Listening to Silence:

Climate change, denialism, and citizenship in coastal North Carolina



Karl Emmanuel Dudman

School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography
St Antony's College, University of Oxford

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Abstract

Residents of Core Sound, North Carolina are in trouble. Despite being at growing risk from sea level rise, this conservative, rural community remains taciturn on the subject of climate change. While journalists, pundits, and activists frame this as a typical case of climate change denial however, rather less critical attention has been paid to exploring the political life and utility of this label, the sociocultural nuances it presumes to describe, and still less those of climate's 'believers'. These questions matter, however. Whatever its causes, the binary of denial and belief has left communities like Down East the butt of disparaging, often classist stereotypes, and after the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in 2017, bereft of representation in the world's primary forum on climate governance. Diagnosing the denialism discourse as deeply asymmetrical, I present in this thesis a corrective reconstruction of the climate 'silences' that hang over the marshes of Core Sound. I do this via an ethnographic story of encounter between two communities in North Carolina: one the villages of Down East, the other a network of environmental institutions hoping to engage them on climate change. Developing a metaphor of imagined 'statehood', I describe each as performing citizenship of its own constitutional settlement; encoding epistemic and moral norms, as well as standards of membership, rights, and participation. Presented this way, the global climate regime and an old fishing community can be reframed as neighbours, cohabiting the same stretch of coastal NC. As they interact, their mutual legibility is determined by the degree of resonance between these constitutional orders, sometimes leading to collaborations, sometimes reproducing a widening gulf of silence. While some scientists alter the climate narrative for the sake of communicability and others turn to less troublesome populations, a trade-off emerges in the governance of climate change between inclusivity and effectiveness.

I have made
a ceaseless effort
Not to ridicule,
Not to bewail,
Nor to scorn human actions,
But to understand them.

— Baruch Spinoza

Serafina Pekkala on her cloud-pine would find a still field of air at night and listen to the silence. Like the air itself, which was never quite still, the silence was full of little currents and turbulence, of patches of density and pockets of attenuation, all shot through with darts and drifts of whispering that were made of silence themselves. It was as different from the silence of a closed room as fresh spring water is from stale.

— Philip Pullman

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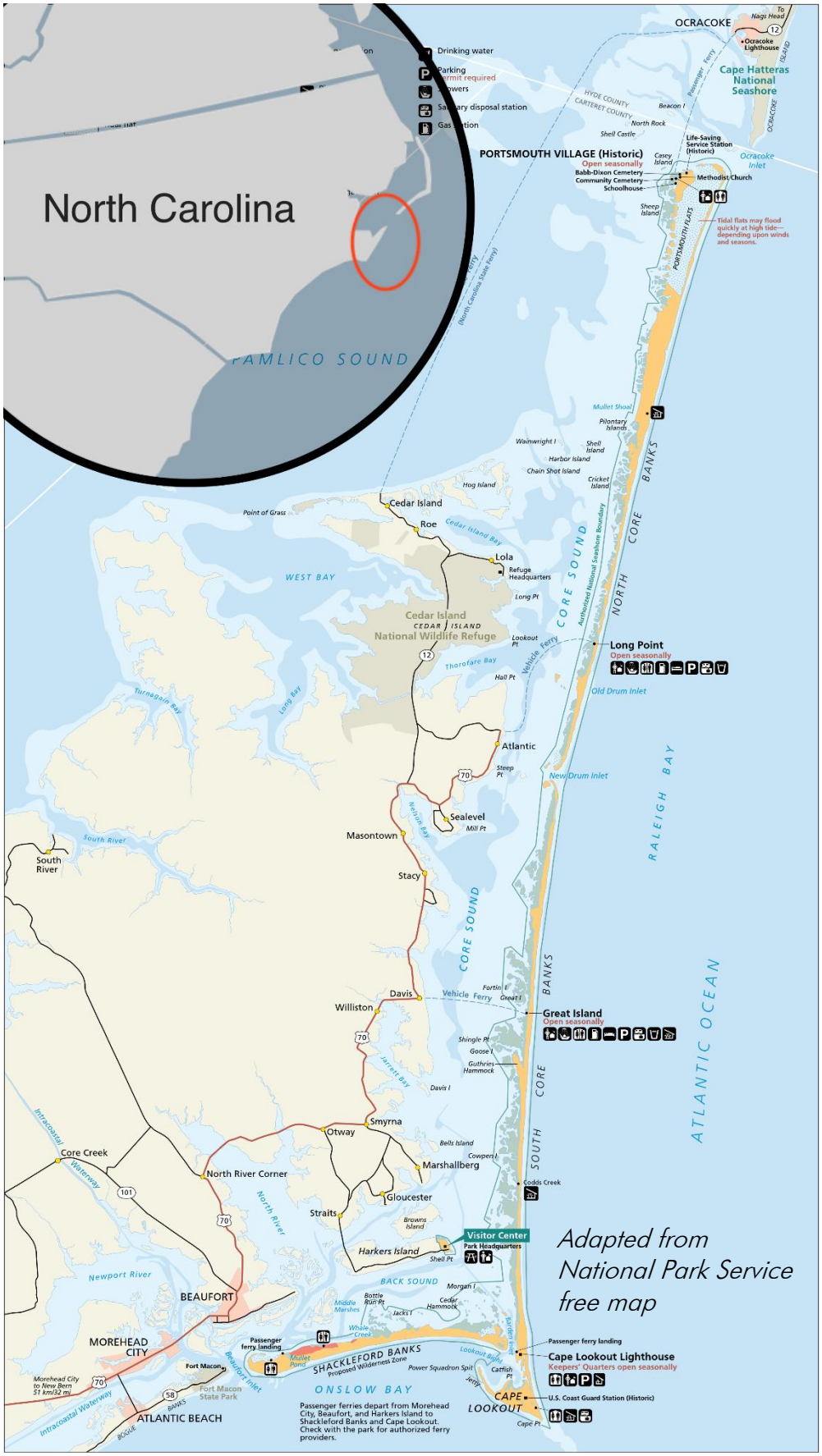
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Abbreviations and Key Terms

CATs	Community Action Teams
CES	Cooperative Extension System
COP(*n*)	Conferences of the Parties
DE	Down East
DMF	Department of Marine Fisheries
ECOP	Extension Committee on Organisation and Policy
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JT	Just Transition
LGU	Land Grant University
NC	North Carolina
NCBIWA	North Carolina Beach, Inlet, and Waterways Association
NCDCM	North Carolina Division of Coastal Management
NCDEQ	North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality
NCSCO	North Carolina State Climate Office
NCSU	North Carolina State University
NECI	National Extension Climate Initiative
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NSA	Non-State Actor
OPEC	Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
RCP	Resilient Communities Program
RCCP	Resilient Coastal Communities Program
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SLR	Sea Level Rise
SSP	Shared Socioeconomic Pathway
STI	Socio-Technical Imaginary
STS	Science and Technology Studies
TANs	Transnational Advocacy Network
UNC	University of North Carolina
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
YPCCC	Yale Program on Climate Change Communication

Banker	Someone living on the Outer (and sometimes also Inner) Banks of NC
Brogue	The distinctive dialect of Down East and the Outer Banks
Core Sounder	Someone belonging to the communities of Core Sound
Dingbatter	Someone not from Down East, but typically who is present there
Down East	The collection of roughly 13 villages and surrounding areas lying east of the North River Bridge and on the inner banks of Core Sound. It is a noun, though often used adverbially, e.g 'heading Down East.'
'From off'	A person, idea, or object originating from west of the North River bridge
Nor'Easter	A northeasterly oceanic cyclone, typically forming between autumn and spring
Sound/Ocean side	The side of an island facing the sound or ocean

Map – Down East



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UK

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I.Intrada

Prologue

23rd June 2016 – Huddleston Road, North London

It is late when the news finally settles. I am 23, in the final year of my undergraduate degree, and spending most of my waking hours thinking about concepts of inalienable cultural ownership and the commodification of indigenous art in museum shops. I am fixated on my dissertation, but already my mind is turning to environmental politics after a year of living in British Columbia. I read Julie Cruikshank's astonishing monograph 'Do Glaciers Listen', and the idea of multiple cultural realities converging on the same landscapes has begun to enchant me.

Tonight though, I am stooped over my laptop in the kitchen of my damp, North London flat, late enough that the slugs have begun their nightly march through cracks in the garden door and along the counters. For weeks, posters have masked almost every ground floor window in my street, instructing passersby – as if they needed to be told – to 'Vote Remain'. A chorus of scholars, think tanks, and pundits have intoned grave prophecies for Britain, should it leave the European Union; comedians have mocked, and pollsters reassured. The referendum was to be close, but common sense would prevail over this eccentric moment of national hysteria. Then the results drooled in and something began to turn in my head. I felt distant from my compatriots, not out of ideological disagreement, but because something that had seemed obvious to me was clearly not obvious at all to a vast number of people, and vice versa. I was shocked, but it was my shock that shocked me: how could I have been so wide of the mark, so misaligned with so much of the country? If I was voting with common sense, expert guidance, and moral integrity, what even more compelling signal was 51.9% of the citizenry in thrall to? Many bitter and disdainful answers circulated in the days that followed – insularity, a lack of critical engagement with information, a gullibility to biased reporting, bigotry and moral corruption – but I found them unkind

and unsatisfying. I grew up in Lincolnshire, with family in Boston and Spalding; areas with the highest percentage of Leave votes in the country. Could I – and my whole street - claim in good faith to have put more research into my vote than them? Had I not gone every time to preferred media outlets for analyses that massaged my moral and ideological priors? Was I really to believe that the whole of Scotland and London had swung yellow in synchronicity because of some mass immunity in these areas to misinformation?

