THE GREENING OF THE GLOBAL ORDER: TO WHAT EXTENT DO INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS AFFECT ENVIRONMENTAL HIERARCHY?

Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, Politics and Economics

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Section 1: Introduction

Since the first-ever international conference on the environment, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) in 1972, international environmental politics (IEP) has been studied through the lens of domination by the Global North over the South.[1] At the UNHCE, the Southern consensus was that: '…development becomes essentially a cure for their major environmental problems…concern for the environment must not and need not detract from the commitment of the world community…to the overriding task of development.'[2] However, despite its reluctant beginnings, IEP has now been broadly accepted as part of global politics.[3]

As such, there exists an expansive literature examining the impact of IEP on North-South relations.[4] However, it primarily focuses on North-South *economic* inequality.[5] Adil Najam draws parallels between North/South environmental discourses and New International Economic Order politics in the 1970s, arguing that both movements arose to challenge unfair economic orders.[6] For example, ecological debt, the idea that the Global North owes the Global South reparations due to its overuse of its share of the ecological space,[7] arose because of the economic benefits the Global North has derived from that overuse.[8] IEP thus filters the environment via its effect on economic inequality and does not consider it independently.

Given the size of this literature, it is surprising that little attention has been paid to uniquely *environmental* forms of domination. By environmental domination (hereafter 'environmental hierarchy'), I mean a system of stratifying natural worlds where some environments are deemed more valuable than others and thus deserve protection that can justify violence and/or

[1] Wade Rowland, *The Plot to Save the World* (1973), p.47.
[2] United Nations Environment Programme, 'The Founex Report,' in *In Defence of the Earth* (1981), p.4.
[3] Robert Falkner, *Environmentalism and Global International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp.161–94.
[4] See, e.g. J. Timmons Roberts and Bradley C. Parks, *A Climate of Injustice: Global Inequality, North-South Politics, and Climate Policy* (2007).
[5] Shangrila Joshi, *Climate Change Justice and Global Resource Commons* (2021), pp. 23-50.
[6] Adil Najam, 'Dynamics of the Southern Collective: Developing Countries in Desertification Negotiations,' *Global Environmental Politics* 4, no. 3 (2004): pp.128–54.
[7] U. Thara Srinivasan et al., 'The Debt of Nations and the Distribution of Ecological Impacts from Human Activities,' *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 105, no. 5 (2008): 1768–73.
[8] Joshi, op. cit., p.25.

condemnation.[9] By the environment, I mean the non-human world, encompassing the plants, animals, air, water, and ecosystems humanity depends on for survival and well-being.[10]

The closest IEP has come to addressing environmental hierarchy is through contentions surrounding sovereignty, where the Global South must repeatedly reassert that land is *theirs* rather than part of some global commons.[11] The most obvious variant of this phenomenon is 'green grabbing', where lands are seized from peripheral communities (particularly in the Global South) for 'conservation' or clean energy projects.[12] Others have also claimed that the whole environmental project violates the sovereignty of the Global South. The environmental project claims to advance universal restrictions on certain forms of land usage (e.g. deforestation) but, in doing so, only truly restricts the Global South, who is yet to gain from these environmentally destructive activities.[13]

These contentions draw primarily from two colonial discourses. Green grabbing draws from *terra nullius,* where lands inhabited by racialised persons were considered 'empty'. Thus, the European settler could freely exploit the land even if the inhabitants opposed it.[14] Broader sovereignty contentions fall within development discourses. These narratives deem the Global South unfit to govern their environments, which is used to justify intervention and colonial practices. For example, the West imagined the Levant as an oasis destroyed by Palestinians, justifying Israeli settlement and Palestinian displacement.[15] Of course, these discourses are not mutually exclusive and many instances of, for example, green grabbing draw on both.

However, I argue that these approaches are insufficient to understand how environmental domination is sustained and reproduced. This is because these discourses arise from how the international society delineates the *people* who live on their land rather than the land itself. There is, of course, a relationship between how the international society views the land and the people living on it, but thus far, land-centric views have not been interrogated independently. This thesis intends to fill that gap and focuses on two research questions:

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[9] Mattern and Zarakol, op. cit.
[10] Paul G. Harris, 'Global Environmental Politics: Charting the Domain,' in *Routledge Handbook of Global Environmental Politics*, ed. Paul G. Harris (2022), p. 19.
[11] Thom Kuehls, Beyond Sovereign Territory (1996), pp.ix–xvii.
[12] James Fairhead, Melissa Leach, and Ian Scoones, 'Green Grabbing: A New Appropriation of Nature?,' *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 2 (April 2012): pp.237–61.
[13] Kuehls, op. cit.
[14] Nikita Sud and Diego Sánchez-Ancochea, 'Southern Discomfort: Interrogating the Category of the Global South,' *Development and Change* 53, no. 6 (November 2022): pp.1123–50.
[15] Manal Shqair, 'Arab–Israeli Eco-Normalization: Greenwashing Settler Colonialism in Palestine and the Jawlan,' in *Dismantling Green Colonialism*, (2023), pp.67–82.

1. Does a unique environmental hierarchy exist, and if so, what is it?
2. If such a hierarchy exists, how is it affected by international environmental agreements?

I draw primarily from decolonial scholarship, building on the work done by Diana Davis in environmental imaginaries of the Middle East.[16] I extend her analysis by comparing valued environments in the Global North, Yellowstone, and the Alps against French Algeria and the Amazon. I argue that there exists an environmental hierarchy that mandates protection for the environments that it deems intrinsically valuable, contingent protection for instrumentally valuable environments, and reconstruction of disvaluable environments. I then turn to insights at the intersection of liberal and critical IR traditions, following David Lake's analysis that hierarchies are reinforced in mutually beneficial bargaining processes enshrined in international law.[17] I argue that international environmental agreements (IEAs) codify and entrench environmental hierarchy.

This thesis proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature surrounding the two discourses currently underpinning discussions of environmental hierarchy. Section 3 outlines this thesis' methodological approach. Section 4 argues that a broad environmental hierarchy exists.[18] Section 5 examines how this broad hierarchy is formally enshrined in international law through qualitative critical document analysis of recent IEAs. Section 6 concludes.

Section 2: 'Environmental' Hierarchy

Land has long been acknowledged as an important marker of hierarchy. Territory creates the spaces that are occupied by friend or foe; it designates who is welcome and who is not.[19] The colonial project began by capturing the land of an 'uncultured' peoples, then reinforced that domination through violence and institutions.[20] But importantly, the domination began with the land.[21]

This section outlines two prevailing discourses that attempt to answer how the Global North established an environmental hierarchy over the Global South.

[16] See, e.g. Diana K. Davis, *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge* (2016).
[17] David Lake, 'Laws and Norms in the Making of International Hierarchies,' in *Hierarchies in World Politics*, pp.17–42.
[18] Janice Bially Mattern and Ayşe Zarakol, 'Hierarchies in World Politics,' *International Organization* 70, no. 3 (2016): pp.623–54.
[19] Stuart Elden, 'Land, Terrain, Territory,' *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 6 (2010): 799–817.
[20] Sud and Sánchez-Ancochea, op. cit.
[21] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (2001), p.70.

Terra Nullius: The Shaping of the Territorial South

Terra nullius, meaning land belonging to no one, is a discourse that justified the European occupation of many colonies.[22] Since the land was *terra nullius*, European settlers could use it as they pleased, regardless of the opinions of the original inhabitants. Obviously, settlers did not literally think the land was empty. For example, the Italian jurist Camille Piccioni invoked *terra nullius* while debating who 'owned' Svalbard but simultaneously acknowledged that Svalbard was not uninhabited.[23] In fact, only once has *terra nullius* been invoked to justify occupying a genuinely uninhabited land.[24] Thus, in what sense was the Global South 'empty'?

There are two main answers: one Darwinist, the other Lockean.

For some, it was Indigenous peoples' inevitable extinction that justified treating their lands as *terra nullius,* motivated by Chapters 5 and 6 of Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man*. According to Sven Lindqvist, the extinction of Indigenous peoples was the 'next step' in evolution, so the European could use their land as they pleased.[25] Lindqvist argues that the widespread assimilation policies of Indigenous Australians were aimed at annihilating the Australian Aborigine so Australia could realise its *terra nullius* status. For example, the Horn Report, written during an expedition to central Australia, wrote, 'Thanks to the untiring efforts of the missionary and the stockman, [the Aborigine] is being rapidly civilised off the face of the earth, and in another hundred years the remaining evidence of his existence will be the fragments of flint which he has fashioned so rudely.'[26]

The second (and more mainstream) perspective was that the Global South had not done the right *kind* of actions to own its land. Many scholars attribute this to Locke, who wrote, 'He that in obedience of this Command of God, subdued, tilled and sowed any part of it thereby annexed to it something that was his *Property.*'[27] Thus, since the inhabitants of the Global South had not 'cultivated the land', this land was *terra nullius*.[28]

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[22] Sven Lindqvist, *Terra Nullius: A Journey through No One's Land*, trans. Sarah Death (2007), p.4
[23] Andrew Fitzmaurice, 'The Genealogy of Terra Nullius,' *Australian Historical Studies* 38, no. 129 (April 2007): 1–15.
[24] Merete Borch, 'Rethinking the Origins of Terra Nullius,' *Australian Historical Studies* 32, no. 117 (October 2001): 222–39.
[25] Lindqvist, op. cit., p.36.
[26] Lindqvist, op. cit., p.38.
[27] John Locke, 'Two Treatises of Government,' 1689, https://www.yorku.ca/comninel/courses/3025pdf/Locke.pdf, p.118
[28] Fitzmaurice, op. cit.

Although *terra nullius* has faded somewhat from modern discourses, it still resurfaces in IEP. For example, the research and development arm of the EU Commission asks: 'There is…a large empty space with ample amounts of renewable energy nearby: Africa's Sahara Desert. Could one giant solar array there replace Europe's energy generation?'[29] The need for clean energy revived *terra nullius,* justifying land grabs from marginalised populations.[30] Eager to capitalise upon European demands for solar, Morocco seized 3000 hectares of land from Amazigh agro-pastoral communities to sell solar energy to Europe. In the words of one activist, 'The project people talk about this as a desert that is not used but to people here it is not desert; it is pasture. It is their territory…When you take my land, you take my oxygen.'[31]

Despite incidents like Morocco, *terra nullius* is less common in modern IEP. However, even though the international society now recognises land ownership, it does not mean they recognise the Global South's *sovereignty* over land that they own. This leads to the subsequent discourse of environmental hierarchy.

