenges. In this sense, the European Green Deal seeks to redefine growth, embedding it within the constraints of planetary boundaries while maintaining a commitment to economic progress (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo 2020).

The European Green Deal strategically addresses multiple domains, including energy efficiency, the circular economy, resource-efficient construction and renovation, sustainable and smart mobility, transformation of the food system, biodiversity conservation, and pollution reduction (European Commission 2019). Given the wide range of domains the Deal intends to address, it functions as both a formal legal framework and a specific rationality, deploying micro-political strategies aimed at managing what may be called the "climate change aggregate" (Banjac and Pušnik 2025, 215). This aggregate encompasses physical environmental resources, economic structures such as capital and market mechanisms, technological developments, and diverse social actors and segments of the European population, from consumers to entrepreneurs.

Turning attention now specifically to the European population's envisioned role in contributing to the European Green Deal, the European Climate Pact was conceived as a complementary framework designed to engage diverse segments of the population in the green transition (European Commission 2019). The discourse surrounding the Climate Pact, as articulated in the Communication on the European Green Deal (European Commission 2019), views public and citizen engagement as indispensable and essential for the transition's success: "game-changing policies only work if citizens are fully involved in designing

them”. This framing implies that the ecological crisis’ complexity requires not only top-down policy measures but also the active participation of individuals and communities. As the Communication states, “The Climate Pact will build on the Commission’s on-going series of citizens’ dialogues and citizens’ assemblies across the EU, and the role of social dialogue committees” (European Commission 2019). However, from the perspective of eco-governmentality, it is precisely this emphasis on engagement that has a strategic purpose: to counteract possible resistance by fostering a sense of collective ownership and responsibility for the transition. In this respect, the Climate Pact may be understood as part of what Swyngedouw (2019) describes as the post-political condition in which participation is often reduced to a declarative or symbolic level, lacking substantive political agency or transformative potential.

The formal launch of the European Climate Pact was marked by the Commission’s 2020 Communication published at the end of that year (European Commission 2020). While this document officially established the Pact, it also outlined its operational structure, including new organisational mechanisms like a dedicated secretariat and knowledge centres. These institutional supports are designed to assure the systematic dissemination of knowledge and the management of the initiative, reflecting a highly structured approach to fostering citizen engagement. From our perspective, it is essential to recognise that the promotion of democratic action and involvement of EU citizens and residents is not a spontaneous or organic process. It is instead a process that the Commission seeks to guide and frame in certain ways, aligning participation with predefined policy objectives and governance frameworks.

Dean (2010, 29) reminds us that understanding power through the lens of governmentality does not negate the existence or importance of centres of authority. Instead of that, it highlights how more centralised forms of authority are often aligned, and compatible, with other modalities of power operating by way of diffuse mechanisms that shape behaviours, norms and subjectivities. In this vein, the European Climate Pact can be understood as a mechanism of eco-governmentality, regulating socio-political realities via institutional frameworks that legitimise and enforce particular actions and policies. While the Pact declaratively promotes democratic participation (European Commission 2020), it does so in a context in which the possibilities for free and transformative expression are constrained. The result is the creation of post-democratic spaces where participation is carefully managed. Moreover, the European Climate Pact should not be viewed solely as an institutional framework for the technical or ‘mechanical’ enactment of policy measures; rather, it is explicitly designed, as the document itself states, to cultivate new, greener attitudes across Europe (European Commission 2020). Here the Pact serves as both a strategic commitment and a form of power that operates through normative exemplification: “The Climate Pact will encourage democratic, science-based, hands-on, transparent, locally grounded, inclusive and long-lasting action on climate change [...]” (European

Commission 2020). By establishing what are presented as exemplary standards of environmentally responsible conduct, the Pact encourages individuals and communities to internalise and replicate these ideals, thereby aligning their actions with the values it advances. What we are confronted with is, in fact, an eco-governmental mechanism wherein power is exercised not by explicit command, order or dictate, but by the normalising of specific behaviours and subjectivities.

EUROPEAN CLIMATE PACT AMBASSADORS: THE ARCHITECTURE OF A GOVERNING MECHANISM

While the Commission's (2019) Communication on the European Green Deal explicitly mentions and foresees the creation of a European Climate Pact, as was critically interpreted in the previous section of this paper, ambassadorship is still not mentioned. It first appears and is defined in the European Climate Pact document (European Commission 2020). In that text, ambassadorship is presented as one of the core instruments for promoting the Pact's objectives and stimulating climate-related engagement across European society (European Commission 2020, 4).

We first consider the general role that ambassadors are intended to play. In this context, the Commission describes them as essential actors and catalysts of climate action, selected to represent a wide range of fields, disciplines and geographical settings (European Commission 2020, 5). This emphasis on diversity suggests a broad and inclusive approach to participation, apparently reflecting the multiplicity of voices and perspectives in European societies. Yet, from our viewpoint this rhetoric of inclusivity is precisely the space in which pluralism functions as a managed framework, one that defines and limits the scope of action and expression available to ambassadors. Along with Chantal Mouffe (2005; see also Swyngedouw 2011b), who argues that the prevailing alignment of various voices in liberal regimes often leads to the loss of genuine diversity, we can claim that such a framing of heterogeneity actually produces consensus-oriented arrangements with particular effects. Inclusivity, in this sense, can serve to depoliticise engagement by subsuming difference within a pre-established order. In this case, while the diversity of the ambassadors' profiles may seem to add to their legitimacy and visibility, it does not translate into a plurality of political positions.

Another important aspect of the Climate Pact Ambassadors setup is that their role is not permanent, but limited to a period of 1 year, with the option for individuals to renew their title annually (European Union 2024). This limited time frame, combined with the precise renewal conditions, may appear as a benign form of regulation, but should in fact be viewed critically as a mode of governance grounded in responsabilisation. That is, the requirement for ambassadors to continually renew their status is also a demand to continuously perform and demonstrate their engagement in order to retain their position. This turns their

role into a site of ongoing self-assessment and productivity that reflects what Foucault describes as modern forms of power that “incite, induce, seduce or prohibit certain forms of behaviour” (Foucault 1982, 789). Along these lines, we can see that the limited terms and renewal conditions function as techniques to ensure the “appropriate”, “effective”, and “continuously valuable” contributions of ambassadors.

Yet another core activity of the ambassadors is shown by the guideline that they should “lead by example” (European Union 2025b). At the heart of this mechanism is the idea of setting a standard, with ambassadors presenting themselves as role models that prioritise moral conduct and behavioural inspiration over political contestation or collective mobilisation. As Swyngedouw notes, in the neoliberal polity as a post-political milieu we are witnessing “an engineering of the social in the direction of greater individualised responsibility” (Swyngedouw 2011b, 372). The Ambassador is thus becoming an emblematic figure of this shift: a visible, self-activating agent whose role is to model change within the parameters already set by institutional actors. The “leading by example” principle is central to contemporary governmental strategies, which operate not via direct command or strict instructions but the modelling of desirable behaviour. In this framework, governing authorities and affiliated actors do not simply impose rules and instead assume the role of exemplars, demonstrating appropriate conduct in the hope of inspiring imitation. Accordingly, the function of the Ambassadors is not to enforce or legislate, but to embody and disseminate normative green behaviours within their communities and professional networks. As Lipschutz and Kütting (2009, 56) state, the underlying logic of leading by example is that “a successful strategy will be copied and thus spread”. This form of governance relies on the mimetic power of example, where influence is exercised through visibility and repetition.

To maintain the mechanism’s continuity, Ambassadors are required to meet a set of clearly defined obligations, and the European Commission has explicitly outlined what is “expected of ambassadors” (European Union 2025b). These expectations include maintaining an active presence in the Climate Pact’s online community at least once every 3 months, publicly sharing their personal achievements related to the Pact, and participating in events on various levels (local, regional, European). However, from an eco-governmentality perspective, such formalised obligations establish a distinctly post-political arrangement – one that is grounded in and simultaneously reproduces a technocratic logic of governance centred on performance, visibility and output. This is characteristic of neoliberal governmentality where participation is not simply encouraged, but structured via mechanisms of self-monitoring and the continual demonstration of (self-)value. Such a post-democratic space revolves around “a consensual arrangement in which all those that are named and counted take part and participate within a given and generally accepted and shared/partitioned social and spatial distribution of things and people” (Swyngedouw 2011b, 371).

The final point in our analysis of the institutional arrangement of the European Climate Pact Ambassadors concerns the values promoted by the Pact. Ambassadors are required to fully endorse values like science, responsibility, commitment, transparency, knowledge sharing, ambition, urgency, local action, impact, diversity, and inclusiveness (European Union 2025a). These values are invoked to signal legitimacy and urgency, but they also serve to frame climate governance within a discourse of rational consensus and ethical obligation. Even though these values may appear uncontroversial, they play what we would describe as a considerable role in depoliticising climate action by presenting it as a universally shared, scientifically grounded endeavour. The outcome of this is suppressed agonistic dimensions of democratic life (Mouffe 2005).

DISCOURSES OF AMBASSADORS

The discourse analysis revealed that Ambassadors (European Union 2024) identify a variety of environmental and climate-related issues as particularly pressing, framing them as matters demanding attention and concrete interventions. Several clusters of environmental problems and issues can be discerned. First, climate change and global warming emerge as prominent concerns. Other recurring issues include biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, energy-related problems, various forms of pollution (plastic, air, water), unsustainable consumption and waste, the lack of public awareness and climate education, insufficient policy action and implementation, as well as socioeconomic barriers and environmental injustice. In the analysis, we identified a set of solutions to these clusters of problems as proposed by Ambassadors, which consistently stress awareness-raising and climate education, underscoring the perceived need for an informed and engaged public. Apart from this, other recurring recommendations include community engagement and local action, renewable energy and energy efficiency, the circular economy and sustainable consumption, policy advocacy and governance, justice-oriented and inclusive solutions, nature-based approaches, and technological and innovative interventions.

In this section, the interpretation concentrates on three interrelated clusters (nexuses) of issues and corresponding solutions that emerged from the Ambassadors' statements: (1) the lack of public awareness and climate education; (2) climate change and energy-related problems, including unsustainable consumption practices and ongoing fossil fuel dependence; and (3) social and environmental inequalities. These clusters were selected due to their frequent recurrence and perceived urgency among Ambassadors, as well as their value as a possible critical entry points for examining the underlying rationalities and governmental technologies embedded within the Climate Pact framework. Each cluster articulates a distinct yet interconnected dimension of the environmental and climate crisis – educational, ecological-economic, and socio-political. At the same time, they illustrate how these challenges are translated into actionable problems by way of specific, often individualised and consensus-oriented solutions. Our

contention is that by centring the analysis on these domains, it becomes possible to critically interrogate how climate governance is structured, enacted and maintained.

We therefore start with the lack of public awareness and the absence of sufficient climate education that emerged as a problem cluster (European Union 2024). The issues in this cluster are consistently framed as a major obstacle to effective climate action, with ambassadors highlighting the widespread unawareness of the severity of environmental problems and the limited understanding of possible responses. The problems are often associated with misinformation, public disengagement, and the marginal position of climate-related topics within formal education systems. For example, Susanne Ramharter, an Ambassador from Austria, claimed she is “frustrated by the lack of knowledge (and apathy)” of the people on climate crisis (European Union 2024). In response to the perceived lack of knowledge and awareness, ambassadors advocate a broad repertoire of solutions, ranging from educational campaigns and school-based programmes to community workshops, public events, storytelling, and social media outreach. These initiatives are discursively portrayed as inclusive, inspiring and transformative. Ambassadors frame their initiatives as efforts to “educate and empower”, “raise consciousness”, and “equip citizens with the tools to act” (European Union 2024). In this context, Ambassadors assume the roles of facilitators, communicators and informal educators, tasked with translating complex environmental issues into accessible and relatable narratives.

From an eco-governmentality perspective, this particular framing of awareness and education reflects a broader transformation concerning how climate inaction is problematised and governed. Ambassadors predominantly target what they perceive as individual knowledge deficits, positioning the solution within the domain of information provision and moral appeal (as illustrated, for example, by words like “frustration”). From this position, Ambassadors invite individuals and groups to learn, adapt and align themselves with predefined and typically benignly articulated climate objectives. Awareness-raising operates in this way as a post-political instrument: it produces informed, responsible and self-regulating individuals. This dynamic exhibits how power relations, political economy processes, and their “structural arrangements mediate education” initiatives and hegemonic approaches (Meek and Lloro-Bidart 2017, 213). What is missing from the Ambassadors’ approaches is precisely what should be an essential part of any climate and environmental education: the elucidation and explanation of the interrelations between political institutions, the political environment, and the economic system (Meek and Lloro-Bidart 2017). Instead, the Ambassadors offer an “apolitical ecology” (Robbins 2019): their discourse therefore stabilises a particular mode of climate governance grounded in depoliticised action and forms of participation.

The next broad problem-solution nexus concerns climate change and energy-related issues, which form a central axis of concern in the discourse

articulated by European Climate Pact Ambassadors. Our analysis reveals that climate change is largely framed as an urgent and far-reaching crisis, frequently described as a “global challenge”, a “planetary emergency”, or “the most pressing issue of our time” (European Union 2024). The Ambassadors regularly connect this overarching condition to continued dependence on fossil fuels, the slow pace of renewable energy adoption, and inefficiencies embedded in the current energy infrastructures. These concerns are presented as simultaneous and overlapping in nature: they are framed as both global and local, structural and behavioural. In terms of solutions, the Ambassadors promote a diverse array of responses, including the acceleration of renewable energy transitions. As Mohammad Aljaradin, an Ambassador from Sweden emphasises: “Using renewable and clean energy will have a significant influence on climate protection” (European Union 2024). Giulio Troncarelli, an Ambassador from Italy, is even more concrete: “I want to ensure that energy is a shared and exchangeable good, allowing everyone to play an active and informed role leveraging digital technologies” (European Union 2024). Thus, alongside improvements in energy efficiency across sectors such as housing and transport, there is broad support for green (digital) technologies. These technical proposals are often accompanied by calls for changes in behaviour and conduct, inviting individuals to “reduce their carbon footprint”, adopt a “low-impact lifestyle”, and become “environmentally conscious” citizens (European Union 2024). The solutions are articulated in aspirational language: the transition to sustainable energy is presented as both a technological imperative and a collective ethical responsibility that implicates states, businesses and individuals alike.

Interpreting this energy-related problem–solution nexus through our analytical lens, the argument here is that the way the Ambassadors articulate energy-related issues reflects a broader economic rationality whereby climate and ecological concerns are reconfigured as opportunities for innovation, investment and growth. The transition away from fossil fuels is not framed as a challenge to, or an alternative for, existing socio-economic arrangements. On the contrary, as Corvellec et al. (2022) show, solutions within the green transition discourse are framed as technical and inherently positive, centred, for example, on resource-use optimisation. Discourses grounded on this optimistic and economic premise construct solutions as a pathway toward green modernisation where renewable energy, energy efficiency, and technological advancement are seen as engines of sustainable economic development. Within this framing, the climate crisis is depoliticised by aligning it with market-based solutions that promise to reconcile environmental protection with continued economic growth. The construction of energy-related problems is hence closely tied to the types of solutions deemed legitimate – those that foster new green markets, stimulate entrepreneurial activity, and maintain competitiveness. What emerges is a post-political configuration in which the transformation of energy infrastructures is governed through technocratic reasoning and expert consensus.

The final problem–solution nexus in the European Climate Pact Ambassadors’ discourse relates to (in)equalities and (in)justices. Although less frequently emphasised than other issues, inequality and environmental justice nevertheless emerge as critical dimensions of the climate crisis. Ambassadors highlight the unequal distribution of environmental harms and benefits, noting that vulnerable and marginalised communities often bear the burden of pollution, climate-related disasters, and limited access to green resources, or are excluded from participation in green transitions (European Union 2024). This problem is presented as both ethical and practical, with Ambassadors stressing that, without inclusivity, the ecological transition would be neither just nor effective. The Ambassador from Sweden, Maria Soxbo, underlines this aspect: “I dedicate my time to raising awareness about the flaws and injustices of our current way of life [...]” (European Union 2024).

As solutions, Ambassadors propose a range of actions aimed at empowerment and inclusion. Through the analysis, we observed that Ambassadors aim to make underrepresented voices heard, ensure access to environmental knowledge and opportunities, promote community-led initiatives, and support policies that recognise the social dimension of climate action. These interventions are described as promoting a “just transition”, “equity”, and “inclusive sustainability”, and framed as efforts to “leave the world as a better place” and build “resilience” for all (European Union 2024). While these discourses hint at systemic concerns, the proposed solutions often stress participatory approaches and local empowerment. The work plan of Zuzanna Borowska, an Ambassador from Poland, is telling here: “In my fight against the most urgent challenge, the climate crisis, I try to put the people and their needs first. As an EU Climate Pact Ambassador, I wish to focus on just transition, climate education, awareness raising, and public participation” (European Union 2024).

From our perspective, the integration of justice discourse, which at first glance appears critical of current socio-political and economic arrangements, into climate action reveals how environmental governance incorporates the language of inclusion and equity without fundamentally challenging hegemonic neoliberal or technocratic frameworks. Sokhi-Bulley (2011; see also Brown 2016) shows how justice (and rights) in contemporary liberal democratic regimes often function as normative notions without concrete substance, deployed in various ways as governmental technologies. We argue that Ambassadors’ framing of justice and injustice is deeply embedded in these practices. In post-political conditions, environmental justice becomes a managed concern, acknowledged but ultimately subsumed within the dominant consensus-driven logic of the green transition, green behaviour, and ‘appropriate’ comportment. Following Brown (2016), one may argue that the green transition functions as a signifier emptied of its political character and, by so doing, neutralises productive conflict (agonism) by creating the illusion of harmony between economic growth, environmental protection, and social justice. Rather than politicising injustice through

confrontation or systemic critique, Ambassadors frame justice in intangible and technicist terms of access, awareness and participation, thereby reinforcing a mode of governance that individualises responsibility and promotes procedural inclusion over structural transformation. In this context, eco-governmentality operates by producing “empowered” subjects who are called upon to act within predefined, depoliticised spaces. Justice, in this sense, is rendered governable, stripped of its disruptive potential (Jamal and Hales 2016) and rearticulated within a moral discourse that maintains the appearance of inclusivity while simultaneously supporting the hegemonic European green regime.