As if my epistemological identity-crisis was not cause enough for discomfort, the vitriolic reactions from my own social and political circles made an already acrimonious atmosphere still more toxic. Embittered commentaries pointed fingers at a bigoted and ill-informed public who had ended up kicked by their own jerking knees. Despite very limited voting data, a narrative imaginary of old and white working-class culpability immediately emerged, attacking a remote and uneducated mass who had 'probably never even seen a migrant' (Scott 2016), or blaming the elderly for pulling up the drawbridge of opportunity on the young (Cosslett 2016). Despite having denounced the misinformation and dirty tactics of the Leave campaign, many Remain voters – themselves a highly diverse set of socioeconomic and political profiles – subscribed to 'the essentialist and exclusive polarities that it accuse[d] the other side of mobilising behind Brexit, fomenting divisions it ostensibly opposes'. The 'middle-aged Tory lady of the shires and the retired City gent in his south coast enclave' disappeared from view as the object of political frustration was reduced to the old, white, working-class man (Seed 2022). This reactive, unempathetic, and emotional response from the camp constructed as rational, democratic, and informed catalysed in me an interest in the discrepancies between the ways that people handled their own beliefs and actions, and those of their Others. Though I was as yet unfamiliar with the ideas and literatures of Science and Technology Studies (STS), it was the concept of 'methodological symmetry' that would eventually give a name to the nascent interest in epistemic even-handedness I was experiencing. First developed by David Bloor in 1976, the

concept asserts that truth claims should not be exposed to different degrees and types of scrutiny, even if one is considered legitimate and the other irrational. My discomfort in 2016 was that different standards were being invoked for assessing the legitimacy of Leavers' opinions vs those of Remainers, leading to a politics as socially destructive as it was epistemologically flawed.

By 2017, this principle of symmetry would become a major part of my emerging research interests in public attitudes towards climate change. As the introduction shall now recount, that story began with three maps.

Chapter 1 – Introduction



In a small town in coastal North Carolina, waves are being pushed over seawalls. The sky is clear and the air calm, yet family photos drown in the basements, and saltwater soaks the roots of live oaks 3 blocks from the shore. The hurricanes come like they always have, but more and more it is the sunny days when roads close and shop owners bring out the sandbags. Scientists saw it coming; just one of a host of complex impacts associated with the anthropogenic heating of the planet's atmosphere. It is here along the Atlantic coast that this steadily growing body of scientific activity anticipates some of the country's most extreme climate impacts will fall (Hsiang et al. 2017, see figure 1). Regular reports from the Union of Concerned Scientists localise impact projections further: from Wilmington, NC which could see over 350 flooding events per year by 2045 (Spanger-Siegfried et al. 2014), to stark claims that a legacy of chronic overdevelopment in Florida's poorest areas will prove a disastrous threat-multiplier for those who can bear it least (Dahl et al. 2018). In rural areas in particular, the fourth national climate assessment predicted the impacts will

gravely compound existing social stresses related to 'limited local community capabilities and associated with rural demography, occupations, earnings, literacy, and poverty incidence' (USGCRP 2018).

Despite the bleak implications of these forecasts for America's eastern shores, there is little to suggest that the threat of sea level rise is having a commensurate effect on public concern in the area. The Yale-based Program for Climate Change Communication's (YPCCC) county-level, nation-wide survey gauges public perceptions of climate change on a range of metrics. The southeast, despite its vulnerability, indicates levels of public concern far below the national average (Marlon et al. 2016). The small, rural Georgian county of McIntosh, for example, is projected to see one fifth of its residential land chronically inundated due to sea level rise (Campbell et al. 2012), yet the population of 14,000 registered 7% above the national average in support for oil expansion, 7% below for having conversations about global warming even occasionally, and 4% below for belief in global warming in the first place (Marlon et al. 2019).

This paradox of unconcern among America's most imperiled is typically as far as my 'elevator pitch' goes when I am politely asked about my research, at which point my interlocutor nods their head gravely and – not without compassion – says something about the importance of educating those who are in denial about climate change. Indeed, this appears to be a story about denial, and the social, cultural, or psychological forces that obstruct an otherwise straightforward calculation of personal risk, scientific consensus, and future action. What else could account for such an irrational response to widely available facts? Such questions seem obvious until one sees that public attitudes to climate change show no greater deference to projections of risk in the rest of the country. Whilst Hsiang

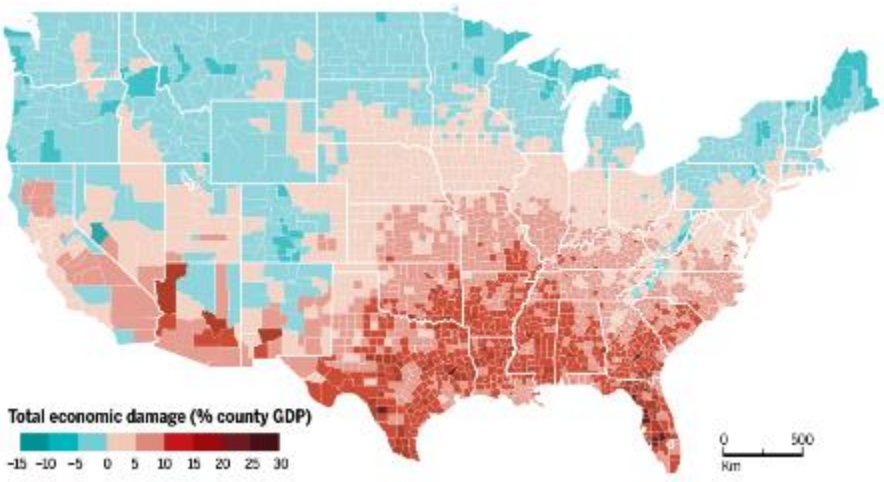


Figure 1: Hsiang et al. 2017. A map depicting the geographical distribution of projected economic costs associated with climate change impacts. Whilst some areas are expected to experience relative 'prosperity' associated with increased agricultural viability, the southeast will bear the greatest burden.

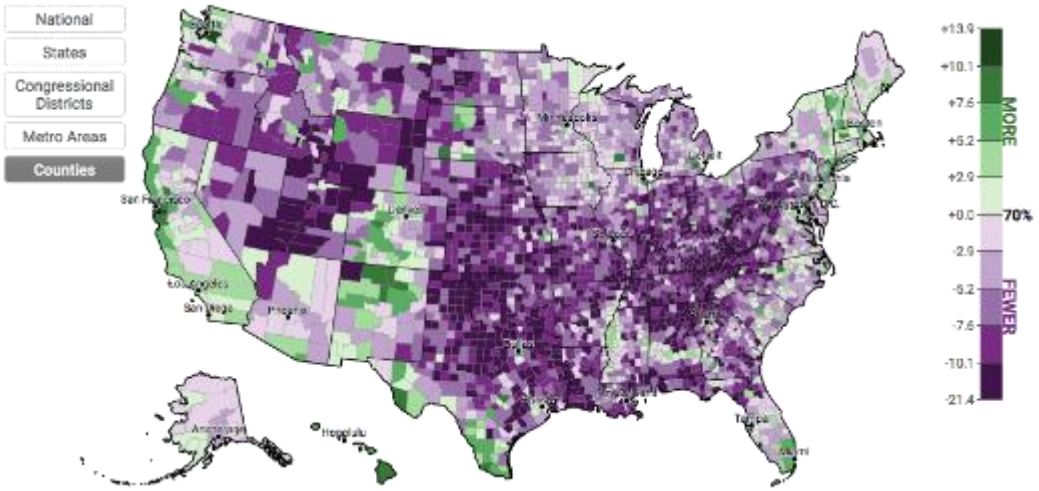


Figure 2: Marlon et al. 2016. The Yale Program on Climate Change Communication's map of public opinion. This map represents at a county level the proportion of affirmative responses to the statement 'global warming is happening' as a percentage relative to the national average of 70%.

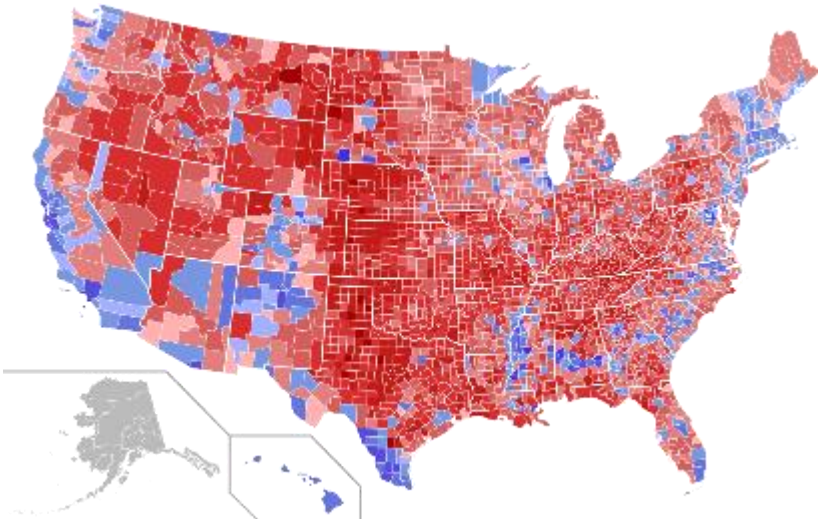


Figure 3: A map of results from the 2016 presidential election. Republican winning counties are coloured red and Democratic ones in blue.

and colleagues' map describes a roughly latitudinal spectrum of risk, results from the Yale survey appear to cluster according to population density and relative urbanity (see figure 2). The extent to which all public concern is determined by social factors rather than rational calculation is made clearer still when comparing each to a third map (see figure 3); a breakdown of results for the 2016 presidential election, to whose partisan patchwork Yale's map could scarcely show greater likeness. The communities of the southeast would seem to be by no means an anomaly then, with social and ideological factors doing more to influence public attitudes towards climate change than the threat of danger across the whole nation. If the unconcerned draw their convictions about climate change from the same source as their political values, so – it seems – do the concerned. It was this observation, initiated by discovering and comparing the three maps one morning in 2017, that was to convert my post-Brexit restlessness into a question of doctoral scope: if everyone is equally drawn to making sense of the world through social, cultural, and political lenses as they are realist and scientific ones, why do deficit narratives like denialism continue to have such obdurate purchase?