The Depraved South: Narratives of Development

During the post-World War II global development project, the Global North shifted away from *terra nullius*. The goal was no longer to evict the Global South from their land but to 'develop' it and to rescue them from their unfortunate primitiveness.[32] These Orientalist narratives dispossessed Indigenous populations as knowers and placed the European in the best position to protect them and their land.

These development discourses are perhaps best illustrated by the tiered Mandate System implemented after World War I. The UN gave European powers (the Mandatory) control over the newly freed Ottoman colonies, not to expand their empire but to tutor the peoples. Certain 'advanced' colonies received more freedoms, while more 'backwards' colonies had their independence harshly curtailed, as they were '…best administered under the laws of the Mandatory'.[33] While the Mandate System no longer exists, Antony Anghie draws parallels between international financial institutions (IFIs) and the Mandate System. He argues that both

[29] European Commission, 'Could a Giant Solar Array in the Sahara Resolve Our Energy Needs?,' CORDIS | European Commission, December 22, 2022, https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/442711-could-a-giant-solar-array-in-the-sahara-resolve-our-energy-needs.
[30] Alexander Dunlap and Jostein Jakobsen, *The Violent Technologies of Extraction* (2019), p.106
[31] Karen Eugenie Rignall, 'Solar Power, State Power, and the Politics of Energy Transition in Pre-Saharan Morocco,' *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 48, no. 3 (December 7, 2015): pp.540–57.
[32] Sud and Sánchez-Ancochea, op. cit.
[33] Taina Tuori, 'From League of Nations Mandates to Decolonization: A Brief History of Rights,' in *Revisiting the Origins of Human Rights*, ed. Pamela Slotte and Miia Hamme-Tuomisaari (2015), pp.267–92.

institutions sought to ensure the 'well-being and development of Third World countries' but often harmed the people living under them instead.[34]

Development narratives feature prominently in IEP, although the Global South that now weaponizes development. Since the UNHCE, the Global South has used the need to develop to push back against the shift towards sustainability. For example, when a Chilean town was investigating frictions over a conservation initiative, the mayor noted: 'If I had asked someone thirty years ago how to make use of a tree, they would have told me to cut it down. Now they tell me to preserve it.'[35] Thus, since the Global North shifted the goalpost from 'development' to 'sustainability', the Global South must 'catch up' to the ever-shifting demands of an unobtainable modernity.[36]

This shifting goalpost has also prompted new intervention from the Global North. REDD+ is a UN initiative in the Global South that pays landholders to reduce deforestation. While it aims to promote conservation, in practice, it restricts Indigenous access to land and undermines their livelihoods.[37] This result was perhaps unsurprising, as REDD+ transposed Western economic institutions onto non-Western contexts, e.g. by establishing property rights to internalise economic externalities. As early critics noted, REDD+ did not attempt to adapt to these contexts or consult local communities. The Global North assumed the forests were global commons and thus established the 'objectively' best way to manage their existence, assuming that continued local management would lead to their eventual deforestation.[38] This subsumed the Global South's land to the North's management, establishing a hierarchy of authority over land.

The Anthropocentrism Problem

Terra nullius and development discourses play critical roles in North-South environmental relations. However, these narratives are fundamentally anthropocentric, which conceals structures of domination that result over the hierarchies of the *land itself*. For example, *terra nullius* states that land can be subjugated because the inhabitants are 'too primitive' to own it. While

[34] Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (2005), pp.263-264.
[35] Tomas Undurraga and Gonzalo Aguirre, 'Now They Tell Me to Preserve It': Changing Environmental Imaginaries in Southern Chile,' *Geoforum* 141 (2023).
[36] Marc Williams, 'The Third World and Global Environmental Negotiations: Interests, Institutions and Ideas,' *Global Environmental Politics* 5, no. 3 (2005): p.56.
[37] See, e.g. Tracey Osborne et al., 'Climate Justice, Forests, and Indigenous Peoples: Toward an Alternative to REDD+ for the Amazon,' *Climatic Change* 177, no. 8 (2024), p.2.
[38] Joshi, op. cit., pp.112-115.

development narratives acknowledge that the original inhabitants can own the land, they argues that they cannot be sovereign over it since they have failed to use the land properly. Regardless of the discursive practice, the land is reduced to an object.

Such environmental sidelining is problematic because environments have independent value in our discourse outside of how the peoples on the land are hierarchised. For example, while 'primitive' is often used pejoratively in relation to *people*, it is often used positively in relation to the *land*. During the founding of Albert National Park, the American explorer Mary Akeley remarked that it was the 'most primitive place in Africa', and that primitiveness made the land valuable and worth preserving.[39] Notably, it was the 'primitive' nature of the Indigenous peoples that made them lesser than the European but elevated the land. Thus, to understand how environments are stratified, we must go beyond examining how the international society stratifies its people.

Furthermore, the combined perspective ignores how the South constructs the value of their environments independently of their place in the human hierarchy. For example, the Global South regularly strives for equal recognition and economic justice in IEP, due to the unjust economic restrictions that conservation places on the Global South.[40] However, the South does not push for similar equality of their environments. Many Southern states consent to being 'carbon havens' and host carbon-intensive industries moving from the Global North to the South to escape environmental regulations.[41] For example, the primary sector has recently exploded in Latin America, leading to deforestation, pollution, and soil erosion, in an economic transition known as reprimarization.[42] While the Global South fights for economic equality, environmental equality seems to be less of a priority.

Thus, if we want to complete our understanding of how the international society stratifies the agents of our world, then we ought to consider the environment as an agent separate from the people. As Timothy Mitchell writes:

> '…the study of environmental imaginaries…provides a way of studying the past and present in which the protagonists are not limited to the merely human…the shifting

[39] Raf De Bont, 'A World Laboratory: Framing the Albert National Park,' *Environmental History* 22, no. 3 (2017): 404–590.
[40] Rowland, op. cit.
[41] Frédéric Branger and Philippe Quirion, 'Climate Policy and the 'Carbon Haven' Effect,' *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 5, no. 1 (August 6, 2013): 53–71.
[42] Paul Cooney, 'Reprimarization: Implications for the Environment and Development in Latin America: The Cases of Argentina and Brazil,' *Review of Radical Political Economics* 48, no. 4 (September 28, 2016): 553–61.

> alliances and amalgamations of human and non-human agencies, organic and technical materials, recalcitrant and malleable forces, have shaped the common worlds to which we belong.'[43]

To accomplish this goal, this thesis will build on the development discourse literature, examining how the discursive value of the environment justified condemning the Global South for its treatment of the environment.

Section 3: Methodology

As stated previously, this thesis aims to answer two questions. First, does a unique environmental hierarchy exist, and if so, what is it? Second, if such a hierarchy exists, how is it affected by international environmental agreements? This section outlines my methodology to answer these questions.

Methods for Establishing Environmental Hierarchy

This thesis primarily employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine how the environment of countries in the Global North/South is perceived, e.g. as a resource to be exploited or as a monument worth preserving. I choose CDA over standard discourse analysis as I am primarily concerned with relationships of dominance and power as expressed through language in line with Foucault and Gramsci rather than examining semantic structures of the text in isolation.[44] While texts are not deterministically related to power, critically examining texts can reveal how language furthers structures of domination.

To establish an environmental hierarchy, I first examine how the Global North perceives value/disvalue in its environments. As a quintessential case study of 'value', I analyse the discourse surrounding Yellowstone that preceded the creation of the first national park. Next, I examine the Alps, which, while seen initially as a site of sin, evolved into an icon of the Romantic literature movement.[45]

Then, I contrast how the Global North perceived their own environments with how they perceived the Global South's. I begin with the French colonisation of Algeria, which provides

[43] Timothy Mitchell, "Afterword," in *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Diana K. Davis and Edmund Burke (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011), p.86.
[44] Ruth Wodak, 'What CDA Is About,' in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Myers (2001).
[45] Richard McClelland, ed., *The Draw of the Alps* (2023), p.12-13.

valuable insights into what kinds of environments the international society considers valuable.[46] Finally, I turn to the Amazon Rainforest. Unlike the Alps, the Amazon was originally considered a 'paradise on earth' but became an *Inferno Verde* (Green Hell).[47] A comparison of the shift between the Alps and the Amazon uncovers why environments become more or less valuable.

Once I have established this hierarchy, I examine how it is construed in IEAs. As a final note, I primarily focus on the Global North's representation of the environment. This is not because the Global South's representations are any less important but simply because the international society is exclusionary. Hegemonic power allows the Global North's 'knowledge' of value to supersede the Global South's. In perhaps the most striking example, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is currently undertaking one of the most extensive afforestation efforts to 'roll back the desert', which constitutes 80% of its territory.[48] Regardless of the UAE's initial understanding of its environment, power incentivises it to comply with Western environmental 'knowledge'. Therefore, I focus my analysis on the Global North's perceptions of the environment.

Methods for Examining Environmental Hierarchy through IEAs

To understand how environmental hierarchy currently appears in IR, I examine how environmental hierarchy is affected by IEAs. An environmental hierarchy is primarily a hierarchy of *norms*, otherwise known as a 'broad hierarchy'.[49] It delineates acceptable ways to treat the environment and compliance with those norms stratify and rank states. Broad hierarchies are replicated and reinforced in traditional 'narrow' hierarchy frameworks, that is, a set of laws intentionally enacted to constrain state behaviour.[50] While no IEA explicitly categorises environments as valuable or not, IEAs will generally reflect the international society's normative attitudes on the environment.[51]

I specifically choose to examine IEAs between 2000 and 2020. This reflects the time when the environment became widely accepted as a global priority for all countries, not merely the Global North.[52] It also leaves some time to examine the policy ramifications of those IEAs. For this thesis, I excluded two types of IEAs:

[46] Diana K. Davis and Edmund Burke, eds., *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa* (2011), pp.60–86.
[47] Aleksandra Wierucka, *The Amazonian 'Other'* (2025), pp.91-92.
[48] Davis and Burke, op. cit., pp.13-14.
[49] Mattern and Zarakol, op. cit.
[50] Lake, op. cit.
[51] Falkner, op. cit.
[52] Falkner, op. cit.

1. Agreements that were not inter-regional multilateral environmental agreements, as I am primarily interested in North/South environmental hierarchy.
2. Trade agreements. Although trade massively affects the environment, many trade agreements do not contain new environmental provisions and defer to other IEAs.[53] Given that their primary normative positions tend to be drawn from other IEAs, I omit them.

Otherwise, all other IEAs were included. I sourced my list of environmental agreements from the 'International Environmental Agreement (IEA) Database' maintained by Université Laval.[54] The twenty-three IEAs that met the inclusion criteria are listed in Appendix A. I assessed IEAs on two criteria:

1. Whether there was a specific commitment to protecting the environments of the Global South, and whether this protection was instrumental (i.e., to avoid further economic damages) or intrinsic (i.e., because the environment itself deserves protection).
2. Whether the policies provided for in the IEA furthered environmental hierarchy by instrumentalising the environment of the Global South. This will be established via supplementary policy briefs or policy recommendations from the agreement's secretariat.

