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Social media analysis, Discourse & Netnography

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Declaration in lieu of oath

We hereby declare in lieu of oath that we have prepared this group thesis without the help of third parties and without the use of aids other than those specified. The ideas taken directly or indirectly from external sources are labelled as such. The work has not previously been submitted in the same or a similar form by us or anyone else as an examination paper.

1 Introduction

In recent years, the resurgence of right-wing populism increasingly impacts or appropriating parts of the discourse around climate breakdown. This phenomenon is closely linked to broader ideological trends, including science scepticism, cultural hegemony, and the formation of post-truth narratives that challenge the established scientific consensus on climate issues. This research seeks to answer the question: how post-truth, right-wing discourse proliferates and reinforces hegemonic structures, particularly in relation to the appropriation of nature? By examining the role of right-wing rhetoric, particularly on social media platforms like X/Twitter, this study explores how these narratives shape public opinion on climate change. It focuses on how populist narratives, which often question the scientific consensus, influence the broader ideological landscape and affect societal attitudes toward environmental policy.

Right-wing populist movements in Germany often frame climate change initiatives as a threat to national identity, economic stability and traditional values. This rhetoric portrays environmental policies as elitist projects that are disconnected from the needs and concerns of ordinary citizens. By analysing social media content, particularly tweets, this research seeks to uncover the strategies used by these movements to spread scepticism and shape public perceptions.

The theoretical framework for this research is based on Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, which provides a lens through which to understand how dominant ideologies are constructed and maintained. Gramsci's theory emphasizes the role of cultural and ideological leadership in securing public consent.This framework is especially insightful in unravelling how authoritarian populism thrives in moments of hegemonic crisis, by reshaping narratives into a political imaginary that focuses directly on the substance of lifewords (cf. Holmes, 2019).

Methodologically, this research employs netnography to explore the dynamic and evolving nature of online discourse around authoritarian populism and climate change. This approach effectively captures how misinformation, emotional appeals, and simplistic narratives play significant roles in shaping public attitudes. The analysis begins with the categorization of tweets based on key themes and sentiments, which will be further explored in the context of their influence on public discourse.

Building on this approach, the research also employs a multi-layered framework for analysis that examines the interactions between different actors within the discourse. This framework includes the analysis of government-to-citizen communication, citizen-to-citizen interaction, and international discourse on climate scepticism. By applying this framework, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how these narratives are constructed, disseminated and received at different levels of digital engagement. This integrated approach, combining Gramsci's theoretical insights with rigorous netnographic analysis, aims to illuminate the complex dynamics of ideological formation in the digital age, where the boundaries between truth and misinformation are increasingly blurred.

2 Literature review / Theoretical Framework

2.1 Understanding Right-Wing Populism in the Context of Globalization

The rise of right-wing populism in Germany has coincided with a growing scepticism towards climate change and environmental protection efforts (Marcks & Pawelz, 2020). Science scepticism in general and the questioning of the scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change, in particular, have become hallmarks of right-wing populist rhetoric (Weingart et al., 2000). While the scientific proof for the existence and human-induced nature of climate change is more than striking, an increasing body of political actors have sought to undermine this consensus by promoting alternative, non-scientific explanations with stunting success (Rekker, 2021). Uncovering both the techniques of moral disengagement employed by climate sceptics as well as the strategic framing of climate change as an elitist or anti-national issue can shed light on how right-wing populists capitalize on and exacerbate existing divisions in society (Stoll‑Kleemann & O'Riordan, 2020). In examining discourse around climate change within right-wing or conservative and right leaning communities, we aim to contribute to an understanding of ideology formation and public perception as largely constitutive forces in, what speaking with Gramsci, can be called a war of position (cf. Gramsci, 1971). It is crucial to dissect the nuances in political parties and the resurgent authoritarian populism to map the context and conditions needed for systemic trust erosion and affective, non-scientific narratives to flourish. Recent studies (see for instance; Sommer, 2022 or Haas, 2024) show that a dominant narrative in right-wing

populism renders climate protection and energy transition as threats to the economy and jobs. What follows is a narrative of climate protection as a project of the elites that lacks democratic legitimacy and is portrayed in a stark disconnect with the people. This is also linked to a rejection of the EU and multilateral approaches in general as they are seen to endanger national sovereignty. However, in order to comprehend the rise in popularity of right-wing populism, it is insufficient to merely focus on the activities of political actors. It is imperative to investigate the historical circumstances that make the ideologies, interpretations, problem identifications, proposed solutions, and the aesthetic and emotional appeals of these entities seem appealing or at least tolerable to specific demographic groups. Marco Revelli (2019) proposed an alternative to the often misconstrued and utterly reductionist narrative of populism simply covering a seemingly natural demand for fascist ideologies. He differentiates between "populism as a project" – political subjects with their individual strategies and "populism as context" which he understands to be "the political-cultural climate of our time, which impresses its own changing pattern upon the political life of whole national or even transnational communities" (p. 11). Analysing right-wing discourses on climate changes thus also means unraveling what Michelle Foucault (1992, pp. 22) might have called the conditions of acceptability of authoritarian, populist politics. Following Opratko (2018), we attempt to inspect the wider net of affective problematizations, aesthetics and narratives that populism employs within an interlocking organic crisis of liberal democracies.

Right-wing populism, as observed in the contemporary political landscapes around the world, has been framed as a complex response to the socio-economic and cultural changes brought about by neoliberal globalization. Influential scholars such as Mudde and Kaltwasser (2019) define it as an ideology which assumes that society is divided into two homogeneous, antagonistic groups, the pure people and the corrupt elite. This ideological framework asserts that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people, framed as the (anständige)Volk in the German context. Even though populists in many cases claim to be championing anti neoliberal globalized ideals (closure not further liberalization for instance) it is in our understanding a very symptom of what Steger calls the "great unsettling of our time" (cf. Steger & James, 2019). This plays out very differently around the world and even within national boundaries and political parties, while mostly revolving around the perceived loss of

identity, dignity, status, voice, respect or economic well-being (cf. Steger & James, 2019). Corresponding sentiments, such as anger or fear, that reside in a long tradition of social incongruences "about the unequal merits of market liberalisation, perceived threats to prosperity, one's culture, security and stability" (Stella & Carius, 2019, p. 5) are openly expressed by right-wing populist parties. These sentiments often crystallize around issues such as climate change, where scientific consensus may be perceived as a threat to traditional ways of life or economic interests.

