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Climate emergency and securitization politics: towards a climate politics of the extraordinary

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ABSTRACT

There is an ongoing debate among climate activists and scholars on the merits of 'climate emergency' frames, which mirrors debates in critical security studies on the benefits and risks of 'securitization'. Climate emergency advocates demonstrate that rapid transformative action beyond 'normal' politics is needed to meet the Paris agreement targets. Critics, on the other hand, highlight the risks of deploying emergency frames to galvanize climate action, which may simply result in failed securitizations or even in emergency suspensions of democratic norms that advance climate action at the expense of climate justice. This paper will engage this debate by exploring the question: could climate emergency mobilizations be compatible with climate justice? I will argue, following Andreas Kalyvas, that the climate emergency can be framed as an opportunity for an 'extraordinary politics' of democratic constituent power, though this would involve risks and trade-offs that must be negotiated in practice.

KEYWORDS

Climate change; securitization theory; emergency; sustainability transitions

I want you to act as if the house is on fire, because it is. –Greta Thunberg (2019)

A nascent discourse of 'climate emergency' has taken off in recent years as increasing numbers of scientists and activists highlight the existential dangers that may emerge if states fail to limit global temperature rises to below 2°C. In 2019 over 11,000 scientists declared 'clearly and unequivocally that planet Earth is facing a climate emergency' (Ripple, & 11,262 Scientist Signatories, 2019, p. 1), a sentiment bolstered by evidence of more severe than expected climate impacts at 1.1°C, continuously rising atmospheric CO_2 concentrations (rising by a record 6.2% in 2021 after a 5%–6% pandemic-induced dip in 2020), insufficient policies to put the world on track to meet the Paris agreement targets, and evidence of approaching tipping points that could trigger a 'hothouse earth' pathway in which warming becomes self-amplifying (IEA, 2021; Lenton et al., 2019). In conjunction with this scientific discourse, a worldwide movement to enact climate emergency mobilizations is gaining steam: as of August 2022, 2,252 jurisdictions in 39 countries, including 18 national governments and covering over a billion citizens, have officially 'declared a climate emergency', which were largely galvanized by grassroots climate activist movements like Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, Sunrise, and Action for the Climate Emergency (Climate Emergency Declaration, 2022). The political effects of such declarations remain contested and uncertain, but

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they at least amount to a symbolic shift in the discursive landscape of global climate politics (Patterson et al., 2021; Ruiz-Campillo et al., 2021).

On the other hand, while often sympathetic to the urgency of the climate problem, other scholars and activists contest climate emergency strategies. Often drawing from the Copenhagen School's understanding of securitization (Buzan et al., 1997), critics highlight the risks of using emergency discourse and related war metaphors to galvanize climate action. They argue that these efforts typically result in failed securitizations (Warner & Boas, 2020), but could also plausibly in the future lead to inequitable forms of rapid climate action that prioritize emissions reduction while marginalizing concerns about historic and contemporary injustice (Hodder & Martin, 2009; Hulme, 2019; Kester & Sovacool, 2017).

This paper will engage this debate by exploring the promise and pitfalls of climate emergency strategies. Unlike most scholars of climate securitization, I take seriously the agency of grassroots activist movements calling for climate emergency mobilizations, which can be understood as counter-hegemonic securitization or 'crisification' speech acts attempting to shift the cognitive–affective dispositions, priorities, and resources of governments and their constituencies (Paglia, 2018; Patterson et al., 2021). In this way my approach follows Ben Anderson's call to 'start from the use of emergency by non-state and non-sovereign actors to disrupt systems of rule', rather than only viewing emergency frames as a technique of sovereign power (2017, p. 475). However, I also take seriously the critiques levelled at climate emergency discourses and strategies. For those who simultaneously agree with the 'objectivist' framing of climate change as an 'emergency' that demands rapid transformative action, as well as the critics who highlight the pitfalls of securitization or 'emergency mode' politics, an urgent question arises: could climate emergency mobilizations be compatible with climate justice? In other words, are emergency disruptions of business-as-usual liberal capitalist democracy possible that could accelerate decarbonization while also advancing social justice objectives?

My core argument is that while climate emergency action would likely involve certain trade-offs in practice (e.g. between speed, justice, and democratic inclusion), it is nonetheless possible to conceptualize and enact climate emergency mobilizations that are capable of advancing climate justice objectives – including increased democratic participation, a more fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of mitigation, and deeper recognition of and reparations for historic injustices. In this sense, rather than inevitably ushering in a Schmittian 'state of exception' that intensifies sovereign power, climate emergency mobilizations are possible that would instantiate what Andreas Kalyvas calls the 'politics of the extraordinary': moments of 'genuine rupture and transformation' that break from the sterility of 'normal' institutionalized democracy and reaffirm the power of organized citizens 'to substantially rearrange or alter the fundamental norms, values, and institutions that regulate ordinary legislation and institutionalized politics' (2008, p. 1, 7). But the politics of the extraordinary carries risks alongside democratic potential (Williams, 2015): such periods of institutional change and experimentation, while unleashing the latent 'constituent power' of citizens, can also devolve into unchecked sovereign power and military-police repression of dissent, as we have seen in revolutionary contexts historically. It is thus critical for climate emergency movements to reflect systematically on how – and in what future conditions – they might help catalyze an extraordinary politics of climate emergency action, the risks and trade-offs that would likely emerge in the process, and how these could be effectively negotiated and (hopefully) softened in practice.