A major limitation of this thesis is that it only examines inter-*state* environmental hierarchy. Obviously, environments within countries are also stratified, as the environmental racism literature demonstrates.[55] However, given that there exists very little research on environmental hierarchy, I believe a limited inquiry into inter-state environmental hierarchy will still prove valuable.

A Personal Note

I am not from the Global South, and due to the constraints of an undergraduate thesis, my research was conducted remotely. Thus, I rely on textual representations of environmental imaginaries or second-hand accounts filtered through other Global North scholars to understand how the environment is perceived. This reliance is inherently limiting, as the House of IR that

[53] See, e.g., United Kingdom and Republic of Kenya, *Economic Partnership Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, of the one part, and the Republic of Kenya, a Member of the East African Community, of the other part*, December 8, 2020, p.64.
[54] International Environmental Agreements (IEA) Database Project, Université Laval, 2025, https://www.iea.ulaval.ca/en.
[55] See, e.g. Ingrid Waldron, *There's Something in the Water: Environmental Racism in Indigenous and Black Communities* (2018).

produces these texts is deeply exclusionary, erasing and filtering the perspectives of the colonised subject through the Western scholar.[56]

Despite these limitations, I bring a personal dimension to this inquiry. I come from a family profoundly affected by the legacies of environmental exploitation and degradation while growing up next to some of the most exalted lands in the West. For me, environmental hierarchy is not an abstract concept but a lived reality. I aim to interrogate how the environment is objectified and wielded as a tool of violence while remaining critically aware of the exclusionary practices that have historically shaped the field. I hope that my reflexivity regarding my position allows me to contribute a meaningful perspective on environmental hierarchies.

Section 4: Constructing Environmental Hierarchy

It is through language that we construct our relationship with the natural world. Language portrays the environment as either a mere source of resources (e.g. narratives on the priority of growth or neoclassical economics) or something worthy of protection and respect (e.g. Indigenous philosophies).[57] This section deconstructs the languages used to describe the respective environments of the Global North and South to uncover which we consider more intrinsically valuable. Before we can deconstruct the language, however, we first need to understand how one can tell if an environment has been deemed valuable. To answer this question, I turn to a site in the Global North whose treatment is often said to have launched the development of international environmental norms: Yellowstone.

Yellowstone

Yellowstone National Park was the first-ever national park, established on March 1st, 1872.[58] Although Indigenous peoples had long lived in Yellowstone, early historians write, 'It is a singular fact in the history of the Yellowstone National Park that no knowledge of that country seems to have been derived from the Indians.'[59] Thus, for the American settler, Yellowstone's story often begins in the early 1800s.[60] While accounts of early explorations are rare, Osborne Russell provides the following, writing:

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[56] Anna M. Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling, 'The House of IR,' in *Transforming World Politics: From Empire to Multiple Worlds* (2009), pp.48–67.
[57] Arran Stibbe, *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By* (Oxford: Routledge, 2015), p.2.
[58] Schullery, op. cit., p.1
[59] Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park: Historical and Descriptive* (1895), p.13
[60] Schullery, op. cit., pp.31-50.

> '… I almost wished I could spend the remainder of my days in a place like this where happiness and contentment seemed to reign in wild romantic splendor surrounded by majestic battlements which seemed to support the heavens and shut out all hostile intruders.'[61]

This early Yellowstone imaginary attracted scepticism from other American settlers,[62] so much so that the Washburn-Doane Expedition set off in 1988 to disprove its existence.[63] Ironically, it was through this trip that American settlers truly 'discovered' Yellowstone. Accounts published by Montana's Surveyor-General and other elite participants, including the son of a Senator and a US Cavalry lieutenant, convinced Americans of the value of this frontier. Hiram Chittenden, who wrote the most-widely read history of Yellowstone in 1895,[64] describes their encounter with the famous geyser Old Faithful as:

> 'Thus it was that "Old Faithful," as if forewarned of the approach of her distinguished visitors, gave them her most graceful salutation; and thus she bowed out the era of tradition and fable, and ushered the civilized world into the untrodden empire of the Fire King.'[65]

From these early texts, we already see an early imaginary Yellowstone as 'untrodden' and 'wild'. Even Russell, who detailed his encounters in Yellowstone with 'well-armed' and 'neatly dressed' Shoshone, still described Yellowstone as an untouched wilderness.[66]

Chittenden believed preserving Yellowstone was necessary, as these wondrous lands would eventually be exploited for mercenary purposes. To avoid this 'calamity', the government must preserve Yellowstone and forever shut it off from commercial use.[67] Thus, in 1872, Congress passed the 'Act Establishing Yellowstone National Park'. This act banned the settlement of any individual on park territory and tasked the Secretary of the Interior with preserving all-natural curiosities and wonders within the park against 'their capture and destruction for the purposes of merchandise and profit'.[68] Any human usage of the park, no matter how small, degraded its

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[61] Osborne Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, ed. Aubrey L. Haines (1955), p.27
[62] Schullery, op. cit., p.41.
[63] Chittenden, op. cit., pp.75-77.
[64] Schullery, op. cit., p.23.
[65] Ibid., p.82.
[66] Russell, op. cit., p.26.
[67] Chittenden, op. cit., p.90.
[68] National Archives, 'Act Establishing Yellowstone National Park (1872),' National Archives, September 8, 2021, https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/act-establishing-yellowstone-national-park.

integrity. When some early tourists 'degraded [Old Faithful] by being made a laundry', they were thoroughly lambasted in a guide for tourists published in 1883.[69]

The establishment of Yellowstone National Park was well-received by foreign dignitaries. The Earl of Dunraven wrote in 1874, 'All honour…to the United States for having bequeathed as a free gift to man the beauties and curiosities of [Yellowstone]. It was an act worthy of a great nation…'.[70] The practice of establishing national parks diffused abroad, reflecting the increasing value placed on European and American landscapes and the growing concern over their destruction.[71]

Yellowstone is an early insight into the language and rhetoric surrounding the budding environmentalism movement.[72] Organised global environmentalism primarily arose in 19th-century Europe and North America, which at the time, were the only members of the European-led international society that now encompasses the world.[73] During the 'global transformations' of industrialisation and urbanisation, natural sites grew increasingly scarce, which sparked conservation movements to preserve them.[74] The momentum that began with Yellowstone carried through to Theodore Roosevelt, the first head of state to make nature conservation a key focus.[75] This focus turned conservation international. Roosevelt hosted the first North American Conservation Conference in 1909, stating: 'It is evident that natural resources are not limited by the boundary lines which separate nations, and that the need for conserving them upon this continent is as wide as the area upon which they exist'.[76] While the two World Wars disrupted the movement's efforts, the groundwork laid in the early 20th-century led to the establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 1945.[77]

The 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (hereafter 'UNESCO World Heritage Convention') is perhaps the most significant indicator of

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[69] Henry Jacob Winser, *The Yellowstone National Park: A Manual for Tourists* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1883), p.46
[70] Earl of Dunraven, *The Great Divide* (1876), p.xi
[71] Ian Tyrrell, 'America's National Parks: The Transnational Creation of National Space in the Progressive Era,' *Journal of American Studies* 46, no. 1 (2012): 1–21.
[72] For a full treatment, please see Falkner, op. cit., pp.81-194.
[73] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 4th ed. (1977; repr., 2012), pp.13-14.
[74] Barry Buzan and George Lawson, 'Introduction,' in *The Global Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp.1–14.
[75] Sara Dant, *Losing Eden: An Environmental History of the American West*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023), pp.153–78.
[76] Kurk Dorsey, 'Scientists, Citizens, and Statesmen: U.S. Canadian Wildlife Protection Treaties in the Progressive Era,' *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 3 (1995): pp.407–29.
[77] Falkner, op. cit.

global norms surrounding the treatment of valuable lands.[78] Article 2 of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention states that a 'natural' heritage site can derive 'outstanding universal value' from aesthetic, scientific, conservationist, or natural beauty purposes.[79] Article 4 states that each state has the duty to identify, protect, conserve, and present heritage sites within its borders. Article 5 states that if such services do not exist, states shall endeavour to set up such appropriate services of protection and conservation. Article 11(4) notes that a World Heritage Site can be deemed 'in danger' if its conservation is threatened by 'serious and specific dangers', which include 'the threat of disappearance caused by accelerated deterioration, large-scale public or private projects or rapid urban or tourist development projects; destruction caused by changes in the use or ownership of the land…'[80] The UNESCO World Heritage Convention has been ratified by 196 states.[81] Thus, the legacy of Yellowstone has persisted in our international society through provisions like the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

This section has shown what it means for an environment to be valuable: if it is deemed worthy of preservation *as is*. The movement that began with Yellowstone and culminated in the UNESCO World Heritage List highlights that 'human usage', no matter how small, degrades the value inherent in the site. Humans are perceived to detract, not add, to the land, which directly contradicts *terra nullius* narratives that depicted Indigenous peoples as primitive for not developing the land.

However, environments are not only categorised as valuable or disvaluable. Thus, to develop the other rungs on environmental hierarchy, I now turn to the Alps.

The Alps

Unlike Yellowstone, which was always deemed valuable, the Alps experienced a reputational transformation in the 1700s.[82] Early Christian theology called mountains a 'blemish' on the otherwise smooth Earth, picturing them as 'warts, and pockholes in the face Of th' earth'.[83] Even in the early 1700s, a professor travelling through the Swiss Alps compiled sightings, descriptions,

[78] Peter Strasser, "Putting Reform into Action' — Thirty Years of the World Heritage Convention: How to Reform a Convention without Changing Its Regulations,' *International Journal of Cultural Property* 11, no. 2 (January 2002): pp.215–66.
[79] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, November 16, 1972, Paris, https://whc.unesco.org/archive/convention-en.pdf., p.2
[80] UNESCO, op. cit., p.7
[81] UNESCO, 'States Parties,' UNESCO World Heritage Centre, October 22, 2024, https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties.
[82] Marjorie Hope Nicholson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, (1959), p.3
[83] Ibid., p.29.

and illustrations of the evil dragons lurking in the peaks.[84] However, contemporary perceptions of the Alps differ markedly from those of the past. Modern writings describe the Alps as full of 'fairy-tale beautiful valleys, towering hills, and majestic alpine peaks, mesmerisingly, gracefully glistening lakes, wide rivers and splashing creeks alternate in the landscape.'[85] This section explores this shift and what it reveals about how we hierarchise environments.