Despite the symmetrical picture that emerges from the composite of maps, there is a striking discrepancy in the ways that the different polarities of climate concern are handled by academics, advocates, journalists, and the political arena both domestic and international. Given the scale of consensus among authoritative figures on the reality and magnitude of global heating, individuals who report believing in climate change and fretting about it are rarely expected to explain their position, whether they are at immediate risk from it or not. By contrast, there are many imbricating words used to describe the lack of concern or interest among those who putatively ought to care most; scepticism, apathy, ambivalence, disengagement, ignorance, bigotry etc. Even anthropologists who have dealt with public perception of climate change diverge with characteristic hair-splitting on the proper term (Norgaard 2011, Jovanović 2016, Crockford 2023, Weston 2017) but invariably

leave the 'reality of climate change' (as the object to which the public subject is reacting) relatively under-excavated. This narrative of climate 'reality', a peculiarly separate body of scholarship has long argued, has solidified around a particular set of scientific, normative, and political framings that emerged by circumstance rather than by necessity (Hulme 2008, Miller 2009, Jasanoff and Martello 2004). Against this stabilised representation, any disagreement for any number of reasons can easily be characterized as a denial of science itself (Wynne 2006).

It is in this sense that the nuanced variations on a theme of disengagement listed above have one thing in common: no matter the reason, they describe an individual's failure to care about something they should. For the remainder of this thesis, it is this deficit logic that inhabits my use of the term that arguably has sat atop all others for its frequency and versatility; denialism. Taken generally to mean a rejection of the reality of anthropogenic climate change, denialism remains a powerful organising narrative in explaining public responses to the settled, scientifically verified concept of global warming. Denialism also justifies the unequal significance given to the purple and the green of the YPCCC maps. If a population has positioned itself on the right side of history, few have deemed it necessary to ask them *why*, and so it is the confounding purple that has become a lightning rod for explanatory attention.

What then do I mean by denial? Narratives of denial have been as diverse in form as their under-investigated causes. Sometimes they are visibly born of animosity between social groups, from classist vitriol of the kind betrayed in Hillary Clinton's denigration of Trump voters as a 'basket of deplorables', to activists' interpretation of partisan opposition as 'close minded[ness]' or a 'determin[ation] to misunderstand' (Fine 2022). There are also less explicit statements about deficits, however. Studies in climate change communication and social psychology replace theories of ignorance and idiocy with a much-needed attention to the sociocultural determinants of public opinion (Zak 2019, Marshall et al. 2018). If used

uncritically however, such findings can easily go from a call to listen to public ways of knowing to 'advi[c]e on how citizens might be governed in terms of their values' (Rose 1999: 189, see also Dudman and De Wit 2021). The use of these psychological templates and heuristics to elicit public 'behaviour change' still identifies the *public* as the problematic agent in need of correction. Meanwhile, despite the fact that much (perhaps most) literature on denialism blames corporations and bad-actors for their cynical and anti-democratic campaigns of manufactured climate dissensus (Goldenberg 2015, Young 2019), this has in practice often come with an implicit dig at the critical faculties of their conservative audience. Even when 'manufactured,' ignorance is still understood as an absence of knowledge (Proctor and Schiebinger 2008). Besides, such frequent claims that 'strident voices on the American right… have told the public that climate change is a left-wing issue' neglect to consider whether the American *left* might themselves have had any role to play (Ostrander 2017).

In a pattern redolent of Brexit's lost 'city gent' and 'Tory lady' then, the landscape of public opinion on climate change has lost much of its ecological complexity, populated instead by an essentialised Other whose most prominent quality is a lack of the right qualities. As the thesis shall discover, the 26% that constitute the US's least concerned[1] appear to fall through the cracks between interest, respect, and legibility. Activists dismiss them as less deserving of their energy than more 'open minded' communities; climate communicators implicitly want to reduce their numbers to 0%; and anthropologists have yet to show a proportional interest in sites of climate change's 'absence' (De Wit 2019). Because of its relational connotation – to deny is to distance oneself from a proposition – denial has

[1] Based on the YPCCC's '6 Americas' report (Leiserowitz et al. 2021), and encompassing the categories 'disengaged' (6%), 'doubtful' (11%), and 'dismissive' (11%). Commentators typically disagree about where along such enumerated divisions the line of reasonable convertibility may be drawn (e.g Fine 2022 vs Wang et al. 2022). They are rather less equivocal that this percentile is an obstructive force to climate progress.

enduring utility in this thesis as a catch-all term for this collection of deficit-oriented imaginaries.

Ethnography – as with much of anthropology's analytical toolkit – is well placed to cut through the fat of stereotype because of its comfort handling human complexity; 'vindicating the other by explaining away the strange' (Mair 2023: 165). Indeed, this thesis's challenge to denialism joins a notable rise in ethnographic accounts on environmental subjects that have offered some of the most powerful and nuancing attacks on deficit logics to date (Norgaard 2011, Hochschild 2016, Ahmann 2019). And yet, to stop at de-pathologising the Other, without attending to who or what *made* them Others in the first place runs the risk of reproducing the very same asymmetries, by playing along with the idea that only Others are required to explain themselves. While a starting hypothesis that 'denialism is more than an absence' is unlikely to shake the academy walls on its own then, I hope in this thesis to do more than restore complexity to representations of the denier. I am drawn to consider the relational aspect of denial or deficit, and what it implies about the meaning of affirmation or abundance. Thinking again about Bloor's Strong Programme, the symmetrical move here is to ask what values, commitments and assumptions it is that deniers' opposite numbers successfully embody, making them *not* deniers. In this respect I identify a need, in studying negative identities like denialism, to acquaint anthropology's anti-deficit literatures with its studies of the systemic and dominant, as it is largely there that the construction and stabilisation of moral and epistemic norms takes place, vindicating some forms of life and pushing others to the margins of legitimacy.

In terms of theory, the project was influenced greatly by concepts from across anthropology, geography, and STS. The scholarship of Reception Studies has done much to reframe publics from agents capable or incapable of accepting universal facts, to a landing site where scientific narratives of climate change interact with and are interpreted by other situated

ways of knowing (Rudiak-Gould 2011, De Wit and Haines 2021). This reframing is subtle but fundamental, as it implies that scientific truth claims are not merely immanent and natural but are 'ideas that travel', everywhere metabolised and translated across diverse settings (Livingston 2003, De Wit, Pascht and Haug 2018, Jasanoff 2010). Framing climate change as a mobile and travelling concept draws attention to how it is received at its destinations but also how it is constructed at its places of origin. Scholarship from geography has asserted that the climate knowledges that are disseminated worldwide are thus not plucked from the fabric of reality itself but have a long and contingent history of *becoming* what they are (Hulme 2009). This symmetrical framing, dubbed 'epistemic geographies of climate change', reminds us that seemingly universal facts about climate are carefully worked on, contested, and renegotiated in a global network of local places (Mahony and Hulme 2018). Here scholarship from STS in particular has excelled in situating the social journeys of scientific ways of knowing, from the centres of narrative construction (Callon 1984, Latour 1987), to the intermingling of scientific truth claims with moral currents in new environmental stories (Jasanoff and Martello 2004), to the ascendency of those stories in global networks of knowledge politics (Miller 2009, Beck et al. 2017). These literatures have added to the project's anthropological methodology a theoretical emphasis on the interactive and multiscalar nature of climate knowledge politics. They point to a mode of upward-oriented critique that renders systemic, dominant and diffuse knowledges legible much as ethnography does for more recognisably human scales of interaction.

This kind of multi-sited scholarship, addressing 'a need to integrate ethnographic and micro-focused perspectives of local institutions and cultures with more systemic and macro-focused perspectives on globalisation' has been a longstanding prescription within the interpretive social sciences (Jasanoff and Martello 2004: 5). Even so, decades later, a canon of such work in the climate change literature has yet to materialise in a systematic

and thoroughgoing way. With its twin focus, this thesis aims to contribute to such a body of anthropological research, positioning an ethnographic account of absence alongside a critical analysis of what it is that constitutes presence. It is only taken together that categories such as denialism (as well as proximal concepts of populism or post-truth politics), can be situated within a relational, political context, that sees each as involved in the construction of the other. This symmetrical approach not only promises a more just, patient, and humane account of controversies like climate denialism or the Brexit referendum, it helps enable clarity regarding these controversies' causes when popular analysis is swamped by partisan rhetoric and bad faith argumentation.

An American *out of* Paris

If Brexit and a few maps were the prompts that triggered my unease with asymmetrical representations of public-climate engagement, a particular controversy rendered those asymmetries visible enough to build a thesis on. Featuring a confrontation between global regime and rural voter, and illuminating in real time the boundary work involved in establishing a global response to climate change, an announcement from the White House Rose Garden became the empirical anchor for this project.

After his accession to the US presidency, Donald Trump fulfilled a longstanding campaign pledge when, in 2017, he confirmed his intention formally to withdraw the US from the Paris Agreement. The Agreement, ratified by the US just a year prior, coordinated global efforts to reduce the emission of planet-heating greenhouse gases, ensure timely and equitable adaptation to locked-in impacts, and facilitate the transfer of finance from the world's richest countries to the poorest to enact the above changes. The US withdrawal marked its formal renunciation of that commitment – a major drama for the international dialogues. Because of the unique structure of the Agreement and its introduction of new roles for nonstate and subnational action however, a sizeable part of the US economy was

able to continue its participation in diplomatic efforts. A host of overwhelmingly Democrat states, cities, and counties; B corp companies; universities; faith groups; charities, and other progressive institutions (predictably mirroring the YPCCC concern maps in geographical distribution) signalled their intention to uphold the country's decarbonisation efforts via informal coalitions of like-minded actors. In other words, these progressive enclaves could maintain a form of participation in the global forum on climate change. For the rest of the country, however, Trump's path of diplomatic isolation became the new status quo. A detailed account of this moment shall be presented later, but suffice it to say, it was the first time that a binary boundary of participation and non-participation in global climate politics ran *through the middle* of US society. In an outcome redolent of Brexit's divisions, a rhetorical fault line seemed to emerge between a polis anchored in domestic soils and one whose imagination wanders towards a more internationalist community. Only in this case however was the latter able to retain a semi-formal membership.