I will begin with a brief overview of the literature on climate securitization, and then shift to ongoing debates about climate emergency strategies. Next, I will engage with scholars like Andreas

Kalyvas, Michael Williams, and Ben Anderson who can help us imagine a different kind of emergency mode politics that may avoid its more authoritarian expressions. Finally, I will speculate on the future conditions in which extraordinary climate emergency mobilizations may become possible, and explore the tensions between speed, justice, and democratic inclusion that would likely surface during such mobilizations. I will focus on climate emergency movements in the global north, which is a limitation of the present study, but justified by the fact that it is the rich overdeveloped countries where emergency mitigation is most necessary according to principles of global climate justice, and where the power to unlock the finance needed to help decarbonize much of the global south lies.

Securitization theory and climate change

Declarations of climate emergency fit within a grammar or set of speech acts that Barry Buzan and colleagues famously described as 'securitization' moves: speech acts through which vulnerabilities are articulated as 'existential threat[s] to a referent object by a securitizing actor who thereby generates endorsement of emergency measures beyond rules that would otherwise bind' (1997, p. 5). The Copenhagen School assumes a distinction between 'normal politics', or the routine haggling between interest groups constrained by rule of law and routine procedures in liberal democratic states, and security or 'emergency mode' politics in which extraordinary measures are legitimized to deal with a threatening situation (4, 21). Politicians, military officials, defense experts, and intelligence agencies are those who hold the most power to '"do" or "speak" security successfully', in the sense that their security claims are more likely to resonate with and persuade a target audience that exceptional measures are needed (27). But Buzan et al note that this power is 'never absolute' (31), and it is thus possible for other actors with different social positionalities to enunciate security or emergency claims. Thierry Balzacq's sociological reworking of securitization theory allows us to develop this insight further, which emphasizes that 'securitization occurs in a field of struggles … a configuration of circumstances, including the context, the psycho-cultural disposition of the audience, and the power that both speaker and listener bring to the interaction' (2011, p. 15, 1–2). This approach facilitates more insight into the variable contexts, strategies, and outcomes of securitization processes. It explores, for instance, how securitizing actors mobilize 'heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc)' in order 'to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions), about the critical vulnerability of a referent object' (3).

Securitization theory has been highly influential among scholars of the climate-security nexus, though it has not been uncritically adopted. The period between 2003 and 2009 is often seen as the time when perceptions of climate change as an existential threat began to take off, which was the result of unprecedented climate-related disasters striking the global north (e.g. the 2003 European heatwave and 2005 Hurricane Katrina), increasing certainty about the science of climate change and its projected impacts articulated in the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report in 2007, and the 'discursive entrepreneurialism' of scientists, activists, national security agencies, and influential figures like Al Gore to successfully communicate climate change as an urgent crisis to a broader audience (Paglia, 2018). From a Copenhagen School lens, these efforts can only be interpreted as failed securitization efforts – attributable to the seemingly distant, abstract, uncertain, and contested consequences of climate change – since states have not yet adopted anything like 'emergency' measures that suspend routine democratic procedures in order to accelerate decarbonization efforts. However, other scholars claim that a more fluid and dynamic understanding of

securitization is needed to grasp how climate change has reshaped security discourses and practices. Maria Trombetta, for instance, argues that securitizing climate change is 'not about applying a fixed meaning of security and the practices associated with it', but has rather involved different modalities and logics of response that are closer to risk management practices – i.e. practices that aim to calculate and mitigate rather than eliminate the risks that climate change poses (2008, p. 600). Similarly, Oels (2012, p. 185) suggests that the 'failed' securitization of climate change is 'better understood as the successful "climatization" of the security field', in the sense that traditional security practices like scenario planning and early warning systems are being applied to climate change, while the security field is also expanding to include techniques from climate science like modelling and risk analysis (see also von Lucke, 2020). Thus while pushing back against Copenhagen School assumptions about a universalizing logic and consequences associated with securitization, these approaches nonetheless share its insight that to securitize an issue 'allows for measures that otherwise would not have been undertaken' by mobilizing the language and affect of urgency (Trombetta, 2019, p. 102), though the specific policy measures that flow from such securitizations are subject to context and political struggles.