I have primarily drawn upon Marjorie Hope Nicholson's *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, which details the English-language evolution of mountain perception. Modern Alpine scholars challenge Nicholson's work as Anglo-centric and an oversimplified binary of mountain perception as 'gloom' and 'glory'.[86] However, the texts that most seriously challenge Nicholson's work, Conrad Gessner's sixteenth-century writings praising the Alps,[87] do not challenge the key takeaways from Nicholson's work. Gessner's letters characterise the Alps as sublime, exalt their irregularity and surprise, and cherish their purity and freedom from ordinary life.[88] He does not introduce a new value-theory of the environment but only proves that positive Alpine attitudes appeared earlier than Nicholson suggests. Given that the purpose is to uncover how we hierarchise environments rather than providing a complete history of Alpine perception, I continue to rely on Nicholson.

Christian theology profoundly influenced early Alpine perceptions. Many writers described the mountains as 'heapes of Rocks so strangely congested and broaken…as would affright one with their horror and menacing posture' and that the Alps were merely an obstacle on the way to plains.[89] However, this presented a puzzle for theologians: John Donne and Andrew Marvell, two prominent 17th-century poets, believed that God held symmetry, proportion, and the restraints of the circle in high regard.[90] Thus, given that mountains violated these design principles, why had God put them on Earth?

The answer, drawing from Jewish and Christian literary traditions, was that mountains symbolised human sin.[91] Most famously, Thomas Burnet argues in *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*

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[84] Sean Moore Ireton and Caroline Schaumann, *Heights of Reflection: Mountains in the German Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century* (2012), p.4.
[85] Emanuele Mele and Linde Egberts, 'Exploring Travel Blogs on Tourism and Landscape Heritage: Representations of the Swiss Alps,' *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 18, no. 6 (September 11, 2023): pp.785–806.
[86] Dawn Hollis and Jason König, eds., *Mountain Dialogues from Antiquity to Modernity* (2021), p.2
[87] Ibid., p.4.
[88] Dan Hooley, 'Conrad Gessner, 'Letter to Jacob Vogel on the Admiration of Mountains' (1541) and 'Description of Mount Fractus, Commonly Called Mount Pilate' (1555),' in *Mountains and the German Mind*, ed. Sean M. Ireton and Caroline Schaumann (2023), p.27.
[89] Nicholson, op. cit., p.61-62.
[90] Ibid., p.77.
[91] Ibid., p.83.

that at creation, the Earth was an egg-like smooth spheroid. However, the Earth gradually fractured in response to human sin, causing the water below the egg's surface to bubble and burst. God thus sent forth the Deluge (as in Noah's Ark) that reassembled the crust into a chaotic mix of earth and rock and left behind 'a World lying in its Rubbish'. That world, with its mountains, is the world we inhabit today.

Burnet's specific theory was controversial, but his general belief was not: the presence of mountains was seen as inherently undesirable and symbolised what *could have been* if man had not sinned.[92] This perception extended beyond England – German literary traditions also believed that the Alps were not to be appreciated; they were a hostile, menacing, and aesthetically repellent world that should ideally be avoided and only traversed if necessary.[93]

However, as the introduction suggests, attitudes toward the Alps changed in the 1700s. But before they could be appreciated, they first had to be perceived as utile. In the mid-1600s, the British philosopher Henry More published *An Antidote against Atheism*. In the chapter 'The Great Usefulness of Hills and Values', he wrote that mountains were 'Nature's Stillatories, in whose hollow Caverns the ascending Vapours are congealed to the universal *Aqua vitae*…'.[94] This *instrumental* appreciation of mountains (because they converted saltwater into freshwater) reflected the general orthodoxy of the 17th-century, where land was valuable if it was useful.[95] Interestingly, More attempts to move from instrumental value to aesthetic value, writing, 'You may deem them *ornaments* as well as *useful,*' implying that mountains may not only exist for convenience but also appreciation.[96] While he ends there, this reveals that aesthetic value was higher on the hierarchy than instrumental value. The 'pragmatic defence' was then used to respond to Burnet's theory of Alpine disvalue, where scientist John Ray argued that mountains constituted part of the Earth's diversity, filled with everything necessary for man's use. This diversification had to be the 'Result of Counsel, Wisdom, and Design' and thus could not be God's punishment.[97]

The final Alpine reputation shift occurred because of the geological explosion of the 1700s. Books such as Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* and the discovery of fossils uncovered the layers

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92 Ibid., pp.78-96.
93 Martina Kopf, 'Mountain Food or the Common Ground of Milk and Coca: On the Relationship between Alpine and Andean Landscapes and Food in Literature,' *Food and History* 11, no. 1 (2013): pp.57–73.
94 Henry More, 'An Antidote against Atheism,' in *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings of Dr. Henry More* (1655), pp.47-48.
95 Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: Adventures in Reaching the Summit* (2004), p.12.
96 More, op. cit., pp.52-53.
97 Nichols, op. cit., pp.260-261.

of history within rock. This is why many early geologists were also pioneering mountaineers; for example, Horace-Bénédict de Saussure wrote a four-volume travel and geology guide of the Alps.[98] Mountains were the 'great stone book' by which knowledge of a previously enigmatic history could be discovered. This geological explosion coincided with the Romantic literary movement that gave 18th and 19th-century scientists a thirst for the grandiose and gigantic. Mountains that were once perceived as threateningly tall now presented a dual treasure for scientific inquiry and sublime fascination for Romantic authors.[99] These forces combined in the writings of John Ruskin, who wrote that, 'The several atoms have all different shapes, characters, and offices; but are inseparably united by some fiery, or baptismal process which has purified them all.'[100] The 'pure Alps' imaginary already emerges in Ruskin's work. In the conclusion, he writes that he fears:

> '…the influx of English wealth, gradually connecting all industry with the wants and ways of strangers, and inviting all idleness to depend upon their casual help; thus gradually resolving the ancient consistency and pastoral simplicity of the mountain life into the two irregular trades of innkeeper and mendicant.'[101]

Following the creation of Yellowstone, the Engadin Alps were designated a national park in 1909, marking the era of Alpine protectionism and value.[102]

This case study of the Alps offers two key lessons. First, the Global North hierarchises its environments into three categories. The lowest rung is an environment that should be avoided or one that the world would ideally be better off without. The middle rung consists of environments that are not necessarily *intrinsically* valuable but *instrumentally* valuable. They are not aesthetically pleasing but worth using because they support life and industry. The highest rung is reserved for intrinsically valuable environments that deserve to be preserved, such as Yellowstone above. Interestingly, both valuable and disvaluable sites should be free from human influence. If one resided in the Alps, one was a barbarian.[103] If one used Old Faithful as their laundry, they were an unwelcome visitor who did not respect the valuable environment. However, the normative attitude towards these peoples differed. If the environment was disvaluable, the people should not be there *for their sake*. If the environment was valuable, the

[98] Macfarlane, op. cit., pp.31-32.
[99] Ibid., p.35.
[100] John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, (1904), p. 132.
[101] Ibid., p.455.
[102] Falkner, op. cit., p.87.
[103] Kopf, op. cit.

people should not be there for the *environment's* sake. This observation reveals much more about how environments are hierarchised by examining the normative perceptions of the people on the land.

Second, the shift from the 'utile' Alps to the valuable Alps occurred because the Alps became much more tangible to the European. The fear of God's wrath and the general inhospitability of the Alps prevented Europeans from *knowing* the Alps and appreciating its value. The need for knowledge is reflected throughout British projects in colonial territories. Macfarlane argues that this incessant drive to map was to make sense of landscapes so different to Europe's but also a drive to conquer the unknown.[104] The British explorer Wilfred Thesiger lamented, 'The surface of the globe, having now…been thoroughly explored, no longer affords scope for the adventurous individual in search of the unknown.'[105] The value in a landscape comes from *exploration*, from being the supposed first to discover it, and to hold knowledge that is 'one's own'. Because the Alps and Yellowstone were knowable and uniquely known *by the West,* they could be valuable. This insight helps to explain certain aspects of environmental hierarchy explored in the following two sections.

French Algeria

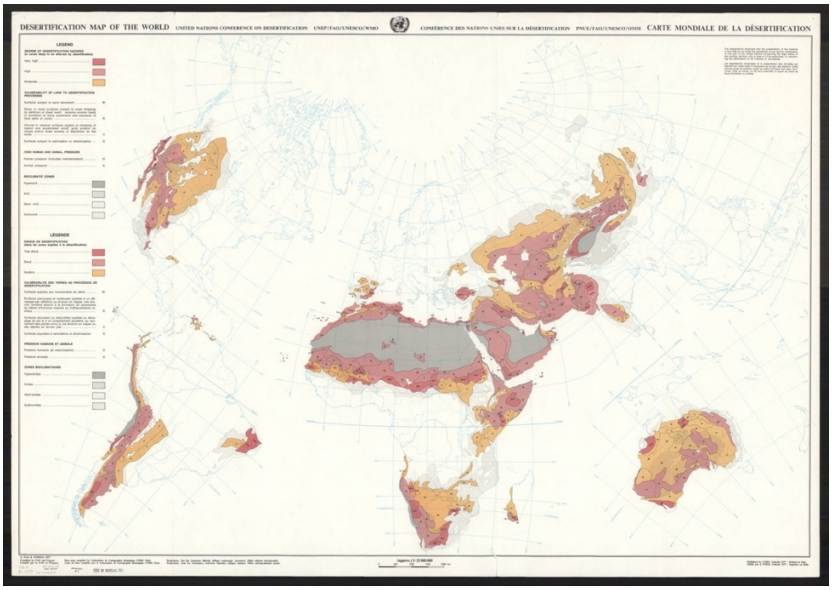
The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is usually imagined as an 'empty' and 'parched' desert.[106] This imaginary of the MENA as a victim of desertification has informed centuries of policy and colonial projects and is the focus of this section.[107] This section primarily draws on the work done by Diana Davis in two book projects: *Environmental Imaginaries of the MENA* and *The Arid Lands*.[108] Although her project is to expose how West/East binaries construct knowledge of the MENA's environments, I will bring her insights into a broader environmental hierarchy framework.

The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) highlights the negative perception of deserts by the international society.[109] Article 1 of the UNCCD defines desertification as 'land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including

[104] Macfarlane, op. cit., pp.184-186.
[105] Wilfred Thesiger, *The Life of My Choice* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co., Ltd., 1987), p.443
[106] Davis and Burke, op. cit., p.1.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Diana K. Davis, *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge* (2016).
[109] Davis, op. cit., p.1.

climatic variations and human activities.'[110] Article 7 highlights that desertification is of particular concern in Africa, designating the entirety of Africa as degraded (or at risk of degradation).[111] Through 'desertification', the UNCCD inextricably ties deserts to poor land management and environmental degradation. In a map released by UNESCO and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1977, almost all the MENA is designated at a high risk of desertification (Figure 1).