The fallout from US withdrawal proved a major catalyst for this research, and will be a recurring case study in its explorations of consensus and denial, participation and non-participation. This moment stoked established animosities in US society rather than sparking new ones, and the accusations ranging from science-denial to madness weighted at Trump and his base had been ongoing since the start of his political ascendency. Nevertheless, controversies are often found to be especially fertile for the study of norms because they are moments of rupture, when 'the order of things' is thrown into relief precisely because it is being contested (Jasanoff 2015, Papazu 2017, Whatmore and Landström 2011). For my growing interest in the (a)symmetries of climate knowledge politics, the US departure from Paris offered a case study with a new gravity. This is because the question of how publics of climate concern are constructed (alongside their *un*concerned *anti*-publics) became central to making not just maps but a new global polity involved with negotiating planetary climate action. The constituencies already rendered

'silent' on climate by opinion surveys and a lack of scholarly interest were here becoming quite literally non-participant in the governance of their own futures (or more precisely the object that threatens it).

For the southeastern communities perched precariously at the edge of a swelling ocean, the loss of agency could scarcely be more consequential. Assuming, in one of this thesis's few realist premises, that this situation is absolutely untenable for the long-term health and wellbeing of said communities, it becomes necessary to establish whether non-participation is the result of a choice not to participate, an inability to meet the conditions for participating, or indeed both. The thesis thus devotes its core empirical chapters to one such population and its relationships with the politics of climate change, foregrounding emic perspectives on sea level rise and political participation, and examining if and how they live up to etic characterisations of disengagement and denial. Focusing in particular on interactions between the community and local institutions embodying and promulgating the global climate agenda, it ultimately becomes clear that the latter hold tacit expectations for engagement that lack legibility to distinctive local cultures. Far from an act of bad faith by either side, it is a relationship of mutual incomprehension that ensures climate globalism's ongoing lack of traction. The allegory of Paris and Trump's Rose Garden address provides an instructive case study then, as it is able to show the construction and delineation of political communities as a political thread that extends from the village fish house to the centres of international decisionmaking. Each is involved in negotiations of participation in ways that bear upon the other.

The metaphor of statehood

Political dynamics as relational and reactive as these demand language and concepts that can handle not just the norms and values performed by a small community of people, but also the more despatialised norms and values mobilised by transnational discourses that it

is in dialogue with. While the former can draw on a heaving catalogue of past anthropological studies, scholarship on the latter has produced nothing like such coherence in approach. Much literature has discussed the proliferation of new political formations and collectives in a globalising age (e.g Hardt and Negri 2000, Jasanoff 2003, Miller 2009). This attention has been uncoordinated however, and cannot point with comparable concreteness to institutions and constitutional objects like law, rights, responsibilities, membership etc. that continue to make the nation state a dominant organising concept. Yet these concepts – beyond their technical definitions argued over by political scientists – have a more constructivist role in structuring and animating political communities, and can therefore help us theorise forms of statehood beyond a traditional Westphalian understanding (Miller 2009). To talk about the political effects of global climate change governance, as a regime with disciplining power yet no formal boundaries, I borrow the language of statehood, and consider how some of these world-building institutions persist in creating and stabilising political communities in post-national contexts, albeit informally. A fuller description is offered in chapters 4 and 5, but elements of this metaphor will have recurring relevance across the whole thesis: The **imagination**, as seminally described by Benedict Anderson at the national scale, becomes the vehicle for the construction of a collective political Self. **Constitutions** become the 'text' in which a set of epistemological and moral norms and standards are simultaneously shaped and stabilised by that collective, and shape and stabilise it in turn. **Citizenship** demarcates where and on what terms the collective is limited. It doubles as a way of both describing the discrete yet relational nature of the community, necessarily imagining non-members alongside members, and exploring the constructions of the good citizen and the social contract that structures relations between members and their institutions. Finally, **Participation** covers the procedural elements that order politics, investigating by what (dis)orderly processes and what proper fora decisions get made and the will of the citizenry get enacted.

The utility of this metaphor is at least threefold: First, it repoliticises climate politics. With an expanding role for nonstate and voluntary forms of action, the ability to enrol global civil society within a climate governmentality that upholds particular definitions of the problem and its solutions has increasingly become foundational to success. The naturalisation of these norms and the diffuseness of their uptake make them analytically awkward to trace. But a symmetrical approach does not permit one side to evade scrutiny. The metaphor of a constructed climate 'state' and its constitutional qualities thus helps remove the black box encasing these ambiguous processes and publics, acknowledging their political forcefulness without presuming to map their dimensions.

Second, it permits comparison between scales. Untethering constitutionalism from its traditional national rendering means any political community can be examined as a stabilised collection of ontological, moral and procedural norms. This means that ethnographic accounts from North Carolina of institutional-public interactions can be framed as encounters between competing imaginaries, each orbiting their own constitutional settlements of the true and the good.

Third, the imagery of statehood – in large part thanks to Anderson – readily evokes a construct that is 'inherently limited and sovereign' (1991: 6). Given the thesis's focus on dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, the language of borders, citizens, and Others make powerful imaginative aids.

Naturally, a study of this conceptual scale presents certain challenges of scope. First and foremost, the sheer breadth of material to be compressed and concertinaed into one analysis is, ostensibly, very ambitious. This is undoubtedly possible and yet, as I have suggested already, the avoidance of studies that deal with the relational, interactive, and mutually constitutive ways in which the systemic and the particular are reproduced risks entombing each in falsely discrete representations, and denies the very real, complex, and

ambivalent everyday politics of a globalising world. As the methodology chapter shall substantiate, anthropology has had to move towards a more multi-sited view of how social life is produced, and this means not expanding the presumed reach of ethnographic representation, but recognising any ethnographic locale as comprising a conversation between multiple scales and sites of meaning. Many scholars have rightly studied global regimes as comprising a host of situated and localised sites of knowledge production, and I too try to ground my representation of 'the global' within a community of localised actors and individuals (mostly in North Carolina) who nevertheless recognise, express, and perform a collection of globalist knowledges, values, and vocabularies.

Secondly, the essentialisation of something as nebulous and heterogeneous as global climate politics as a single discrete community should rightly raise critical eyebrows. To this I hope to make clear that no such discreteness is posited. Rather, following Anderson's interest in the philosophically thin but massively successful construct of the nation state, I am more interested in categories that are performed than those that can bear the weight of comprehensive scrutiny. It is based on the former, after all, that elections are won and movements cultivated. I make no claims of completeness beyond what is borne out: by a broad academic canon on global environmental regimes; by my own experiences as a former delegate to UN climate processes, a regular observer of high level political and social movements (particularly in Anglo-American contexts) and a researcher of climate communication; by the articulations expressed by scientists, government agents and activists in North Carolina; and by the discourses formally institutionalised in international agreements.

Research design

Driven by a commitment to methodological symmetry, I have investigated the above through a twin focus: both on how a distance from the politics of Paris is perceived and experienced at the local public level, *and* in terms of how participation in Paris's collective politics is tacitly predicated on the performance of a particular construction of globalist citizenship. For the former, I spent a year living in North Carolina, visiting a string of remote coastal villages collectively known as Down East (DE). The 'Core Sounders' inhabiting these villages (named for their location on the marshy banks of Core Sound) are critically vulnerable to sea level rise yet, as the YPCCC maps foreshadow, appear strikingly taciturn on the subject of climate change. Attending public meetings and social events, and interviewing residents in varying contexts and degrees of formality, I attempted to build an image of how *they* understand and frame environmental changes as far as possible without making recourse to realist concepts or inherited framings of denialism.

For the latter focus on membership of a global climate imaginary, I first ground my theorisation of this imagined community within an in-depth discussion of theoretical precedents, then draw on extensive personal observations of global political discourses (UN climate dialogues, international institutions, civil society movements, and scholarship) and how they are interpreted and embodied domestically in the US.

This analysis, derived from my own professional experiences with international climate politics, looks at empirical expressions of this community in the localised settings of North Carolina. Specifically, the network of science-based climate institutions attempting to cultivate broad public participation in conversation and action around climate change, its impacts, and remedial activities in the form of mitigation, adaptation, and coastal resilience. Hosted by the State Climate Office during the same year of fieldwork, I was able to participate in a wide range of institutional activities and observe negotiations of public-

science encounter at close quarters. My goals here were to understand how institutional actors embodied and interpreted principles of climate globalism in their work; to observe how they navigated interactions with publics who did not subscribe to those principles (both in terms of their outward behaviour and their private reflections); and to see whether their efforts resulted in transformations to their audience's/their own perspectives, or merely reproduced a relationship of incompatibility.

Broader contributions

Drawing on the as-yet unlearned lessons of Brexit, the controversies of the Paris withdrawal (and the wider narratives of denialism it has become a key chapter in) are hypothesised in this research to be deeply relational in nature. Analysis of Paris and denialism that holds the systemic and the particular together have been seemingly absent, and the fields of anthropology and STS have yet to produce a significant canon of studies encompassing *both* the semiotic richness of ethnography and the planetary imaginaries of global political regimes in one analytical frame. This is despite ample demand from its scholarly communities (De Wit 2020, Hulme 2008, Jasanoff and Martello 2004). On a methodological level then, the thesis contributes to the development of a mode of anthropological enquiry that sees – with a symmetrical agnosticism – identities and norms imagined at vastly different scales as co-producing one another in the same interactional sites.

On another level however, pursuing this methodology allows the research to double as a corrective manoeuvre, redressing some of the asymmetries common within climate discourse. **First, it treats communities dismissed as 'denialist' with the same intellectual respect as others.** A more nuanced attention to how Core Sounders construct their own relationships with the environment and extrinsic climate narratives leads to an account of 'absence' and denialism as more than just the negative space beyond legitimate ways of

knowing. Indeed, not only does it show such concepts to have all but no explanatory value, it suggests their constant repetition only serves to reinforce stereotypes that hinder the possibility of more expansive political discourse. **Second, it applies the same critical scrutiny to climate norms regarded as legitimate as to others.** The thesis serves to draw attention to the black-boxed journey that brought the global climate regime from a collection of improvised or contingent framing exercises to the naturalised, unquestioningly scientistic imaginary it is today. Doing so shows both that public disengagement may just as likely stem from their indirect exclusion from climate discourses as from their own recalcitrance, and reminds us that global regimes are never immutable, 'natural', or unchangeable, however much they are presented as such.