CONCLUSION

As this article has sought to demonstrate, the mechanism of the European Climate Pact Ambassadors and the Pact itself must be understood not simply as an inherently positive initiative designed to provide space for and foster the engagement of various actors in realisation of the Green Deal. In our view, the Pact is an effect of a broader and historically sedimented regime of contemporary modalities of power and, more specifically, of European environmental governance. Emerging as a formally supportive participatory framework of the European Green Deal, the Pact operates within a structure that aligns ecological imperatives with market rationality, technological innovation, and economic growth. An additional rationale guiding the Climate Pact is visible in the emphasis on progress and (technical) innovation (European Commission 2020). The Commission prioritises research and development as essential components of change and key drivers of the green transition, while the Pact is grounded in techno-optimism, the belief that technological solutions can address climate challenges (Keary 2016). This perspective both stems from and bolsters the dominant green growth discourse in which environmental concerns are reframed as opportunities for modernisation and economic development. As Pellizzoni and Ylönen (2016) observe, the fusion of technoscience with neoliberal principles frequently reduces the environment to a mere resource for innovation and growth. This is an important insight for our discussion since by foregrounding the role of research and technological advancement the European Commission positions the Climate Pact as a driver of economic progress. As such, the Climate Pact should not be understood solely as a venue for political participation; it plays multiple roles. It also reinforces a paradigm that privileges market-based and technocratic solutions within a broader neoliberal framework. This lends support to the view that the European Climate Pact is an example of the dual nature of contemporary environmental governance. It seeks to construct and shape new green attitudes while simultaneously promoting a narrative of progress that give priority to technological and economic solutions. As such, the Pact is both an effort to engage citizens in the green transition and a manifestation of the post-political condition.

Within this strategic formal instalment of the European Climate Pact, as we have argued, the institutional architecture of the Climate Pact ambassadorship embodies a form of eco-governmentality that operates by way of carefully managed pluralism, individual efforts, and the performative demonstration of green commitment. Far from being a neutral or merely supportive mechanism, the ambassadorship acts as a strategic device that situates and embeds climate action within a depoliticised framework of conduct of conduct, normative values, and technocratic metrics of participation. By way of conclusion, we argue that what emerges is a space structured by consensus. It is a framework that privileges 'exemplary' individuals who align themselves with pre-established objectives. In this sense, the ambassadorship is not simply a mobilising tool; it operates as a form of governing, influencing not only what can be said or done in the name of responding to climate change, but also how climate politics itself is to be imagined, enacted and legitimised.

Finally, our interpretation, based on the analysis of Ambassadors' discourses, is that their narratives construct climate and environmental problems via a set of interrelated framings that give priority to awareness, behavioural change, green technological innovation, and inclusive participation. Across the three selected problem-solution nexuses (public awareness and education, energy-related challenges, and socio-environmental inequalities) a clear discursive pattern emerges in which climate governance is articulated through depoliticised and consensus-oriented logics. Solutions are predominantly positioned as non-conflictual, technical and "empowering", while the political, economic and structural dimensions of the crisis are largely silenced or left unaddressed. What these discursive formations reveal is that they are themselves part of the perpetuation and stabilisation of a post-political eco-governmentality, a mode of governance that redefines environmental action as a matter of informed choice, entrepreneurial initiative, and procedural inclusion. Through the engagement of the Ambassadors as a governmental mechanism, the European Climate Pact not only promotes environmental objectives but also orchestrates the production of governable subjects and compatible solutions that sustain, rather than disrupt, the prevailing socio-economic order.

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UPRAVLJANJE PREK ANGAŽIRANJA: AMBASADORJI EVROPSKEGA PODNEBNEGA PAKTA IN POSTPOLITIČNI ZELENİ PREHOD

Povzetek. Članek kritično obravnava ambasadorje Evropskega podnebnega pakta kot konkretnega mehanizma oblasti, ki ga je Evropska komisija uvedla v okviru Evropskega zelenega dogovora. Z analitičnim foucaultovskim pristopom ekovladnosti in diskurzivno analizo 839 profilov ambasadorjev preučuje in interpretira dva ključna vidika. Prvič, pokaže, kako ambasadorstvo ne deluje zgolj kot podporno orodje, temveč kot oblastni mehanizem, ki omogoča upravljanje glede okoljskih in podnebnih vprašanj v postpolitični formi. Drugič, razkriva, kako ambasadorji konstruirajo okvire mišljenja o okoljskih in podnebnih problemih in njihovih rešitvah, ki krepijo neoliberalno ekonomsko racionalnost, depolitizirajo zeleni prehod in sistematično omejujejo alternativne možnosti ekološkega delovanja.

Ključni pojmi: Evropski podnebni pakt, ambasadorji, ekovladnost, diskurz, postpolitika.

Luka ZEVIK TOMAZIN*

GOVERNING THE RESPONSIBLE SELF: EU CLIMATE POLICY AND THE PRODUCTION OF GREEN SUBJECTIVITIES**

Abstract. *The article presents critical analysis of the regime of eco-governmentality behind the EU's green transition project, focusing on how it is exercised via the forming of green subjectivities and their individual environmental responsibility. We trace the four dimensions of ethics outlined by Foucault (ethical substance, mode of subjection, practices of the self, telos). Contemporary green citizenship is shown to be characterised by continuous everyday green behaviour and self-monitoring that may be traced back to Christian renunciation practices. This mode of governance, grounded in pastoral power, is argued to serve a dual function: in the name of green modernisation, it consolidates a neoliberal regime of eco-governmentality by promoting a form of subjectivation whereby individuals govern themselves according to the capitalist imperatives. At the same time, this mode of subjectivation complements the EU's technocratic depoliticisation of the climate crisis. By partitioning responsibility within the domain of individual self-deciphered conduct, it systematically redirects focus away from the structural dimensions of ecological crises, preventing them from being articulated as matters of power, inequality, or systemic transformation.*

Keywords: *Climate policy, eco-governmentality, technologies of the self, pastoral power, European Green Deal, individualised responsibility.*

INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) views its green transition as a historic project that answers to the “want” expressed by “Europe’s voters – and those too young to vote” to address the pressing threat of climate change (European Commission 2024). Through ambitious policy initiatives and public communications, the EU

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frames the green transition as a shared “endeavour” in which “everyone can help build a greener Europe” (European Commission 2020). Here it is important to note that when referring to the climate crisis this discourse is not putting ecological or socio-economical aspects on centre stage and is instead “putting people at the core of the transition” (EU 2024). This framing subtly shifts the burden of responsibility for systemic ecological problems onto individuals: “Reducing emissions and adapting to a changed climate will require us all to change our habits” (European Commission 2020). The idea it promotes is that the climate crisis can largely be mitigated through responsible behaviour on the level of everyday life such as by recycling, choosing sustainable modes of transport, reducing personal energy consumption, and making environmentally conscious consumer decisions. In turn, this discourse also implicitly suggests that individuals and their behaviour are the biggest reason for the climate crisis. Such framing risks depoliticising environmental struggles by presenting the green transition as an inherently practical and positive project, devoid of conflict or structural critique. As Maniates (2001) pointed out in his influential article, focusing on individualisation in environmental politics serves to obscure broader systemic causes and responsibilities. Personal lifestyle adjustments are encouraged at the same time as political, economic and industrial dimensions of the crisis are sidelined: “When responsibility for environmental problems is individualized, there is little room to ponder institutions, the nature and exercise of political power, or ways of collectively changing the distribution of power and influence in society” (Maniates 2001, 33).

Building upon Maniates (2001) assisted by Foucault (2000), this article presents critical analysis of the nature and exercise of political power behind the EU’s green transition project, focusing on how it is exercised through the formation of the individual. The main research question is genealogical in nature: how is the contemporary green subjectivity constituted along Foucault’s four aspects of ethics and what role does the hermeneutics of the self and confessional practices play in the (micro and macro) configuration of the EU’s eco-governmentality. The article thereby offers a unique and novel perspective, complementing existing critical work on green policy based principally on the theory of governmentality by uncovering deeper power mechanisms functioning on the axis of the subject.

GOVERNMENTALITY AND ITS ECOLOGICAL TURN

Using the Foucauldian concept of eco-governmentality, we first present broader critical analysis of the EU’s green transition before engaging in detailed analysis of how it constitutes green citizens. The eco-governmentality concept offers a critical theoretical lens for understanding the ways in which power increasingly operates via environmental discourses and ecological rationalities (Darier 1999; Agrawal 2005; Malette 2009; Banjac and Pušnik 2025; Banjac 2025). Emerging from Michel Foucault’s (2009) work on “governmentality”, this

conceptual framework allows for a historical analysis of how governance extends beyond populations and their social organisation to encompass the management of entire environments. As Malette (2009) argues, environmental governance does not represent a rupture or a fundamentally new mode of power. Instead, it constitutes an extension and “intensification” of the existing logic of governmentality as adapted to the ecological challenges and imaginaries of the modern era. Eco-governmentality should thus be understood as a continuation of biopolitics whereby the management of life extends from bodies and populations to the biophysical systems that sustain them¹. The forms of knowledge and techniques deployed in statistical models, risk assessments, and behavioural norms remain rooted in the apparatuses of modern liberal governance, although their objects of intervention have been broadened. Climate systems, biodiversity, and soil health itself have become sites of regulation and optimisation. In this way, power increasingly operates through the environment, constituting new forms of subjectivity and social organisation around ecological imperatives.

When describing this extension, Malette (2009) insists that contemporary eco-politics cannot be untangled from the global capitalist and postcolonial structures within which it has emerged and solidified. Environmental governance arises not as an emancipatory project, but as part of the ongoing reconfiguring of governmental rationalities that have historically managed populations, territories and resources. Early forms of environmental concern emerging in the 17th and 18th century, notably in colonial contexts, were embedded in the management of resource extraction, agricultural productivity, and the mitigation of ecological degradation that directly threatened imperial economic interests. In this sense, Malette (2009, 227) argues “the emergence of Western environmental preoccupations was intimately tied with economical expansion from the start”. What today appears as the urgency of the planet’s survival has deep genealogical roots in the techniques and rationalities of population control, territorial security, and market stabilisation. The environment is becoming a medium through which power circulates, disciplines and organises life on multiple levels.

Malette’s (2009) analysis also shows that eco-governmentality operates in both macro and micro dimensions, which are interconnected and thus reinforce each other. On the macro level, ecological governance seeks to reorganise political and economic systems according to environmental logics. Climate risk management, sustainability metrics, and planetary boundary frameworks operate on the level of global governance, rearticulating the issues of security, economic growth, and geopolitical competition in ecological terms. Ecological crises are becoming a problem of global coordination, infrastructural investment, and risk calculation, producing new forms of management rationality aimed at securing resilience and optimising the stability of systems.

¹ For an interesting and novel Foucauldian analysis of the extension of biopolitics to forests, see Toplak (2025).

On the micro level, eco-governmentality works at the same time to reshape individual subjectivities through appeals to responsibility, ethics, and self-governance. Individuals are here interpellated as green subjects or citizens encouraged to adopt sustainable behaviours, internalise ecological imperatives, and monitor their own consumption, waste production, and energy use. A crucial mechanism by which this micro-level governance operates is the production of norms, modes of behaviour, and truth-claims anchored in scientific rationalities. By taking the “political significance of statistics” into account, Malette (2009, 228) claims

we can explore the ways in which the progressive mathematization of ‘nature’ has enabled various ecological rationalities and technologies to produce a wide range of ‘norms’ which refer to ‘nature’ not only to supplement the power of the ‘sovereignty-law’ apparatus, but also to shape a series of ‘truth-claims’ about ecological modes of conduct by which rational individuals are expected to govern themselves and others.

Understanding eco-governmentality along these lines provides a critical framework for analysing contemporary environmental discourses and policies². It draws attention to how environmental rationalities function as both technologies of system management securing economic growth and geopolitical stability via ecological governance as well as what Foucault (Foucault 2009, 108) calls the “conduct of conduct” producing self-governing responsabilised green subjects. It also recognises the need for genealogical sensitivity regrading the historical continuities that link today’s environmental imperatives to earlier regimes of colonial extraction, biopolitical control, and capitalist expansion³.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EU’S GREEN TRANSITION PROJECT

Having established a theoretical framework rooted in eco-governmentality, in this section the mentioned approach is applied to critical analysis of the European Green Deal (European Commission 2019) and accompanying documents like the Climate Pact (European Commission 2020). In order to provide the theoretical and contextual background for the core analysis undertaken in the next section, the aim here is to briefly overview the way the Green Deal functions not simply as

² In this section, we draw from Malette (2009) to provide what could be called a prevalent account of eco-governmentality that is largely shared by key authors in this field such as (Darier 1999; Agrawal 2005; Malette 2009; Banjac and Pušnik 2025). Since eco-governmentality is not the primary topic of this article, we shall not engage in a more thorough theoretical dialog within this field. If the reader is interested in an alternative use of Foucault in relation to green governance, Hristov (2024) provides an interesting perspective.

³ Another important sensibility is that the regime of eco-governmentality, the practices of self-formation and expressions of behaviour are dependent on the field of strategic possibilities determined by class, gender and race. While this aspect is extremely important, it is beyond the scope of this article.

a policy package for ecological transition, but as a complex governmental project that stabilises economic growth, neutralises political contestation, and disperses responsibility onto individual subjects⁴. The analysis identifies two fundamental problematics: eco-governmentality and ecological modernisation, and shows how technocratic⁵ framing and individual responsabilisation act as mechanisms to cover, justify and reinforce these deeper structures.

The Green Deal represents a paradigmatic form of governing through the environment. Ecological systems, carbon cycles, biodiversity levels and energy flows are rendered visible, calculable and actionable as objects of governmental management. Environmental governance is not an external supplement to economic governance; it is integral to securing the future viability of political and economic systems. The discourse of “in(stability)”, “resilience” and “climate neutrality” marks a shift toward treating ecological life itself as a condition of the possibility for the reproduction of market societies. The Green Deal’s formal aim of achieving climate neutrality by 2050, for instance, is not merely an environmental ambition but a strategic governance technique for ensuring long-term economic competitiveness, “access to resources” and “strategic security”. Environmental phenomena are hence integrated into a logic of optimisation and risk management where future ecological conditions must be stabilised to guarantee economic and political continuity: “All EU actions and policies will have to contribute to the European Green Deal objectives. The challenges are complex and interlinked. The policy response must be bold and comprehensive and seek to maximise benefits for health, quality of life, resilience and competitiveness” (European Commission 2019, 3).

Parallel to the logic of environmental management, the Green Deal embodies a deep commitment to ecological modernisation. Rather than challenging the structural imperatives of economic growth, competitiveness, and accumulation, the Green Deal seeks to rearticulate them within a “green” framework. The transition to a carbon-neutral economy is framed as a “modernization” process that will create markets: “Together with the industrial strategy, a new circular economy action plan will help modernise the EU’s economy and draw benefit from the opportunities of the circular economy domestically and globally” (European Commission 2019, 7).

The Green Deal is also presented as a technocratic project grounded in scientific consensus. Ecological transition is framed as inevitable, necessary and therefore universally desired. The articulation of policies is portrayed as a rational response to empirical evidence rather than as a field of competing visions, interests, or power relations. Climate neutrality, biodiversity protection,

⁴ For a more thorough Foucauldian account of this topic, see the recent book by Banjac and Pušnik (2025).

⁵ An even more dangerous form of technocratic framing increasingly employed by American techno-oligarchs is analysed by Vrečko Ilc (2025), who shows how they are significant drivers of the contemporary poly-crisis.

and energy transformation⁶ are framed as technical challenges requiring expert solutions. Policy interventions are legitimised through scientific models, risk assessments, and cost–benefit analyses, which also place environmental governance beyond political debate.

Last but not least, the Green Deal discursively constructs itself as a response to popular “demand”. This double framing – scientific necessity combined with a democratic mandate – closes the space for alternative systemic critiques. If the transition is both technically necessary and democratically demanded, then any contestation appears irrational or irresponsible. Thus, the Green Deal depoliticises environmental struggles, while presenting a highly structured and selective reorganisation of capitalism as the natural and inevitable path forward.

In this section, we have seen that the EU’s Green Deal exemplifies the contemporary dynamics of eco-governmentality: it governs via environmental systems, sustains neoliberal economic logics under the umbrella of ecological modernisation, and depoliticises ecological governance by framing it as both a technical necessity and a popular demand. Yet to fully grasp the way eco-governmentality operates, it is not sufficient to analyse systemic strategies alone. Power, as Foucault argues, also acts on the level of subjectivity, producing specific ways of being, knowing, and governing oneself. In this context, the figure of the responsible green citizen emerges not naturally but through targeted technologies of subjectivation. The following (core) section hence turns to a closer analysis of how responsible green citizens are constituted along the Foucauldian axis of the subject, a process that is crucial for understanding how ecological governance is internalised, normalised and conducted in everyday life.