Figure 1: FAO/UNESCO 1977 Desertification Map of the World. Available at: https://collections.lib.uwm.edu/digital/collection/agdm/id/29597/



However, research suggests that claims of desertification have been exaggerated, with most arid land ecologists claiming that there is insufficient evidence of large-scale permanent desertification.[112] Thus, this raises the question: when did the degraded desert imaginary begin?

Historically, the desert was not always imagined as such. In early Christian thinking, the desert provided shelter and refuge to Israelites escaping slavery.[113] In the 3rd and 4th centuries, some Christians inspired by Jesus's fast viewed the desert as the locality of ascetic perfection that brought them closer to God.[114] This idea was so influential that many scholars depicted Eden as a desert, with one scholar saying, 'The desert becomes, in fact, a heaven on earth…because no

[110] United Nations, *United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa*, 1994, https://catalogue.unccd.int/936_UNCCD_Convention_ENG.pdf
[111] Ibid., p.8.
[112] Stefanie M. Herrmann and Charles F. Hutchinson, "The Scientific Basis: Linkages between Land Degradation, Drought and Desertification," in *Governing Global Desertification: Linking Environmental Degradation, Poverty and Participation* (2006), pp.45–63.
[113] Daniel Hillel, *The Natural History of the Bible: An Environmental Exploration of the Hebrew Scriptures* (2006), pp.118-139.
[114] Davis, op. cit., p.38.

sound is heard…save the voice of God.'[115] Some accounts suggested that deserts could be improved with man's careful cultivation, but they were relatively rare and counterbalanced by positive perceptions.[116]

The earliest version of modern desert imaginaries appeared during Christopher Columbus's travels to the New World, where he reportedly believed that the forest cover on the island caused the frequent rainfall in Jamaica.[117] This idea, known as 'desiccation theory', was popularised in the 1750s by the Royal Geographical Society.[118] At first, colonists used this theory to advocate for deforestation as they considered the 'Damps' obnoxious. However, by the Industrial Revolution, the Global North witnessed deforestation's grave impacts, and hence, a lush forest came to represent the ideal landscape.[119]

Thus, the desert was seen as the epitome of the environmental crisis, and its lack of forest terrified Europeans. For example, the director of Paris' Royal Botanical Gardens, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, argued that it would be dangerous for colonists if they did not reforest the desert (and particularly Arabia). Indigenous peoples in North America, he said, were descendants of the Old World corrupted by exotic landscapes. He combined desiccation theory with the notion of environmental improvement to argue for a single forest planted in Arabia to 'temper them' and give the earth all the elements of its fertility. Thus, to avoid such a 'catastrophe', reforestation and efforts to make the environment more 'European' had to be undertaken to prevent human degradation.[120]

This theory had a firm hold in France, which colonised Algeria in the 19th and 20th centuries.[121] From Roman texts, French colonisers believed North Africa was once a region of legendary natural fertility, and its current desert state was the responsibility of Indigenous Algerians. In 1847, a member of the government-sponsored commission exploring Algeria said: 'This land, once the subject of powerful exploitation, was neither as deforested nor depopulated as we see today…she was the abundant granary of Rome.'[122] Accordingly, the French mission aimed to 'restore' the North African landscape to its former glory with reforestation and agricultural

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115 James E. Goehring, "The Dark Side of Landscape: Ideology and Power in the Christian Myth of the Desert," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, no. 3 (2003), p.447.
116 Davis, op. cit., pp.41-47.
117 Ibid., pp.55-56.
118 Richard Gove, "The Evolution of the Colonial Discourse on Deforestation and Climate Change," in *Ecology, Climate and Empire* (Cambridge: The White Horse Press, 1997), pp.5–36.
119 Ibid., pp.61-62.
120 Ibid., pp.74-75.
121 Davis and Burke, op. cit., p.60.
122 J.A.N. Perier and A. Berbrugger, *Exploration Scientifique de L'Algérie*, vol. 1 (1847), p.29, my translation.

projects.[123] This was not only to restore Rome's glory but also to prevent the degradation of France. Dr. Paulin Trolard, an influential French colonist, claimed that if the environment were not restored, that the Sahara, 'this nest of evil, stretches its arms towards us; it will soon imprison us, expand around us, annihilate us!'[124] The fear and need to restore Roman glory drove developmental policy for decades. By the late 1870s, the Algerian colonial government had planted approximately four million trees to 'reforest' the desert.[125]

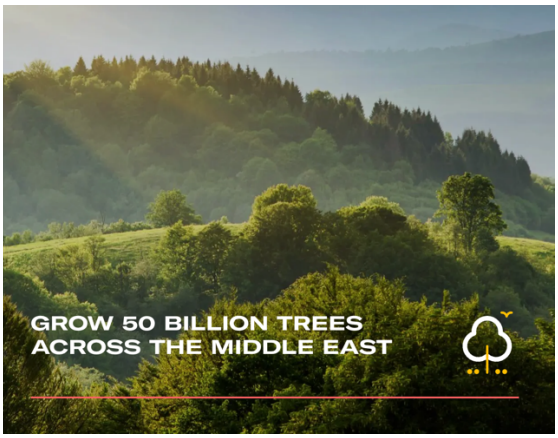
From French Algeria, and the treatment of North Africa in general, one immediate environmental hierarchy emerges. Because Europe is heavily forested, with around 39% forest cover,[126] forests are associated with 'better' environments. The insider-outsider Orientalism binary extends to the natural environments in which individuals lived, where the forested environments of Europe were considered a reflection of the 'superior self'. Europe's forests produce the 'superior' character of Europeans, whereas the desert lands of Algeria and the MENA produce the 'inferior' character of the Global South.[127] This 'green superiority' extends beyond the MENA: the Arizona-Sonora Desert was called the 'greenest of the deserts' or an 'arboreal desert' in 1911 by visiting geographers, drawing an implicit hierarchy between the green Western Sonora Desert and other deserts.[128]

Furthermore, Indigenous Algerians were derided for 'tainting' the landscape by deforesting it instead of preserving the environment handed down to them by Romans. It thus became a 'moral imperative' for the international society to care for green spaces, and failure to protect them makes one an 'other'. This is perhaps why Saudi Arabia spearheaded a tree-planting framework in the MENA, officially approved in October 2022. To quote the Saudi & Middle East Green Initiatives' website, 'The growing of 50 billion trees across the Middle East is the equivalent of restoring 200 million hectares of degraded land. A fifth (10 billion) trees will be grown within Saudi Arabia's borders, with the remaining 40 billion set to be grown across the region in the coming decades.'[129] The website features photos such as Figure 2, depicting the

[123] Davis and Burke, op. cit., p.65.
[124] Ligue du Reboisement, *La Forêt: Conseils Aux Indigènes* (1883), p.2, my translation.
[125] Davis and Burke, op. cit., p.73.
[126] Eurostat, "39% of the EU Is Covered with Forests," European Commission, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20210321-1.
[127] Sud and Sánchez-Ancochea, op. cit.
[128] Thomas F. Saarinen, "Public Perception of the Desert in Tuscon, Arizona," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 5, no. 3 (1988): p.200.
[129] Saudi & Middle East Green Initiatives, "MGI Target: Grow 50 Billion Trees across the Middle East," 2024, https://www.sgi.gov.sa/about-mgi/mgi-targets/planting-trees/.

MENA as a lush, green environment that is not an 'other' but part of the green international society.

Figure 2: Screenshot from the Saudi & Middle East Green Initiatives Webpage, Accessed at: https://www.sgi.gov.sa/about-mgi/mgi-targets/planting-trees/.



Finally, we can split the category of 'disvaluable' environments into two further subcategories. The first is inherently disvaluable environments, and nothing can be done about it beyond its destruction. The second is environments like Algeria, which, while not *currently* valuable, can be *made* valuable by European intervention. European societies have the 'knowledge' of what the environment once was to be able to restore them to their former glory, which makes them more valuable than untameable environments that Europeans cannot 'know'. Thus, Algeria rests on the second-lowest rung – a *disvaluable* environment because it lacks the forests associated with the beautiful European environments but can be restored.

The Amazon

One may wonder why the Amazon was characterised as a 'green hell'. The Amazon is heavily forested and thus should be deeply valuable. This was certainly true during early explorations. Columbus reportedly described the Amazon as possessing:

> '…groves of lofty and flourishing trees… as also large lakes, surrounded and overhung by the foliage, in a most enchanting manner. Everything looked as green as in April in Andalusia. The melody of the birds was so exquisite that one was never willing to part from the spot, and the flocks of parrots obscured the heavens.'[130]

[130] Christopher Columbus, "Christopher Columbus: Extracts from Journal," 1492, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/columbus1.asp.

The lush paradise imaginary continued well into the 1800s, overlapping with the imaginary of the degraded desert. In 1859, the English naturalist Henry Bates, after spending years in the Amazon, wrote, 'I was leaving the equator, where the well-balanced forces of Nature maintained a land-surface and climate that seemed to be typical of mundane order and beauty…', characterising the Amazon as filled with endless streams and boundless forests.[131] While he still believed that civilised life was incomparably superior compared to the 'spiritual sterility of half-savage existence', he held the opinion that '…although humanity can reach an advanced state of culture only by battling with the inclemencies of nature in high latitudes, it is under the equator alone that the perfect race of the future will attain to complete fruition of man's beautiful heritage, the earth.'[132] As a forested land, the Amazon was thus indeed seen as superior.

Two authors are often credited with shifting the Amazon's reputation to a green hell. The first is Alberto Rangel, a Brazilian author whose book *Inferno Verde* (literally, 'green hell') sparked the view of the Amazon as a wild space that resisted and destroyed individuals who tried to tame it. Although Rangel popularised the term, the notion of 'green hell' was prevalent among white Latin American writers in the 20th-century. These *novelas de la selva* (jungle novels) portrayed the Amazon as aggressive, mysterious, and violent: a space people cannot understand or tame.[133] For example, Rangel wrote, 'The jungle makes the worker into an alert watchman. If he abandons his post, it vigorously breaks past the edges of his field, empowering itself again.'[134]

The second force came from American archaeologist Betty Meggers. In 1954, she wrote:

> 'The evidence suggests that the environment exerts an unsurmountable limiting effect on the cultures it supports as long as it permits only a hunting and gathering subsistence pattern…No amount of inventive genius or receptivity to borrowing…is sufficient to overcome this barrier.'[135]

She extended this argument in 1971, arguing that the Amazon's environment was so poor that warfare had developed to keep the population manageable.[136] As Meggers termed it, the

131 Henry Walter Bates, *The Naturalist on the River Amazons* (1864)
132 Ibid.
133 Felipe Martínez-Pinzón and Javier Uriarte, eds., *Intimate Frontiers: A Literary Geography of the Amazon* (2019), pp.17-18.
134 Alberto Rangel, *Inferno Verde* (Livraria Francisco Alves, 1908), trans. Nicholas C. Kawa.
135 Betty J Meggers, "Environmental Limitation on the Development of Culture," *American Anthropologist* 56, no. 5 (1954): p.807.
136 Betty J Meggers, *Amazonia: Man and Culture in a Counterfeit Paradise* (Aldine: Atherton, Inc., 1971), p.160.