Performing these two manoeuvres, in an act of methodological positive discrimination, is intended to restore a symmetrical vantage point of the rift that has emerged between participants and non-participants of the Paris Agreement. From there, the analytic gaze is not one searching for a victor or looking to honour one perspective over another. Rather, it shows a vast social landscape populated by communities of different sorts, each acting in accordance with a constitutional set of norms encoding the real universe they inhabit, the good life they pursue, and the kind of politics they imagine as holding everything together. Assumed within this project then is a normative vision of a just climate politics that recognises regimes and institutions as every bit as much (if not more) responsible for the participation of public parties as parties are for subscribing to the goals and norms of the former. The idea is not to designate different or new winners, but to suggest that the global regime should never be comfortable with the existence of losers.

Chapter summaries

The chapter on **Methodology** shall explore the above dynamics in greater detail, alongside the other major considerations in designing and implementing the thesis. Given the thesis's

grounding in an essentially methodological concept – i.e methodological symmetry – this chapter is particularly important to the coherence and success of the research. The chapter explains the various adaptations required to navigate research that studies 'up' as well as 'down', attempts to discern a fieldsite across multiple heterogeneous scales and contexts, and asks questions about something that by definition people do not wish to discuss. After that theoretical discussion, a short sub-chapter introduces the two geographical sites where I conducted research, and presents in practical and descriptive terms where I was and what I did.

The two chapters in the **Corrective** section of the thesis, taken together, do the above-mentioned work of redressing critical asymmetries in how knowledge emanating from US rural working class populations and the global climate regime have been treated. In **chapter 3 on Post-truth and Populism,** the project's focus on denialism and contemporary Anglo-American knowledge politics is situated within a brief history of the construction of public opinion in relation to science and expertise. Both populism and post-truth are terms that emerged to distinguish legitimate styles of political discourse from those deemed baseless, irrational, or 'paranoid'. The chapter suggests that, far from drawing on common standards of truth or legitimacy, these designations have generally been the creations of an unofficial 'narrator class' which has naturalised its own ways of knowing while exposing an opposite 'perpetual bigot class' to regular scrutiny (Hubbs 2014). This was memorably the case in the dynamic explanation economy that emerged following the electoral shocks of 2016, as journalistic, literary, and other popular media sought to figure out 'what went wrong'. Academic voices from anthropology and STS were surprisingly muted, despite being perfectly positioned to exorcise these deficit narratives and promote more nuanced discussion. The chapter presents denialism as inheriting many of these tropes within the liberal climate imagination.

Opposite the poked and prodded figure of the aggrieved 'white working class', the logics, values, and assumptions buried in the institutions of multilateral politics went comparatively unexcavated, except by various far-right news outlets rightly or wrongly dismissed as bad-faith pedlars of disinformation. **Chapter 4** does not accept the putative illegitimacy of such outlets as exempting global systems and institutions from scrutiny, and instead turns a constructivist eye to the conditions and contingencies that produce global kinds of knowledge (Hulme 2010), politics (Miller 2004), and personhood (Cao 2015). Building on Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' (1983), the chapter considers how the idiom may be adapted in an age of deterritorialised political, epistemic, and moral authority. Can the generation of civic consensus at larger and larger scales lead to the creation of transnational or even global political communities, with their own disciplining power? Introducing the metaphor of statehood, the chapter builds on scholarship from political theory and STS to reframe global political institutions like the UN as constructed regimes, revolving round a constitution of epistemic and moral norms, limited by the imagination of its consenting citizens, and governing from afar via a global governmentality. The chapter frames the prescriptions of – for example – the IPCC or ICJ[2] not as simply Truth and Justice respectively, but as the conclusion of participating parties' processes for determining what constitutes truth and justice. In so doing, it illustrates that, like any social order, authoritative global regimes are the product of narrative-building and as such are contingent rather than essential constitutions. In challenging the narrative convictions of rural populations as cultural and flawed and global climate politics as natural and apolitical respectively, the Corrective section thus aims to level the playing field and present both parties as equally the product of their own constitutional choices in the empirical chapters that follow.

[2] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and International Court of Justice

Having set up the metaphor of statehood as a way to bring a constructivist lens to bear on global politics, **chapter 5** applies it specifically to the climate change context. The Paris Agreement, already introduced briefly, is discussed in greater detail. Specifically, the effect of and response to the US withdrawal from the treaty demonstrated that certain conditions must be met to participate in the forum. The chapter goes into some of the epistemic and moral dimensions of Paris's tacit constitution, and how they were developed, circulated, and institutionally stabilised. Not least among the conditions for participation then is a desire to do so, based on an alignment with these constitutional principles and a membership of the informal state it constructs around it. It is this voluntary ethic and the responsibilisation of climate politics that the chapter suggests is one of Paris's most striking innovations. This rule by governmentality relies on an existing consensus around common norms and values to motivate action. For those who do not already agree, little in the way of coercion or persuasion exists to extend the allure of membership. As the thesis moves towards its second site in North Carolina, the chapter finally describes the ways in which the global climate society is embodied and performed by a network of institutional actors in climate science, public outreach and community resilience.

Against the image of the idealised climate citizen, the spectre of the disengaged anti-citizen is always present in the periphery. Launching an ethnographic account of one such community of the disengaged – as diagnosed by the YPCCC map – **chapter 6 on Denialism** chooses to investigate the residents of Core Sound's relationship with sea level rise in terms of their articulation of it, rather than someone else's they fail to live up to. The chapter finds that reception of climate change is filtered through strong cultural narratives of isolation, environmental dynamism, precarity, and time that erode the salience of extrinsic climate stories, if indeed they arrive. Second, the politics of climate change comes as but one issue competing with a range of pressing threats 'from off' and cannot present itself as non-implicated in these relational dynamics. The chapter concludes that Core

Sounders as much as the climate society or any state are beholden to their own constitutional order, replete with its own standards and conventions. That the climate narrative often fails to live up to these does not necessarily lead to rejection, apathy, ambivalence, or any blanket response. Rather, it shows that climate change is not a primary organising principle for life Down East either for or against. The portfolio of non-ideal public responses collectively known as climate denialism completely fail to carry the breadth and complexity of responses to environmental change, and asymmetrically deploy their own standards to adjudicate the rationality of a public for whom climate change remains essentially a foreign concept.

Significantly more prominent Down East than opinions about climate change was a wariness and occasional open hostility towards government or any presumptive centralization of authority. The villages of Core Sound exercise every democratic right they possess to hollow out the social contract of state and citizen and rid themselves of both the rights and responsibilities that come with it. It is one more way in which they appear to *choose* the status of non-citizen. This surprise finding shows that statehood and constitutionalism are as much about procedural matters of participation as the ontological or ethical worlds we all see ourselves as living in. Given the centrality of voluntary participation to the success of post-Paris climate action, **chapter 7** looks specifically at the unspoken expectations levied at the climate citizen in terms of how they conduct themselves and engage with the political fora intended to create a safer world under climate change. Expanding on the emic sense-making from the previous chapter, the famously wayward Core Sounders appear to operate within a political culture that revolves around kinship, cycles of order and chaos, and reserves of crisis-induced solidarity that look nothing like the demands of orderly and conscientious engagement made by institutional resilience efforts based locally. Seen this way, the combination of these institutions' laissez-faire approach to public engagement with their strict conditions for inclusion creates what

I refer to as a 'voluntary dilemma' in which whether or not people participate in public outreach and assistance is determined by whether they are *already* interested in and amenable to those kinds of interventions; a gap that only calcifies in the absence of communication. Meanwhile 'non-participation' can be reframed as a form of tacit exclusion, or an act of self-actualisation that makes participation in Core Sounders' own forms of citizenship more possible.

In the **final chapter**, I present a case study of an American institution which has been at the heart of federally sponsored science communication across rural society for over a century. The Cooperative Extension System – a nationwide network of science advisors mediating the political demands of governments, the knowledge production of universities, and the interests of even the smallest communities – has transformed from its founding preoccupation with agriculture, and now represents one of the only channels for communication about climate change for much of the country. This included Down East, where extension agents have daily to navigate whether their allegiances ought to lie with the scientific and moral narrative of inexorable sea level rise necessitating immediate action, or with the 'needs' identified by the communities they serve, which typically lack any reference to the above. The case study is instructive because it presents a meeting point of the two constitutional communities at the heart of the thesis, and examines if and how their encounter changes or reproduces existing differences. The chapter finds that relationships of accountability determine how different agents interpret their institutional remit. As those closest to the public choose to honour local lifeways over centralised narratives, they begin to shed the urgent prescriptions of the climate message. By contrast, the university-based 'specialists' who come into less contact with rural publics tended to see them as an irredeemable minority obstructing potential progress; as such their interests were *less* important to cater to. The result was a widening gulf of silence between those who are included or excluded from the climate society. The capacity of agents' messaging to carry

both scientific and normative elements of the climate narrative depended on the degree to which their audience already subscribed to each, and the voluntary dilemma ensured that no mechanism could be found to change this.

Chapter 2 - Methodology



Introduction

The introduction has outlined the critical tension constructed by different distant representations of a denialist America, and expressed a need to interrogate that contradiction with a type of analysis that, in the West, has been broadly lacking within mainstream political, academic, and public discourses on climate change. As such, the questions at the heart of the thesis are deeply methodological, because they are interested in *how* political communities imagine, stabilise, and organise themselves around concepts like climate change. They build on an assertion that climate change and its social ecosystem of narrators, advocates and deniers, did not emerge as a natural order but were the product of analytical choices, however tacit or unconscious. In short, they ask how people study the warming planet. Many of the conceptual tools that must be considered, honed and applied by me in performing my own analysis map onto the wider situation this thesis investigates.