GREEN SUBJECTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE SELF

While other Foucauldian-inspired attempts at analysing green subjectivity (see for example (Agrawal 2005; Malette 2009; Banjac and Pušnik 2025)) have thus far remained largely within the governmentality framework, the principle aim of this article is to develop a theoretical approach for understanding how green citizens are formed based on Foucault’s theory of ethics and the hermeneutics of the self. Such a perspective however should not be viewed as being *against* the theories of green subject formation within the governmentality frame, and instead as an attempt to *complement* them. To that end, we conduct a critical genealogy in an effort to show that – through their relationship to the self – the green subject of today is not simply (self)-governed but also (self)-deciphered.

For Foucault (2000, 200), a complex historical experience is “constituted from and around certain forms of behavior: an experience that conjoins the field of knowledge”, “a collection of rules (which differentiate the permissible from the

⁶ For a convincing Foucauldian take on the European renewable energy transition, see Anfinson (2023).

forbidden, natural from monstrous, normal from pathological, what is decent and what is not, and so on)”, as well as “a mode of relation between the individual and himself”. In the case of the green subject, the field of knowledge refers to the growing body of environmental expertise, climate science, sustainability models and goals that renders the ecological crisis intelligible and actionable. The rules are constituted by the normative frameworks that define what it means to be a good green citizen: recycling, reducing energy consumption, eating less meat, minimising waste etc. However, unlike coercive disciplinary mechanisms, these rules are rarely codified or legally binding. They function primarily through recommendation, moral appeal, and civic expectation. The dominant patterns of ecological self-regulation are directly enforced much less and accordingly more the result of a “mode of relation between the individual and himself”(Foucault 2000, 200). In this sense, contemporary green citizens are more “active subjects” who constitute themselves “in an active fashion through practices of the self” (Foucault 2000, 291). Nevertheless, these practices are “not something invented by the individual himself: They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group” (Foucault 2000, 291).

Contemporary ecological conduct is thus proposed as a practice of the self (“*pratiques de soi*”), which in Western society is becoming an ever more important strategy of the individual to construct their personal identity and make sense of the world in which they live and act. According to Foucault (2000, 87), self-forming activities are an important part of the relationship to oneself and can be defined as “the procedures, which no doubt exist in every civilization, offered or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge”. These self-forming activities are especially important because they are “frequently linked to the techniques for the direction of individuals” (Foucault 2000, 277). In the case of green subjectivity, they link the macro-level of ecological governance to the micro-level of self-disciplining conduct, embedding planetary crises within the moral logic of individual responsibility and ethical self-care.

In order to fully understand how the conditions for contemporary green subjectivity are constituted, it is not enough to only consider external factors such as the availability of sustainable lifestyle options, eco-labels or climate policies. We must also undertake a genealogical analysis of the green subject and their individual responsibility within the framework of contemporary green rationality. This analysis benefits from Foucault’s concept of ethics, which offers a more precise lens than governmentality for exploring how subjects relate to themselves as ethical beings. Within green governance, the subject is not only concerned with external outcomes but also with being the right kind of person; in other words, a morally responsible green citizen. Individual responsibility is thus not merely a behavioural directive; it is experienced as an ethical demand that must

be internalised and sustained. In this context, failing to live up to the norms of ecological self-care and sustainability not only risks social disapproval or environmental harm but might also generate internal conflict or moral guilt. The subject is invited, even expected, to continuously examine, monitor and correct themselves in line with the ideals of green citizenship – a phenomenon Foucault calls hermeneutics of the self.

For Foucault (2000, 224), “a hermeneutics of the self has been diffused across Western culture through numerous channels and integrated with various types of attitudes and experience, so that it is difficult to isolate and separate it from our spontaneous experience”. His genealogical analysis along the four aspects of ethics reveals that Christianity, with its stress on practices of self-renunciation and moral purification, introduced enduring tensions into Western subjectivity. In this light, we argue that the modern green subject and their individual responsibility continues these ethical structures: it demands the renunciation of comfort, control over desire, and a continuous striving towards moral ecological purity. Like the Christian subject, the green citizen is not just required to act, but through practices of the self to become someone responsible and virtuous. To trace these sediments of Christian modes of the relationship to oneself inherent in modern green subjectivities, we first look at Foucault’s genealogical analysis of the Christian self and examine (using his four aspects of ethics) how Christianity overturned ancient forms of subjectivity.

FROM ANTIQUE CARE OF THE SELF TO THE CHRISTIAN HERMENEUTICS OF THE SELF

Foucault (2000, 262–65) states that the relationship to oneself, which he calls ethics, has four aspects. The first aspect, called the ethical substance, answers the question of which aspect or part of myself or my behaviour is concerned with moral conduct? The second aspect, called the mode of subjectivation, is the way in which people are invited or incited to recognise their moral obligations. The means by which we can change ourselves so as to become ethical subjects is what Foucault calls the self-forming activities or technologies (practices) of the self, which constitute the third aspect of the relationship to oneself. Finally, the fourth aspect of the relationship to oneself is the telos, which tells us which kind of being we aspire to when we behave in a moral way. In volumes 2 and 3 of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1988b; 1988a) describes various forms of subjectivity that emerged in specific societies and in certain historical periods in antiquity. What most of them had in common was that they were not rooted in any firm, formal external ethical or legal rules and, instead, the individual’s behaviour was regulated by an internal ethical relationship with oneself. Ethical reflection starts in antiquity exactly at the point where rules, regulations and formal restrictions end. Ethics was a matter of personal “aesthetic” and/or “political choice” (Foucault 2000, 266). If one wanted to occupy an important position in society, rule others, or leave an exalted reputation behind, one

first had to conduct certain work on oneself, an ascetic practice that would give one's subjectivity the right form. To be able to rule others, for example, one first needed to become a master of oneself. This was done through what the Greeks called care of the self (*epimeleia heautou*). Foucault explains that for the Greeks care of the self “does not mean simply being interested in one-self, nor does it mean having a certain tendency to self-attachment or self-fascination. The care of the self is a very powerful word, which means working on, or being concerned with something” (Foucault 2000, 269). This is because “no personal skill can be acquired without exercise; neither can one learn the art of living, the *tekhne tou biou*, without an *askesis* which must be taken as training of oneself by oneself” Foucault (2000, 273).

In volume 3 of *The History of Sexuality, The Care of the Self*, Foucault (1988a) goes on to describe how for the Stoics care of the self is still extremely important but what has changed are its ethical grounds. Ethics is no longer only a personal political or aesthetical choice but begins to acquire certain universal aspects. Before, the mastery of oneself “was directly related to a dissymmetrical relation to others” (Foucault 2000, 267) since “in the classical perspective, to be a master of oneself meant, first, taking into account only oneself and not the other, because to be a master of oneself meant that you were able to rule others” (Foucault 2000, 267). On the other hand, the Stoics were faced with the decline of classical political institutions (*polis*) that resulted in a redefinition of classical values. As a consequence, the role of males in society changes “both in their homes toward their wives and also in the political field” and “becomes much less reciprocal than before” (Foucault 2000, 267). Being a master of yourself is no longer a choice but a universal imperative: “you have to do it because you are a rational being” (Foucault 2000, 266) and “in this mastery of yourself, you are related to other people, who are also masters of themselves” (Foucault 2000, 267).

These newly introduced aspects of universality presented a fertile substratum for the forthcoming Christian ethics of the universal and absolute law of God to which individuals must subject themselves completely. This transition was analysed by Foucault (2022) in the final – recently published – volume 4 of *The History of Sexuality*. For Foucault (2022), this is the point when the ancient culture of the self was eroded by Christianity, which replaced the antique idea of creating the self as a work of art with the idea that the self is something that has to be renounced:

From the moment that the culture of the self was taken up by Christianity, it was, in a way, put to work for the exercise of pastoral power, to the extent that the care for the self became, essentially the care for others which was the pastor's job. But insofar as individual salvation is channeled to a certain extent at least through a pastoral institution that has the care of the souls as its object, the classical care of the self disappeared, that is, was integrated and lost a large part of its autonomy. (Foucault 2000, 278)

In these conditions, the relationship to oneself (ethics) changes. Ethical substance for the Christians becomes desire, flesh, concupiscence which had to be neutralised, suppressed to reach the telos: “the Christian formula puts an accent on desire and tries to eradicate it” (Foucault 2000, 269). The Christian telos was absolute purity, which is supposed to bring the individual closer to Heaven, God and immortality, while the mode of subjectivation for the Christian self was the divine law imposed by God, an external and absolute metaphysical authority. Since God is omnipotent and absolute, the individual as a limited being is put in a position where they never fulfil their moral obligations enough, and they never surrender enough. The Christian was never clean enough because, according to Foucault (2000, 270), “for Christians, the possibility that Satan can get inside your soul and give you thoughts you cannot recognize as satanic, but might interpret as coming from God, leads to uncertainty about what is going on inside your soul. You are unable to know what the real root of desire is, at least without hermeneutic work”. Such constant internal tension and uncertainty demands new technologies of the self, which for the Christians take the form of endless “self-deciphering” (Foucault 2000, 268): “the new Christian self had to be constantly examined because in this self were lodged concupiscence and desires of the flesh. From that moment on, the self was no longer something to be made but something to be renounced and deciphered” (Foucault 2000, 274).

Essentially Foucault is suggesting that contemporary Western subjectivity continues to bear the scars of Christian self-renunciation and the associated hermeneutic techniques by which the self is called upon to decipher and govern itself. As he notes, “we inherit the tradition of Christian morality which makes self-renunciation the condition for salvation” (Foucault 2000, 228). This inheritance persists not as a static legacy but as a dynamic set of ethical technologies that continue to inform the formation of modern subjectivities. It is through these very mechanisms reconfigured within secular, ecological and economical registers that contemporary regimes of environmental governance secure their hold on individual conduct.

THE GREEN SUBJECT AND THE FOUCAULDIAN THEORY OF ETHICS

Ethical Substance

Ethical substance for modern individuals is, according to Foucault (2000, 263), “feelings”. Here we note that “feelings” in this sense are not purely spontaneous psychological states but historically produced modalities of self-relation, operating as subtle mechanisms via which power organises the ethical conduct of subjects. Critical work by authors like Ahmed (2015) and Doyle (2016) shows that contemporary (environmental) governance increasingly operates through affective technologies. Climate guilt, eco-anxiety, eco-shaming, and green pride function as affective alignments: historically specific modes of feeling that mobilise individuals to govern their conduct according to ecological rationalities.

Mode of Subjectivation

As shown above, for the Christian subject the mode of subjectivation as the way in which individuals are constituted as ethical subjects was structured by an absolute and transcendent norm: divine law. Salvation was conditional on the subject's capacity to recognise their own sinfulness, engage in perpetual self-scrutiny, and strive for moral purity under the guidance of a universally binding religious truth. In environmental governance today, we are witness to a secular transformation of this mode of subjectivation. The divine law is replaced by what we might call a universal planetary imperative: an equally totalising norm that calls on subjects to align their lives with the urgent need for climate action. This imperative is grounded not in religion but in the authority of science, the ethics of intergenerational justice, and a new form of moral universalism. As stated in the European Climate Pact (European Commission 2020, 1), "We have not moved fast enough to prevent irreversible and catastrophic climate change. Science tells us we have to act urgently to stand a chance of achieving the Paris climate goals". The formulation is temporal and normative: it constructs a subject who has already failed and must now double their efforts in the face of escalating stakes. The moral obligation to act derives from a combination of scientific truth claims and an ethical horizon of shared vulnerability: the need "to guarantee a healthy and thriving planet for us and those who come after us" (European Commission 2020, 1). Within this structure, the past becomes a source of guilt, the present a scene of urgency, and the future a field of existential risk. This affective configuration produces not just responsibility but anxiety that one's actions (or inactions) are part of the decline of the planet. The resulting feelings of climate guilt and eco-anxiety are not incidental side-effects; they are integral emotional technologies through which the planetary imperative takes hold within the subject. Similarly, the European Green Deal frames climate action as "this generation's defining task", placing the subject in a historically exceptional moment in which ethical responsibility becomes total: every act, every omission and every lifestyle choice acquires planetary significance (European Commission 2019, 2). The subject is interpellated not merely as a consumer or citizen, but as a historically burdened moral agent responsible for preventing catastrophe and sustaining life on Earth for future generations. What emerges is a form of secular universalism whereby the subject is no longer accountable to God but to humanity, nature, and the unborn. Just as divine law once universalised the duty of ethical self-formation, the planetary imperative now installs care for the Earth as a moral absolute, rendering climate responsibility an integral part of our relationship towards ourselves and others. In this way, the mode of subjectivation in contemporary climate discourse retains the structural features of Christian ethical formation with its universal normativity, future-oriented salvation and moralised conduct but rearticulates them within a secular, biopolitical and planetary frame.

The Telos

The telos is no longer the purity of the soul like for the Christian subject but the purity of individuals' environmental impact, which needs to contribute to the common environmental goals. It is precisely in the process of the transposition from the common to the individual level that the mechanism of the hermeneutics of the self takes hold. While climate neutrality is presented as a strategic and measurable goal on the level of EU policy, its translation into the domain of individual conduct introduces a profound level abstraction and uncertainty. Citizens are repeatedly told across the European Green Deal, the Climate Pact, and through climate ambassadors that "every little step counts", and that personal lifestyle changes are indispensable to achieving systemic transformation (European Commission 2020, 9). Yet the actual impact of individual behaviour on global emissions remains incalculable, unclear, and often negligible when viewed in isolation. This disconnect creates a paradox: individuals are held ethically accountable for a fundamental outcome (net-zero emissions) that they cannot empirically influence in any direct or measurable way. Much like in Christian ethics where divine law demands perpetual self-scrutiny despite the unknowability of salvation, environmental governance calls individuals to internalise the imperative of carbon purity despite the absence of any clear metrics for how their actions contribute to the overarching goal of climate neutrality. Although the subject may attain individual moral recognition for performing ecologically virtuous acts like recycling properly, eating plant-based foods, refusing air flights, these actions remain disconnected from any demonstrable or measurable impact on systemic outcomes. The impossibility of knowing whether one's conduct truly "makes a difference" on the level of planetary emissions does not weaken the ethical injunction; it intensifies it. The green subject is thus incited to endless self-evaluation and self-regulation in pursuit of an idealised environmental self, a purified, future-oriented individual who lives as if every action matters absolutely.

Practices of the Self

In line with the telos described above, ethical subjectivity is enacted through practices of the self that echo the ascetic and confessional techniques of earlier moral regimes. These include meticulous self-monitoring, confession (public climate pledges, sustainability disclosures), and the cultivation of habits aimed at minimising one's perceived ecological harm. Among these, recycling⁷ is probably the best example. It condenses the regime's central paradox: a simple, daily, repetitive gesture of sorting waste, rinsing plastics and placing them in the correct bin becomes invested with disproportionate moral significance. Regardless

⁷ We should note that practices like recycling and individual carbon footprint monitoring also have their own history. To a large extent, they have been popularised by marketing and PR campaigns of systemic corporate polluters in the sectors of fossil fuels and plastics. For more, see Mayer and Kohl (2024).

of its limited systemic effect, recycling functions as a visible, performative affirmation of one's alignment with the ecological imperative. It becomes a micro-ritual through which the subject enacts care for the environment, not through direct efficacy, but via symbolic fidelity to the ethic of sustainable living.

A similar logic governs the increasingly normalised practice of reducing or eliminating the consumption of meat. While the ecological argument is clear as animal agriculture contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions, the ethical weight that the practice has acquired far exceeds this causal link. In the context of green rationality choosing plant-based foods becomes a site of moral investment, a means of cultivating ecological virtue through bodily abstinence. Here the echoes of Christian fasting and ascetic purification are unmistakable. Just as fasting in Lent demanded the renunciation of bodily pleasures to align oneself with divine judgment, the plant-based diet disciplines the flesh in pursuit of planetary salvation.

These, along with similar practices of the self, are embedded in an affective structure that reinforces the subject's alignment with the ecological norm. The emotional economy surrounding green conduct often unfolds in three main outcomes of self-deciphering. First, a sense of moral satisfaction when acting in accordance with environmental ideals, which manifests itself as pride (Schneider et al. 2017). Second, failure and a feeling of guilt when deviating from those ideals (Schneider et al. 2017). Third, paternalism: the emergence of a subtle or expressed sense of superiority toward others who do not conform, which may result in soft forms of moral correction or eco-shaming (Nielsen et al. 2024). These emotional dynamics are not incidental but central to the forming of the (self)-deciphering ecological subject as someone who not only governs themselves but also participates in the informal governance of others.

Eco-shaming, in particular, reveals a key transformation in the ecology of subjectivity: the hermeneutics of the self is no longer merely an inward-facing exercise in moral clarity or self-regulation. It is increasingly enacted publicly, affectively and relationally (Nielsen et al. 2024). This relational dynamic of green subjectivity is especially illuminated through the lens of "pastoral power", as theorised by Foucault (2009). Originally understood as a form of power rooted in religious care, vigilance, and moral guidance where the pastor assumes responsibility for the conduct and salvation of the flock, this form of governance has been secularised and diffused throughout contemporary ethical regimes (Foucault 2009). A notable example of how green pastoral power is working in conjunction with confessional practices can be found in the figure of the climate ambassador⁸ (European Commission 2020). This is a subject who not only engages in sustainable behaviours, but makes those behaviours public, visible, and morally instructive. Social media is becoming a kind of digital confessional where the ideal of the ecological self is made legible to others and to itself by

⁸ For a more thorough Foucauldian analysis of the climate ambassadors, see Banjac (2025).

way of continuous exposure, storytelling, and moral accounting. Through curated disclosures of green consumerism, lifestyle modification, and personal reflections on ecological responsibility, climate ambassadors therefore enact a contemporary form of confession and employ it as a form of pastoral behaviour guidance. Their authority does not derive from institutional position, but from their ethical authenticity measured by consistency, emotional resonance, and the ability to embody the values they promote (European Commission 2020).