The literature on the securitization of climate change has so far done an excellent job illuminating the politics of climate securitization in different national and/or institutional contexts, their policy consequences, and their lessons for securitization theory more broadly. But it contains two gaps that this paper will address. First, scholars of climate securitization have not yet systematically investigated grassroots activist movements as actors with the capacity to 'speak security' (e.g. by declaring climate emergencies) and in doing so reshape global climate politics. Occasionally their agency is recognized (e.g. von Lucke, 2020, p. 5), but questions regarding their capacities to affect climate policy outcomes and the conditions under which they may succeed in driving more radical climate emergency mobilizations have not received much (if any) attention. Second and relatedly, these scholars focus overwhelmingly on past and present patterns of climate securitization rather than considering how these may change in the future (both as a result of worsening socio-climate shocks and intensifying climate activism). Both of these oversights are understandable: grassroots activist movements remain marginal (if increasingly efficacious) actors in global climate politics, and claims about possible futures are inherently unverifiable and thus avoided by most social scientists. However, as Heikki Patomaki argues, 'anticipation of the future is a necessary part of social action … Consequently, if the social sciences are to be relevant they should be able to also say something about possible and likely futures' (2006, p. 5). Similarly, in a context of worsening climate change and multiplying calls for climate emergency action, scholarship on climate securitization should be able to say something about the prospects, potential, and possible pitfalls of grassroots-driven climate emergency mobilizations in the coming years. If scholars have been primarily interested in the limits of mainstream climate securitization strategies to date, we should also be asking whether and how more radical 'emergency mode' disruptions to business-as-usual liberal-capitalist democracy may emerge, the role grassroots movements can play in catalyzing such shifts, and the possibilities and risks of such strategies.

Debating climate emergency

To declare or not to declare a climate emergency? That is one of the questions facing climate scientists and activists around the world seeking more radical climate action. For climate emergency activists like Salamon (2019), co-founder of The Climate Mobilization (an American NGO), the main goal is to shift states and the broader public towards what she calls

'emergency mode' – a cognitive and affective state involving heightened sense of urgency about the risks we face and the need for rapid transformative action. Following Kathryn Davidson and colleagues, 'climate emergency mode' can in this sense be defined as 'action that goes well beyond business-as-usual by demanding a radical, urgent mobilisation of economic and social resources at an abnormal level of intensity and scale so to appropriately address the climate crisis' (2020, p. 2).

There is no straightforward way to precisely define how climate change constitutes an 'emergency' (which, from a constructivist perspective, is merely an intersubjective discourse and/or affect rather than a material situation that can be objectively defined) (Paglia, 2018). But Paul Gilding suggests that three criteria must be met for a situation to warrant the 'emergency' designation: (1) the risk is high; (2) the consequences of failure are unmanageable or unacceptable; and (3) there is a 'time constraint governing whether a response will be effective' (2019, p. 6). Such a definition arguably raises more questions than it answers – what is the threshold of risk that distinguishes an emergency from any other hazard or vulnerability? Unmanageable or unacceptable for who? And in what sense? But we can say that climate emergency advocates generally agree on two key points: (1) exceeding 1.5°C and especially 2°C of global warming risks triggering a 'domino-like cascade' of tipping points that would push the earth to ever hotter temperatures (Steffen et al., 2018), creating an existential risk for humanity and the biosphere; and (2) ensuring that global temperatures are kept below this threshold requires a rapid transformation of the global political-economy that goes well beyond business-as-usual market-based strategies (e.g. emissions trading, carbon taxes, subsidies and tax credits for renewable energy and electric vehicles, etc.) (Spratt & Sutton, 2008, pp. 224–230). While the first point is contested by many climate scientists who claim that the risks of tipping cascades are often exaggerated (e.g. Mann, 2021), the second has become increasingly conventional wisdom since the publication of the IPCC's 2018 Special Report on 1.5°C, which called for 'rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban, and infrastructure' that 'are unprecedented in terms of scale' (IPCC, 2018, p. 21). Current policies – which prioritize economic growth over climate action, aim to minimize disruption to businesses and consumers, and assume the continued expansion of fossil fuel production at least into the mid-2030s – put the earth on pace for an estimated 2.7°C by 2100 (Climate Action Tracker, 2021). In contrast, the policy shifts needed to bring the 1.5°C target within reach would entail 'nothing less than the rapid and dramatic reversal of our present direction as a civilisation', as Jason Hickel puts it – a massive 5%–7% drop in emissions *every year* between now and 2050, and the rate would need to be even higher for rich countries (10%–15% annual reductions) in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibility (2020, p. 137).