'counterfeit paradise' was a far cry from the lush, overflowing paradise that Bates believed made the natives lazy.[137]

The catalyst for this shift is often traced back to the rubber boom in the 1800s. The new automobile industry caused rubber prices to rise dramatically and migrants to flood the Amazon.[138] The rubber boom led to massive wealth in the Amazonian city of Manaus, rivalling some European and North American centres of commerce.[139] However, the rubber boom was short-lived. In 1876, Henry Wickham smuggled Brazilian rubber tree seeds to London, which were sent to Sri Lanka and Malaysia. These rubber trees thrived in Southeast Asia, as they did not suffer the same blight that afflicted the Amazon.[140] As such, Wickham's seeds were said to destroy Brazil's rubber industry. While this story is more of a folk narrative than a historical truth, it promotes the image of the Amazon as immutable and hyper-natural.[141] The failure of the Amazon to be exploited turned the once-lush paradise full of potential for humanity's development into a 'green hell' that could not be tamed. It became a disvaluable landscape from which the failure to develop was not the settler's fault but due to immutable characteristics that the settler could not reasonably overcome.

This narrative shifted again in the mid-1900s. US-led surveys made the Amazon known, producing the first soil map of the inner Amazon basin.[142] These surveys indicated that the Amazon had 'friable reddish clay subsoils' with 'the highest grade of wild rubber and the largest quantity per unit area', indicating that large parts of the Amazon could be agriculturally developed.[143] This research made the Amazon tangible: no longer a 'green hell', it was now the new frontier for development and resource extraction. Henry Ford soon bought land in the Amazon to plant rubber trees, and development schemes continued with the support of the Brazilian government into the 1950s.[144]

The Amazon shows that it does not suffice for an environment to be *like* Europe. The environment must also be exploitable – environments that are not challenge the hierarchy between (European) people and the natural world. Humans alone shape the natural world,

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137 Bates, op. cit.
138 Nicholas C Kawa, *Amazonia in the Anthropocene: People, Soils, Plants, Forests* (2016), p.29.
139 Charles Mann, *1493* (2011), pp.325-326.
140 Mann, op. cit., pp. 340-341.
141 Stephen L. Nugent, *The Rise and Fall of the Amazon Rubber Industry* (2018), p.54.
142 Ibid.
143 C. F. Marbut and C. B. Manifold, "The Soils of the Amazon Basin in Relation to Agricultural Possibilities," *Geographical Review* 16, no. 3 (July 1926): p.416.
144 Susanna Hecht and Raoni Rajão, "From 'Green Hell' to 'Amazonia Legal': Land Use Models and the Re-Imagination of the Rainforest as a New Development Frontier," *Land Use Policy* 96 (2020): pp.1–12.

making us superior to animals who merely exist within it.[145] An environment like the Amazon, which challenges that hierarchy, is dangerous and belongs on the lowest rung. This was not a problem for early explorers, who did not seek to 'develop' the environment and thus did not perceive the Amazon as a challenge. However, later settlers had to justify their failures in developing the Amazon, so they portrayed the jungle as a green hell. But when humanity *could* conquer the Amazon, it became more valuable (albeit only instrumentally via its agricultural potential). As shown later in this thesis, the value of the Amazon continues to grow, but that is predated on the fact that it is a *choice* that we preserve the Amazon rather than one necessitated by human limitations.

Summary

This section tackles the question of whether an environmental hierarchy exists and, if so, what it is. Through the case studies of Yellowstone, the Alps, French Algeria, and the Amazon, it is clear there is. These environments are perceived as more or less valuable, and this difference in perception entails different treatments by the international community.

This section also reveals the form that this environmental hierarchy takes. In sum, the hierarchy has four rungs. The highest rung of the environmental hierarchy is reserved for intrinsically valuable environments that deserve to be protected as is. The next rung belongs to instrumentally valuable environments, e.g., the Alps that purified. These environments do not (necessarily) deserve to be preserved but deserve appreciation for the material benefits they bring to humanity.

The penultimate rung belongs to environments that are neither instrumentally nor intrinsically valuable but can be restored to instrumental value, e.g. by becoming the granary of France via careful cultivation. Deserts in the MENA are the clearest example of this – they are currently disvaluable, but afforestation efforts can 'restore' them.

The lowest rung belongs to environments that are neither instrumentally nor intrinsically valuable and cannot be restored. Before it was made legible to settlers by mapping and survey efforts, the Amazon was a 'green hell' because settlers could not tame it, nor could anything be done about it.

[145] Kawa., op. cit., p.22.

Although this thesis cannot provide a complete account of when an environment will be considered more or less valuable, some early insights may prove helpful in relating environmental hierarchy to the broader critical literature. An environment is ranked higher if it more closely resembles a European landscape. The heavily forested Europe provides the baseline 'self' for comparison. Other environments must be more like the 'self' for international acceptance, as seen by visions of the Sonoran Desert as 'green' or the Saudi & Middle East Green Initiative. Furthermore, because the European *knows* Europe, environments must be legible, that is, one the European understands better than the locals. The Amazon was illegible and untameable and thus became a green hell. For the Global North, preserving the environment must be a choice rather than an act imposed on them by the 'inferior' nature.

With this conception of environmental hierarchy in mind, I now turn to its replication and institutionalisation in IEAs.

Section 5: Through the Lens of Multilateral Environmental Agreements

Building on the 'broad' hierarchy framework developed in Section 4, I now examine how this is replicated in 'narrow' hierarchy frameworks, i.e. negotiated hierarchy through IEAs. In this section, I examine the twenty-three agreements listed in Appendix A. I have organised them into five categories: General/Administrative, Pollution, Fishing, Development, and Biodiversity. I cover each category and reserve a final section for the Paris Agreement.

General/Administrative

While twenty-three IEAs meet my inclusion criteria, there are five that I will leave out of the discussion. These five IEAs fall into two camps. The first is 'general' IEAs that outline how some inter-regional body will facilitate some aspect of a larger IEA (e.g. the agreement between Latin American countries and the US on environmental cooperation). These 'general' IEAs typically mirror other IEAs rather than providing independently novel insights into hierarchy, so I focus on the larger treaties they are modelled after.

The second type I exclude is 'administrative' IEAs. Despite the name, these are deeply important IEAs that establish inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) such as the Global Green Growth Institute or International Solar Alliance. These IGOs are incredibly important and have incredible normative power via their reports and expertise. However, this thesis' focus is mainly to examine how the text of the IEAs *themselves* reflect environmental hierarchies, not actors

borne out of IEAs. I thus choose to exclude these administrative IEAs, although I believe there is fruitful inquiry in that domain.

Pollution

This section examines five pollution-related IEAs, covering various forms of pollution from anti-fouling systems on ships to mercury pollution. I cover them in three subcategories: agreements that are largely irrelevant to environmental hierarchy, agreements that do not differentiate between environments, and finally, agreements that do differentiate between environments.

The International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships is primarily concerned with the impact of asbestos and other dangerous chemical compounds on human health from ships.[146] Although the environment is briefly mentioned, it is only in reference to organic pollutants covered by other agreements, so I end my treatment of this convention here.

The two treaties that do not differentiate between environments are the International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage (hereafter Bunker Oil Convention) and the International Convention on the Control of Harmful Anti-Fouling Systems on Ships (hereafter Anti-Fouling Convention). Both conventions aim to mitigate the impact of their respective pollutant on the environment. The Bunker Oil Convention furthers Article 194 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)[147], which aims to tackle marine pollution, including pollution that threatens rare or fragile ecosystems and the habitats of depleted, threatened, or endangered species and marine life.[148] The Anti-Fouling Convention agrees to reduce the poisoning of marine animals from anti-fouling technology, which is used to keep barnacles and weeds off ships.[149] Both recognise the importance of marine ecosystems and the value of their preservation. However, both are primarily technical documents that establish how bunker oil should be contained or what counts as anti-fouling technology. The only line that the Bunker Oil Convention draws between environments is exclusively regulating exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters and the high seas, which draws a binary between state-owned and non-state-owned lands, but no binary between the Global North and South (as all countries with

146 *Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships*, May 15, 2009, p.3.
147 *International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage*, March 23, 2001, ATS 2009 No. 14.
148 *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, December 10, 1982, p.101.
149 *International Convention on the Control of Harmful Anti-Fouling Systems on Ships*, October 5, 2001, Cm 8284, p.2.

a coastline are entitled to an EEZ).[150] These agreements therefore suggest an equality of environments.

However, the Stockholm Convention Persistent Organic Pollutants (hereafter 'Stockholm Convention') and the Minamata Convention on Mercury provide insight into how environmental hierarchy manifests in IEAs.

The preamble of the Stockholm Convention acknowledges that persistent organic pollutants (PoPs) are particularly concentrated in developing countries and Indigenous communities.[151] It notes that PoPs are dangerous as they accumulate in environments and threaten public health. In the accompanying Global Monitoring Report that established a baseline for PoPs, Asia, Africa, and Latin America are noted to have high levels of these PoPs, whereas the 'Western Europe and others' group, consisting of North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Western Europe was had low levels of PoPs.[152] Similarly, the Minamata Convention highlights the adverse effects of mercury specifically in developing countries and is named after Minamata Disease, caused by mercury poisoning in 1950s Japan.[153] The Global Mercury Assessment, mandated by the Minamata Convention, notes that the majority of mercury emissions occur in Asia (49%), South America (18%), and Sub-Saharan Africa (16%).[154]

These conventions on PoPs and mercury reinforce the idea that the environments of the Global South are in some way dangerous. Much like the French believed they held the burden to 'repair' these environments, these Conventions also placed the duty of 'repair' on the Global North. For example, the Stockholm Convention specifies measures for developed countries to support developing countries in reducing organic pollutants, even noting that: 'The extent to which the developing country Parties will effectively implement their commitments under this Convention will depend on the effective implementation by developed country Parties of their commitments under this Convention relating to financial resources, technical assistance and technology transfer.'[155]

Thus, these pollution IEAs stratify the environment of developing countries on the second-lowest rung, damaged by the excess presence of mercury and PoPs. However, it *can* be

[150] *Bunker Oil Pollution Convention,* op. cit.
[151] *Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants*, May 22, 2001, p.3.
[152] United Nations Environmental Progamme, "Global Monitoring Report under the Global Monitoring Plan for Effectiveness Evaluation," 2009.
[153] *Minamata Convention on Mercury*, October 10, 2013, p.51.
[154] United Nations Environment Programme, "Global Mercury Assessment 2018: Key Findings," 2018, p.3.
[155] Ibid., p.25.

ameliorated, but only with the help of the Global North. The Global South cannot be expected to resolve the situation by itself (due to a lack of financial resources); thus, it is a burden for the Global North to restore the environment with its superior technological capacity.