In the environmental domain, green pastoral power is increasingly also exercised by individuals themselves, embedded in everyday relations and micro-interactions. The climate-conscious subject, shaped by discourses of ecological responsibility, does not only strive for internal moral consistency. They also feel ever more compelled to shepherd others to alert, correct or educate those who deviate from environmental norms. This may be seen in casual advice, social media performances of virtue, or more deliberate interventions in the behaviour of peers, family or strangers. What emerges is a distributed, omnipresent secular pastorate linked to confessional practices and the hermeneutics of the self in which each subject oscillates between the roles of shepherd and sheep: responsible not simply for their own environmental conduct, but also for the moral rectitude of others.

CONCLUSION

In the first part of the article, drawing on Malette (2009), we demonstrated that a genealogical sensitivity is essential to uncover the continuities linking contemporary EU green governmentality with earlier regimes of colonial extraction, biopolitical control, and capitalist expansion. Far from being a neutral or purely ecological initiative, the European Green Deal operates as a sophisticated governmental rationality. It integrates ecological systems into the logic of economic optimisation, rearticulates capitalist growth through the discourse of ecological modernisation, and depoliticises environmental transition by presenting it as both scientifically necessary and democratically endorsed. Yet the historical continuity does not manifest solely on the level of EU's governmental rationalities or institutional strategies as it also traverses the axis of subject formation.

By tracing the four aspects of ethics outlined by Foucault (1988b; 2000) – the ethical substance, the mode of subjection, the practices of the self, and the telos – we have revealed a line of continuity that leads back to the concept of the hermeneutics of the self. Rooted in Christian practices of self-deciphering and confession, this concept reappears in contemporary environmental governance in the form of the green subject: self-examining, self-regulating and ethically invested in its own carbon virtue. This ethical self-formation unfolds most intensively by way of the minute, continuous monitoring of everyday life. What one eats, how one travels, what one buys, how one disposes of waste, how one chooses clothing, holidays or domestic appliances – each of these becomes an object of ethical scrutiny, a potential site of either carbon harm or ecological

integrity. In this context, EU citizens are constituted not primarily as political actors but as consumers and behaviour changers, invited to ‘participate’ not by challenging systemic structures but by improving their own individual conduct⁹. Such expectations, when embedded in the modern hermeneutics of the self, can give rise to a persistent sense of individual responsibility and ethical questioning – an ongoing tension that steers individuals away from questioning the broader structural aspects of the climate crisis.

The construction of responsible green subjects on the substrate of the hermeneutics of the self and pastoral power therefore serves a dual and mutually reinforcing function within the EU’s green transition project. On one hand, it consolidates a neoliberal regime of eco-governmentality by promoting a form of subjectivation in which individuals are incited to govern themselves and others in line with the capitalist imperatives guiding the green modernisation. On the other hand, this mode of subjectivation operates as a powerful mechanism of depoliticisation. By locating ecological responsibility within the domain of individual conduct and by employing continuous self-deciphering, it systematically redirects focus away from the structural dimensions of ecological crises, preventing them from being articulated as matters of power, inequality or systemic transformation.

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⁹ Articulating concrete practices of freedom that could resist such a problematic mode of subjectivation is an important next step, which – however – lies beyond the scope of this article. For an innovative attempt in this direction, albeit with a wider sense of polycrisis, see Vodovnik (2025).

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UPRAVLJANJE ODGOVORNEGA SEBSTVA: PODNEBNE POLITIKE EU IN PRODUKCIJA ZELENIH SUBJEKTIVITET

Povzetek. Članek izpelje kritično analizo režima ekovladnosti v ozadju projekta zelene tranzicije EU, pri čemer se osredini zlasti na to, kako se izvaja prek oblikovanja zelenih subjektivitet in njihove individualne okoljske odgovornosti. Sledimo štirim razsežnostim etike, ki jih je začrtal Foucault (etična substanca, način podrejanja, prakse sebstva in telos), in dokazujemo, da sta za sodobno zeleno državljanstvo značilna stalno zeleno obnašanje in samonadzor, ki izvira iz krščanskih praks odrekanja. Glavna teza članka je, da ta način upravljanja, ki temelji na pastoralni oblasti, služi dvojni funkciji: s spodbujanjem oblike subjektivacije, v kateri se posamezniki upravljajo v skladu s kapitalističnimi imperativi, v imenu zelene modernizacije utrjuje neoliberalni režim ekološke vladavine. Po drugi strani pa ta način subjektivacije deluje komplementarno s tehnokratsko depolitizacijo podnebne krize, ki jo izvajajo strukture EU. Z umeščanjem podnebne odgovornosti v domeno posameznikovega ravnanja sistematično odvrača pozornost s strukturnih razsežnosti ekološke krize in preprečuje, da bi jih artikulirali kot vprašanja razmerij moči, neenakosti ali sistemske preobrazbe.

Ključni pojmi: podnebna politika, ekovladnost, tehnologije sebstva, pastoralna oblast, evropski zeleni dogovor, individualizirana odgovornost.

Blaž VREČKO ILC*

INTENSIFICATION OF THE POLYCRISIS AND THE RISE OF A TECHNO- OLIGARCHIC IDEOLOGY IN THE USA**

Abstract. The article analyses the techno-oligarchic ideology in the USA during the 2nd Trump Administration and the implications it holds for tackling the climate/ecological crisis. It argues that this ideology is a novel, far-right political ideology of the US techno-oligarchy whose rise was predicated on intensification of the polycrisis. Its central purpose is to expand the techno-oligarchy's influence, power and wealth, and squash opposition to its dominance and any visions/policies that critically interrogate the existing ecologically unsustainable capitalist model of growth and technological development. By analysing its central characteristics, its re-imagining of the state and political institutions via the introduction of AI, and in the context of the Israeli genocide of Palestinians, the article shows that its novel nature stems from the centrality of technological development and technology(ies) in its oligarchic, anti-democratic, repressive, neo-imperial, eugenic, hyper-capitalist, extractive and destructive vision of society.

Keywords: polycrisis, techno-oligarchy, far-right political ideology, the state, AI, genocide.

INTRODUCTION

The following article analyses the rise of a new far-right ideology, a techno-oligarchic ideology, which can be observed in the USA in the context of the 2nd Trump Administration and the centrality of the tech-oligarchs (e.g., Elon Musk)¹ in it. This rise could have a crucial impact on the global order, especially in relation to an intensification of the polycrisis (above all the climate/ecological crisis affecting it) and the fact that the USA is at the centre of this order. An order

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¹ Musk, the richest tech-oligarch, owner/CEO of Tesla, SpaceX, X, and other companies, became the de facto head of DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) to lead Trump's effort to "make government more lean and efficient".

that is capitalist (the logic of the continuous expansion of capital and exploitation of labour and natural resources), West-dominated, and neo-imperial (built on past exploitative, extractive imperial structures and asymmetrical relations of power, wealth and influence), ecologically unsustainable and historically prone to crises. Today's polycrisis can be considered as qualitatively different since the various crises (from ecological to geopolitical, social and political) do not have clear boundaries and are not mono-causal, they are quite a complex set of various shocks to the system and their joint effect is worse than the mere sum of their individual effects (Tooze 2022). Its effects are also intensifying and have more directly started to affect the West, specifically the USA.

We initially understand the rise of techno-oligarchic ideology as a specific response on the part of the American elites to the polycrisis. Given that in the polycrisis there is no return to normal (Tooze 2022), we initially argue that the rise of a techno-oligarchic ideology and its central characteristics must be seen as the rise of a novel political ideology that could shape the USA's future and, crucially, could generally have a negative impact on sustainably and democratically tackling the polycrisis. This rise must be viewed in the context of a novel central part of the capitalist class – the techno-oligarchy – that utilises its power derived from its novel centrality in the political economy to assert its direct political power to achieve hegemony and thereby the conditions to further consolidate its power, wealth and influence in the setting of the polycrisis (see Hočevar and Vodovnik 2025; Sadowski 2025). Crises produce novel openings for political struggle to articulate and implement fresh visions of society. The polycrisis is no exception because one of its central dimensions is the political destabilisation of the ideological consensus among the major political forces concerning the future of society.

In modern capitalist societies it is the political sphere that is vital for articulating and disseminating novel visions of the order, and rationalising and legitimising its specific transformations (Banjac 2025; Hočevar and Lukšič 2018; Zevnik Tomazin 2025). The political is critical as it is a field of strategically (re)ordering other socio-political-economic relations, structures and institutions (Foucault 2001). It is the central sphere where actors articulate and politicise specific issues and solutions in order to achieve strategic goals. There is a continuous contestation of various visions promoted by specific actors and formed into specific political ideologies. The latter are a coherent set of ideas that establish the basis for organised political action to preserve, modify or overthrow existing systems of power (Heywood 2021). They are an instrument of political mobilisation and include a critique/celebration of the existing order, a vision of a desired future order, and the theory of political change/consolidation. Their success is related to the extent that their views on particular concepts become normalised. Each political ideology has a cluster of core concepts, which ensures coherence in spite of variations concerning the adjacent and peripheral concepts and notwithstanding their ambivalences and contradictions (Freedon 1998).

The political struggle is always-already unequal as the capitalist nature of modern liberal representative US democracy inherently subverts the fantasy of political pluralism and its notions of equal competitions among interests. The US political system has strong oligarchic tendencies whereby corporations and the wealthy disproportionately influence political decisions (see Gilens and Page 2014), which is understandable when we consider that the power of US capitalists rests not only on the political-ideological sphere but is tied to the repressive state apparatus and their economic power that determines the living conditions of all societal groups (Mau 2023).

We argue that the techno-oligarchic ideology is a vision of a novel oligarchy articulated, promoted and implemented by its individual and collective members. Oligarchy in general refers to a system in which a wealthy minority holds and maintains power at the expense of the common good and by excluding the majority from political power. The US political system can be understood as a form of oligarchy where the super-rich control governance. Yet they have done this in an indirect way through influence over impersonal state institutions, making the USA a form of civil oligarchy. The tech-oligarchic ideology promotes a mutation of this system into a ruling oligarchy where the oligarchs play an active role in consolidating their power, wealth and influence and govern directly in a collective manner via institutions and infrastructure that they themselves control (see Van den Bosch 2025). Here the technological dimension plays a central role as the techno-oligarchy derives its strength not only from its wealth but above all from their control over the core technological infrastructure that society needs for its functioning and survival. This enables them to imagine and potentially implement a novel intrusive system of coercion, manufacturing of consent and determining the living conditions of individuals and communities to assure public obedience and maintain control. Despite technology(ies) playing a role in previous political ideologies (e.g., in liberalism and socialism) and playing a central role in the foundational ideological legitimisation of the capitalist social form (Mau 2023), we argue that technology(ies) and technological development play an unprecedented central role in the techno-oligarchic ideology. Upgrading our materialist framework with neo-luddite analytics, we initially argue that technology(ies) and technological development are conditioned by the capitalist social form and its imperatives. And that they are determined by a set of choices made by the capitalists which are intended to reinforce their power (asymmetrical power relations) in the class struggle, their domination over communities and workers (and users of technology) and curtailing their autonomy, enhance their capabilities for expanding the accumulation of capital and exploitation of workers and natural resources (Merchant 2023).

In the context of the above framework, the core question that will guide us in our analysis concerning the rise of a techno-oligarchic ideology is what are the conditions for its rise and crucially what is its core set of ideological notions, and which implications do they hold for the present and the future of not just the

US order but also the global implications for tackling the most prescient issues, primarily the intensifying climate/ecological crisis.

INTENSIFICATION OF THE POLYCRISIS AND THE IDEOLOGICAL-MATERIAL CONDITIONS FOR THE RISE OF A TECHNO-OLIGARCHIC IDEOLOGY

Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic and the succession of ‘historical’ natural disasters, the polycrisis has started to massively affect the USA. 2024 was the hottest year on record globally and a year of catastrophic hurricanes, floods, droughts and fires that continued into 2025.² The crisis was also societal, geopolitical, economic and public health-related and, combined, these crises were truly unprecedented and have led to an intensification of the existing political crisis. Trump’s victory in the US presidential election of 2024 and the intensification of the polycrisis under Biden has put to rest the fantasy of centrist political forces³ that the first Trump Administration was an aberration (see Frank 2020). The worsening of the climate crisis, rampant inflation, uneven economic growth and exploding inequality, falling life expectancy, the plethora of intensified geopolitical crises that have further destabilised the US-dominated global order demonstrate the specific limits of the US-led western powers (Russo-Ukraine war), their belligerent nature (trade war on China) and their explicit hypocritical, neocolonial, racist nature by enabling the Israeli genocide of Palestinians. These crises show that destabilisation is a consequence of the constitutive contradictions of the capitalist global neo-imperial order. The latter is ecologically and socially unsustainable due to its organising imperatives and logic of ever-expanding capital accumulation. This has inevitably led to the unsustainable exploitation of finite natural resources, ecological catastrophe(s) and a general degradation of living conditions, ever increasing levels of exploitation and domination of people as workers, carers, and further neo-colonial expropriation, exploitation and extermination of third-world populations and first-world marginalised populations. It has caused ever stronger geopolitical competition for strategic resources, control over crucial value chains and general speculative financialisation and assetisation of social and natural life as the avenues for expansive growth become harder and financial bubbles are becoming bigger and more dangerous. It has also led to higher levels of inequality and growing isolation and segregation of elites from the lives of the common people and escalated discontent of common citizens with the existing order and greater political radicalisation, especially in Western countries that are inextricably tied to re-articulated and novel political

² See <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/news/national-climate-202413>.

³ It refers to all political forces that subscribe to a variation of the status quo concerning the fundamental organisation of society on the basis of capitalist logic and imperatives of continuous growth, commodification and the private ownership of the means of production and the private property system and the capitalist sovereign nation state and the neo-imperial global system of geopolitical domination and capitalist exploitation.

ideologies promoting various visions of a future order that would specifically resolve the polycrisis (Dunlap 2024; Patel and Moore 2017; Vodovnik 2025).

The most central expression of these destabilisations was the rise of left-wing populist and (far)right-wing quasi-populist movements and the radicalisation of the centrist political forces in cracking down on the discontent targeting primarily populist left movements that were anti-systemic (Frank 2020). Centrist and far-right visions represent pro-or-hyper systemic ideologies that differ only in the ways in which specific constitutive elements of the existing unsustainable capitalist neo-imperial order are being intensified. The far-right 'alternative' is a more sadistic version of the existing order with regard to the oppression of marginalised communities (e.g., immigrants, Native American, Latino and Black communities, the LGBTQ community) and above all oppression against all (e.g., homeless, poor, disabled) that do not conform to the 'normal productive' American population and its 'natural' hierarchies where wealth and economic success is perceived as directly linked to the moral and biological/racial superiority of existing elites. Hence the partial fascistic leanings of these visions concerning the state where it is imagined as a tool of oppression of marginalised communities and of workers and their autonomous organised power. A tool for destroying any emancipatory potential and forces. A tool for materially strengthening capitalist oligarchy (plutocrats) by expanding the repressive apparatuses (the police, the military, the prison system, secret services) targeting the marginalised and workers (the law and order doctrine) and also via the destruction of state capacities to provide material benefits to marginalised communities and at least to partially hold corporations and capitalist responsible (e.g., the minimum wage, working conditions, workers' rights, ecological standards) that were gained through successful past democratic emancipatory struggles. These visions ideologically strengthen the capitalist oligarchy as they subscribe to the ideological tenet concerning law and its application since they explicitly make a distinction between the in-group(s) that the law protects but does not bind and the out-groups whom the law does not protect but binds (Harris 2023).

The similarity of centrist and far-right ideologies can also be traced to their similar veneration of technologies and technological development and the general constitutive capitalist techno-deterministic, utopistic, solutionist ideology. Both the founders/CEOs of technological corporations are imagined as inherently beneficial for the progress of humanity, for a continuous resolution of subsequent issues and problems, and as an expression of the genius and superiority of a nation, a "race", a civilisation (McQuillan 2023). This common feature is essential for understanding the context of the rise of the far-right techno-oligarchic ideology and the changing political allegiance of most of the crucial Silicon Valley (CA, USA) adjacent techno-oligarchs that switched sides and began to explicitly support Trump. Previous darlings of the centrists, such as Musk, participated in the campaign with unprecedented financial, technological and ideological support and became part of the new Trump Administration. Musk

and other techno-oligarchs (e.g., Zuckerberg (Meta), Bezos (Amazon)) began to explicitly subscribe to the far-right political visions (from anti-environmentalism, selective anti-migration, to the retrenchment of (parts of) the state, militarisation, neo-imperial expansion, hyper-nationalism, anti-China positions, to elitism, hyper-masculinity, and eugenics) joining the list of far-right tech-billionaires such as Thiel,⁴ Schmidt,⁵ Andreesen,⁶ Karp⁷ etc. (see Aronoff 2025; Lewis 2025). We argue that this is part of the political awakening of the techno-oligarchy (Big Tech and the techno-oligarchs) and the rise of the techno-oligarchic ideology in the context of the gradual re-configuring of the political economy and the perceived danger to its novel central position. The latter was connected with centrist policies, especially those that intensified the anti-democratic developments of the system. These policies established a national and global regulatory framework that enabled the techno-oligarchy to amass unprecedented power and wealth, to establish monopolies and crush competition, and to establish highly exploitative employment practices and unprecedented intrusive accumulation and surveillance regimes targeting the users of their technologies for the purposes of algorithmic governance to increase engagement and/or for tailored advertisement and the general commodification of people's lives. Whilst ever their activities could be ideologically framed as "defending our democracy" and furthering American interests globally, the Big-Tech abilities to surveil, discipline, and stifle dissent and crush competition had a stamp of centrist approval (Doctorrow 2023; Larson 2020). The legitimising of these activities by the centrist forces must be seen as part of a larger decades-long neoliberal dismantling of democratic achievements of past emancipatory struggles (Slobodian 2018). It should also be understood as a fundamental dimension of the process of expanding, consolidating and/or retaining the USA's global political, economic and military power and hegemony over the global neo-imperial capitalist order. Since the 1990s the US establishment forces have seen the control over central Internet technologies, the fundamental infrastructure of digitalised capitalism and neo-imperialism, as essential for American supremacy (Levine 2019). Successive crises (the 9/11 attacks (2001), the global financial crisis (2008) and the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-?)) have further strengthened the power, capabilities and importance of the techno-oligarchy that has ascended "the commanding heights" (cf. Lenin) of American capitalism (joining the finance, fossil fuel, and

⁴ Peter Thiel, co-founder of PayPal and Palantir, is directly connected to Trump's administration and to Musk. Vice-President JD Vance is his protege and he is primarily responsible for the success of PayPal's IPO where Musk, a part owner, received an enormous payout of several hundred million dollars, that acted as the foundation of his subsequent acquisition of Tesla.