This chapter shall start by unpacking some of the methodological considerations engaged by the introduction chapter, and explore how they necessitated careful choices in the design of my fieldwork: The field is *the* foundational territory that the anthropological imagination must conjure up, to be populated with 'encounters' and 'utterances', but it just as easily describes the conceptual spaces and scales embedded in the idea of climate change, as well as the geographies of its construction, movement, and reception. Methodological symmetry is an analyst's tool for arriving at a fair and epistemologically robust representation of a political situation, but it also sheds light on how (un)evenly different perspectives get treated in prominent debates. Studying up is a well-known challenge for researchers hoping to study systems, institutions, or political black boxes, but the very existence of a gravitational force that influences the movement and accessibility of knowledge is also a significant finding when it is those who control the economy of knowledge that shape how we think about the world. And silence might be the last thing any researcher wants to be offered as the answer to a question, but it is also potentially a versatile expression of personhood, knowledge politics, and a prompt for methodological reflexivity.

Having explored these methodological concepts, the chapter will follow with a more detailed summary of the project's research design and methods.

Methodological Considerations

The Field

The elusive territory known as 'the field' is one that anthropology, as part of its long term trend of increasing reflexivity, has perhaps spilled more ink than any discipline getting to grips with (Hannerz 2010). Referring both to the conceptual sphere of interest and activity that research refers to, as well as the literal sites that will be the access points for understanding those conceptual domains, the field and the ways it is defined lay the terms

on which evidence can be gathered and analysis undertaken. For this project, spanning the ontological globalism of UN vernacular language, to the hyperlocal interpretations of sea level rise in coastal North Carolina, clarity about how the field has been conceptualised and interacted with is especially important.

The case detailed in the introduction, that first inspired this enquiry, will offer a helpful starting point for understanding how the research design extended in two directions, with two sets of questions:

Firstly, the ostensible paradox – that a swathe of the US southeast identified as the most vulnerable to economic harm from climate change in another survey appeared to host some of the most unconcerned constituencies in the country on the same subject – was problematically simple. The comparison of graphics clearly alluded to an interesting socio-cultural dynamic, yet offered no more than block-coloured counties for exploring the diverse and complex attachments held by peoples in negotiating the question of climate change. What could a more qualitative, nuanced approach reveal about the social conditions that turn a county beige with supposed apathy?

Secondly, the premises of the YPCCC survey itself remain notably uninterrogated, treating terms like climate change and concern as ontologically settled, and guiding the reader's attention singularly towards the public respondents as the site of inference and speculation without any acknowledgement of the uneven effects of interpretation (Livingstone 2003) or the agency of discourses (of climate change) and those who define them in stimulating diverse public responses. Reacting to this prompt, I felt there was a need to ask what it is about the survey questions themselves and the concepts they invoke that are taken as transcending contingency.

The YPCCC report is additionally something I take as a metaphorical extension of the politics of climate governance itself, and the ways in which respective social responses to

climate change are rendered visible and democratically viable or not under the Paris Agreement. In both cases, an entire population is represented only by its *disengagement* from a discourse, which is itself naturalised and uninterrogated; in both cases, understanding what is meant by 'non-participation' or 'denial' cannot be achieved by studying either 'side' in isolation. I am thus less interested in the UN or NC as discrete sites in and of themselves, than in what studying them and their relationship can explain about how the current order came to be.

Such a study would, however, present methodological challenges before even getting to questions of politics. As mentioned, the 'field' is both a spatial and epistemological artifact, and encoded within a given articulation of it are decisions about how to triangulate the relationships between researched constituents, the researcher, and even an idea of reality itself (Massey 2003). This becomes clear when comparing the two conceptual sites for investigation I outlined above, and what methodological approaches subjects of their kind have garnered in the past. Researching the blocks of colour might conventionally imply a classical community-centred ethnographic approach, prioritising depth and specificity over breadth and comparability (Marcus 1997). By contrast, critical studies of the systemic and the global – where the second set of questions ostensibly belong – have tended to fall in the domain of political scientists and STS scholars, whose critiques of universalism have employed comparison (Jasanoff 2011) networks (Latour 1999), or historic metaphor (Shapin and Schaffer 1985). Yet as the swell of recent literatures exploring post-truth epistemologies and the politics of expertise (explored more in later chapters) had suggested, there was likely to be something specifically in the relationship between these two poles that were in some way mutually-shaping (Jasanoff and Simmet 2017).

The 'field' I would design, or recognise, thus had to be able to encompass a community of people who could in some way embody the imagined 'denialist' trope, and a globalised epistemic, political and moral climate hegemony, in a way that could describe each as

imagined, and as *imaginative* in constructing the other. In a sense it is classically 'multi-sited' then, collapsing 'local site and global system' into a continuous and iterative movement of 'people, stories, metaphors, or objects, as they themselves travel from place to place' (Candea 2009, see also Marcus 1995). Multi-sited does not here mean multiple separate and coherent domains that are 'relational' in the way that two walled forts communicating cannon balls at each other are, but rather that following how ideas like climate change travel, get constituted, adapted, taken up or rejected means moving with them across and between imagined concepts of space, culture and scale. It is multi-sited because it does not imagine the 'global' as merely contextualising scene-setting to the local, but as itself constituted at a multitude of scales and sites. Such a focus has long been called for by social scientists wanting greater integration of studies of global systems and local effects (Jasanoff and Martello 2004, Latour 2018).

It was this post-modern call, obstinately resistant to existing disciplinary dogmas, that Marcus recognised as impossible to answer by anthropology's tradition of hyperfocused, single-sited studies, outsourcing any discussion of socio-political context to non-ethnographic macrotheories such as Marxism or political economy (1995, Candea 2009). In multi-sited ethnography, mobile researchers ethnographically construct not only individual subjects and lifeworlds, but the systems they are embedded in or subject to through 'associations and connections… among sites' (1998: 80). The global is thus not a stage backdrop, static and cut off from the action. It is an actor onstage.

How then to construct a site that lives up to this contiguous, multidimensional, and endlessly networked vision of the research landscape? I envisaged the field, for this project, as emerging like watershed maps from following existing lines of communication; lines, as Tim Ingold would say, as 'the trails along which life is lived' (2006: 13). To this end, I felt this research should focus on instances where these relations and interaction between

poles[3] are rendered *observable*. Moments of encounter and controversy are notable for their ability to illuminate otherwise buried commitments (Whatmore 2009) . While the slow inference work of ethnography can excavate the same, the project's split attention to coastal NC and the global climate regime would make honouring the longitudinal engagement central to the method twice as challenging if applied to each in isolation (Shah 2017). I thus opted to look for institutional bodies operating in eastern North Carolina, that could be said to embody a globalist climate agenda – as imagined by the Paris Agreement and articulated in chapter 5 – *and* had a specific remit to interact with public audiences in the region on matters of sea-level rise and its impacts. Employees of these institutions, by embodying systems but acting as social individuals, made visible the politics of encounter between globalist and place-oriented imaginaries. These actors were predictably diverse, encompassing environmental scientists and other academics working within land-grant universities, as well as full-time employees of the Cooperative Extension System (CES); employees of state and federal agencies such as NOAA Sea Grant, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) or Division of Coastal Management (NCDCM); town planners and managers; advocacy groups such as Croatan Sierra Club; foundations like the Coastal Federation; and certain locally operational media outlets. Though this list sounds rather broad and diffuse, it is a relatively small and tightly networked community of institutional actors, frequently working towards common goals, communicating and collaborating promiscuously across sectoral and institutional boundaries and very often working with

[3] I refer to 'poles' or use similar binary language out of practical necessity (in the same way as one might *need* to handle a bomb one intends to disarm), but hope I have clarified by now that the facile discreteness that these terms might imply are in no way taken for granted here. Nor are they dismissed, however. They are taken as artifacts of contingency and the imagination, interestingly involved in each other's development and ongoing reinscription.

similar concepts and vernaculars (see figure 4). Later empirical chapters shall go into depth about the particular ways in which different actors interpreted their individual and institutional mandates, motives and values, but suffice it to say that all the above bodies in some way mediated a relationship between the globalist imaginary of climate change (with its various epistemological and normative trappings) and the place-based political cultures, needs and wants of coastal publics. The ways in which these actors formally and informally adjudicated these bidirectional interests and imaginaries – and crucially their (in)ability to reconcile them – are the intervening sites that transform 'the field' from a comparison of two weakly bounded wholes to a multi-sited relationship that can understand the systemic as coproduced with the specific, the global with the local, the rhetorical denial of climate change with its affirmation.