Climate activists and NGOs demanding climate emergency action are thus in effect calling on states to move beyond hollow 'net zero' rhetoric to push through the decisive, disruptive, and transformative policy shifts needed to put the world economy on pace for the 1.5°C target. Such movements are diverse and vary in terms of their specific policy prescriptions. But they typically share two primary goals. The first, as noted, is to get governments (both local and national) to 'declare a climate emergency', or to officially acknowledge the gravity of the climate crisis and the necessity of transformative action. Following Balzacq (2011, p. 3), climate emergency declarations could be understood as symbolic actions or speech acts that mobilize 'heuristic artefacts' (e.g. future projections of climate catastrophe, war metaphors, analogies to the World War II experience of rapidly reorienting economic production) in order to prompt a 'coherent network of implications' among target audiences (e.g. feelings of fear, hope that the emergency can be averted through transformative action, and belief in the need for national solidarity and sacrifice). Studies so far suggest that

such declarations, while largely symbolic, can also lay a foundation for concrete policies while reinvigorating democratic participation in climate action (Howarth et al., 2021; Ruiz-Campillo et al., 2021), though in most cases so far they have at best led to 'incremental rather than transformative action agendas' (Patterson et al., 2021, p. 847).

The second and primary goal of such movements, however, is to eventually push national governments to adopt radical climate emergency plans that accord with the scientific evidence on what should be done to keep global temperatures as close to 1.5°C as possible. The Club of Rome's 'Climate Emergency Plan' (2018), for instance, calls for immediately halting fossil fuel expansion and fossil fuel subsidies, tripling annual investments in renewable energy, creating a globally coordinated carbon pricing system that imposes border adjustment tariffs on non-participating countries, dramatically increasing circular economy practices, and replacing GDP with alternative indicators for measuring social 'progress'. This last recommendation is supported by evidence that continued compound GDP growth is incompatible with the speed of emissions reductions needed to reach the 1.5°C target, though breakthroughs in 'Negative Emissions Technologies' could plausibly alter this calculus (Kallis & Hickel, 2020). Other plans go even further by calling for World War II style-rationing provisions, which go well beyond current market-based strategies by placing a hard cap on emissions and energy consumption and equitably sharing emissions allowances among critical industries, individuals, and other users – a strategy often lauded for its perceived fairness and effectiveness in meeting strict targets (Lieven, 2021, pp. 92–106; Spratt & Sutton, 2008). Also informed by the experience of the World War II mobilization in the US, Laurence Delina envisions 'national mitigation plans' for states composed of the following elements: legally binding targets for emissions reductions; new institutional coordinating bodies to conduct comprehensive studies on available resources, labour requirements, and needs for the renewable energy transition; expedited re-training programmes for displaced workers; universal basic income and/or state-backed job guarantees to ensure economic security for all; and a 'super-tax' on individuals earning more than a given income threshold (2016, pp. 121–138). Recent calls for 'Green New Deals' in the US and Europe provide similar approaches, which in their more radical forms call for state-driven mitigation plans in the global north combined with 'Marshall plan'-scale aid for mitigation and adaptation, technology transfers, and debt cancellation (Aronoff et al., 2019; Klein, 2019). The overall objective of these movements is to get rich countries to net zero emissions in the 2030s and by 2040 at latest, and the rest of the world to net zero by 2050 or shortly thereafter, which (according to the IPCC) would give the world a 50/50 chance at stabilizing global average temperature increases at 1.5°C (Delina, 2016; Klein, 2019).

In contrast, critics of climate emergency movements, while usually sympathetic to their goals, are wary of emergency-based strategies for at least three reasons. First, some simply counsel that the strategy is highly unlikely to motivate rapid climate action and may even backfire. Jeroen Warner and Ingrid Boas, for instance, show that emergency and security frames often 'come across as strategic and calculated' to target audiences, which means they are received with skepticism; furthermore, rather than galvanizing support for accelerated action, they suggest these climate securitization moves may instil 'a sense of ontological insecurity in the intended audience' in a way that promotes pushback and disengagement rather than action (2020, p. 1472, 1475). Second, others argue that climate emergency frames create an overly restrictive lens on global challenges that exceptionalizes the climate problem while potentially diverting attention and resources away from other goals. Mike Hulme, in this sense, asks 'why is the the scandal of deepening economic inequality in the world not subject to emergency politics? Why should an emergency be declared

for the planet, but not for the poor?' (Hulme, 2019). The fear here is that focusing on the climate emergency 'narrows the policy gaze to the restrictive logic of equating human well-being with reduced carbon emissions', rather than facilitating a multi-dimensional platform for political-economic change that targets intersecting global challenges (Hulme, 2019).