In a study by adelphi Caria and Stella contended that in Europe "21 right-wing populist parties [were] sceptical of the scientific consensus on human-induced climate change or [were] overtly denying it." (2019, p.10)[1].

Populism writ large is a weak or thin ideology (cf. Mudde, 2004) that needs to be undergirded with a stronger ideological project, which in the case of right-wing populisms takes the shape of nationalism or authoritarianism. In many cases, as will be explored within the analysis of our data set, both the populist as well as the nationalist core narratives are present to varying degrees within the climate change and climate protection discourse. It will be pivotal to understand how these differ and under which circumstances they tend to take root. Firstly, we will map the prominent positions against climate science and the corresponding attempts to genealogically make sense of them. We will then interrogate these stances on the socio-cultural specificities of their origins to make sense of why and how these ideologies continue to proliferate.

2.2 Systematizing Populist Stances against Climate Science

Recent studies on right-wing populism in Germany and Europe have produced five systemic approaches to explain right-wing populist stances towards climate politics. One explanatory strand focus on economic reasons, arguing that right-wing populist forces are creating an offer for transformation losers (cf. Sommer, 2022). It is predominantly within this explanation attempt, that the resurgence of the far right from 2014 onwards is rendered as a reaction to globalization. Locally this plays out in

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[1] The study traces the rise of right-wing parties in Europe, culminating the 2019 European election with 19 right-wing populist parties being assigned seats in the parliament, many of which started their carrier by the turn of the century in the early 2000s.

examples such as Lausitz, where the AfD campaigned for the continuation of coal mining under the banner of securing workplaces (cf. Sommer, 2022). Hochschild (2018) argues in a similar vein, opening up the term "deep story", which contains the tendency to craft a perceived disadvantage into political narratives. Environmental protection requirements thus prevent the people from occupying what they consider their legitimate place in society. A second prominent line of explanation, traces the aversive attitude of many right-wing populists to climate issues to a fundamental rejection of cosmopolitan values (Lockwood, 2018). Thirdly, some scholars (see Sommer, 2022 for a detailed literature review) draw attention to the fact that many tenets of contemporary right-wing parties are based on a long-established continuity of disapproval that has been festering in society and is only now being leveraged by parties such as the AFD in Germany. Fourthly, the rejection of climate protection policies is a strategic endeavour to appeal to particular voter groups (i.e. car drivers) that stages climate change as an elitist struggle. Finally, there are many synthesizing approaches that focus on the intersectionality (see Crenshaw, 1991) of economic and cultural factors. Eversberg (2018) for instance describes the rise of right-wing populism as a visceral form of defense of material and cultural privileges that manifest themselves in the prevailing imperial way of life. Especially the cultural polarization between classes and lifestyles (cf. Reckwitz, 2017) has gained traction in post-industrial capitalism, not least due to a revolution in information dissemination and access to academic resources.

Since we are not exclusively interested in right-wing rhetoric in terms of political communication but rather as a constituent in ideology formation, we are interrogating the dominant attitudes towards climate science on the societal constellation that make their popularity plausible. From a top-level perspective Stella and Carius (2019) uncovered three stances towards climate science within the European political landscape that will serve as a reference point for the present study in terms of a broad segmentation to contrast our findings with. The dominant stances are:

Type 1: DENIALIST|SCEPTICAL parties cast doubt on the scientific consensus on human-induced climate change or explicitly reject evidence beyond reasonable doubt"

Type 2: DISENGAGED|CAUTIOUS parties either have no position on climate change or attribute little importance to the problem

Type 3: AFFIRMATIVE parties support the scientific mainstream and recognize the danger that climate change poses to the world and their own countries
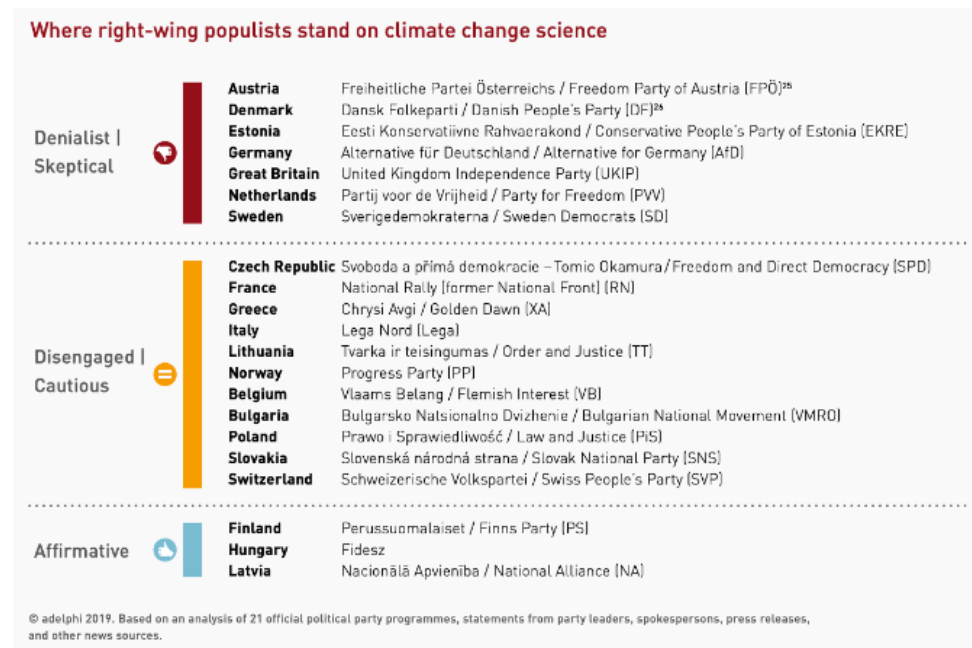

Where right-wing populists stand on climate change science

Denialist | Skeptical		
	Austria	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs / Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)[25]
	Denmark	Dansk Folkeparti / Danish People's Party (DF)[26]
	Estonia	Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond / Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE)
	Germany	Alternative für Deutschland / Alternative for Germany (AfD)
	Great Britain	United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)
	Netherlands	Partij voor de Vrijheid / Party for Freedom (PVV)
	Sweden	Sverigedemokraterna / Sweden Democrats (SD)

Disengaged | Cautious		
	Czech Republic	Svoboda a přímá demokracie – Tomio Okamura / Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)
	France	National Rally (former National Front) (RN)
	Greece	Chrysi Avgi / Golden Dawn (XA)
	Italy	Lega Nord (Lega)
	Lithuania	Tvarka ir teisingumas / Order and Justice (TT)
	Norway	Progress Party (PP)
	Belgium	Vlaams Belang / Flemish Interest (VB)
	Bulgaria	Bulgarsko Natsionalno Dvizhenie / Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO)
	Poland	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość / Law and Justice (PiS)
	Slovakia	Slovenská národná strana / Slovak National Party (SNS)
	Switzerland	Schweizerische Volkspartei / Swiss People's Party (SVP)

Affirmative		
	Finland	Perussuomalaiset / Finns Party (PS)
	Hungary	Fidesz
	Latvia	Nacionālā Apvienība / National Alliance (NA)

© adelphi 2019. Based on an analysis of 21 official political party programmes, statements from party leaders, spokespersons, press releases, and other news sources.