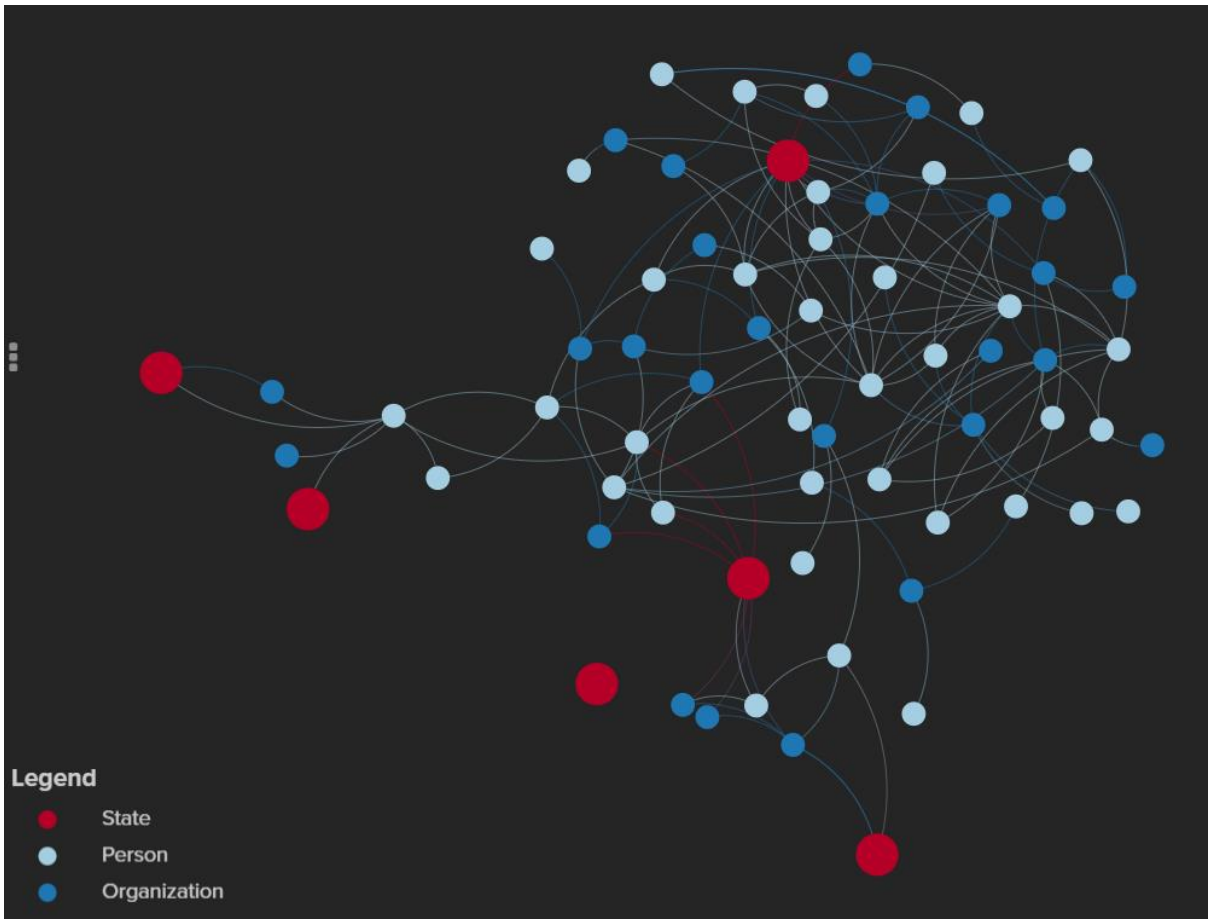


Figure 4. A visual depiction of the professional connections I observed between institutional actors I met. All names have been obscured and the visual is intended merely as a heuristic aid. Made on kumu.io

Methodological Symmetry

The principle of methodological symmetry is one of the most consistent and foundational frameworks underpinning both the conceptual motivations and execution of this piece of research. Developing as one of relatively few core tenets in STS directly pertaining to methodology and research design, symmetry nevertheless emerged initially as one of several theoretical clauses of David Bloor's seminal manifesto for his Strong Programme in the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (Bloor 1976); a text that reads more like a classically philosophical exercise in epistemology than a practical guide to research. Among his core arguments, Bloor claimed that scientific knowledge should not be treated as a separate realm of enquiry to that of the social forces enfolding it. As Chapter 4 seeks to demonstrate, the wedding of a globalised sociological imaginary of climate change with a comprehensively scientific suite of explanatory tools does not render it apolitical or asocial. Indeed, symmetry is about *not* allowing the existing status of a claim or form of knowledge (its perceived credibility or legitimacy) to exempt it from critical scrutiny, or marking it as not contingent or socially influenced. Even where truth claims are demonstrably built on robust methodological groundwork, if the constructivist case that no knowledge is immune to the influence of social crosswinds is to be believed, then the utterances of demagogues and professors alike must be understood as each in some sense cultural artifacts; both IPCC report and reddit post as an articulation of some politically active vision of the real, the good, or the desirable.

Nervous realists have at various points decried the tenets of constructivism for leading inescapably to a postmodern nightmare where all truth claims are counted as equal in value and legitimacy to the next, and the power of expertise and facts atrophy beneath the strident claims of populists. This was the anxiety that flushed through academic circles during the famous 'science wars', but it also resonates with more recent dismay at the emergence of so-called 'post-truth' politics (more on this in chapter 3). This has been a regrettable

mischaracterisation of much of constructivism, however, which is less concerned with asking 'what is true' than asking 'how is knowledge transmitted, how stable is it, what processes go into its creation and maintenance?'. What is crucial to make clear, is that symmetry is what is left when assumed attributions of credibility and veracity are *removed*, when the origins of knowledge hierarchies are not allowed to disappear behind appeals to authority, and uninterrogated interests and invisible hands are brought into view. No truly symmetrical analysis can conclude with a utopic vision of absolute relativism because symmetry is not in the business of ascribing legitimacy. Rather, as Michael Lynch has suggested, it is a 'procedural maxim' (Lynch 2017) a heuristic device for understanding not how things should be going forward, but how they came to be as they are.

Symmetry suits this research as a methodological framework because what is at stake in the controversy of denialism and engagement is not the facticity of this or that narrative of climatic change, but the politics of one's ascendency over another; what constructions of personhood and participation are shown to provide the architecture of global political systems when appeals to truth or reality will not suffice. To me this approach suggested a need for a study that can show both system and exception, participant and non-participant as being involved in the same social and political ecosystems. My research could not therefore focus in on one part of that relationship but must examine the relationship itself. The chapters in the 'corrective' section of the thesis are dedicated to ironing out some of the asymmetries that have long 'gone underground' (Povinelli 1990) in climate discourses.

On another level, the agnosticism of symmetry also permitted me to navigate my own situatedness within the field without having to coldly keep my opinions to myself, or present ones that flatter my discussants in bad faith. I can say with confidence that my own ideals, attitudes, and experiences – which in almost every respect align much more closely with the liberal, globalist contingent of this research than with the rural conservative one – have not been a drag on my efficacy because the study is about epistemology, not ideology.

Incorporating a symmetrical ethic into the practical execution of the research has presented particular methodological challenges, and necessitated forms of reflexivity both familiar and strange to standard anthropological practice. To this end, the following section shall explore: a need for an analysis that is itself even-handed in its solicitation and treatment of counterposing perspectives; a navigation of a decidedly asymmetrical sociopolitical landscape in attempting to do so, well captured in the discourse of 'studying up'; and a challenging of anthropology's own asymmetrical attention to different geographical, political, and social 'others'.

Studying Up

One particular challenge to the design and implementation of symmetrical research was the practical question of cultivating some kind of equivalence between heterogeneous sites, social contexts and degrees of access. If symmetrical analysis requires being open to drawing on the same set of explanations and analytic tools, do the respective data have to exhibit the same kinds of semiotic texture, richness, or formality? Are symmetrical methods a prerequisite of methodological symmetry? Even in a decidedly asymmetrical landscape? Here again, anthropological conventions were challenged, as the ethnographic nuance that I hoped would enliven the enumerated picture of climate 'denialism' in small coastal communities would be much harder to apply among the institutions and processes of government, global governance and science. 'Participant observation', claims Hugh Gusterson reflecting on his own stuttering fieldwork in a nuclear weapons lab, 'is a research technique that does not travel well up the social structure' (1997: 115). Indeed, a small but influential and increasingly pertinent body of literature on 'studying up' has identified fieldsite power dynamics as an obstruction to study that anthropology – with its historic predilection for studies of 'the poor, the ethnic groups, the disadvantaged' (Nader 1972) – has not only rarely been disadvantage by, but has even relied upon. Laura Nader, whose

1972 essay 'Up the Anthropologist' originated the 'studying up' discourse, challenged anthropologists to question whether our very discipline and its core methods are reliant on 'dominant-subordinate relationships', and whether these 'may not be affecting the kinds of theories that we are weaving' (5). The types of reform that Nader proposes present fundamental challenges to anthropology, both theoretically and methodologically (Gonzáles and Stryker 2014), but in doing so they crucially move the discipline towards a more symmetrical type of analysis.

At a basic level, the ethos of 'studying up' appears to pre-empt Bloor's call to bring received ways of knowing into the same analytical frame as those considered suspect. In questioning ethnography's fixation on why the poor stay poor rather than why the wealthy stay wealthy; or why peasants are resistant to change but not more mobile and influential institutions, Nader reframes power not as something that pools here and not there, but as an ecology formed of relations between a host of diverse political actors. Her image of the 'vertical slice' moves the anthropological gaze away from a single layer of society and applies its sophisticated cultural analysis to a whole social stratigraphy. Despite Marcus's surprisingly dim view of elite studies as adding 'mere completeness' (1998: 85), this thesis takes the studying up ethos as inherently complementary to multi-sited approaches. Institutions, governments, and society's 'winners' are no longer black-boxed but seen as sociologically active in producing dynamics of power. For this thesis, such a reframing is essential for understanding where categories like 'climate denial' or indeed 'climate change' themselves come from.

In some senses, this is nothing radical for contemporary readers. Nader's intervention can be seen as one early iteration of an argument taken up by feminist and decolonial scholars to repatriate anthropological interest in Western, industrialised contexts (Peirano 1998). There, the questions investigated by anthropologists in the Global South inexplicably become the jurisdiction of sociologists upon reentry to the North, and what

anthropological activity there is has yielded 'more studies of scientologists and crack dealers than of federal bureaucrats and corporate executives' (Gusterson 1997: 114). In other ways, however, the seeming ethnographic fertility of the marginal and the oppressed continues to grip the anthropological imagination. This is often and correctly discussed in terms of the disproportionate practical challenges in interacting with the powerful, where access is restricted, information carefully curated, and time minutely rationed (Ortner 2010, Gusterson 1997, Takahashi 2021). Yet it is not just access, but interest that might steer anthropological attention away from centres of power. Despite a tradition of reflexivity when it comes to positionality and a methodological discourse on situating the ethnographer that extends back half a century (Geertz 1973), recent scholarship has observed a less critical awareness of how one's moral and political preferences guide which constituencies receive ethnographic attention, and even a sympathetic analysis. Scholars, drawn to publics they 'like', or inspired in an activist mode to right identified wrongs, seem to generate scholarship that reflects their own normative commitments[4] (Takahashi 2021, Hayden 2007). Opposite a broadly liberal anthropological community, a mish-mash of 'elites, capitalists, conservatives, whites, police, military etc' (Carey 2019) has been implicitly identified as a monolithic core of social power – and thus presumably oppression. Understanding what this homogenised 'repugnant other' has in common – apart from a seeming lack of ethnographic desirability – is as telling of the unspoken priors of anthropologists as it is of the groups tacitly marked unanthropological, suggesting that the discipline's 'antiorientalising tools of cultural criticism are better suited for some "others" and not other "others"' (Harding 1991: 375). Perhaps more concerning is the similarly

[4] This is not to claim that my research here does not have its normative motives. About these I have tried to remain explicit and transparent. I believe there is a difference, however, between projects where the research problem is quietly and unreflexively framed by convictions of the researcher, and those (I hope like mine) where the researcher's convictions are a discomfort with the lack of reflexivity in their own social milieu.

implicit conclusion proceeding from this logic, that ethnographic representation is equivalent to sympathy or endorsement.