Fishing

While pollution IEAs revealed that the international community sees the Global South's environments as 'degraded', fishing IEAs uncover what 'value' remains. This section briefly covers the agreement on illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing before turning to five agreements that cover the sustainable management of fisheries in various oceans globally.

The Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) aims to eliminate IUU fishing. IUU fishing is particularly prominent in developing countries due to the financial cost of enforcement and monitoring, with estimated actual catches in West Africa exceeding reported catches by 40%.[156] IUU fishing can be economically devastating to local communities since fish caught by larger trawlers leave little for subsistence fishing, making it more challenging to manage fish stock sustainably.[157] As such, the PSMA aimed to deter IUU fishing by increasing port state responsibility (the state buying the fish), ensuring more checkpoints for IUU fish.[158] This agreement enforces the idea that the natural environments of the Global South are (at least) instrumentally valuable as the fish provided are valuable and deserve protection against non-state exploitation. However, this agreement is otherwise silent on environmental hierarchy as the measures nominally apply to all countries, even if they effectively only apply to the Global South. Thus, I turn to the other five fishing-related IEAs.

Interestingly, the language discussing fish has evolved over the 2000s. In earlier agreements, the primary goal was usually to 'ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use, in particular for human food consumption, of highly migratory fish stocks for present and future generations.'[159] The word 'stock' implies that fish are only instrumentally valuable, as stock is defined as the goods kept on the premises of a shop or warehouse available for sale or distribution.[160] Thus, fish are viewed as no better than merchandise, just merchandise that can

[156] Sjarief Widjaja, Tony Long, and Hassan Wirajuda, "Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and Associated Drivers" (2022), p.3.
[157] Ibid., p.4.
[158] Food and Agriculture Organization, *Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing*, November 22, 2009.
[159] United Nations, *Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean*, September 5, 2000, p.2.
[160] Angus Stevenson, ed., "Stock," in *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2010, p.4516.

swim. Subsequent fishing IEAs also echo this language. Even when agreements commit to conserve ecosystems, they usually do so to protect the 'resources'. For example, the South-East Atlantic Ocean Convention states they are: 'COMMITTED to ensuring the long-term conservation and sustainable use of all living marine resources in the South-East Atlantic Ocean, and to safeguarding the environment and marine ecosystems in which the resources occur.'[161] Non-human life and ecosystems are thus only valuable because they provide 'resources' for human consumption.

The status of the environment as 'instrumentally valuable' is even clearer in the sections on developing countries. For example, in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean Convention, Article 30 gives 'recognition to the special requirements of developing states'. Article 30(2)(a) states that they 'are dependent on the exploitation of marine living resources' and thus cannot be expected to partake in conservation activities without the support of the Global North. Article 30(4) then sets out the financial assistance, technical assistance, technology transfers, and consultative services the Global North may provide.[162] A similar provision emphasizing the special need for developing countries to exploit their environments is present in all five fishing IEAs. Due to the strong push for economic equality in IEP (see Introduction), fewer restrictions are placed on developing countries because their resources are 'less valuable': they need to be exploited for the sake of the superior man. This hierarchy is missed when one focuses on anthropocentric forms of hierarchy. The Global South places their environments on a lower rung by pushing for them to be developed and used.

This hierarchy is particularly stark in the South Pacific Ocean Convention and the South Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement. Unlike other IEAs, these agreements impact two Global North states: Australia[163] and New Zealand.[164] These IEAs are also the only two to include a commitment to biodiversity *without* referencing its instrumental value. For example, the South Pacific Ocean Agreement notes that states are '*Conscious* of the need to avoid adverse impacts on the marine environment, preserve biodiversity, maintain the integrity of marine ecosystems and minimise the risk of long-term or irreversible effects of fishing.'[165] However, even as these

[161] *Convention on the Conservation and Management of Fishery Resources in the South-East Atlantic Ocean*, April 20, 2001, Official Journal of the European Communities L 234, August 31, 2002, p.40.
[162] United Nations, *Convention on Fish,* op. cit., pp.19-20.
[163] *Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement*, July 7, 2006, p.17
[164] *Convention on the Conservation and Management of High Seas Fishery Resources in the South Pacific Ocean*, February 1, 2010, p.8.
[165] *South Pacific Ocean Convention,* op. cit., p.3.

agreements explicitly recognise the importance of biodiversity, they still underscore the Global South's overriding need to exploit their environment.[166]

Thus, although fishery agreements do not explicitly hierarchise environments, it is telling that only agreements impacting the Global North contain references to biodiversity and ecosystem protection independent of instrumental value. CDA acknowledges that omission can be as equally informative as inclusion, and it is clear that the omission of biodiversity goals from IEAs that do not impact the Global North hierarchises environments of the South as 'resources' and the North's as 'worth preserving'. The inclusion of separate duties for developing countries emphasises that the international community does not see the Global South's spaces as worth protecting beyond their instrumental value, at least in the same way they prioritise biodiversity and preservation of their own.

Development

One may ask why measures such as REDD+ exist if the international community primarily perceives the Global South's environment as a resource. Under the pre-2000s hierarchy, this would indeed be a puzzle. However, modern IEAs have expanded how instrumentally valuable environments can be treated. Modern science recognises the importance of ecosystem services and has accordingly expanded the 'instrumental value' of an environment to benefits that can be derived from the preservation of an environment. This is revealed through a close examination of the development IEAs.

The International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA) focuses on managing wood grown between the Tropic of Cancer and Capricorn, primarily consisting of countries from the Global South.[167] The ITTA recognises the importance of forests for development, as one of its aims is to promote 'increased and further processing of tropical timber from sustainable sources in producer member countries, with a view to promoting their industrialization and thereby increasing their employment opportunities and export earnings.'[168] However, the ITTA also worries about excessive logging. In Article 1(j), the ITTA '…encourag[es] members to support and develop tropical timber reforestation, as well as rehabilitation and restoration of degraded forest land…'[169]

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[166] *South Pacific Ocean Convention,* op. cit., p.22-23; *Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement*, op. cit., p.11.
[167] *International Tropical Timber Agreement, 2006*, adopted January 27, 2006, entered into force December 7, 2011, p.5.
[168] Ibid., p.4.
[169] Ibid.

It may initially seem that the Global North is attempting to balance intrinsic value with political feasibility, as they mention the need to promote 'other forest values'.[170] However, this need is only mentioned once, compared to the overwhelming focus on development with seventeen mentions. Thus, I argue that what drives the Global North to reforest and sustainably manage pre-existing forests is the *instrumental* value these forests provide. The preamble notes the 'importance of the multiple economic, environmental and social benefits provided by forests, including timber and non-timber forest products and environmental services…'[171] The ITTA justifies conservation instrumentally, meaning that the mere fact that policies conserve an environment no longer means that an environment is intrinsically valuable.

The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture reflects this more clearly. Plant genetic resources (PGR) consist of various crops that farmers can use to selectively breed new plants with desirable traits, e.g. requiring less water to grow.[172] As climate change advances, PGRs can reduce its potentially devastating effects on our food supply.[173] The Global North relies heavily on foreign PGR, with 100% of the food production in Australia and North America depending on species from other regions.[174] Especially as PGR stock declines and agriculture becomes more industrialised (and uniform), the international community has grown increasingly worried that pests or diseases may destroy the food supply.[175]

Thankfully, the MENA, West Asia, and Southeast Asia have a high amount of PGR due to the continued prevalence of subsistence farming.[176] As such, the International Treaty on PGR has pushed to conserve this genetic diversity by bringing it to Europe or conserving it within local environments. The International Treaty on PGR also demonstrates that this drive for conservation is *purely* instrumental, as the only mention of biodiversity is in reference to International Agricultural Research Centres that will preserve the biodiversity collected from the Global South.[177]

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[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid., p.3.
[172] Food and Agriculture Organization, *The State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* (1997), p.1.
[173] Romesh Kumar Salgotra and Bhagirath Singh Chauhan, "Genetic Diversity, Conservation, and Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources," *Genes* 14, no. 1 (January 9, 2023).
[174] FAO, op. cit., p.23.
[175] *International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*, November 3, 2001, p.5.
[176] Colin K. Khoury et al., *Estimation of Countries' Interdependence in Plant Genetic Resources Provisioning National Food Supplies and Production Systems*, Research Study 8, International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (2015), p.10
[177] *International Treaty on PGR,* p.26.

Thus, while IEAs advocate for the Global South's conservation, it is not because they *intrinsically* care about those environments. Preserving (resources from) these environments is useful, which justifies violating the usual preservation/exploitation binary.

Biodiversity

The instrumental nature of the Global South's environment is made even clearer when compared against IEAs that primarily protect the Global North's environment. These agreements mainly focus on biodiversity. Of the three biodiversity agreements, two were spearheaded by the Global North. I turn to those now.

The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) is the only agreement on this list to protect a species explicitly. ACAP notes: 'albatrosses and petrels are an integral part of marine ecosystems which must be conserved for the benefit of present and future generations, and that their conservation is a matter of common concern, particularly in the Southern Hemisphere'.[178] ACAP then details numerous measures that states agree to undertake to preserve albatrosses and petrels, including conserving and restoring their habitats, raising awareness of conservation issues, and coordinating an international system for information sharing regarding albatrosses and petrels. Importantly, the document never appeals to instrumental value to justify conservation.[179] ACAP was spearheaded by Australia and New Zealand, with these two countries being the first signatories in 2001.[180] The albatross is also an important symbol in the Global North, inspiring Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and, more recently, Taylor Swift's song 'The Albatross'. Fittingly, the only bird to receive international protection is one considered bad luck to kill — but notably, a key species of the Global North was conserved without reference to instrumental value, unlike any in the Global South.