Figure 1: Right-wing populists parties' stances towards climate science in the EU (adelphi, 2019)

Coherent with the five systemic approaches towards the context of authoritarian populism, most parties revert to arguing climate science as either being; economically harmful; socially unfair; environmentally harmful or not worthwhile to begin with (cf. Stella & Carius, 2019). The contention that climate policies are harmful to the local environment poses a prime example for how nationalists and populist narrative are intertwined in one – perceived to be – coherent "deep story" (Hochschild, 2018). In this regard new turbines for instance are rendered as destroying the national environment – the homeland of the good people (cf. Stella & Carius, 2019). It is this homeland that needs to be defended against various trends of societal transformation that are mostly associated with the "new ascended middle-class" (Reckwitz, 2017, p. 109) as the bearer of harmful culturalization processes.

In order to uncover what is needed to set these processes of social segregation in motion we remain in the Hall and Gramscian tradition to focus on the real-life worlds of people, looking at the "subjective processing of transformation and crisis" (Opratko, 2018, p. 180). While many of the right-wing populists' tenets, we have outlined thus far, are science sceptic or outright conspiracy narratives, they foster and operate on actual sentiments. Arguably it is precisely the apparent ability of fascism to root in the

cracks of collective crisis experiences that is central here. An analysis that seems to be ripped directly out of Hall's observations on Thatcherism in the 1970s:

"[Their] success and effectivity does not lie in [the] capacity to dupe unsuspecting folk but in the way it addresses real problems, real and lived experiences, real contradictions and yet is able to represent them within a logic of discourse which pulls them systematically into line with policies and class strategies of the Right" (Hall, 1979, p. 20).

Much like Thatcherism in the 70s the new right-wing populism offers segments of the population subjective frameworks to navigate the current hegemonic crisis of neoliberal capitalism. This does not necessarily imply that it provides solutions to the objective contradictions inherent in the system. However, it does furnish a language to articulate these contradictions and a repertoire of attitudes to endure them. Right-wing politics thus serves as a means of subjectivation: it acts as an outlet for emotions and a source of identity through exclusion (cf. Opratko, 2018). At the same time authoritarian populism promises the restoration of a Law-and-Order Society based on a traditional moral compass that it strives to achieve even by non-governmental and non-humanitarian means (Hall et. al., 1987, pp. 273). It is this tenet that constitutes its authoritarian nature. Especially in times of social transformation authoritarian populism offers a moral anchor point that operates as a recipient for emotional experiences, which are ordered and made intelligible only by its exclusionary judgment (cf. Hall, 2014a, p. 116). To understand these dynamics, we need to turn to the Gramscian concepts of cultural hegemony, organic intellectuals and common sense that are all very much alive in Hall et al. (1978) work on "Policing the crisis". Exploring "populism-as-context" (Revelli, 2019) we have been thus far, shifts the focus on the necessary conditions for a system or an ideology to become hegemonic.

2.3 Authoritarian Populism as Caeserism 2.0 – A crisis of hegemony

Gramsci was both a political activist and socialist thinker who developed most of his ideas a century ago during the last major time of fascist uprising in Europe, leaving us with productive concepts for understanding how one social group becomes hegemonic over others and how cultural hegemony is produced and maintained. A concept that is peculiar in the way it interweaves the cultural and the political in a practical

philosophy that is decidedly non-reductive. Gramsci attributed the success of fascism to a range of interconnected societal crisis, such as the disconnection between social classes and political parties, as well as the lack of representation felt by the former. "Crucial here is the left's inability to work towards a stronger connection between the elite and popular culture, and more broadly: to reach to, understand and consequently transform popular culture." (Pasieka, 2022, p. 420). To Gramsci, such a transformation was the condition of socio-political change, since true, sustainable hegemony was only ever be achieved by consent not by coercion. Cultural hegemony is rule by consent through intellectual and moral leadership that emerges out of the common sense of the people without being reduced to it. The ruling class's values are then internalized by their subjects, making their choices appear free rather than restricted, while still proliferating and stabilizing the hegemonic ideology.

Populism, fascism or comparable "thin ideologies" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2019) thus unveil a much deeper crisis of authority in society. As such Gramsci observed the epochal rupture in the 1920s and 1930s (Global economic crisis, Great Depression, polarization of the political field, decline of the young democracies) – a crisis of hegemonic ideology. "Hegemoniekrise im Sinne Gramscis meint zunächst, dass Menschen sich nicht mehr auf die Weise führen lassen, wie sie bisher geführt wurden." (Oprakto, 2018, p. 123). Crisis is understood as a gradual process that might take decades to come to a close. It is a process of trust erosion in established routines, values and institutions that ultimately lead to questioning fundamental moral axioms of the hegemonic group. It is a crisis of moral and cultural leadership and a simultaneous "aufkündigen des Vertrauens von unten" (cf. Oprakto, 2018, p. 123). Since in non-hegemonic societies the majority of the population does not share a common worldview -– they are ideologically fractured. "When civil society is fractured and its institutions 'gelatinous', leaders can easily appeal to catch-all populist or nationalist ideologies to unify a discontented population" (Mooberry, 2019, p. 3). In this regard Gramsci provides an interesting diagnosis of the possible shifts from stability to instability, or from hegemonic societies to non-hegemonic ones. Historical conjunctures, in which a system struggles to maintain hegemony due to flaws of its own making, are moments of organic crisis. A contemporary example for this would be climate change. The dependency of neoliberal capital on the continuous exploitation of natural resources, has produced a conundrum where the conditions for

prosperity and growth can no longer be externalized beyond the boundaries of western states. As a result, citizens are increasingly confronted by the aftermath of climate extinction, while not being presented with tangible solutions. Trust erosion and rejection of political elites' manifests on both sides of thepolitical spectrum, during this organic crisis. Ideology, for Gramsci, constructs a unity out of difference (cf. Hall 1987, p. 19). What is crucial in his analysis is that he understands crisis as a moment of reconstruction, as "historically nothing is dismantled without also attempting to put something new in its place; […] every form of power not only excludes but produces something" (Hall, 1987, p. 19). One such production of power is fascism or authoritarian populism that latches onto the power void faster than science-based, left-wing politics historically have proven to be capable of. When faced with an organic crisis such as the current neo-liberal hegemony of capital, populism is an illiberal democratic response to lived and ore perceived democratic illiberalism (cf. Mudde, 2004). The loss of consent, determines a critical phase with unpredictable results, in which "the old dies and the new cannot rise" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 311). While sustainable cultural transformation is in dire need of a scientifically and strategic sound plan, the translation error lies in the inability of the left to embed transformative ideas within common sense not just in the philosophical strata. When Gramsci speaks of the need for a robust alternative (cf. 1971), he envisions an ideological project that is capable of unifying the subalterns.