Third, following the Copenhagen School, many are concerned that if such strategies *do* at some point succeed in galvanizing climate emergency action, then this would be done by overriding concerns about justice and democratic accountability. For example, Johannes Kester and Benjamin Sovacool claim that 'the cure may be worse than the disease', since a 'partly successful mobilization that entices government support but not broad public acceptance would push towards a police state' (2017, p. 52, 53). Similarly, while supportive of climate emergency action, Laurence Delina and Mark Diesendorf acknowledge that climate emergency declarations may be used to legitimate intrusive state surveillance and coercion to ensure mitigation targets are met, and there would be 'no guarantee that a state of normal democracy would return' after the end of the transition period (2013, p. 378). In addition to the usual fears about the suspension of democratic rights and procedures during an emergency, there is also the danger that single-minded determination to accelerate emissions reductions would intensify new forms of dispossession. 'Green sacrifice zones', for example, refer to spaces and communities negatively impacted by 'the sourcing, transportation, installation, and operation of solutions for powering low-carbon transitions', including end-of-life waste disposal (Zografos & Robbins, 2020, p. 543). Dispossession of and/or harms to indigenous and rural communities to build solar and wind farms; win carbon credits from carbon sequestration projects; and ramp up mining for lithium, graphite, cobalt, nickel, and other minerals needed for the renewable energy transition (projected to increase by 40, 25, 21, and 19 times respectively above contemporary levels by 2050 to meet the Paris targets) have already been amply documented (Dunlap, 2018; IEA, 2021; Sovacool et al., 2021). In the context of a climate emergency mobilization, community concerns about and resistance to such projects would most likely be marginalized at best, and crushed via military-police repression at worst.

In sum, if we take the arguments of both the advocates and critics of climate emergency strategies seriously, this suggests that we may be confronting a 'tragic' predicament, or a situation where core values with equal claim on us (e.g. rapid mitigation, democracy, and justice) are in tension if not irreconcilable opposition (Foster, 2022, p. 11). Emergency disruptions of business-as-usual liberal capitalist democracies are almost certainly needed to put the world economy on pace to meet the 1.5°C target, yet such strategies carry evident authoritarian risks. Most climate emergency plans developed by scholars and NGOs explicitly foreground concerns about climate justice (e.g. Club of Rome, 2018; Gilding, 2019; Klein, 2019; Salamon, 2019; Spratt & Sutton, 2008), but critics would argue that these are idealist gestures that would be overridden in any real-world climate emergency mobilization. In contrast, Anatol Lieven's approach, which tries to derive the imperative of climate emergency action from political realist principles – national security, survival, and the motivating power of nationalism – may provide a more accurate account of what a climate emergency mobilization would entail in practice. For Lieven, the primary goal of climate securitization should be 'to get through or around the dogmatic free-market capitalist ideology of contemporary Western elites', though for him this must come at the expense of 'ideological luxuries' like climate justice (2021, p. 133). As he writes: 'the first things that get tossed out in a real emergency are luxuries' (xxv). Also coming from a political realist approach, John Foster sees it as delusional 'that our key social-political values, justice *and* democracy *and* liberty … *and* universal material well-being on a habitable planet, can all be achieved together' (2022, p. 135). Instead, he argues that

the climate emergency demands whole system transformation '*at whatever cost*', which 'will inevitably come at the sacrifice of important values' (128–129; italics original).

Is this the best we could hope for? Must climate emergency action necessarily override democratic norms and accelerate decarbonization at the expense of climate justice in the name of urgency? Is a different, more just and democratic form of climate emergency action possible? I agree with realists like Lieven and Foster that the goal of emergency mitigation may be in conflict with the values of justice and democracy (at least in its current institutionalized forms), and that certain trade-offs will likely be unavoidable in practice. We need a framework that can help us confront and work through these tensions and trade-offs (Ciplett & Harrison, 2020), rather than holding unshakably to an 'all or nothing' approach. But the trade-offs are not as ironclad as these authors suggest. When viewed through the lens of the 'politics of the extraordinary', I argue that it is possible to imagine more 'just emergency mobilizations' that can accelerate decarbonization while advancing many (if not all) climate justice objectives – including increased democratic participation, a more fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of mitigation (both nationally and globally), and deeper recognition of and reparations for historic injustices – though this could only occur in a context of organized grassroots power on a massive scale. This argument is unavoidably speculative and relies on what Foster calls 'counter-empirical hope', since the scale, speed, and depth of transformation we are hoping for is historically unprecedented and faces long odds at best (Foster, 2022, p. 45). But theoretically and empirically-informed speculation is needed to imagine how climate emergency movements can help create an alternative future that is climactically stable *and* more just. Certain trade-offs and ethical quandaries – what Ciplett and Harrison (2020) call 'transition tensions' – may be unavoidable in any real-world climate emergency mobilization, but exploration of future scenarios can help clarify what these might be and inform strategic reflections on how they might be negotiated (and hopefully softened) in practice (Albert, 2022).