⁵ Eric Schmidt, former CEO of Google/Alphabet, and promoter of 'AI hype' and technological neo-imperialism.

⁶ Marc Andreesen is one of the crucial financiers of Silicon Valley start-ups and is very close to the 2nd Trump Administration.

⁷ Alex Karp, co-founder and CEO of Palantir, the surveillance/spyware company providing tech to the NSA.

transport industries) and become the most important sector of the US economy. Given that the policy responses to each of these crises leaned on the tech sector as the provider of ‘solutions’, these corporations became central to people’s lives, central to the economy and politics, and central to the USA’s global power (Larson 2020; Morozov 2022).

Starting in the 1990s, the Silicon-Valley-centred techno-oligarchy, the corporate (and new) media, and politicians have established an ideological Teflon-like framework where the hype to do with the capabilities of technologies and radical breaches of existing laws and various negative effects of technologies on people’s lives, the democratic political processes, economic competition, could be obfuscated without any serious push-back from centrist forces (Marx 2022). The Teflon-like nature was retained despite various crises such as the dot.com crash of 2000, the 2010 Occupy Movement, the 2013 Snowden revelations, and the 2016 social media crisis that temporarily shook this ideological framework. In part, the early “Internet utopianism” of “open networks” enabling a “globalised, connected world”, the idea of the Internet as an engine of democracy, a technology that should not be regulated by state power was muted and a new focus was given to the notion of technology as a weapon in the service of US-national interests. Until the mid 2010s, US technological corporations were dominant and the first framing was beneficial to their power and thus to the interests of the US state in consolidating its global hegemony. As soon as other countries (especially China) began to catch up and overtake US corporations, the second framework became more prominent and the techno-oligarchy partly re-branded itself as central to US neo-imperial interests and started to shed their image of defenders of an open Internet and claim the mantle of primary defenders of American online spaces from ‘foreign nefarious forces’. They also framed their monopolistic power as necessary for the USA’s technological supremacy (Dottorow 2023; Marx 2022; Levine 2019).

On the level of the societal legitimisation of wealth, influence and power of the US techno-oligarchs, this ideological framework drew from the fantasy of the ‘typical’ Silicon Valley entrepreneur, which contrary to the facts turned these oligarchs into inherent geniuses, maverick entrepreneurs, self-made men, pioneers who through their individual brilliance and by going against the dominant trends, practices, technologies in their garages out of nothing created world-changing innovations and disruptions of existing structures and practices for the benefit of all humanity. Their success was imagined in the public sphere as giving them the exclusive right, despite a complete lack of any actual expertise and knowledge, to articulate the future of society and ‘improvements’ in every societal sphere and to formulate tech-based solutions to every central issue (Larson 2020; Sadowski 2025). This acted like a Teflon-like shield against criticism. Their belief in their inherent superiority and elitism (e.g., Bezos, Gates, Musk, Zuckerberg, Thiel), dabbling in eugenic racist thinking (e.g., Musk), pronatalism (e.g., Musk), hyper-masculinity, sexism and patriarchy (Gates, Bezos, Musk,

Zuckerberg etc.), hyper-nationalism, American exceptionalism, and totalitarian fantasies taken from various science fiction stories (e.g., Zuckerberg and the Metaverse) make the notion of the sudden right-wing turn of the techno-oligarchs and corporations problematic (Lewis 2025; Torres and Gebru 2024). It should be understood as an instrument of centrist forces that in a self-serving manner absolves them from blame by rationalising and legitimising their past (future?) collaboration with the techno-oligarchy and past centrist policies that established the conditions for its rise.

The changing political allegiances must instead be viewed as the rise of a techno-oligarchic political ideology in response to the (limited) curtailment of its power. This was linked to the tech-clash tied to various scandals that revealed online platforms' detrimental effects on societies ranging from negatively effecting adolescents, to fostering genocide (e.g., the Rohingya genocide), negatively effecting the democratic political process by promoting far-right views (e.g., the Cambridge Analytica scandal that is thought to have led to the first Trump election victory in 2016 and the success of the Brexit referendum). Public trust in the techno-oligarchy was also heavily eroded by the process of "enshittification" (Doctorow 2023) tied to the "rot economy" (Zitron 2023) that has made crucial technological services substantially worse due to Big Tech's increased power over consumers, business, advertisements and the media and their sole focus on maximising growth and share prices.

The centrist elites became open to the idea of regulating these corporations especially following the 2020 presidential campaign. To secure Biden's victory, Bernie Sanders' large voting block needed to be accommodated. Hence, the Biden Administration implemented several policies to at least partially curtail the power of the tech-oligarchy (Vassallo 2025). Various US federal agencies (e.g., the FTC) began to take important steps to regulate the tech sector and its blatant breaches of existing laws.⁸ For instance, Musk's companies faced over 20 governmental investigations and reviews to do with environmental harm, the safety of Tesla cars, detrimental working conditions (harassment, sexism, racism) and were given various fines.⁹ However, the policies of the Biden Administration were contradictory because regulation activities were accompanied by the continuing veneration of the tech sector and its dubious innovations (e.g., generative "AI"). During the Biden Administration, the entanglement of Big Tech (Musk's companies¹⁰, Google, Amazon, Microsoft etc.) with the federal government grew even deeper. They expanded their provision of crucial technological infrastructure via lucrative government contracts. Further, they influenced public policy and the government's day-to-day functioning and were positioned as critical for the US state's power. Despite prospering under Biden, the novel regulatory

⁸ In 2024, a federal judge ruled Google was a search monopoly, and that it had violated Antitrust Law.

⁹ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/20/us/politics/elon-musk-federal-agencies-contracts.html>.

¹⁰ Musk's companies accounted for approximately USD 15.4 billion in contracts in the last 10 years.

activities were perceived by most of them as dangerous for their monopolies, for their economic, political and societal power. This was deemed even more potentially dangerous as the US regulatory undertakings were not isolated from those in other contexts like the EU and China (Del Valle 2025). The tech-oligarchy began to intensify their activities (e.g., lobbying, financing political campaigns, ideological warfare via owned or subservient media) to apply pressure to the centrist forces to stop these policies (see Vassallo 2025). They also perceived the existing volatile political situation as a strategic opportunity to expand their power and began to distance themselves from the centrist political forces and to support the far-right and its anti-democratic/authoritarian, anti-welfare, anti-union, racist, sexist, hyper-nationalist, neo-imperial, genocidal political project(s) (Blakeley 2025). Practically the whole techno-oligarchy either explicitly (e.g., Musk) or silently supported Trump's candidacy. They were unbothered by the optics of attending Trump's inauguration, even for paying for it.¹¹ They not only started to explicitly commend and represent the far-right forces and policies as generally beneficial to the technological sector but also to articulate their own techno-oligarchic political ideology that, as we show in the following part, is anti-democratic, anti-emancipatory, anti-sustainable, exploitative, exclusionary, elitist, and eugenic in nature. It has a specific framing of the past, understanding of the present central issues, and a highly dangerous vision of the future.

CENTRAL NOTIONS OF THE TECHNO-OLIGARCHIC IDEOLOGY

In order to critically interrogate the techno-oligarchic ideology, we shall focus on the core notions promoted by central actors of the techno-oligarchy ranging from prominent techno-oligarchs (Musk, Zuckerberg, Bezos, Thiel, Altman, Andreesen, Ellison¹² etc.) to Big Tech to specific policies and their rationalisations enacted by DOGE,¹³ while drawing from and synthesising reflections from various analysts (Gallagher 2025; Gebru and Hanna 2024; Ongweso and Sadowski 2024). We shall consider various sources, including statements that accompany their actions, while focusing on ideological manifestos that clearly outline key central elements of their ideology. In this context, the manifesto of the tech-oligarch Mark Andreesen, the 2023 *The Techno-Optimist Manifesto*, represents an illuminating general framework for understanding the various dimensions of the techno-oligarchic ideology.

The techno-oligarchy represents itself in a self-aggrandising manner that legitimises its distancing from centrist political forces and their (far)right-wing

¹¹ Musk, Zuckerberg, Bezos, and Pinchai (CEO of Alphabet/Google) attended, while Amazon, Meta, Google, Microsoft, and Uber made a corporate donation and Cook (CEO of Apple), Altman (Open AI) and Zuckerberg made personal donations for the inauguration (USD 1 million each). See <https://www.commoncause.org/articles/big-tech-is-donating-millions-to-trumps-inauguration/>.

¹² Ellison is the billionaire founder of Oracle.

¹³ DOGE – Department of Government Efficiency – is a creation of the 2nd Trump Administration and can be considered a personal instrument of Musk to radically transform the US administrative and regulatory state according to the ideology of the techno-oligarchy.

drift, while promoting authoritarian policies and politics and an oligarchic system in which they enjoy an *exalted social status*. They frame themselves as *victims of the ungrateful public and the state* that not only fail to see their crucial contribution to the prosperity of all but also have *broken an unwritten contract* to not interfere in their presumably socially beneficial activities by (starting to) regulating them and their technologies and the free markets that presumably enable the unprecedented technological development. Any critique of themselves and their technologies and the ways they are developed is de-legitimised as irrational and dangerous for humanity as it could lead to regulating technological development (see Andreesen 2023).

They perceive this as leading to the curbing of *growth*, a process that must never be stopped. Only growth is deemed to lead to higher well-being. As technological innovation is imagined as the central element of growth, and population growth and natural resource utilisation are deemed to have limits, any form of 'artificial' limit on technological development is considered harmful. Growth is framed as an issue of *survival* since stagnation (or even worse degrowth) is seen as leading to the ultimate death of society (Andreesen 2023). This is diametrically opposite to the extensive scientific research on the unsustainability of our capitalist model of development and its contribution to potentially making our planet uninhabitable for humans (Wallace-Wells 2020).

Similarly to growth, *technological development is seen as inevitable*, as something that realises our inherent potential. They subscribe to *techno-optimism* in the sense of technology being a non-corruptible force for good and dismiss any notion of technology and technological development having negative effects on humanity, society and the environment and, ultimately, on a liveable future. They also subscribe to *techno-determinism* and *techno-utopianism* in the sense of ascribing an inherently beneficial nature to (novel) technologies and imagining these (novel) technologies (generative AI being the focus of today) as instrumental for reaching a utopia of unimaginable productivity, energy and abundance. They believe that not only should there not be any obstacles to technological development and any prohibition on developing certain technologies, but that the pace should be accelerated (Andreesen 2023; Vance 2025).

They see no contradictions between accelerating development *and the degradation of a liveable natural environment*. This belief is based on the notion that our *domination of nature* is something positive and crucial for building a better world and the implicit notion that technologies are detached from the material-natural world. They are imagined as instruments that allow us to create more valuable things. And *expanding markets and consumption are imagined as the only proper measurement of the quality of life*. They still believe in the fantasy of competitive markets as obstacles to the consolidation of power and as agents of fostering technological innovation precipitating the continuous advancement of societies (see Andreesen 2023; Bezos 2025).

Moreover, they perceive that continuous growth and technological devel-

opment is inherently connected to the *expansion of energy production and use*, which they believe, contrary to scientific facts, is not detrimental to the natural environment (Andreesen 2023; Altman 2024). This is based on notions of *technological solutionism and total technological substitution*. The latter notion refers to the idea that natural resources could be replicated technologically *ex nihilo* as technologies are imagined divorced from their dependence on natural resources (Patel and Moore 2017). The notion of technological solutionism is even more central to disregarding the negative effects of technological development and of expansive growth on the natural environment, societies, groups and individuals. It is a notion that is constitutive of our capitalist industrial order (Merchant 2023). It refers to the idea that no ecological, social, political or economic problem exists that cannot be solved through technology. There is no need for any structural politico-economic change to address the causes of given issues (e.g., burning fossil fuels for energy). *The problems that were, are, and will be created by technology (or the market) will be solved by more technology (or more markets)*.

These beliefs are founded upon a fabulous tale of technology solving past problems according to which hunger, poverty, exploitation, pollution and other social ills were solved by technology. These fables gloss over the actual history of capitalist societies and the fact that these issues have either persisted or intensified in various (historical) contexts. They present as lies the actual negative and destructive effects of the implementation of capitalist technologies during industrialisation (a reduction of wages, unemployment, poverty and immiseration, massive increases in inequality and the domination of workers, detrimental health effects for workers and society, and due to pollution, environmental destruction) that is increasingly affecting the global ecological well-being and threatening to catastrophically erode the foundations of a liveable planet (Harris 2023; Jensen et al. 2021; Merchant 2023; Noble 1999) (see Andreesen 2023). And they gloss over the fact that capitalist technologies are being utilised by the (neo) imperial West for the ecological-social-cultural destruction and exploitation of non-Western peoples and environments (Harris 2023). These fables also silence the fact that the beneficial societal effects of technologies and the partial tackling of issues have been predicated on the resistances, struggles and revolutions of workers, citizens, exploited and oppressed masses and movements that have forced capitalist states and capitalists to make concessions and adopt policies that have (partly) addressed these issues and (partly) limited the power of the capitalist classes in favour of increased well-being of the masses. Without the movements that struggled to (re)distribute the wealth and benefits of capitalist industrialisation and technological development, the beneficial effects would be massively outweighed by their negative effects (Merchant 2023).

The techno-oligarchs imagine themselves as singularly capable of understanding and directing the ‘inevitable’, ‘divine’ force of technological progress. They claim for themselves *the status of infallible prophets/kings* who should be given free reign to do what in their “divine” minds is seen as necessary, be

celebrated, and not face any doubts or criticism for their actions and ideas since they are the harbingers of fantastical technology-enabled futures (Marx 2022; Nobel 1999). In the latter, there is no place for doubters and no place for reality as these imagined futures are built on technologies that are either fantastical/impossible or ecologically devastating and accelerating a path to dystopia, not utopia (e.g., generative “AI”). They assert this ‘*divine*’ status based on their past and present success measured in their present wealth and power and based on their technological innovations that they either made themselves or claimed ownership over (see Andreesen 2023).

They completely obfuscate the structural societal conditions of their success, their appropriation of the collective work of innovation, the dependence of their innovation and their success on luck and contingency and certain public policies. The techno-oligarchs’ eugenic obsession with *the notion of intelligence* and its problematic measurements such as IQ becomes understandable as their supposed *superior intelligence* makes their success inevitable. They are touched by the ‘divine’ not only in the sense of their capability to create technological inventions but by being inherent, biological geniuses. They deem their ‘expertise’ and their superior intellect as above any type of specialist expert knowledge that should be ignored, if and when they decide that this would be ‘beneficial’ for tackling specific issues and for the future of society. They also believe themselves to be above and beyond any laws and regulations, traditions and existing procedures that they can and should be able to ignore, breach, and make obsolete. Other experts, politicians, as well as citizens (the masses) should accept and follow their lead without question (Geburu and Tores 2023; Merchant 2023).

They also project the historically singular uncritical glorification of technology and innovators and their superior status into the past as something normal. This is closely connected with their experience in the context of the rise of the novel ICTs in the 1990s through to the mid-2010s when they were uncritically glorified and their transgressions were normalised and left unchecked. It was in this context that the problematic principles of “move fast and break things” and “do not ask for permission, ask for forgiveness” were formulated (Harris 2023; Levine 2019).

Their claim to exalted societal status also draws from the framing of society as analogous to contemporary (computer) software. The majority of tech-oligarchs are computer software engineers and the majority of Big Tech are primarily software corporations (Ed Zittron 2025; Scott 2025). Software is imagined as principally developed for the purpose of continuous expansions and growth, entailing a continuous deepening of its invasion into our lives via ever expansive surveillance and data gathering. It is framed as a universal means to achieve innovation in practically all industries and societal spheres. Innovation is presented as achievable only insofar as the tech-oligarchy via its software penetrate and disrupt the ‘old-fashioned, tradition-rules-regulation-following’ ways of doing and thinking. Thus, every type of societal structure and institution should

be either open to interventions from the tech-oligarchy and emulate software companies, especially Silicon Valley start-ups that are imagined as uniquely innovative, agile, problem-solving collectives with extreme working conditions (e.g., long hours, sleeping in the office) and meritocratic high-risk, high-reward cultures where only the best can thrive.¹⁴ In the contemporary oligopoly of centralised Big Tech, innovative start-ups are however either destroyed or taken over by Big Tech, thereby stifling any disruption of the status quo. The notion of a meritocratic high-risk, high-reward culture is also factually problematic given that the vast majority of founders come from privileged backgrounds and are predominantly part of the white majority, are male, heterosexual, and able-bodied (Larson 2020; Liu 2020).¹⁵

The start-up fantasy is a tool for making palatable a plethora of problematic issues of the oligopolistic and oligarchic reality of the contemporary tech-sector and its material and ideological dominance of our societies. Notions of innovation and efficiency have become thoroughly colonised where they are deemed to be exclusive to Big Tech and the tech-oligarchs and to their digitalisation of everything and the automation of every societal process. The tech-oligarchy has normalised its right to determine what these notions refer to, while simultaneously normalising general surveillance, authoritarian censorship, propaganda, exclusion and domination via its ownership, development, implementation and control over specific software (Scott 2025).