Since cultural hegemony is based on intellectual and moral leadership, conquering the ways in which beliefs and ideologies are organized within society is vital. In a sense Gramsci is envisioning hegemony through ideological assimilation of the intellectual sphere. He writes: "One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer 'ideologically' the traditional intellectuals (…)" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10) but this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the "more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals." (p. 10). The divide between organic and traditional intellectual; critical philosophy and common sense is one of the most productive constellations to explore for the acceptability conditions (cf. Opratko, 2018) of fascism that the Italian thinker left us with. Gramsci starts from the premise that "everybody is an intellectual" (Gramsci, 1971, Q12 §1, p. 1) in the sense that a segregation between homo faber and homo

sapiens is unthinkable for him. He decouples the intellectual from the traditional notion of a professional academic in favour of a more pervasive notion. While society largely equates intellectuals with those who have an intellectual function in it, Gramsci recognizes that even the most mechanical, physical labour contains a minimum of intellectual activity. Henceforth, every social group organically creates "one or more strata of intellectuals, which give it homogeneity and awareness of its own function [...]" (Gramsci, 1971, Q12 §1, p. 5). These "organic intellectuals" (Gramsci, 1971, Q12 §1, p. 6), are innate to their social group and articulate its interests and perspectives. Since everyone, regardless of social status or profession, engages in intellectual activities that shape culture and society, Gramsci asserts a general capacity for critical thinking and intellectual engagement to all individuals. Consequently, every slightest manifestation of intellectual activity in language contains a specific conception of the world that Gramsci reads as "spontaneous philosophy" (Gramsci, 1971, Q11 §12, p. 323). Non spontaneous philosophy in contrast is an intellectual order, which neither religion nor common sense can be as it is capable of critiquing and superseding both. While philosophy coincides with a reflexive good sense, the everyday life and spontaneous philosophy of the people is dominated by common sense, which is by nature messy and incongruent. Common sense mixes fables and tales with the practical knowledge of daily activities.

"The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity […] he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed." (Gramsci, 1971, p. 333).

Due to the chaotic nature of common sense it is impossible to reconcile beliefs rooted in it with good sense, hence the organic intellectual – the figure innate and literate to a social group's common sense – needs to obtain an organizational and connective role in society. To win large sections of people over to new ideas, it is mandatory to critique the established individual philosophies, through a system of thought elaborated by engaging with the genealogy of the respective ideas (cf. Gramsci, 1971). "The great intellectual must then throw himself, too, into practical life, and become an organizer of the practical aspects of culture […] he must democratize himself"

(Gramsci, 1971, p. 689). Henceforth for an ideological project to be successful it must remain in contact with common sense while striving to elevate it to a coherent, scientifically grounded worldview. As an example, for how right-wing populist narratives have influenced common sense in the past Opratko (2018) writes: "The right's most important political success in 2016 was to place the movement of the refugees in the everyday minds of large sections of the population as a metaphor for the loss of political control par excellence" (p. 125, translated by the authors). However, Fascism as a form of Caesarism is inherently unable to provide a robust alternative as Gramsci calls it, since it does mostly ignore the traditional intellectual sphere. Gramsci understood fascism or Caesarism – a force capable of asserting domination and temporarily restoring equilibrium in a time of crisis, yet unable to bring about profound social change: a passive revolution or a "revolution without revolution" (Gramsci 1979, p. 250). Organic crisis persisted under fascism, as it did not address the major contradiction (capital/labor) of the time (cf. Pasieka, 2023, p. 421). In arguing that fascism managed to fill the void (see Mosse 1966; Griffin 2002), Gramsci insisted that fascism's success was a result of the weakness and failure of the left, rather than of the power of the fascist alternative.

Modern Western democracies are divided, not only in a narrower economic, cultural or regional sense, but also with regard to what can be described as socio-moral coexistence and the democratic spirit. As has been shown in 2.1 one dominant rhetoric figure of the right as well as actual social-transformation manifests in shifting bearers of mainstream culture. This increasing "polarization of classes and lifestyles" (Reckwitz, 2017, pp. 108) in Western democracies

"applies in particular to the relationship between the culturally ascending new middle class on the one hand and the socially and culturally descending new underclass on the other. While the new middle class can see itself as the cosmopolitan bearer of the culturalization and singularization processes, a social and cultural devaluation of the new underclass is taking place." (Reckwitz, 2017, p. 109)

On the other side of the spectrum, it seems that right-wing populist movements in Europe achieve more than simply attracting voters. They are representatives of a new, "contentious European fascism," whom Douglas Holmes (2019) sees as figures of a "political imaginary which focuses directly on the substance of lifeworlds." (cf. Pasieka, 2022, p. 427). This fits well with Crehan's reading of Gramsci who emphasizes that a

struggle for hegemony does not mean "the creation of new narratives by new organic intellectuals, but rather the effective dissemination of already existing narratives, recrafted to resonate with the concerns of a given historical moment" (2016, p. 116). The challenge is thus to develop a practical philosophy out of the everyday lived reality of people by interweaving organic with traditional intellectuals, good sense with common sense. This for Gramsci would be the organizational project of the political party.

3   Methodology

Netnography is a qualitative research methodology adapted from ethnography, focusing on analyzing online communities and digital interactions. This method is particularly useful for understanding social interactions within digital environments. It involves a systematic process of data collection and analysis, yielding insights into cultural phenomena as expressed in these online spaces. Below is a comprehensive overview of each step in the netnography process, including explanations of the data collection methods, framework, research platforms, and the overall approach. (Kozinets (2015)

3.1 Netnographic Research Strategy and Methodological Foundations

A crucial step in the netnographic research process is clearly defining the research questions and topics to be explored. This phase lays the foundation for the entire project, as it provides direction and ensures that the research remains focused and coherent. The research questions need to be specific and measurable to set clear, achievable objectives. It is equally important that the chosen topics are closely related to the online community being studied to ensure that the data collected will offer relevant insights.