Similarly, the Agreement on Environmental Cooperation among the Governments of Canada, the United States of America, and the United Mexican States (USMCA) heavily prioritises the environmental conservation of the three countries. The preamble opens with: 'CONVINCED of the importance of the conservation, protection and enhancement of the environment in their territories…', implying that environmental conservation will be a focus of the agreement.[181] This

[178] *Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels*, adopted June 19, 2001, entered into force February 1, 2004, amended May 11, 2018, p.1.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Bonn Convention, "ACAP," www.cms.int, accessed 2025, https://www.cms.int/en/legalinstrument/acap.
[181] Global Affairs Canada, "Agreement on Environmental Cooperation among the Governments of Canada, the United States of America, and the United Mexican States," GAC, 2018.

is not to say that the North American environment is only intrinsically valuable. There is a heavy focus on sustainable development and green growth, including a section titled 'Reducing pollution and supporting strong, low emissions, resilient economies'. However, unlike all the agreements that primarily discussed the Global South, there is an explicit section on 'Conserving and protecting biodiversity and habitats'. This section enables measures like conserving wild flora and fauna in their natural habitats, combatting wildlife trafficking, and preventing alien species from impacting North American flora and fauna.[182] This biodiversity section does not reference instrumental value and implies that conservation is a valued goal in and of itself.

Compare this to the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments ('Ballast Water Convention'). Ballast water is water carried in ships' tanks to maintain stability, but it often carries alien species that can destroy the port state's environment.[183] The Ballast Water Convention aims to reduce the number of invasive species transported abroad via ballast water to preserve natural wildlife and biodiversity. The preamble of this convention justified this primarily through the intrinsic value of biodiversity, citing previous statutes that empower states to prevent the introduction of new species that could cause significant and harmful changes, with no reference to economic value.[184]

The ballast water problem is not unique to the Global South. In the 1980s, European ships brought zebra mussels to the US in their ballast water, devastating the Great Lakes ecosystem.[185] The zebra mussels are often called the catalyst for domestic US action against invasive species, including mandatory regulations on ballast water to ensure that no zebra mussels enter the US again. Other developed nations, such as Israel and Australia, also introduced mandatory ballast water legislation to stop invasive species.[186]

However, none of these three nations have ratified the Ballast Water Convention.[187] The first nations to ratify were primarily island nations, including the Maldives, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Tuvalu, as well as some other Global South countries such as Syria and Nigeria. Norway and Spain were the only countries from the Global North to ratify the treaty before 2008. Even

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182 Ibid.
183 Briony MacPhee, "Hitchhikers' Guide to the Ballast Water Management Convention: An Analysis of Legal Mechanisms to Address the Issue of Alien Invasive Species," *Journal of International Wildlife Law & Policy* 10, no. 1 (March 16, 2007): pp.29–54.
184 *International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments*, adopted February 13, 2004, entered into force September 8, 2017, p.2.
185 MacPhee, op. cit.
186 Ibid.
187 Université Laval, "Members," International Environmental Agreements Database, 2025, https://www.iea.ulaval.ca/en/treaty-members/4298.

though the treaty was signed in 2004, it only came into effect in 2017 due to insufficient ratification. While some delays were related to inconsistencies with technical requirements, a significant force was the fear of high costs surrounding the implementation and enforcement of the convention. Notably, many Global North states already had binding legislation regarding ballast water, but the additional cost still dissuaded some from ratifying the convention.[188]

While it is difficult to say why exactly the Ballast Water Convention was delayed, it seems relevant that these measures would have uniquely protected the Global South's environment against degradation. The Global North could protect its biodiversity by itself (or via regional organisations) and thus was unwilling to bear the extra cost of adapting to new international regulations that it considered unnecessary for environments not worth protecting.

The Paris Agreement

While the previous IEAs revealed useful information about environmental hierarchy in IEAs, I turn to the Paris Agreement to see the complete picture of how IEAs hierarchise environments. In the 21st-century, no other IEA has been as influential.[189] Four articles are relevant for examining how environmental hierarchy is constructed: Articles 5-8.

I begin with Articles 7 and 8, which commit parties to invest in climate adaptation. While Article 7(2) acknowledges that all countries must adapt, it highlights 'the urgent and immediate needs of those developing country Parties that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change'.[190] The special needs of developing countries are mentioned five times in Article 7, with no mention of the special challenges facing developed countries. What is interesting is how adaptation is framed in Article 7(4), which states, 'Parties recognise that the current need for adaptation is significant and that greater levels of mitigation can reduce the need for additional adaptation efforts, and that greater adaptation needs can involve greater adaptation costs.'[191] This section implies that while we would *prefer* to have mitigated the climate crisis, once the environment is degraded enough, there is no choice but to change it or move ourselves away from these disvaluable environments to ensure they are still fit for human survival. Article 8 continues, highlighting the role of 'sustainable development' in reducing the 'adverse effects of

[188] Nora-Phoebe Erler, *The Protection of the Marine Environment against Alien Invasive Species: International Law and Policy Responses* (2018), p.42.
[189] Robert Falkner, "The Paris Agreement and the New Logic of International Climate Politics," *International Affairs* 92, no. 5 (August 31, 2016): pp.1107–25.
[190] *Paris Agreement*, adopted December 12, 2015, entered into force November 4, 2016, p.9.
[191] Ibid.

climate change'.[192] The language of 'development', which only applies to the Global South, creates an environmental imaginary of the Global South as a degraded world struck by climate change, ranking the Global South's environments lower on the hierarchy.

Article 5 outlines two mechanisms that attempt to save and restore what environment is left over. First, parties should 'take action to conserve and enhance, as appropriate, sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases…including forests.' Second, parties should create 'positive incentives for activities relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries…'.[193] Two takeaways can be drawn from this text. First, the Paris Agreement continues to imagine the forest as humanity's saviour and downplays the importance of other environments (e.g. deserts). Second, it instrumentalises the forests of the Global South specifically by highlighting forest management in developing countries. Much like 'fish stocks' from before, the language of 'forest carbon stocks' reduces forests to solely use-value. While Article 5 pushes for conservation, it is instrumental conservation.

Article 6 furthers this conservation's instrumental nature by providing for international transfers of mitigation outcomes (ITMOs). ITMOs allow Country A to finance an emissions reduction project in Country B and count that emissions reduction towards Country A's carbon-reduction goals. Article 6(4)(a) argues that the purpose of ITMOs is to 'promote the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions while fostering sustainable development.'[194] While the text does not explicitly limit ITMOs to between the Global North and South, the World Bank acknowledges that it was designed to incentivise the Global North to reduce the Global South's emissions.[195] The 'conservation' of the Global South's environment is now directly useful for the Global North by designating the Global South's environments as emissions reduction stores for the Global North.

The Paris Agreement does mention the environment's intrinsic value, as parties '[note] the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity, recognised by some cultures as Mother Earth…'[196] While this clause ostensibly applies to *all* ecosystems, it is unclear how this article is intended to protect ecosystems that have

[192] *Paris Agreement,* op. cit., p.12.
[193] Ibid., p.6.
[194] Ibid., p.7.
[195] Michal Toman and Suzi Kerr, "International Transfers of Mitigation to Achieve the Goals of the Paris Agreement," World Bank Blogs, 2017.
[196] *Paris Agreement,* op. cit., p.2

already lost their integrity, as Article 7 heavily implies is true of developing countries. Even this explicit acknowledgement of environmental equality cannot override the environmental hierarchy implicit in much of the Paris Agreement.

Section 6: Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to answer two research questions. First, does there exist an environmental hierarchy in international politics? I have argued that an environmental hierarchy exists through the case studies of Yellowstone, the Alps, French Algeria, and the Amazon. These case studies show that the environment hierarchy has four rungs: valuable environments that deserve to be preserved, instrumentally valuable environments, disvaluable environments that are fixable, and disvaluable environments that are not.

The second question asks how this hierarchy is affected by IEAs. Through discursively analysing twenty-three IEAs signed between 2000-2020, I argue that IEAs have cemented an environmental hierarchy that portrays the environments of the Global South as degraded or, at most, instrumentally valuable. This is exemplified most clearly in Articles 5-8 of the Paris Agreement, although other IEAs also support this environmental hierarchy. Modern IEAs, however, have allowed an environment to be instrumentally valuable via conservation, a new development in how instrumentally valuable ecosystems can be treated.

This thesis builds on the existing IR hierarchy literature, owing greatly to the 'broad' and 'narrow' hierarchy framework by Ayşe Zarakol and Janice Bially Mattern. It extends this hierarchy framework to non-human agents in the international community, noting that how we perceive environments is foundational for understanding the worlds in which politics is conducted. How we stratify members of our international society is determined by how we expect them to behave, which arises (in part) from expectations of how they should treat their environment. Thus, to fully understand the hierarchies in IR, we must understand anthropocentric hierarchies as situated within how we hierarchise the natural world.

The conclusions I have drawn in this thesis are greatly limited by its focus on inter-state environmental hierarchies. The 'state' as an entity inherently involves environmental destruction. War, the principal activity of states in IR theory, is deeply environmentally destructive, with the US military being the largest emitter in the US.[197] Environmental violence is imbued in every

[197] Neta C Crawford, *The Pentagon, Climate Change, and War* (2022), p.13.

aspect of the state, and restricting my inquiry to inter-state environmental hierarchy does not reflect the many environmental worlds that people inhabit. Despite this limitation, this early insight into environmental hierarchy could form the basis for such future inquiry.

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Appendix A: List of IEAs

Year Signed	(Shortened) Treaty Name	Category
2018	Environmental Cooperation Agreement among USMCA	Biodiversity
2016	Framework Agreement establishing the ISA	Administrative
2015	Paris Agreement	Paris Agreement
2013	Minamata Convention on Mercury	Pollution
2012	Agreement on the establishment of the Global Green Growth Institute	Administrative
2009	Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing	Fishing
2009	Convention on the Conservation and Management of the High Seas Fishery Resources in the South Pacific	Fishing
2009	International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships	Pollution
2008	Statute of the International Renewable Energy Agency	Administrative
2006	Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement	Fishing
2006	International Tropic Timber Agreement	Development
2005	Agreement among Latin American countries and the USA on Environmental Cooperation	General
2004	Cooperative agreement among USMCA supplementary to the North American Plant Protection Agreement	General
2004	Agreement for the Establishment of the Global Crop Diversity Trust	Development
2004	International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments	Biodiversity
2003	Convention for the Strengthening of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission	Fishing
2001	International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture	Development
2001	International Convention on the Control of Harmful Anti-Fouling Systems on Ships	Pollution
2001	Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels	Biodiversity

2001	Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants	Pollution
2001	Convention On the Conservation and Management of Fishery Resources in the South-East Atlantic Ocean	Fishing
2001	International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage	Pollution
2000	Convention on the Conservation and Management of the Highly Migratory Fish Stocks of the Western and Central Pacific Ocean	Fishing