The tech-oligarchic ideology is transforming the notions of citizenship rights and sovereignty. The techno-oligarchy claims for itself the prerogative of a sovereign, that is authoritarian, absolutist, unaccountable, arbitrary and should have the absolute right to change (user) agreements/terms and conditions ('laws'), change the functionality of the software, change the user experience, arbitrarily ban some and privilege other users, to extract as much data as possible, to breach laws and regulations concerning privacy, freedom of expression and anti-discrimination, and to make leaving the service/software as hard and unpleasant as possible (Doctorow 2023). Big Tech ultimately owns and controls the central digital infrastructure and utilises it to extract as much value from users in the form of surveillance, data-gathering, algorithm manipulation, and ad-selling as possible regardless of the fact that you are paying for the service/software. They imagine themselves and in many ways are a corporate autocracy. A sovereign that is deemed to have no accountability to its users, the general public, and the state (Doctorow 2023; Zitron 2023).

Still, the state and political institutions figure prominently in the techno-oligarchic ideology as the re-imagining of the state represents a central set of notions and provides a framework in which a systematic legitimisation is made as to

¹⁴ DOGE is an almost perfect example of utilising this ideological fantasy of start-ups to radically transform 'legacy' US state institutions.

¹⁵ There are very few exceptions (e.g., Sundar Pichai (Alphabet/Google), Satya Nadella (Microsoft)).

who counts as relevant, whose interests are naturalised and made unquestioned in the context and in relation to the capitalist representative democratic state. And above all, whose interests should the state heed, what is the public interest, who should articulate it, and what role should the common citizens (the masses) play in it. As we show in the next section, this re-imagining mirrors and radicalises the role of the state during the industrial revolution when representative political institutions were not only firmly aligned with the interests of nascent industrial capitalists but actively supported the industrial revolution by ideologically and materially brutally attacking any resistance to industrialisation as irrational, anti-progress and techno-phobic and primarily contrary to the public interest, which was conflated with the interests of industrial-capitalists (Merchant 2023). We argue that this re-imagining is fundamentally predicated on the specific central fantasy of the ‘unimaginable’ capabilities of “AI” systems and on the template of Israel’s genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza and the relationship of the US state and tech-oligarchy with it.

THE RE-IMAGINING OF THE STATE VIA AN ‘AI-POWERED REVOLUTION’

The techno-oligarchic ideology draws heavily from far-right re-imaginings of the state and democracy, their nature, scope and necessary transformation that were articulated as a reactionary-revolutionary response to the New Deal capitalist and biopolitical welfare administrative-regulatory state developed following the Great Depression and the Second World War. In this context, we can observe various interrelated re-imaginings of the state. These include *the sleek state* whose purpose is to maximise the returns on investment and *the shackled state* that is unable (legally and organisationally) to provide well-being to the majority of the population, especially the most vulnerable parts (Slobodian 2025).

The notion of the sleek state is built on the idea of government as a special corporation that has a monopoly on violence and cannot go bankrupt. As a corporation, it should be made as efficient as possible by shedding every service and staff that, according to ‘analyses’ of private-sector-trained managers perceived as having a better grasp on efficiently allocating resources, are declared redundant/wasteful. As a corporation, the government should outsource as much as possible to the private sector as it is deemed to be inherently more efficient. Along with outsourcing, the state is imagined as a crucial source of funding for privately oligopolistically controlled and directed technological development (Slobodian 2018). Here the notion of the public interest and nation state interest plays a central ideological role. The tech-oligarchy frames its interests, its (control over) technological development and technologies as beneficial to wider society. It presents the (massive) financial (and scientific) support it receives as normal, necessary, competition-re-affirming and inherently socially beneficial if the state funding is not tied to strict (or any) regulation and the tech-oligarchy has free reign over how it develops and implements technologies (see Andreesen 2023).

The notion of the shackled state is utilised to delegitimise the public regulation of the tech-oligarchy's actions, and problematise who has the legitimacy to articulate and enact the public interest. Even more generally, it is an ideological attack on the general functioning of the state especially in relation to its policies, its administrative-regulatory institutions that have a mandate to assure the well-being of society, including its (historically) marginalised communities. The post-war (New Deal) welfare state that has been under continuous ideological and material attack from the right-wing and centrist political forces, corporations and the oligarchs at least since the neoliberal revolution of the 1970s is in the context of this ideological attack re-framed as a fantastical right-wing representation divorced from any facts (Slobodian 2018). Putting a modern twist on the Cold War anti-communist paranoia, the state and its institutions are seen as totally dominated by leftists, above all Marxists, who have co-opted the state to wage war against the 'silent majority', against the interests of hard-working, productive Americans and private entrepreneurial wealth. Welfare policies, policies addressing past and present harms and discriminations (DEI policies), environmental policies and similar policies that (strive) to provide for the well-being of general society and are generally socially desirable are re-framed as universally wasteful, fraudulent and being systematically abused by nonproductive special interests (e.g., liberal elites, minority rights NGOs, illegal immigrants) (Slobodian 2025).¹⁶

The techno-oligarchic ideology frames these policies as part of a 'sinister ideological project' to promote 'wokeism', which can include everything (e.g., critical race theory, transgender rights, feminism) that critiques the right-wing white-washed fantasy of US history, its social structures, institutions, and relations. The latter fantasy silences their genocidal, racist, sexist, discriminatory, class-exploitative, expropriational, white-supremacist, patriarchal, hetero-normative, ecologically devastating and imperial history and its present legacies that determine the radically asymmetrical life-possibilities of various social groups depending on their place in the societal hierarchies (see al-Gharbi 2024). It naturalises existing social hierarchies, the radically asymmetrical wealth and income distribution, the radical divergences in life expectancy, the disproportionate criminalisation of marginalised minorities and other forms of structural discrimination. It legitimises what Gilmore (2023) calls organised abandonment by the state and capital whereby marginalised communities, those deemed less worthy by being less well-off, the less productive, are left behind or biopolitically killed (cf. Foucault 2001) via disinvestment, privatisation and environmental degradation.

The concept of "alternative facts" also becomes central to these ideological-material undertakings in line with the notion that if the reality does not correspond to ideological fantasy, then the reality should be obfuscated via censorship

¹⁶ The central mantra of DOGE is fighting waste, fraud and abuse by destroying the regulatory and administrative state.

and propaganda. A crucial element of the ultimate ideological goal of the notion of the shackled state is, apart from the abolition of all policies that respond to the demands of citizens, the goal of incapacitating administrative and regulatory institutions to collect data on various inequalities and discriminations and hence to destroy the specific data-gathering capabilities used to formulate and implement socially desirable policies. Censoring reports on the wrongdoing of corporations¹⁷ and official statistics enables unhinged propaganda to be created by the tech-oligarchy and the wider right-wing political forces and also hinders emancipatory struggles. The ideological goal is a very specific deconstruction of the administrative and regulatory state and its capabilities to curtail the power, wealth and influence of the tech-oligarchy and the broader US elites and corporations and regulate their socially, politically and ecologically detrimental behaviour, while simultaneously framing this deconstruction as being in the public interest, as democratisation, as socially beneficial, in line with the will of the people (see Doctorow 2023; Gilmore 2023). Any kind of expansion of the regulatory state contrary to the interests of the tech-oligarchy is re-framed as illegitimate, irrational, a Marxist-communist coup, and being infected by the “woke mind-virus” (Gallagher 2025; Slobodian 2025). In the most radical expression of its ideology, the tech-oligarchy imagines itself as the central arbiter that decides who ultimately has fundamental civic and political rights, including eligibility to vote.¹⁸

The ideological notions of the sleek and the shackled state are conjoined by a specific vision of technology, technological innovation and specific technologies as the central means to enact the above-mentioned ideological goals, while also disciplining, deskilling, punishing and reducing the number of the public administrative workers who the techno-oligarchy frames as lazy, inefficient, “woke” and “radical/Marxist” etc. Here, the ideological *mystification of AI systems* plays a key role. The tech-oligarchic ideology imagines AI systems as unprecedentedly powerful automation and decision-making technology that will enable enormous efficiency and productivity gains and a stark reduction of government workforce (directly fired by AI), by automating and streamlining work processes, speeding up administrative decisions, and making them properly unbiased and neutral by radically reducing the input and autonomy of human workers with their biases, personal preferences, ideologies, labour rights, and their biological limitations. The AI systems are framed as inherently beneficial, universally applicable, value-neutral, supremely capable technologies and implicitly or explicitly presented as inevitably leading to a novel radical reorganisation of government for the benefit of all (Andreesen 2023; Altman 2024). Workers, on the other hand, are framed as being ultimately replaceable by these inherently

¹⁷ Under Trump's 2nd administration, the FTC removed online material critical of Big Tech.

¹⁸ According to Trump's decree (25 March 2025), Musk's DOGE is positioned as central in deciding who is eligible to vote by reviewing state voter rolls. The latter is supposed to be done via technological means (AI systems).

superior systems or as logically subservient to these systems, while *austerity* is re-framed as a necessary step towards unimaginable abundance being unleashed by the power of AI (McQuillan 2023).

Research (Boulamwini and Gebru 2018; S. Nobel 2018) demonstrates that AI and related automating technologies used by governments, police, juridical systems, educational institutions, financial institutions and employers in general perpetuate, reinforce and intensify existing asymmetries of power, existing historically established discriminations and marginalisations of individuals and communities by naturalising their ever more extensive surveillance, control and breaches of privacy (gathering of their personal data). And by creating the appearance of the impartiality of automated-decisions that have historical socio-political, economic, biological and cultural biases, hierarchies and asymmetries of power baked into them and produce even more discriminatory outcomes than human-led decision-making and make these decisions even more unchangeable and even less accountable. These technologies empower the bosses and the tech-oligarchy, while dis-empowering the workers and the individual and the communities that are their users/targets. When these systems are implemented, the results are always in line with the imperatives of the capitalist ruling forces, as well as with austerity for the workers, their exploitation, and domination and repression, dispossession, disciplining and punishing of marginalised communities and individuals and the masses generally and exuberant profits for the owners and controllers of these technologies. Their implementation leads to worse results as they make ethically reprehensible results normal and obscure the accountability of managerial elites.¹⁹ These systems are prone to failures and incapable of properly replacing human workers but make the work of humans worse. They destroy institutional knowledge passed from generation to generation, and atrophy crucial skills or destroy the context where they can be learned.²⁰ These systems are also implemented of the purpose of scaring workers into submission (Merchant 2023).

These technologies are developed and implemented by Big Tech in an authoritarian way that prevents those negatively affected by them to participate in and influence their design, implementation and functioning. They are developed with logic and imperatives fundamentally opposed to public interests and the needs and interests of the masses of citizens, government workers, and marginalised communities. Moreover, their implementation makes the complex workings of government institutions that have been built on (at least partial) responsiveness and resilience substantially more prone to failure and dysfunctional by

¹⁹ For an overview of various examples, see K. de Liban – AI Means “Oh-No” for Low-Income Americans – <https://inequality.org/article/ai-means-oh-no-for-low-income-americans/>.

²⁰ See the Microsoft study concerning critical thinking skills and various reports on how the use of generative AI negatively effects the skills of computer programmers where experienced ones are losing skills, while junior ones even fail to learn many fundamental skills of programming (see Namanyay 2025) – <https://nmn.gl/blog/ai-and-learning>.

concentrating control, erasing redundancies built to ensure the continuous functioning of core government services. It makes the functioning of these services totally dependent on the technologies owned, controlled and maintained by the tech-oligarchy, which establishes an unprecedentedly lucrative profit extraction scheme while also concentrating power and eliminating accountability. This reduction of state capabilities and the inevitably worse functioning state institutions insidiously also serve the ideological goal of further delegitimising the state as the agent of public interest and position the private sector, the tech-oligarchy responsible for the degradation, as the saviours (Dell Valle 2025; Merchant 2025).

AGI, GENOCIDE, AND THE RE-IMAGINING OF THE NEO-IMPERIAL AND REPRESSIVE DIMENSION OF THE STATE

The re-imaginings that focus on the economic and social welfare dimension of the state are inextricably connected with the re-imagining of the repressive and neo-imperial geopolitical dimension of the US state. Initially, we must stress that these re-imaginings never subscribe to the logic and imperatives of austerity but *the logic of expansion* and imperatives of increased accumulation via extending the neo-imperial and repressive reach of the US state.

Silicon Valley has since the outset been a testing ground of US neo-imperialism and its engineers and corporations have been in the vanguard of the US state's rising global influence. Especially during and after the Second World War, the US state massively supported the nascent computer industry, which it perceived as central to the expansion of its power. Most of technologies related to the Internet and computers were developed for the purposes of the military in fighting foreign wars and specifically for counter-insurgency (surveillance, control, discipline, punishment, elimination) in the third world and at home, for fighting resistance to the global capitalist neo-imperial (biopolitical) order. The US state understood that technological supremacy in the novel ICT field is crucial (militarily, geopolitically, economically, ideologically) for consolidating and deepening the USA's global hegemony in the post-Cold War era (Harris 2023; Levine 2019). With the rise of Chinese technological companies that began to directly compete with the USA and to endanger the global dominant position of the US tech-oligarchy, the latter started to re-imagine the neo-imperial dimension of the state in its relationship with the tech-oligarchy. The notions of (Internet) freedom and global competition as the foundation of US hegemony were replaced or re-articulated with a novel explicit neo-imperial twist. And the primary ideological tool was the discourse around (generative) AI (Morozov 2023).

The tech-oligarchy has re-framed the development of (generative) AI systems as the fundamental geopolitical issue, as an issue with the highest national security priority, as an existential issue for the continuation of the USA's global hegemony (see Vance 2025). In this context, the AI systems are framed as unprecedentedly capable technologies that will revolutionise the military and will confer unimaginable powers on whoever controls them. The most extreme, and

from the point of view of the existing and potential capabilities of LLM²¹ AI systems ludicrous, idea promoted and utilised by the tech-oligarchy to rationalise neo-imperial policies is the idea of the nascent AGI (artificial general intelligence) (Bender et al. 2021). A truly autonomous, thinking, self-reflecting system with its own agency capable of immediately solving any type of issue concerning humanity and hence being ultimately superior to humans. This idea is thoroughly eschatological and eugenic in nature and combines both the foundations of the techno-oligarch's claim to their superior societal position nationally and globally, while also perfectly aligning with the ideological bedrock of US imperialism, the belief in US exceptionalism as either an instrument of God or of historical forces of social and biological evolution as the chosen and globally superior entity (Harris 2023; McQuillan 2024).

The coming of AGI is framed in a eugenic manner as the final stage of the evolutionary development of intelligence that mirrors the historical eugenic quasi-scientific 'measurements' and hierarchisations and reduction of human intelligence to numerical values (McQuillan 2024). The US tech-oligarchy imagines their striving for developing AGI as an existential battle for the future of human civilisation with China, where the former is framed contrary to facts and hypocritically as a force of divine good, freedom and democracy, of moral and intellectual and biological superiority and the latter as a force of evil, authoritarianism, unfreedom and moral, intellectual and biological degradation and inferiority (see Vance 2025).

The tech-oligarchy believes the primary existential threat to human civilisation is not the climate crisis, not global warming, the destruction of biodiversity, unsustainable natural resource use, climate and the natural environment harming fossil fuel emissions and industrial pollution. It frames these issues as non-existential because not all of humanity will be destroyed by the climate crisis (Andreesen, 2023; Kissinger et al., 2022). In an eschatological manner, they claim that *the central existential risk is the development of AGI, of a malevolent God* that could destroy the whole humanity if it were to be developed and controlled by the wrong people, the wrong corporations, the wrong nation state(s), and aligned with the wrong values.

The techno-oligarchy claims for itself the authority to define what the crucial existential risks are and the superior intellectual and moral capability and authority in developing responses to this primary existential risk for human civilisation and for the US-led neo-imperial order. This ideological framework legitimises the existing power, influence and wealth of the US tech-oligarchy nationally and globally and its further expansion in the name of developing the AI God, the ultimate solution to human problems.²² It rationalises the US state's

²¹ LLM stands for large language models.

²² All future visions of humanity promoted by the US techno-oligarch follow the same logic of the eternal nature of capitalism and the logic of their continuous central position in it, where their power, wealth and influence is consolidated or even expanded.

unconditional support for and active defence of the supremacy of US tech-oligarchy by waging a technologically-focused trade war against the USA's only serious competitor – China and its technological corporations – in the form of sanctions, restrictions and through threats of potential military escalation for as long as China does not submit to the supremacy of the US tech-oligarchy.

On the other hand, the framework legitimises and rationalises the existing environmentally and socially/politico-economically unsustainable model of development and functioning of generative AI systems since this is framed as the only and inevitable path to developing AGI, to the future of abundance and prosperity and sustainability. This gives the tech-oligarchy *carte blanche* to expand their domination of the development of AI systems as it establishes the predominant model of authoritarian hyper-exploitative, resource, energy and data hyper-intensive development as universal, neutral and without alternatives (the “bigger is always better” doctrine). The predominant model of development and implementation is already based on disregarding existing laws and regulations, and actively limiting and fighting against any form of democratic oversight and state regulation that would limit what the tech-oligarchy can do in the development of AI (Williams et al. 2022).