Once the research questions have been established, the next task is to identify and select the appropriate online communities for study. This involves identifying platforms and communities that are particularly active and rich in data. The chosen community should align with the research objectives and, most importantly, should feature enough

interaction and exchange to provide meaningful insights. The success of the study hinges on selecting a community that fits these criteria well.

Following community selection, the next phase is data collection. Here, the researcher may either passively observe or actively engage in the discussions within the community, depending on the research design. The goal at this stage is to gather data that reflects the behaviors, interactions, and cultural practices of community members. These data can take various forms, including text, images, videos, or other multimedia content shared within the community. Ethical considerations are particularly important here, especially in ensuring informed consent and protecting the privacy of community members.

After collecting the data, the next step is to analyze and interpret it. This involves identifying patterns, themes, and insights that will answer the research questions. Various qualitative analysis techniques, such as coding, thematic analysis, or discourse analysis, may be employed. It is critical for the researcher to remain aware of personal biases and to ensure that the interpretation of the data is objective and grounded in the evidence collected.

Finally, the findings of the research need to be presented. This involves not only reporting the results but also discussing their implications for the wider field of study. The presentation of findings should be accessible to both academic and non-academic audiences, highlighting the key insights and offering recommendations for future research or practical applications.

3.2 Analysis of X/Twitter as a Research Platform

Our research utilized X/Twitter as the primary platform, offering significant advantages such as access to a vast number of publicly available tweets relevant to our research questions. This approach allowed us to capture a wide range of political perspectives on climate change. Additionally, X/Twitter's capability for real-time data collection enabled us to observe trends and shifts in public opinion as they developed, providing dynamic insights into public discourse

The platform's vast and diverse user base also offered a unique opportunity to examine cross-cultural and international perspectives on climate change, enriching our understanding of the global conversation. However, we also faced certain

limitations. Our analysis was restricted to tweets associated with specific hashtags or accounts, which may not fully represent the broader dialogue. Furthermore, right-wing rhetoric on X/Twitter can be amplified by bots and coordinated efforts, potentially distorting our findings. Moreover, tweets might not accurately reflect the views and opinions of German citizens, which could introduce biases in our data interpretation.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

In netnographic research, archival data plays a crucial role. This type of data refers to information that has been previously collected and stored, often for reasons unrelated to the current research, such as records, documents, or digital footprints left by users online. In the context of netnography, archival data is a valuable resource, as it includes social media posts, comments, likes, shares, and multimedia content that are publicly available. These data provide not only historical context but also allow researchers to observe changes in discourse, user behavior, and community dynamics over time. Archival data is essential for understanding the evolution of online communities and tracking the trajectory of specific discourses within those communities. (Kozinets, 2015)

Another important source of data in netnography is elicited data, which is gathered through direct interactions initiated by the researcher with the online community. This can include surveys, interviews, or discussions designed to draw out specific information from participants. The researcher actively engages with community members to gain deeper insights into their perspectives, motivations, and interpretations. Elicited data is particularly valuable because it allows researchers to go beyond what is readily observable in archival data, capturing nuances and underlying sentiments that may not be explicitly expressed. This method requires careful consideration of ethical guidelines, especially to ensure that the interactions remain authentic and natural. (Kozinets, 2015)

Equally important in netnographic research are field note data. These are systematically recorded observations, reflections, and interpretations made by the researcher during the data collection process. Field notes are often detailed and descriptive, capturing not only the content of online interactions but also the context, tone, and atmosphere of the digital environment. These notes help contextualize the

archival and elicited data, providing a comprehensive view of the community and its dynamics. The reflexivity inherent in field notes allows the researcher to be aware of their own biases and influence on the research process, which is crucial for maintaining the rigor and validity of the study. (Kozinets, 2015)

3.4 Framework for Analysis

In our research, we focused on examining the communication and interaction between government entities and citizens on X/Twitter. Our main objective was to understand how government accounts distribute information, engage with the public, and manage discourse on key issues like climate change. By analyzing these interactions, we aimed to evaluate how effective governmental communication strategies are and how citizens receive and respond to policy messages. This approach offered valuable insights into the top-down process of public engagement, particularly highlighting how official narratives shape and influence discussions related to climate issues.

While the communication from government to citizens provides an understanding of how authorities craft and share their messages, it's just as important to examine how citizens communicate with each other. Citizen-to-citizen interactions reveal how people discuss, debate, and exchange information on social media, especially around topics like climate skepticism. By focusing on this peer-to-peer communication, we aimed to gain insight into how public opinion is formed at the grassroots level and how ideas and sentiments related to climate change circulate within these digital communities. This bottom-up perspective allowed us to capture the spontaneous and unfiltered conversations that unfold independently of government intervention, offering a broader and more authentic view of the public discourse.

To expand our analysis, we also considered the international dimensions of climate skepticism by examining cross-border and cross-cultural discussions. We explored how narratives and rhetoric related to climate skepticism vary between different countries and regions, identifying common themes as well as context-specific differences. By including this global framework, we acknowledged the fact that climate change is not just a local or national issue but a global one, where local and national debates feed into a larger international conversation. This approach helped us uncover how different contexts shape climate skepticism and how these global discussions

influence and interact with one another, providing a more nuanced understanding of this complex discourse.

3.5 Approach to Data Collection

In our research, we began by identifying and following the official X/Twitter accounts of political parties in Germany, such as the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Green Party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and others. These accounts often act as primary sources of information about party positions, campaign strategies, and public statements on climate-related issues. For instance, by closely monitoring the AfD's official X/Twitter account, we were able to gather valuable insights into how the party frames climate change. The AfD frequently emphasizes skepticism about climate science and advocates against strict environmental regulations. Observing this allowed us to understand how political entities use X/Twitter to shape public discourse and influence public perception on climate policies, particularly in the context of skepticism and opposition to mainstream climate action.

After identifying the key political parties, our focus shifted to locating and analyzing the X/Twitter accounts of individual politicians, especially those prominent in the Bundestag who are active in discussions on climate issues. These individual accounts, whether personal or related to their campaigns, often offer more nuanced and candid perspectives compared to the official party accounts. For example, individual AfD politicians' tweets revealed a range of views on climate skepticism, with some questioning the validity of climate science, while others primarily focused on the economic consequences of climate action. By analyzing these posts and observing how politicians interacted with their followers, we gained a deeper understanding of their personal stances and the role they play in shaping public opinion within their political base.