Climate emergency and the politics of the extraordinary

To envision how climate emergency strategies may galvanize democratic political-economic transformation rather than resulting in either failed securitizations or authoritarian erosion of democracy, we can begin by taking inspiration from Kalyvas's (2008) concept of the 'politics of the extraordinary'. As opposed to the relatively 'static and frozen' periods of 'normal' institutionalized democratic politics, the politics of the extraordinary involves

> high levels of collective mobilization; extensive popular support for some fundamental changes; the emergence of irregular and informal public spaces; and the formation of extra-institutional and anti-statist movements that directly challenge the established balance of forces, the prevailing politico-social status quo, the state legality, and the dominant value system (6–7).

In short, these are periods of revolutionary rupture catalyzed by 'self-organized insurgent publics' that institute the basis of a new kind of political-economic order (13). If 'state of emergency' suspensions of ordinary legality represent one form of extraordinary politics, then a different form emerges when the latent 'constituent power' of a demos manifests itself to disrupt prevailing systems of rule. The ultimate goal of such movements at such times, as Kalyvas writes, is to

> mobilize and encompass broader strata of the population, to form wider organic alliances, to articulate new norms and rights, to formulate original collective aims that transcend the confines of the existing regime, and to propose a new hegemonic founding project (299).

Michael Williams suggests that by rethinking securitization theory through the lens of extraordinary politics, it is possible to develop a more positive understanding of securitization as 'a process of openness and self-determination with democratic potential' that may enable 'a more foundational – if always fraught – revaluation of the political order itself in ways that can be inclusive and reformative as well as violently exclusionary' (2015, p. 115). In other words, from this view, there is no inevitability that emergency claims (if accepted) lead to suppression of democracy and exclusionary injustice, though this is always a danger. Instead, enunciations of security or declarations of emergency from grassroots movements may be viewed as expressions of latent constituent power that also have democratizing potential. As Ben Anderson shows, both climate and racial justice movements use emergency declarations as 'a pragmatic-contextual intervention in the present that aims precisely to disrupt what has already become normal', or to fold 'a sense emergency into the mode of operation of the very systems and infrastructures that, for some, once produced a sense of stability' (2017, p. 473, 472). In this way they aim to generate urgency among otherwise complacent publics, erode the legitimacy of constituted political regimes, inspire hope that rapid transformative action can stave off the emergency and create a better future, and call forth 'self-organized insurgent publics' capable of realizing this alternative future (Anderson, 2017, pp. 469–470; Kalyvas, 2008, p. 13).

The strategy of Extinction Rebellion can usefully be read in this way. Their key demands – forcing governments to 'tell the truth' about the climate emergency, bring emissions to zero within a decade, and create 'citizen's assemblies' to democratically determine how societies decarbonize – aim to disrupt and transform dominant cognitive–affective dispositions by highlighting the unsustainability of business-as-usual, the criminal negligence of existing governments vis-à-vis the climate emergency, and the necessity of decisive emergency action. Like earlier forms of civil disobedience, their disruptive actions 'target directly the existing symbolic and juridical structures of instituted power' in order to rearticulate the 'illegal' as 'extra-legal', or subject to a 'higher law' or rationality beyond the arbitrariness of instituted state authority (Kalyvas, 2008, p. 299). Furthermore, by calling for citizen's assemblies they explicitly aim to supplement institutionalized democratic decision-making with 'extraconstitutional forms of participation that strive to narrow the distance between rulers and ruled, active and passive citizens, representatives and represented' (7).

But of course there is no guarantee that grassroots climate emergency strategies will result in the desired outcome: target audiences may remain unpersuaded by the urgency of the crisis and/or the need for emergency action beyond current policies, and dominant interests and their media mouthpieces may effectively write them off as 'eco-extremists' or 'millenarian cultists' (the common discursive strategy employed by rightwing UK media outlets). On the other hand, in conditions of worsening climate shocks and deepening political-economic crises, climate emergency movements may indeed help trigger 'social tipping points' in which the need for emergency action rapidly becomes popular common sense (Otto et al., 2020), though the outcome may be eco-authoritarian securitization more than climate justice (as I'll elaborate below). Critics of climate emergency strategies are thus not wrong when they highlight the risks of such strategies. They are simply one-sided, ignoring or downplaying their democratic and constituent potential.

The politics of the extraordinary provides a useful theoretical interpretation of climate emergency movements that highlights their democratic constituent potential as well as their risks. But rather than just theorizing these possibilities in the abstract, we should also consider more concretely whether and how these movements might succeed in catalyzing climate emergency mobilizations in the global north, as well as the tensions and trade-offs that would most likely surface in the process. To start, as I've alluded to, worsening climate shocks over time may push more and