Considering the already worsening climate and broader ecological crisis and the vast amount of research establishing a scientific consensus on the need to limit emissions of greenhouse gases, phase out fossil fuels, reduce our energy and resource use for the planet to remain liveable for the majority of the population, this neo-imperial singular focus on the AI system and specifically developing AGI is completely detrimental to establishing an environmentally sustainable system. It is slowing down the already slow transition from fossil fuels due to their immense energy needs, and by their expansive natural resource use, which includes precious clear water for cooling the data centres, thereby helping to worsen the ecological crisis (Brevini 2022). The insatiable need for energy is also silently re-legitimising the fossil fuel industry as the techno-oligarchy has entered into close cooperation with it while simultaneously silencing and breaking their once explicit commitments to the green transition and sustainability.

The re-imagining of the neo-imperial dimension of the US state is intimately and inextricably connected with the re-imagining of its repressive dimension, especially as concerns the development and implementation of AI systems and their rationalisation in surveilling, identifying, analysing, managing, regulating, disciplining, punishing, segregating, oppressing and ultimately removing unruly, resisting, non-docile, not-quite-normal and abnormal, historically marginalised, discriminated, oppressed and harmed populations and individuals as their members.

The way the repressive dimension of the state is re-imagined can most clearly be discerned from the vision articulated by the tech-oligarch Larry Ellison (Oracle).²³ His dystopian vision is a vision of an AI-driven surveillance state

²³ See <https://fortune.com/2024/09/17/oracle-larry-ellison-surveillance-state-police-ai/>.

where there is continuous (from work to leisure) surveillance of individuals utilising advanced facial-recognition software where all their actions are recorded, analysed and judged by AI systems ensuring that we are all on our best behaviour. As we will demonstrate, the actions of the tech-oligarchy imply that “best behaviour” is determined by people not resisting the wealth, power and influence of the tech-oligarchy, not resisting the status quo. As the repressive dimension of the state in techno-oligarchic ideology is never burdened by the imperatives of austerity but operates on the logic of the continuous expansion of resources to secure the functioning of the capitalist, hypermasculine, racist, eugenic, heteronormative ecologically destructive system (preventing and cracking down on resistance), hence providing an almost unlimited source of profit accumulation for the tech-oligarchy.

Reminiscent of past historical examples of imperial outposts influencing the imperial centre, the techno-oligarchic re-imagining of the repressive state is inextricably connected with the neo-imperial outpost of the US state namely the Zionist Israeli settler colonial apartheid regime and its technological capabilities and specifically with its recent genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza that relies on genocidal AI systems (Khallil 2021; Loewenstein 2024). As concerns the development and implementation of technologies and their legitimisation, the relationship between the US centre and its neocolonial outpost is symbiotic and interdependent where the US tech-oligarchy (e.g., Microsoft, Google) provides Israel and its corporations with crucial technological infrastructure and financial resources, while Israeli corporations develop the most advanced and ethically reprehensible, dehumanising, repressive technologies (e.g., CCTV, facial recognition, location tracking, web surveillance technologies), including automated decision-making AI technologies. The Palestinians are ideal test subjects as they live in a state of permanent exception that enables Israeli tech-companies to develop and implement these technologies without legal limits. These technologies are then procured, adapted and implemented by other authoritarian regimes and forces, including the USA’s repressive apparatus for tackling domestic political resistance (Loewenstein 2024).

A brutal implication of the above vision of the repressive state can be observed in the full commitment of techno-oligarchy to the unlimited US state support for the total destruction of the lived environment and the genocide of the Palestinian people who are designated as expendable, less-than-human, unworthy, and opposed to US geopolitical interests, which legitimises the most reprehensible actions (from the mass slaughter of civilians, to the use of human shields, to the cutting off of water and humanitarian supplies, to systemic sexual assault) without accountability.

The genocide has revealed *the actual lethal risk of AI automated decision-making systems*, not the ‘existential’ risk promoted by the tech-oligarchy. AI systems (e.g., Habsora) utilised by the Israeli army for perpetrating the genocide were developed to rapidly process massive amounts of data to generate massive

amounts of targets for military strikes in wartime operations. Their explicit rationality was to prevent human bottlenecks in both locating and decision-making to approve targets. To prevent a kill matrix from operating at the maximum of its efficiency and to establish a “mass assassination factory” with no review of targets and no oversight, no moral or legal obstacles (Abraham 2023). This brutally illustrates the central ethical issues of automating decision-making processes whereby reprehensible actions are objectified, normalised, sanitised and accelerated to an extreme via these systems, while the developers and users of these technologies are obfuscating their accountability for how these systems operate, on which grounds, with which biased data, with which central purpose that is directly predicated on the wanton slaughtering of civilians including children that the Zionist racist ideology deems inhuman monsters, collectively responsible for every action of individuals or groups. It is essential to stress that the Palestinians are the test object as the most marginalised populations are always the first to be subjected to abusive, destructive technologies that never remain confined to them (McQuillan 2023). This can clearly be observed in the US domestic context where the genocide plays a crucial role in developing and legitimising a brutal response by the repressive state to those resisting the genocide, which illustrates how the above re-imagining of the state in the tech-oligarchic ideology is gradually taking shape. It can be seen as a template of how the response of the state and the tech-oligarchy will look when faced with organised domestic opposition and the critique of its policies, practices, technologies and ideologies that will increase due to the intensifying polycrisis.

The US protest movement against the genocide has faced extreme material and ideological repression and an intensive collaboration between various private collective, corporate and individual actors, private security forces, the state repressive apparatus and political elites. The tech-oligarchy has played a key role in the establishment and rationalisation of this novel private-public repressive arrangement that utilises physical and technological repression of resistance (enhanced by Israeli tech) tied to a violent crackdown on protest activities by private and public security forces and private far-right/Zionist zealots and also tied to expansive on- and off-line surveillance of protesters and views that criticise the genocide and technologically (via algorithmic manipulation and shadow-banning) repressing these critiques that they do not reach a wider audience. The tech-oligarchy technologically and ideologically supported and amplified Zionist and far-right and centrist views that have either denied the genocide is happening have blamed the Palestinians themselves, or even legitimised it, thereby contributing to the systematic and systemic delegitimisation of anti-genocide views via technological and ideological means (Goodarzi and Dolinar 2025; Marcetic 2025; Whittaker 2024). The US state’s and tech-oligarchy’s censorship and propaganda activities have entered an even more unhinged stage as any pretext of division of interests was replaced by the notion of a common enemy against the order that can be easily identifiable and who should be dealt with in

the most decisive, brutal, repressive manner. Constitutional rights including the freedom of speech have been further eroded, where in an Orwellian manner history and the present have been subverted in an insidious way. The Israeli genocide has been legitimised by obfuscating its settler colonial history, the past occupation and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, and by silencing the racist apartheid nature of the Israeli regime and presenting Hamas' attacks on Israeli civilians as an *ex nihilo* brutal inhumane attack that legitimises every imaginable brutality. This erasure was paired with an ideological discourse that turns "wokeism" into its antithesis and is used to delegitimise the opposition, curtail the freedom of speech, and breach other constitutional rights (due process). Here antisemitism has been invoked in a way that re-frames it as any form of criticism of Israel and the genocide. Those protesting against the genocide have been framed as those who are truly genocidal, not those who actually perpetrate the horrific, dehumanising fascistic acts. These "alternative facts" have framed rationalised various repressive actions (firing, imprisonment, revocation of degrees, deportation etc.), various curtailments of constitutional rights (e.g., freedom of speech, due process) against all that according to the state and the tech-oligarchy have breached the "best behaviour" norm set by them. This has also legitimised the further expansion and development of surveillance and AI data analysis systems by the tech-oligarchy to identify and brutally tackle global and internal opposition to the environmentally and socially unsustainable neo-imperial capitalist order (Finkelstein 2024; Haskins 2024; Marcetic 2024).

CONCLUSION

The article analysed the rise of a techno-oligarchic ideology in the USA and its grave potential implications for tackling the polycrisis in a democratic, emancipatory and sustainable way, not just in the USA, but globally as well. We first interrogated the conditions of possibility of its rise, which was followed by analysis of its core notions focusing on the centrality of technological development and technologies for imagining the past, present and future order, and for legitimising the specific societal status of the tech-oligarchy. In the third and fourth parts, we considered the way this political ideology re-imagines political institutions and the state in its various dimensions, focusing first on the economic and welfare dimension and, finally, on the neo-imperial and repressive dimension of the US state and the central role that AI systems and the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and the responses to it play in these re-imaginings. We demonstrated that the techno-oligarchic ideology represents a new far-right political ideology of some of the US capitalist elite who have become central for the US and global neo-imperial capitalist order due to their control over crucial technological infrastructure on which this order depends. We determined that the rise of this ideology must be understood as a highly dangerous political response of the tech-oligarchy to the polycrisis and to recent state policies intended to regulate and limit its power, influence and conditions for ever expansive growth.

It is an instrument in the class struggle that takes the form of an anti-democratic, anti-egalitarian and oligarchic political ideology that is hyper-capitalist, ecologically unsustainable, anti-welfare, unaccountable, eugenic, neo-imperial, repressive and ultimately genocidal. And that is centred on self-serving fantasies of technological development and technologies and their benevolent societal effects and posits the tech-oligarchy as religious or secular prophet-kings. We showed that the radical implication of the techno-oligarchic ideology is the establishment of a system that would purge capitalism of its welfare dimension and bolster the ability for existing capitalist regimes of exploitation and extraction, while establishing a techno(AI)-enabled unprecedentedly penetrative police and neo-imperial state overseen by the techno-oligarchy that would brutally strive to repress any form of resistance and would exacerbate the polycrisis. The intensification of the latter will result in a world where the conditions for living of not simply humans but all living beings (animals and plants) in general will severely deteriorate, making the world ever more un-nurturing, uninhabitable, and deadly for all, not only for certain living beings (see Toplak 2025). To prevent this, emancipatory reflections, visions and movements should systematically attack and push the centrist forces to euthanise the techno-oligarchic ideology and dismantle the basis of the power of the techno-oligarchy itself. This should start with the delegitimisation of their authoritarian control over the direction and nature of technological development, the characteristics of technologies, and their horrific visions of the future that worsen the unsustainable status quo and lock us into paths that are leading to a world that is unliveable.

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INTENZIVIRANJE POLIKRIZE IN VZPON TEHNOOLIGARHIČNE IDEOLOGIJE V ZDA

Povzetek. Članek analizira vzpon tehnooligarhične ideologije v ZDA v kontekstu druge Trumpove administracije ter njen potencialni učinek na reševanje ekološke krize. V tem okviru razkrivamo, da gre za novo skrajno desno politično ideologijo ameriške tehnooligarhije, ki je povezana z intenziviranjem polikrize. Trdimo, da je temeljni namen te ideologije krepitev moči, vpliva in bogastva tehnooligarhije ter hkrati zatiranje uporov proti njeni dominaciji in utišanje kritičnih pogledov ter zamišljanj, ki problematizirajo obstoječi, ekološko nevezdržen in netrajnosten kapitalistični model rasti in tehnološkega razvoja. Na podlagi analize temeljnih značilnosti ideologije ter načina, kako si zamišlja državo in politične institucije skozi sistematično vpeljavo umetne inteligence – v kontekstu izraelskega genocida nad Palestinci –, v članku pokažemo, da novost te ideologije tiči v osrednji vlogi, ki jo igrata tehnologija in tehnološki razvoj. Slednja namreč predstavljata temelj oligarhične, nedemokratske, represivne, neoimperialne, evgenične, hiperkapitalistične, ekstrakcijske, destruktivne vizije družbe, ki jo ta ideologija zagovarja.

Ključni pojmi: tehnooligarhija, politična ideologija, polikriza, tehnologija, UI, genocid.

PRIKAZI, RECENZIJE

Bojan VRANIĆ

POLITIČKE IDEOLOGIJE.

OD ISTINE DO TIRANIJE

Fakultet političkih nauka in CLIO,

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Delo Bojana Vranića »Politične ideologije: Od resnice do tiranije« vrača razpravo o ideologiji in ideologijah spet v orbito politologije. Po dolgem času. Po veliki zmagi strankarske liberalne demokracije in s tem prilagoditvah delovanja političnega sistema pospešeni koncentraciji kapitala na poveč(ev) anem Zahodu se znova pojavlja vprašanje, kaj je resnica in kaj laž v politiki. Ta ambicija ni izrastla iz kritike kapitalizma, temveč ob boku razprave o kovidizaciji politike in trampizaciji. Trumpu gre zasluga, da je razpravo o dejstvih nadgradil s pojmom »alternativna dejstva« in s tem v jedru kapitalistične demokracije spodnesel samorazumevanje zahodnega sveta kot neproblematične v nedogled se perpetuirajoče resnice, ki ji samozaverovano mirnost najedata azijski avtoritarizem zlasti ruskega ter kitajskega tipa in hkrati vedno prisotna fantazma tu za vogalom prežečega socializma ali komunizma, ki vsi skupaj proizvajajo laži in poskušajo zaslepiti jasnost vpogleda zahodnih množic v jedro resnice. Trumpova zmaga, ugotavlja Vranić, je »odprla vrata boju glede tega, kaj je resnično in lažno v politiki« (str. 10).

V uvodu Vranić v izhodišče svoje razprave postavlja razmerje med resnico in lažjo. Navrže trditev, da sta »kriza

resnice in neulovljivost znanja o politiki značilnosti sodobne družbe. Politični odnosi in orientacije so bili v preteklosti bistveno bolj trdni« (str. 10). Tako so lahko politični voditelji lažje narisali nasprotnika na platna prepoznavnosti svojim privrženecem in politika je s tem dobila jasnost in predvidljivost.

Vranić je delo razdelil na tri sklope in jih naslovil s tremi vprašanji: 1. česa ne vemo o političnih ideologijah; 2. kaj vemo o političnih ideologijah; 3. kaj lahko rečemo o političnih ideologijah.

Prvo poglavje začenja s prepričanjem, da se »z ideologijami govori nekaj pomembnega, vendar se našemu jeziku izmika narava znanj, ki jih one reproducirajo« (str. 16).

Za Vranića so ideologije »(kolektivna) akcija, ki je usmerjena k anticipiranju spremembe vedenja v svetu okrog nas« (str. 21). Po pravilu je svet, ki nas obkroža, razumljen negativno: nesvoboden, nepravilčen, neenakopraven in celo nenaraven. V jeziku politične znanosti je jasno, da »ideologija predpostavlja polariziran svet« in tako »tam, kjer ni polarizacije, kjer vlada enumje, ni družbene potrebe po ideologiji« (str. 22).

V posebnem poglavju se Vranić loti nekaj Marxovih označb ideologije, začenši z najbolj uveljavljeno, da je ideologija lažna oz. sprevrnjena zavest. Najprej opozarja na Marxovo misel iz Nemške ideologije; Marx zapiše, da poznamo eno samo znanost, znanost zgodovine, pri čemer se »skoraj vsa ideologija reducira na preobrnjeno pojmovanje te zgodovine ali na popolno abstrakcijo od nje. Ideologija sama je le

ena od strani te zgodovine« (str. 25). Pri tem Vranić opozarja, da se v ideologijo vrvira »razredni interes kot resničnostni princip«. Marx govori tudi o vladajoči ideologiji, ki je ideologija vladajočega razreda, v povezavi z zgodovino pa je za Vranića ideologija »preoblikovanje zgodovine, tako da ustreza vladajočemu razredu, da ponudi legitimnost ureditvi, ki drži naključne individue zasužnjene v lažni predstavi o materialnih pogojih eksistence« (str. 27).

Vranić navaja tudi Marxovo misel o tem, da zavest ne more biti nič drugega kot ozaveščena bit, bit ljudi pa je njihov stvarni življenjski proces. In naprej: »Zavest ne določa življenja, temveč življenje določa zavest.« Vranić vključuje tudi Marxov koncept fetišizacije blaga, ki omogoča razumevanje popolne sprejemljivosti kapitalističnega izkoriščanja delavcev.

Za Vranića je ideologija »integralni del našega strukturiranja političnega sveta« (str. 35). Od tu naprej se ukvarja s problemom jezika v ideologiji.

Poglavje o tem, kaj vemo o političnih ideologijah, zastavi s Karlom Popperom in Hannah Arendt. Oba namreč gledata na ideologijo kot na »patologijo zgodovine, ki vodi v totalitarizem« (str. 49–50). Nato pa se obsežno posveti delu Karla Mannheima *Ideologija in utopija*, pri čemer je izhodišče, kako ljudje dejansko mislijo v javnem življenju in politiki kot instrumentu kolektivnega delovanja. Vranić je prepričan, da je prav Mannheim dosegel, »da se domena političnih ideologij prezrači« (str. 59). Nato se Vranić posveti diskurzivnemu pristopu, po katerem je ideologija reprodukcija teksta in govora, sledi obravnava sociopsiholoških teorij ideo-

logije. Tu omenja tudi delo Daniela Bela *Konec ideologij*, katerega glavna poanta je v tem, da so politične ideje izčrpane in da gre v politiki samo še za bitko med posamezniki glede tega, kdo lahko zagotovi večjo gospodarsko rast in materialno bogastvo.

Vranić koncept ideologije postavlja tudi v razmerje do politične socializacije in politične kulture (Almond, Verba).

Potem se na kratko ustavi pri kritični teoriji družbe, ki ji gre za razkrivanje vladanja, tudi tako, da reflektira ideologijo in s tem upa na prispevek k procesu emancipacije človeštva. Prek Gramscija pride do Althusserja ter njegovih ideoloških aparatov in koncepta interpelacije. Pri poststrukturalizmu Vranić opazi predvsem koncept pripovedovanja zgodb, pri katerem je v ospredju osebna izkušnja, ter koncept narativa, ki stavi na mite in legende.