To capture a broader view of the discourse surrounding climate skepticism and political discussions in Germany, we also identified and tracked relevant hashtags and keywords used within these conversations on X/Twitter. Hashtags such as #DeshalbAfD ("Therefore AfD") and #AfD were particularly helpful in pinpointing discussions about climate skepticism and the AfD's stance on climate policies. Other terms like #Klimalüge ("climate lie"), #Klimawandel ("climate change"), and

#Klimapanik ("climate panic") provided insights into ongoing debates across X/Twitter. By analyzing posts associated with these hashtags, we were able to observe how economic concerns related to climate policies, anti-establishment rhetoric, and skepticism toward climate science were discussed and debated. This step enabled us to identify key players in these conversations, including influential users and politicians, and track trends in the evolving discourse on climate change skepticism.

In addition to analyzing political accounts, we also turned our attention to media accounts on X/Twitter, including those of news organizations, journalists, and commentators. Observing the content shared by these media outlets and the subsequent discussions that followed allowed us to understand how media narratives surrounding climate change are constructed and spread. For example, by monitoring the coverage of climate policies in major German news outlets, we could see how these narratives were received by the public and how they sparked further debate. This analysis was crucial for understanding the relationship between media framing and public opinion, particularly in terms of how media coverage on X/Twitter can either amplify or counteract political messaging on climate skepticism.

4 Analysis

Having examined the theoretical background in detail, we will now move on to the analysis. We start by looking at the data log in which we have entered our 200 collected data sets. Our final data log consists of seven columns, starting with the coding of each data set, which consists of the first letters of the second label and the number indicating its position within the data log. This is followed by the original language statement and, as most of the datasets are in German due to the subject matter, they are also translated into English. The next columns contain the date on which the tweet was posted and a collection of keywords and hashtags used by the user. The dataset ends with a primary and a secondary label: the first label is assigned intuitively based on the dataset, and the second label provides an analytical perspective. As all columns except the last are self-explanatory, we will focus on the last column. This column, the second analytical label, is crucial for the analysis and we will now discuss it in more detail.

As a group, we began our analysis by identifying which labels best fit our collected data. We identified six key labels that capture the core themes and sentiments present in our datasets. Green as an Enemy Concept refers to narratives that portray environmental policies as threats, often casting green initiatives as adversarial. Anti-Establishment reflects distrust or opposition toward established institutions and authorities, highlighting a critical stance against the status quo. Ideology Claims identifies statements heavily influenced by ideological beliefs, emphasizing how personal or political ideology shapes perspectives. Techno-Optimism describes a strong belief in technological solutions to major problems, such as climate change, reflecting confidence in innovation as a driver of progress. Science Skepticism represents doubt or rejection of scientific consensus, challenging established scientific knowledge. Post-Truth encompasses narratives where emotions or personal beliefs override objective facts, underscoring the influence of subjective perceptions over reality.

Using these six initial labels, we began labeling the datasets and noted any additional labels that might apply. During this process, we identified significant overlaps, prompting us to consider merging some labels to improve clarity and reduce redundancy. First, we decided to combine "Green as an Enemy Concept" with "Anti-Establishment." We observed that narratives portraying environmental policies or "green" concepts as adversaries were often framed within a broader anti-establishment context. Arguments depicting green initiatives as threats frequently target not only the policies themselves but also the institutions and elites advocating for them. This framing aligns closely with anti-establishment rhetoric, which criticizes and opposes perceived dominant power structures. Therefore, "Green as an Enemy Concept" can be viewed as a specific manifestation of the broader "Anti-Establishment" sentiment.

We have also merged "Post-Truth" with "Science Skepticism." Both labels deal with a fundamental distrust or denial of objective facts and scientific consensus. "Post-Truth" describes a societal trend where emotional appeal and personal beliefs outweigh factual accuracy, often leading to the spread of misinformation. "Science Skepticism," on the other hand, focuses specifically on the rejection of scientific findings and principles. We found that narratives labeled as "Post-Truth" frequently overlap with those challenging scientific facts, as both involve undermining the credibility of

established knowledge. Thus, merging these labels helps us capture the common theme of rejecting or distorting factual information.

After refining our labels through careful analysis, we finalized four key labels for categorizing our datasets: Anti-Establishment, Post-Truth, Ideology Claims, and Techno-Optimism. Each of these labels encapsulates distinct narratives and themes that recur in the data. For example, the Post-Truth label is exemplified by statements like, "Global warming is a total scam and the globalists knew it was a lie, so they renamed it Climate Change. Antarctica has more ice than it did in 1981." (PT-5) which underscores how emotional appeal and misinformation can override factual accuracy. The Anti-Establishment label captures sentiments such as, "And once again, green propaganda radio brings an erroneous courtesy model without comment." (AE-21) highlighting opposition to and distrust of mainstream institutions and media. Ideology Claims focus on statements shaped by ideological beliefs, such as, "That the temperatures on Earth change over millions of years is so, no one will be able to prevent that. The problem for nature, however, is not temperature fluctuations, but global overpopulation - this brings everything else along with it." (IC-24) which reflects how personal beliefs shape understanding of complex issues. Finally, Techno-Optimism is captured by statements like, "Even #StreetGlue can safely fly on vacation - because the challenges of #climate change are solved by #engineers, not ideologues!" (TO-41) emphasizing faith in technological solutions to address global challenges. These refined labels provide a robust framework for analyzing our datasets, allowing us to categorize and interpret the data effectively and reveal underlying patterns in the discourse.

Utilizing these refined labels, we conducted a comprehensive analysis of our dataset. The following section presents our key findings, substantiated by specific examples from our data collection. A significant number of the collected tweets express significant frustration and anger, reflecting a genuine disbelief in climate change. Many believe that the Green Party's policies will unnecessarily decrease their quality of life. This reaction is clearly observable e.g. in tweets no. 9, 11, 18, 27, 94, 104, 161, 184. This perspective arises from the perception that climate policies are baseless and detrimental, leading to resistance against changes perceived as intrusive and unfounded. The emotional response is fueled by the belief that these policies are imposed without valid reasons, worsening their lives for no apparent benefit.