more individuals towards either active or passive support for climate emergency action. But it is also often recognized that the 'slow emergency' of climate change will likely lack so-called 'focusing events' in the global north that are powerful enough to trigger social tipping points that dramatically alter public consciousness about the need for rapid political-economic transformation (at least within the timeframe needed to meet the 1.5°C target) (Davidson et al., 2020; Patterson et al., 2021, p. 847). Unprecedented socio-climate disasters and 'record-shattering' events like Hurricane Harvey in 2017, the 2019–2020 Australian bushfires, and summer 2021 floods in Central Europe, while certainly raising public concern about the climate crisis, have had at best marginal effects on climate policy (Patterson et al., 2021). The recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, however, shows that concerns about energy security can have 'far greater mobilizing force that the climate catastrophe paradigm' due to the capacity of rising energy prices to inflict more immediate, widespread, and synchronized economic pain for producers and consumers (Hook & Hume, 2022). The ongoing energy crisis is leading some European states to develop emergency plans to ration energy, cut consumption, and ramp up permitting and deployment of renewable energy, though they currently take the form of 'all of the above' energy strategies that include re-opening coal plants, building up liquified natural gas terminals and pipelines, and supporting fossil fuel extraction-for-export in the global south (Dempsey et al, 2022).

We can thus hypothesize that if fossil fuel supply shocks of similar or worse magnitude emerge synchronously with increasingly intense and relentless climate shocks (e.g. in the 2030s, when the world economy will be dealing with the consequences of roughly 1.5°C of warming, as well as higher dependence on 'unconventional' oil and gas supplies that are more expensive and diffuse), then together these shocks may motivate concerted action among G7 countries to accelerate the renewable energy transition (Ahmed, 2017). But as we see in the contemporary context, incumbent elites can also effectively exploit energy and economic crises to justify continuation or even deepening of the fossil fuelled status quo. Thus a radical emergency programme to address the root causes of worsening climate shocks and energy insecurity will only materialize if pushed successfully by increasingly powerful grassroots climate movements with much greater numbers, organizational strength, and coherence than at present. Such movements would need to be at least capable of coordinating massive general strikes, far larger than the 2019–2020 strikes and civil disobedience actions organized by movements like Fridays for Future, Sunrise, Extinction Rebellion, and Black Lives Matter, while interfacing with progressive political parties that can translate their demands into concrete political gains. It is questionable to what extent and how quickly such movements can scale up their organizational strength to be capable of pushing governments and elites towards more than reformist responses. But if these three conditions converge – (1) intensifying climate shocks that galvanize heightened collective urgency about the climate emergency, (2) intractable energy insecurity and resulting political-economic crises that politicize broader sectors of populations in rich countries, and (3) strengthening networks of climate, labour, and antiracist movements that are able to persuade democratic majorities that radical action is needed to address these crises – then the scene may be set for climate emergency mobilizations that look something like those envisioned by Lieven, Delina, the Club of Rome, and others (Club of Rome, 2019; Delina, 2016; Klein, 2019; Lieven, 2021).

This would of course be an unlikely best-case scenario. But even then we must consider dangers and trade-offs that may emerge in the course of extraordinary climate emergency action. First, as noted by some critics, would be the risks of non-inclusive policy processes, unchecked executive power, and repression of dissent that would accompany a climate emergency programme (Delina & Diesendorf, 2013; Kester & Sovacool, 2017). For instance, there is already intense local resistance

to solar and wind development across the US and Europe – much of it the product of NIMBYism, some of it fuelled by disinformation, but also often reflecting legitimate concerns about negative social and ecological impacts (Groom, 2022; Shankleman & Paulsson, 2020). In a context of accelerated renewable energy deployment in a climate emergency programme, would such resistance simply need to be crushed in the interests of speed, or must it be accommodated in the interests of procedural justice while slowing the pace of transition? Incentivizing community ownership of renewable energy systems, innovation in rooftop and water-based solar ('floatovoltaics'), and intelligent land-use and siting practices can soften these trade-offs (Goodstein & Lovins, 2019), but they would likely be unavoidable to some extent.

An even bigger issue would be sustaining a multi-decadal climate emergency programme in a context of polarized democratic constituencies and gridlocked legislatures (particularly, but not solely, in the US). Even if such programmes are (at least initially) backed by solid majorities, they will undoubtedly face intense resistance from incumbent elites, rightwing parties, far-right movements, and in certain national contexts the court system. If a climate emergency regime intends to push through and sustain its radical platform in the face of such resistance, will existing democratic institutions and norms need to be weakened or suspended? Might there even be pressure to erode electoral democracy if oppositional regimes bent on overturning climate emergency protocols risk coming to power? In an extraordinary political context of 'high levels of collective mobilization; extensive popular support for some fundamental changes … [and] extraconstitutional forms of participation that strive to narrow the distance between rulers and ruled' (Kalyvas, 2008, pp. 6–7), new and more radically democratic institutions may emerge even if older ones wither away. But the time-sensitive pressures of climate emergency action in a context of gridlocked political systems may push democratically elected regimes to erode checks and balances and consolidate executive authority (like we've seen, for instance, with the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela) in order to push through controversial mitigation measures like carbon rationing, land-use transformations, bans on carbon-intensive products and services, and 'super-taxes' on the rich (Albert, 2022; Foster, 2022; Delina, 2016, pp. 121–138; Kester & Sovacool, 2017). A trade-off between rapid emergency mitigation and the stability of institutionalized pluralist democracy may in this sense be unavoidable, though it could be softened by post-consumerist cultural change or near-term technological breakthroughs that minimize disruption to current rich-world lifestyles.