Nato se Vranić posveti delu Michaela Freedena, ki izhaja iz predpostavke, da je za analizo relevantno samo tisto mišljenje, ki se smiselno lahko poveže z vedenjem. Zanima ga, kako ljudje politično mislijo: »Vloga misli je, da vedniju da strukturo, ki mu zagotavlja konsistentnost in predvidljivost« (str. 89).

V tretjem razdelku se Vranić ukvarja s tem, kar lahko napišemo o političnih ideologijah. Nekako povzema že povedano in postreže z nekaj primeri uporabnosti analize ideologemov.

Delo Bojana Vranića je dobra osvežitev razprav o ideologiji, o razmerju med resnico, ideologijo, znanostjo in politiko ter o njenem pomenu za delovanje politike.

Igor LUKŠIČ

Sergije DIMITRIJEVIĆ
**TUJI KAPITAL V GOSPODARSTVU
BIVŠE JUGOSLAVIJE**

Sophia, Ljubljana 2023
386 strani, prevod Marko Kržan,
23,00 EUR
(ISBN: 978-961-7003-91-8)

Prevod pričujoče knjige smo dobili 65 let po njenem izidu. Knjiga je avtorjeva doktorska disertacija, ki jo je zagovarjal leta 1957 na Pravni fakulteti Univerze v Beogradu in je leto pozneje izšla v novoustanovljeni knjižni zbirki z naslovom Ekonomska biblioteka. Zbirko je spodbudila takratna Zveza ekonomistov Jugoslavije, posvojila pa jo je beograjska založba Nolit. Ta knjižna zbirka je bila prva pomembna pridobitev povojnega vzleta jugoslovanskih ekonomistov, ki so odločilno vplivali na univerzitetno izobraževanje ekonomistov vse do razpada Jugoslavije. Snovalci zbirke so načrtovali izdajanje šestih knjig letno: dveh monografij teoretične narave, dveh monografij iz uporabnih ekonomskih disciplin, ene monografije s področja drugih ekonomskih disciplin (ekonomska zgodovina, ekonomska statistika itd.) in enega prevoda tuje knjige. V nekaj letih se je v zbirki nabralo precej zanimivih knjig. Med slovenskimi avtorji so svoje mesto v njej našli Ivan Lavrač, Aleksander Bajt in Dolfe Vogeltnik. Dimitrijevičeva knjiga je seveda zasedla mesto, namenjeno ekonomski zgodovini. Ni nepomembno, da je knjiga izšla ob koncu obdobja, ko je imela gospodarska zgodovina Jugoslavije zagotovljeno mesto v predmetnikih jugoslovanskih ekonomskih fakultet, pa tudi dejstvo, da so bile nekatere pomembne doktor-

ske disertacije s področja ekonomije pridobljene prav na pravnih fakultetah. Gospodarska zgodovina je bila postopoma izločena iz študijskih programov, doktorske disertacije s področja ekonomije pa so se s pravnih preselile na ekonomske fakultete. Zanimanje za gospodarsko zgodovino je izginjalo tako med ekonomisti kot zgodovinarji, živela je v senci paradnih disciplin.

Ni mogoče ugotoviti, kakšen je bil vpliv Dimitrijevičeve knjige ob njenem izidu. Vsaj v vodilnih ekonomskih revijah tistega časa nisem našel njene predstavitve. Pri nas so knjigo poznali starejši gospodarski zgodovinarji. Sam avtor se je po njenem izidu usmeril v preučevanje delavskega gibanja v Srbiji in Jugoslaviji, srednjeveške srbske zgodovine in numizmatike. Vprašamo se torej lahko, zakaj naj bi bil prevod te knjige danes zanimiv za slovenske bralce. Moj odgovor je, da zaradi podobnih razlogov, kot v času njenega izida. To je bil čas, v katerem je obstajalo precejšnje zanimanje za zgodovino kapitalizma na ozemlju takratne Jugoslavije. Kapitalizem je znova tukaj, z njim pa tudi tuji kapital in prakse, ki jih je socialistična doba prekinila. Pri tem je zanimivo, da prevod knjige ni nastal na pobudo ekonomistov ali zgodovinarjev. Pobuda je prišla iz kroga sociologov, zbranih okoli dr. Rastka Močnika, zlasti njenega prevajalca dr. Marka Kržana, ki želijo s svojimi prizadevanji – zlasti v okvirih Založbe */cf in založbe Sophia – obuditi zanimanje za pri nas pozabljeno področje gospodarskega razvoja, ki je izginilo z ekonomskih fakultet. Natančneje, gre za enega izmed pristopov pri obravnavi gospodarskega razvoja, ki poudarja razvojno odvisnost

in s katerim se v naše intelektualno okolje vrača zanimanje za imperializem, monopolni kapitalizem, finančni kapital, odnose med centrom in periferijo. V dobi socializma smo lahko o tem brali v številnih prevedenih delih, ki so teoretično in empirično obravnavala izkušnje dežel v razvoju, kar so nekateri ekonomisti poskušali prenašati tudi v domače razprave med razvitiimi in nerazvitiimi. Ta pristop ne sodi v glavni tok prevladujoče, tj. ameriške ekonomske misli, ki v celoti prevladuje tudi v našem izobraževalnem sistemu. Zato je tudi pojmovanje gospodarskega razvoja in modernizacije pri nas pod velikim vplivom utemeljevanja vloge tujih neposrednih investicij, o čemer priča tudi nedavni zapis glavnega ekonomista Gospodarske zbornice Slovenije v časniku *Delo*, v katerem beremo, da bi bolj morali spodbujati ambicioznost svojih izvoznih šampionov, vključevanje v verige vrednosti multinacionalk in slednje privabiti, da investirajo v slovensko gospodarstvo. Opozorim naj na primer na delovanje Ameriške gospodarske zbornice v Sloveniji (*Amcham Slovenija*), Britansko-slovenske gospodarske zbornice – BSCC, Slovensko-nemške gospodarske zbornice, Avstrijsko-slovenske trgovinske zbornice, ki včasih razumejo pojem poslovnega okolja zelo široko in želijo vplivati tudi na delovanje družbenih podsistemov, kot so na primer zdravstvo, izobraževanje, socialna zavarovanja, davki ipd. Brez kakršne koli zadrege lahko zapišem, da je njihova temeljna naloga vplivati na državno politiko, ki naj bi sledila njihovim poslovnim ciljem.

Gledano s tega zornega kota je Dimitrijevičeva knjiga naravnost izjemna

demonstracija analiziranja, razumevanja in ocenjevanja ekonomskega in političnega razvoja kake dežele v luči vpliva tujine in tujega kapitala. Zanimal ga je vpliv tujega kapitala na jugoslovansko gospodarstvo med svetovnimi vojnami ter na zunanjo in notranjo politiko države. Njegovo temeljno sporočilo je bilo, da je takratni Jugoslaviji, ob velikosrbski buržoaziji, narekoval tuji kapital, oba skupaj pa sta pomenila (pre)vlado finančnega kapitala. Ocenil je, da je imel tuji kapital negativen vpliv na gospodarski razvoj in družbene odnose v takratni državi. Jasno je, da je bila v skladu s socialistično usmeritvijo države po drugi svetovni vojni odprava tujega kapitala prvi pogoj oblikovanja plansko usmerjanega in na državni lastnini temelječega gospodarstva.

Dimitrijevič je svoje raziskovanje tujega kapitala opravil na bogatem fondu 5000 svežnjev dokumentov o posameznih podjetjih, zbranih pri Upravi za ljudsko premoženje in Gospodarskemu svetu FLRJ. Iz dokumentov je pridobil verodostojne podatke o naložbah tujega kapitala v jugoslovanskih podjetjih okoli leta 1940, o odvisnosti teh podjetij od tujine in o politikah njihovih lastnikov. Slika seveda ni bila popolna, saj pridobljeni podatki zaradi povsem utemeljenih objektivnih razlogov, ki jih je pojasnil, niso zajeli vseh podjetij. Poleg tega, da je posebno pozornost namenil podjetjem, ki so delovala kot delniške družbe – ne glede na to, ali so delovale kot podružnice (namesto delniškega kapitala so izkazovale dotirani kapital) ali kot domače delniške družbe (s celotnim ali delnim tujim kapitalom) – je pomembno tudi to, da v raziskavo ni vključil tujih virov v obliki državnih

oziroma javnih posojil oziroma posojilnega kapitala na sploh.

Dimitrijevićeva ocena je nedvoumna: jugoslovansko gospodarstvo je bilo privesek razvitih industrijskih držav in je imelo polkolonialni značaj, za katerega je značilen odnos med metropolami in kolonijami, med centrom in periferijo, odnos, v katerem tuji in domači kapital nista bila v tekmovalnem ali konfliktnem razmerju, saj je tuji kapital pletel mrežo odvisnosti s pomočjo domačega. Verige vrednosti, kot se jim dandanes reče, pa so delovale tako, da so črpale iz ekstraktivnih dejavnosti, onemogočale organsko povezavo med domačimi surovinskimi oziroma ekstraktivnimi dejavnostmi in predelovalnimi industrijami oziroma panogami, ki so proizvajale predmete končne porabe. Nad njimi pa je bedel finančni kapital, ki je obvladoval jugoslovansko bančništvo.

Dimitrijevićevo knjigo bi morali vzeti kot enega od mogočih zgledov za obravnavo vpliva tujine na sodobno slovensko gospodarstvo in politiko. Če se je Dimitrijević moral prebijati od spodaj navzgor in je iz arhivskega gradiva sestavljal celovite slike, pa zdaj lahko začnemo tudi od zgoraj navzdol, kar omogočajo statistični podatki Banke Slovenije o tujih investicijah in finančnih računih, iz katerih lahko s ptičje perspektive razberemo težo tujega kapitala v slovenskem gospodarstvu, in se potem spuščamo navzdol po panogah in področjih ter posameznih subjektih. Kar se je nekoč dogajalo pod vplivom posameznih tujih držav in njihovih kapitalov, dandanes poteka v okviru institucionalne ureditve Evropske unije. Da v njej sobivata center in periferija, vsaj od krize 2007/2008 ni več skrivnost.

Neven BORAK

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Tabele, grafi in slike morajo biti izdelani kot priloge (in ne vključeni v besedilo). V besedilu naj bo okvirno označeno mesto, kamor sodijo.

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Dobesedni navedki, ki so dolgi tri vrstice ali več, naj bodo postavljeni v poseben odstavek, robovi odstavka naj bodo obojstransko zamaknjeni, besedilo naj bo v poševnem tisku in brez narekovajev.

Knjižne recenzije

Teorija in praksa sprejema v objavo recenzije domačih in tujih znanstvenih del, ki niso starejša od dveh let. Recenzija naj obsega do 1.500 besed. V recenziji naj se avtorica/avtor dosledno izogiba navajanju druge literature in virov.

Navajanje

Teorija in praksa za navajanje in citiranje uporablja *Chicago Manual of Style* (CMS), način »avtor-datum«. Navodila CMS so dostopna prek: <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org>.

Osnovna oblika navedka v besedilu je (Novak 1994). Za navajanje strani se uporablja naslednja oblika navajanja: (Novak 1994, 27–29). Če sta avtorja reference dva, se navede oba: (Novak in Kosec 2007, 312–33). Če je avtorjev reference več kot štiri, se v tekstu uporablja oblika navajanja: (Novak et al. 1994, 27), na seznamu literature pa naj se navedejo vsi avtorji. Če ne gre za prvo izdajo knjige, se pri navajanju zabeleži tudi letnico prve izdaje: (Novak [1953]1994, 7). Več referenc hkrati se loči s podpičjem: (Novak 1994, 7; Kosec 1998, 3–4; 2005, 58). Pri navajanju večjega števila referenc enega avtorja, objavljenih v istem letu, so le-te ločene med seboj s črkami a, b, c itd.: (Novak 1994a, 27–29; Novak 1994b, 1), in sicer v zaporedju, v kakršnem se prvič pojavijo v besedilu.

Seznam referenc je na koncu besedila. Na seznam referenc naj bodo vključeni vsa uporabljena literatura in viri. Seznam referenc mora biti urejen po abecednem redu priimkov avtorjev referenc ter v primeru istega avtorja po časovnem zaporedju izdaj.

Primeri navajanj:

Knjige

Geertz, Clifford. 1980. *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Zborniki

Featherstone, Mike, ur., in Mike Hepworth, ur. 1991. *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*. London: SAGE Publications.

Poglavje v zborniku

Palan, Ronen. 1999. "Global Governance and Social Closure or Who is to Governed in an Era of Global Governance?" V *Approaches to Global Governance Theory*, urednika Martin Hewson in Timothy J. Sinclair, 55–72. Albany: State University New York Press.

Članek v znanstveni reviji

Bachrach, Peter, in Morton S. Baratz. 1963. "Decisions and Nondecisions: An Analytical Framework". *American Political Science Review* 57 (3): 632–42. <https://doi.org/xxx>.

Časopisni članek

Mihajlović, Novica. 2024. »Z Daytonom rešeni mir, v Dayton ujeti razkol«. *Delo*, 1. marec 2024. <https://www.delo.si/novice/svet/z-daytonom-reseni-mir-v-dayton-ujeti-razkol/>

Spletna stran

Fakulteta za družbene vede. 2024. »Fakulteta za družbene vede omogoča športnikom prijazno izobraževanje«. Objavljeno 16. februarja 2024. <https://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/obvestila-in-informacije/novice-in-obvestila/fakulteta-za-druzbene-vede-omogoca-sportnikom-prijazno-izobrazevanje>

Družbeni mediji

Souza, Pete (@petesouza). 2016. »President Obama bids farewell to President Xi of China at the conclusion of the Nuclear Security Summit«. Instagram, 1. aprila 2016. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BDrmfXTtNct/>

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The *Teorija in praksa* journal accepts for publication original texts. The texts submitted should not be previously published or under review for any other scientific journal or monograph. The publication of the article or book review in the *Teorija in praksa* journal is free of charge.

Please, send the text to: teorija.praksa@fdv.uni-lj.si

The text should be in A4 format with 1.5 line spacing, 12-point Times New Roman font, justified alignment with 2.5 cm margins. All pages of the text should be numbered consecutively.

A separate title page should contain: the author's name and surname, title of the article, author's academic title, current employment, full postal address, telephone number and e-mail. The first page of the text should only include the title of the text and the abstract, without the names of authors.

The text should be accompanied by the author's statement that it has not been previously published or is not being prepared for press in any other scientific journal or monograph.

The Editorial Board has the right to refuse contributions for the review procedure that do not meet the required high standards of writing in the Slovenian language (or English language if the article is submitted in English – British English should be used).

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Articles in Slovenian or English should have between 4,500 and 6,500 words.

The article should include an abstract in Slovenian and English of up to 100 words. The abstract should contain an accurate definition of the topic, the method of argumentation and the conclusions. Up to seven key words should be included.

Tables, graphs and pictures should be designed as attachments (and not included in the text). Their approximate positions in the text should be marked in the text.

Footnotes should be clearly marked in the text with consecutive numbers from the beginning to the end of the text. The footnotes should be limited in number and length.

Quotations of three or more lines in length should be placed in a separate paragraph with justified alignment and the margins indented on both sides, with the text appearing in italics and without quotation marks.

Book Reviews

Reviews of Slovenian and foreign scientific books not older than 2 years are accepted for publication in the *Teorija in praksa* journal. The review should contain up to 1,500 words. The author should consistently avoid making references to any sources and literature in the review.

References

The *Teorija in praksa* journal uses *Chicago Manual of Style* (CMS), “author-date” system for citation and quotation. The CMS Instructions are accessible at: <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org>.

The basic form of an in-text reference is (Novak 1994). To give a reference to a page the following mode of referencing should be used: (Novak 1994, 27–29). If two authors are referred to, they should both be stated: (Novak and Kosec 2007, 312–33). If there are three or more authors the following form of referencing should be used: (Novak et al. 1994, 27), and all authors should be stated in the reference list. If the author does not use the first edition of the book, the year of the first edition should also be given: (Novak [1953]1994, 7). Several simultaneous references should be separated by a semicolon: (Novak 1994, 7; Kosec 1998, 3–4; 2005, 58). When citing several references by the same author published in the same year they should be separated by letters: a, b, c etc.: (Novak 1994a, 27–29; Novak 1994b, 1), in the order in which they first appear in the text.

The reference list should be placed at the end of the text. It should include all the literature and sources that were used. The reference list should be arranged in the alphabetical order of authors’ surnames and in the case of multiple works by the same author in the consecutive order of the publications.

Examples of References:

Books

Geertz, Clifford. 1980. *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Edited Books

Featherstone, Mike, ed., and Mike Hepworth, ed. 1991. *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*. London: SAGE Publications.

A chapter in a monograph

Palan, Ronen. 1999. “Global Governance and Social Closure or Who is to Be Governed in an Era of Global Governance?” In *Approaches to Global Governance Theory*, edited by Martin Hewson and Timothy J. Sinclair, 55–72. Albany: State University New York Press.

An Article in a Scientific Journal

Bachrach, Peter, and Morton S. Baratz. 1963. “Decisions and Nondecisions: An Analytical Framework”. *American Political Science Review* 57 (3): 632–42. <https://doi.org/xxx>.

A Newspaper Article

Freeman, Jeremy. 2024. “The Best Way to Find Out if We Can Cool the Planet.” *New York Times*, 17 March 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/17/opinion/solar-geoengineering-risks-research.html>.

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Faculty of Social Sciences. n.d. "Doctoral Programmes". Accessed 16 February 2024. <https://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/en/study/study-at-the-FDV/doctoral-programmes>.

Social Media

Souza, Pete (@petesouza). 2016. "President Obama bids farewell to President Xi of China at the conclusion of the Nuclear Security Summit". Instagram, 1 April 2016. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BDrmfXTtNct/>.

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