Right-wing rhetoric specifically caters to these existing anxieties. It leverages people's often precarious economic and societal positions, exacerbating fears that "green" politics will further deteriorate their circumstances. Even though authoritarian populism does not present a comprehensive solution to societal problems produced by neoliberal capital it offers a mode of subjectivation, a stance to take against it when other modes of agency seem to elude the "transformation losers" (Sommer, 2017). While some individuals may be entirely convinced that climate change is a hoax, many others might harbor underlying doubts about its validity. Based on the patterns observed in the data, it appears that the apprehension about potential lifestyle changes is so potent for many individuals that it seems to supersede any emerging acceptance of climate science. This, in turn, may lead them to adopt the belief that climate change is fabricated, as it would justify their opposition to environmental policies that they perceive as threatening their (often already compromised) living standards.

This emotional appeal is particularly powerful because it taps into deep-seated fears about economic instability and social status. By framing climate action as a direct threat to personal well-being, right-wing narratives create a cognitive dissonance where rejecting climate change becomes a form of self-preservation (e.g. visible in tweets no. 26, 36, 70, 113). This psychological mechanism may help explain why some individuals cling to climate skepticism even in the face of mounting scientific evidence. Their immediate concerns about financial security and lifestyle maintenance appear to take precedence over long-term environmental considerations.

Right-wing rhetoric frequently employs everyday examples to challenge the reality of climate change. The absence of immediately visible effects in Germany, coupled with the complexity of scientific data, lends credibility to these simplified arguments among their target audience. By highlighting observable phenomena and weather anomalies, these simplifies arguments appeal to common sense, enhancing their relatability and persuasiveness to skeptics (e.g. in tweets 5, 22, 36, 47, 69, 182). This approach effectively reduces a multifaceted issue to straightforward, tangible experiences that resonate with people's daily lives, thereby undermining complex scientific arguments with seemingly obvious counterexamples.

Moreover, the misuse of data further complicates the discourse. Graphs and statistics are sometimes presented out of context or used to draw incorrect conclusions,

creating the illusion that scientific evidence supports climate change denial (e.g. in tweets no. 65, 105, 116, 148). This manipulation of information exploits the general public's low level of Data Literacy i.e. their unfamiliarity with nuanced scientific methodologies and data interpretation (Schmidt et al. 2021). By cherry-picking or misrepresenting data, climate skeptics create a facade of scientific legitimacy for their claims, further confusing those who may lack the expertise to critically evaluate such information.

This strategy of simplification and misrepresentation is particularly effective for people who have a natural tendency to trust their own experiences over abstract scientific concepts. The immediacy of personal observations often outweighs long-term trends or global data in shaping individual beliefs. Consequently, when faced with a choice between complex, sometimes counterintuitive scientific explanations and simple, relatable anecdotes, many individuals seem to gravitate towards the latter, reinforcing their skepticism about climate change.

There is a clear distinction between far-right AfD supporters and more centrist-right CDU voters in their views on climate change. While the former predominantly dismiss climate change as a hoax (e.g. in tweets no. 11, 61, 118, 122, 135), the latter acknowledge its existence but criticize the Green Party's approach. CDU supporters tend to view climate change as a manageable issue, often focusing on technological advancements (e.g. in tweets no. 41, 45, 53, 120), and consider it secondary to economic concerns (e.g. in tweets no. 43, 50, 51, 113). This division illustrates a spectrum of climate skepticism, with varying degrees of acceptance and critique of climate policies depending on political alignment. Far-right rhetoric often outright denies climate change, while centrist-right rhetoric tends to emphasize what they see as exaggeration and misprioritization by climate-focused parties.

5 Discussion

In the previous chapter, we conducted an in-depth analysis of the collected data. Our examination highlighted key findings, identified recurring patterns, and recognized differences in climate change perspectives between right-wing parties and their supporters. We also developed an understanding of how right-wing populism is

employed in relation to climate change and explored its effectiveness. In this discussion section, we aim to contextualize our findings within our theoretical framework, establishing connections between our analytical results and the existing literature. In 2.2 and 2.3 we attempted to render authoritarian populism as a form of modern Caesarism that fills the void opened by the organic crisis of neoliberal capital, in order to carve a path of analysis through the interlocking experiences of crisis present in the sentiments and comments we analysed. Both the systemic approaches and the counter-hegemonic stances towards climate science presented in 2.2 pointed to three distinguishable experiences that constitute some of the conditions for rejection that right-wing populism thrives on: a crisis of moral economy, a crisis of political efficacy and a crisis of the mediated public sphere (Opratko, 2018, p. 182). The crisis of the moral economy reflects mainly in the sub-cultures and practices of rejection from "transformation losers" (see Sommer et. al., 2022). The specific moral economy of neoliberalism fundamentally hinges on the meritocratic bargain that effort, performance and "Singularity" (Reckwitz, 2017, p. 181) are rewarded. Though not perceived to be a fair or equal compensation for all strata of society, the internalization of the performance-based work ethic is fundamental for the system to maintain hegemony. "Performance morale workers strive to keep 'their' part of the meritocratic bargain by not only submitting to labor discipline, but also by performing this submission as a self-determined and pleasurable activity" (Opratko, 2018). It is this process of ideological formation that Gramsci saw being carved within the individual by means of their cultural context, work environment etc. Since neoliberalism fundamentally relies on a ubiquitous narrative of (personal) growth, a rejection of its underlying "Singularity" (cf. Reckwitz, 2017) and progress etiquette is detrimental to its hegemonic claim. What we have found in our research is that most cultures of rejection are representations of complex intersectional issues where the object or expression of rejection often combines a general disdain against the bearers of neoliberal culturalization with racist and culturalists beliefs. In the analyzed data sample rejections against the current bearers of culturalization, interlock with the surrounding themes of racism and rejection of climate science. AE-32 for instance draws a through line between green climate and migration politics towards an overall perceived anti-german tendency of the green party, often also expressed in nationalist reinforcements like "Heimat" (AE-163; IC-147) (homeland or rather sex-gendered: fatherland) Islamic migrants are equated with "Vergewaltiger und Mörder" (rapists and

murders), which in turn opens up a dialectic that devalues the green parties climate policies, since all measures are futile anyways when compared to the looming danger of migration (PT-161,: "Actually, we could really paint the town red right now, since in 100 years there will only be muslims anyways" (PT-86).