Furthermore, there is the question of whether and how climate emergency action in the global north could also pursue the ends of *global* climate justice, since even best-case emergency mobilization scenarios in these countries may be accompanied by a rapid increase in green sacrifice zones (GSZs) across the global south, insufficient climate finance, and political-economic destabilization in southern fossil fuel producers. There at least two challenging questions here that climate emergency movements in the global north must think through: (1) how to prevent or limit the extension of GSZs, and (2) how to couple a global programme of 'climate reparations' to domestic climate emergency action. On the first, we know that a significant expansion of mining for transition metals will be necessary (IEA, 2021), though this can be limited through strategies like energy demand reduction, extended producer responsibility, massive investments in recycling infrastructure, prioritizing public transportation over private cars, and urban mining (Aronoff et al., 2019; War on Want, 2019; Zografos & Robbins, 2020). A broader context of rising energy prices and energy insecurity would make such strategies more feasible. But some further extractivism is unavoidable, which will require global governance initiatives to ensure supply-chain transparency, labour protections, free and prior informed consent among communities affected by mining, and fair trade

practices to prevent imperialist rent extraction (Aronoff et al., 2019; Sovacool et al., 2021). In practice, however, it would be challenging to enforce such policies, and the imperatives of emergency mitigation will pressure northern states to accept transition metals at whatever cost. Again, this may constitute a tragic dilemma, one that can be softened but will be difficult to resolve without causing further injustice.

On the issue of climate reparations – which would include debt cancellation and ramped up finance for mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage for the global south (likely needed in the trillions of dollars annually by 2030, far beyond the paltry sums currently being offered mostly in the form of loans) (Taiwo & Bigger, 2022) – it will be difficult to sustain political-economic coalitions in rich countries that support accelerated domestic action *alongside* expensive commitments to global reparations, *particularly* in conditions of worsening economic insecurity caused by climate and energy shocks. As a result, some analysts perceive an inherent trade-off between the goals of effective mitigation and distributive global climate justice (Lieven, 2021; Symons, 2019). However, this trade-off may be attenuated if such programmes are successfully framed as matters of the 'national interest' and security (rather than just morality). This undoubtedly entails risks – e.g. that geopolitically strategic states and regions will receive largesse while others are sacrificed. The challenge for climate emergency movements will be to persuade democratic majorities that climate reparations are both ethically imperative as well as essential to the goals of climate stabilization and national security, rather than being mere 'ideological luxuries' (Lieven, 2021), but it remains to be seen whether and how such programmes might become adequately just, expansive, and sustainable.

Conclusion

This paper has engaged the debate on climate emergency strategies in order to illuminate their promise as well as their potential risks and pitfalls. It has argued that the climate emergency may pose a tragic predicament – one with no ideal solution, and which will necessarily entail trade-offs – though it is nonetheless possible to conceptualize and enact climate emergency mobilizations that can advance climate justice objectives. It follows scholars who suggest that emergency declarations, like securitization speech acts more broadly, can disrupt and challenge prevailing systems of rule rather than inevitably reinforcing existing forms of sovereign power (Anderson, 2017; Williams, 2015), though it acknowledges that such strategies carry risks and may backfire. But the truth is that both emergency as well as non-emergency frames contain risks: if the former risk failed securitizations or intensifications of sovereign power and unjust mitigation policies, the latter risk the continuation of incrementalist climate policies that have proven utterly inadequate to put the world on track to meet the 2°C target, let alone 1.5°C. Thus rather than rejecting emergency frames *tout court,* a better approach is to work with them critically and constructively, mindful of their tensions and risks as well as their openness and democratic potential. This requires further exploration of the ethical quandaries, trade-offs, and risks that would accompany any real-world implementation of climate emergency programmes. In particular, deeper investigation is needed of where the goals of emergency action and climate justice can be synergistic, where they are in tension, how such tensions can be softened, and where (if at all) they might be in tragically irreconcilable opposition (e.g. Ciplett & Harrison, 2020). It is probable that not all climate justice objectives could be met in a context of climate emergency action, given the trade-offs between different values and competing justice claims in different regions, at different scales, and between present and future generations (Caney, 2016). But climate emergency mobilizations are nonetheless possible

that could advance many (though perhaps not all) of these objectives, though the discussion above shows that they would be challenging to achieve in practice. The question of whether and how they might be possible, and the specific obstacles that would need to be overcome, deserves more systematic attention from scholars and climate justice movements.

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