Symptoms of the neoliberal globalization of capital are rarely addressed as such by right-wing parties, instead they are re-contextualized as "questions of ethnicity, nationality, migration" and gender (Sauer, 2021, p. 61).Here, the experience of a crisis-ridden moral economy is translated into an antagonism that constructs, on the one hand, a community of the laborious, sane and good people, on the other, a diffuse outside, often coloured via anecdotes and supposed everyday knowledge, populated by figures of the dumb, tricksters, climate-idiots or green fascists (cf. Ege & Wietschorke, 2014). Very much in alignment with Reckwitz's (2017) analysis of the cultural degradation process towards the former cultural middle and under class, climate politics is framed as an illusory politics of the misguided ascending new middle class. "Riding bikes" (PT-97), "eating salat" (AE-15) or receiving energy purely from renewable sources (AE-15) is understood as a direct attack on and limitation of their current way of life (see for instance AE-1, AE-15, AE-18).

These tweets show the strong commonsensical affiliation between right-wing populist parties and the often unreasonable and irrational rejection narratives they aggravate. The symptoms produced by the organic crisis of neoliberal capital are spun into a reductionist narrative that draws no connections between "global environmental change, climate change and the wellbeing of other countries, and forced migration" (Stella & Carius, 2019, p. 24). Rather climate change is weaponized and drawn into the overlapping crisis of perceived political efficacy.Characterized by a naturalization of the economy and hence a perceived loss of agency, "certain normative demands are no longer formulated at all because they seem illusory to fulfill" (Menz/Nies 2019, p. 216) or are turned into unspecific anger against common antagonists like "Muslims" or "green fascists" (PT-86; AE-15; AE-32; AE-74). This is often paired with the subjective perception that politics has little to no relevance for the individual's reality, as politicians are not concerned with the fate of actual people. Politics then is perceived as a closed-off system that is no longer accessible (AE-26, PT-156) and does not rely on the participation of the populus in any meaningful way. If at all relevant, politics deal with topics that benefit other social elites. "Climate protection" is an

absolutely anti-social huge redistribution of money from bottom to top. It's not about the "climate" at all! The broad masses have to pay, the already rich become even richer. And all politicians, experts and profiteers know this very well." (IC-94).

The last dimension is the crisis of the public sphere, as the withdrawal of trust does not merely extend to the political parties but to most institutions of civil society that claim any sort of opinion leadership (cf. Hagen, 2015). Especially in regards to the media, a crisis of the authorities is met with a complex techno-cultural transformation, initiated by the revolution of information technologies and data capitalism (Opratko, 2018). As a result there are many overlapping structural changes in the public sphere going on at once. Common reference spaces for social negotiation processes disappear and are replaced by unequally connected sub-publics. Bolstered by algorithmic sorting practices these sub-publics often find themselves in "echo chambers" that reinforce affective beliefs (see for instance Lünenborg, 2019; van Dijck & Poell, 2015, Ahmed, 2004). At the same time the complexity increase in today's information ecologies increasingly turns the rejection of mainstream, traditional media likewise against Social Media and academic communication. One outcome of this being the utter distrust in establish communication channels as individuals find neither the energy nor the means to aptly verify public claims within the erosion a hegemonic ideology (IC-171; PT-107; PT-95; PT-72; AE-46). Environmental topics and scientific judgements are only respected if they relate to the immediate, local life-worlds of people. "Global" or globalization is rendered as an antagonist or misleading endeavor from the left or green elites that have forsaken their homeland: "The new narrative of the climate cult is "global". Nicely difficult argument. We're just not interested in "global" here." (PT-77).

The strong presence of techno-optimism in our data set (see for instance TO-42; TO-51; TO-53) seems to represent mostly a conservative, right leaning demographic. While this matches less well with the other prominent narratives on climate change in our data set it opens up an interesting path for further research. One potential way to explore these sentiments could be to look at them from the perspective of the hegemonic group in neoliberalism in Germany. As a country that strived through industry development and exportation for many years techno-optimism might reflect the current bearers of culturalization clinging to the established system. This is

expressed by a sort of over optimism towards established solution mechanics (further growth not degrowth for instance):

We must understand climate and #economic policy as a unity: "With the avoidance of CO2 alone, we will not achieve the #climate goals. We need new technologies to really move forward" (TO-53).

These techno-optimist accounts can thus be read as capitalism beginning to recognize its ecocidal propensities as fundamental threats to continuing hegemony (cf. Surprise, 2024, p. 455). In this regard so-called "green capitalism" presents itself as a crisis management strategy to dampen selective aspects of ecological catastrophe to preserve the neoliberal hegemony of capital.

6 Conclusion

"Overall, climate change mitigation and adaptation policies are still niche issues for European right-wing populist parties. As political agendas are shaped around national identity politics, immigration and a simplified view of national economic interests – climate (in-)action is rarely a focus in their election campaigns, but does occur frequently as a vehicle for slanderous and defamatory statements against the dwindling political efficacy and loss of reality of the current cultural elites" (cf. Stella & Carius, 2019). Our nethnographic work supports this statement by elaborating how right-wing populist discourse in Germany is shaped by a collective weaving of a shared narratives that spins various threats of crisis experiences into one "deep story" (Hochschild 2016: 135).

Uncovering the specific circumstances that enable certain population segments to adopt these articulations as a subjective lens and employ them to construct their own self-perception and worldview (cf. Optrako, 2018) is what is at stake here. We have shown that authoritarian populism does not present itself as a solution to the societal issues caused by the organic crisis of capital, but rather as a chance for individuals and their communities to navigate crises with minimal harm (cf. Opratko, 2018). It is an authoritarian offer in times of a crisis of authority that seems to pair well with the Gramscian notion of Caesarism. However, some of the acceptability conditions for right-wing populism (Opratko, 2021) that we have found in our research are rooted in

an overwhelming increase in complexity and a corresponding longing for reductionist narratives. It is here where left leaning politics fail to present a comparable offer that is deeply connected with and originating out of the common sense of subaltern groups. The data set overwhelmingly cements the intersectionality of oppression, even present within everyday ideas and world-views. Analyzing how these modes of oppression are maintained through cultural hegemony can help to stress the detrimental relation between capitalism and the nexus of ecological systems that support life on earth which are fundamentally rooted in a nature-culture split (cf. Salleh, 2017). Thus for further research we think it necessary to draw "historical, symbolic and political relationship[s] between the denigration of nature and the female" (Spretnak, 1997, p. 181) as a through line for all forms of oppression that are reproduced through the nature/ culture divide. Especially in regards to the increasing success of right-wing populist ideologies that contort the inequalities produced by neoliberal capital into "deep stores" (Hochschild, 2016) that normalizes practices of othering against migrants, feminists through a vague alignment with corrupted cultural elites.

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