On methodology, 'studying up' presents more obvious and well discussed challenges. As previously mentioned, questions of access more reliably plague the researcher attempting to enter a 'field' where the control of time, information and participation is firmly in another's hands, and that 'other' is often simply less visible to begin with (Rosaldo 1989). On a fundamental level, this presents existential questions to anthropology, with its foundational commitment to longitudinal methods and rich, interpretive data. This question of compatibility leads Gusterson to wonder aloud whether 'anthropologists who want to study up will have to abandon, or at least subordinate, the research technique that has defined anthropology as a discipline.' (1997: 116). Indeed, the parts of my fieldwork attuned to federal and state agencies, government policy, or highly regulated diplomatic spaces like the UN Conferences of the Parties, held no room for the candid exchanges and chance encounters that may characterise ethnographic study. Exchanges were, where successfully arranged, planned long in advance, and restricted to relatively formal interviews lasting between 30 minutes and two hours. In the case of COP26, occurring as it did in the UK while I was in the US, I had in place of the diplomacy of the hermetic 'blue zone' only the publicly available recordings of side-events, which I observed from afar. While this 'green zone' was arguably better suited to my interests – being populated by civil society and non-state actors more affiliated with an imagined global society than any formal national structure – the presentations accessible remotely are often highly rhetorical and congratulatory; a common issue when studying up (Ortner 2010), and a source of wholly different communications to those presented in private.

On both theoretical and practical levels then, the language of 'studying up' illuminates the fundamental challenges that methodological symmetry presents to anthropological scholarship; in terms of its privileging of depth over breadth, the uneven compatibility of

its methods with different social settings, and the discipline's own unchecked biases in determining what even counts as anthropological. Fortunately, the studying up literature is not only a source of criticism, but offers alternative approaches that help to navigate these challenges.

For studies such as mine that focus partly on powerful institutions and actors, partly on anthropology's more traditional marginal subjects, a form of data asymmetry seemed inevitable from the start. Far from a niche challenge however, this is a problem that is bound to be recurrent and ought to concern the whole of anthropology, if the conditions for our wedding to participant-observation has been a selective filtering of humanity's most accessible (or desirable) constituencies. Rather than abandon ethnography however, this has been taken as an opportunity for adapting ethnographic methods to ever-expanding disciplinary horizons (Rubinstein 1998, Marcus 1998); or, as the title that first carried Nader's ideas suggests, for *reinventing anthropology*. In my case, this meant an expansive pragmatism. This approach, broadly following what Gusterson calls 'polymorphous engagement' (1997) entailed a promiscuous interest in diverse and heterogeneous forms of interaction 'across a number of dispersed sites, not just local communities…and it means collecting data eclectically from a disparate array of sources in many different ways' (116). To this end, the modes of engagement I threw myself into included university lectures, seminars and webinars from federal and state agencies and governments, non-state and academic institutions; observations of institutional grant applications and acquisitions; conferences; town and county council meetings, public consultations on resilience projects, and archive material. This more improvised, opportunistic, and scattered approach, despite taking place over 12 months of fieldwork and two years remotely, can perhaps only tenuously be called ethnography. Yet despite ethnography's evolution as something of a 'badge of honour' for anthropologists, a study grounded in participant-observation but not calling itself ethnographic does not cease to be anthropological (Ingold 2014). Indeed,

active 'participation' here continued to be as important a complement to 'observation' as in more conventional research designs, as my recurring presence, interest, and knowledge in different contexts from national level networks to village politics gave me a degree of credibility, and resulted in invitations to yet more events. What proved especially interesting was that my multi-sited approach, encompassing participant-observation in both coastal communities and the institutions attempting to work with them, made *me* an object of interest and potential learning to many of those institutions. As such I not only attended but was invited to *speak* at state level conferences; I had less to seek out perspectives on approaches to public engagement when I was included in regular cross-sector meetings about strategies of equitable outreach; and I had less to worry about pleading higher-ups for their time when they took an active interest in my findings. The achievement of common *interest* such as this is one possible entry point for studies of elite environments, and as Ortner puts it (2010) can go some way to create a sense of equivalence that makes studying up more akin to 'studying sideways.'

As well as an altered approach to participation, observation in a diffuse and ungiving environment required recalibration. While traditional ethnographies rely on accumulations of meaning through long term, informal exposures to a cultural group, piecemeal encounters lacking candidness might be taken as less semiotically nutritious (Candea 2009). In my approach to reading these encounters, a parallel comes to mind in the form of a flock of sheep living on one of the islands of Orkney. At some point in time fenced out of the inland pastures by frustrated farmers, the sheep were forced to live exclusively on the frigid North Sea beaches, and had to subsist on nothing but seaweed. Owing to the low nutritional value of this diet, the sheep have evolved a hyper-efficient digestive system, able to extract their requisite quantities of copper from the trace amounts available. In the manner of the sheep of North Ronaldsay, I thus adjusted my interpretive sensitivity in institutional settings to glean more from less; thinking not just about what is

said at a day conference, but what is not; who is present and who not; and researching the relationships of speakers and attendees to one another etc. Even in the entirely non-interactive domain of digitally broadcast COP side events, one can learn to read these performances as their own meaningful - if coded – projections of institutionally held assumptions, standards, or relations (Caldwell 2004). This 'interface ethnography' (another helpful term coined by Ortner 2010) is one more way in which classical anthropological principles can be – and in my case certainly were – adapted for challenging new contexts. But there are also many ways in which neighbouring disciplines can inform the work of anthropologists in unconventional environments. Geographers in particular have been creative in their ways of articulating what the 'field' can be, especially with regards to scientific work, which all too easily slips from view as an analytical object (Mahony and Hulme 2018).

A final point about the concept of 'studying up' is that the reality of access can be less binary than the 'up' and 'down' framework suggests. As previously described in the discussion on defining 'the field', getting to the coastal constituencies that would, under this framework, be designated as 'cultures of the powerless' (Nader 1972: 5) still meant first negotiating certain forms of gatekeeping. Whilst critical reflexivity and abundant care are basic requirements for any project striving for ethical interactions, the various methods used by academics, activists, advocacy groups, and other local organisations to delay, complicate, or even dissuade on behalf of communities to which they did not belong were striking. In early scoping and preparatory interviews, I sought the advice of actors already operating in the US southeast and engaged in activities related to my own interests, in order to narrow my focus and ideally find entry points into a network of interlocutors. I was taken by the cautious and defensive tone with which these informal conversations covered working with 'communities'. Despite presenting myself explicitly (and increasingly performatively) as a serious, well-prepared person with a genuine commitment to producing sensitive and

ethical research, I was often left disheartened by these conversations. In my humblest moments I looked at the project of research with vulnerable populations as inescapably extractive, while at my most cynical I harboured doubts about the motives of these advisors, who talked of the lives of strangers as some kind of finite resource to be rationed carefully among watchful downwind academics and institutions[5]. In the event, I found that residents of vulnerable coastal communities were more than capable of regulating access. Aside from the oft-bemoaned reticence of Core Sounders to academic enquiries (of which more later), the simple task of finding people to talk to is logistically Herculean. With no municipal centre to speak of, and barely a bar or restaurant to share among the dozen or so villages that constitute Down East, one's experience of 'the community' is likely to consist almost entirely of fleeting glimpses of amply set-back houses as you are pressured from behind to drive ever faster by a growing queue of impatient SUV-drivers. This is unless you can earn the interest of someone who will facilitate your introduction[6].

All this is to say that power, in this instance, does not behave like gravity, and the ease of charting research 'up' and 'down' in Nader's sense is not like coaxing water up- and downhill. Often, access to anthropology's conventional sites of interest (namely the vulnerable) are

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[5] From my vantage point on this side of fieldwork, I now consider both my hunches to have been in some respect correct. I observed many Raleigh-based institutional actors approach public interactions with a kind of delicacy one would expect from an archaeologist pulling Han dynasty vases from a muddy pit. I felt in some cases this verged on a condescension that underestimated peoples' agency, endurance, and sense of self. On the other hand, it is abundantly clear that, for public-facing institutions, relationships, trust, and legitimacy are hard-won assets that constitute perhaps the most important foundations of their work. This goes some way to explaining any defensiveness I initially encountered.

[6] Here again though, the insights of the 'studying up' literature proved most instructive. I quickly discovered that public Facebook groups are an extremely active site of exchange and performative politics within the Down East community. Taking these fora as substitutes for the town hall is the kind of creative opportunism advocated by Gusterson when he asserts that 'If virtual space increasingly becomes a real space of social interaction then we will need virtual anthropologists to follow our subjects there.' (1997: 116).

in their own ways carefully mediated through institutional structures or peoples' own established boundaries. And even notwithstanding these checkpoints, the difficulties associated with reaching 'elite' study sites are to some degree counterbalanced by the differentiated disciplinary standards that exist in what represents responsible and ethical research in those environs verses others.

Silence

The idea of silence has recurring significance throughout this thesis, but appears in at least two distinct meanings. The first is the literal silence over a subject; the unspeakability or at least unspokenness of certain words and topics. The second usage refers to silence as disengagement: the attribution variously of apathy, unconcern or forms of denial that compel publics to distance themselves from climate discourse. Opinion surveys measure engagement by how often respondents 'talk about climate change' in a given amount of time (as in the YPCCC examples), and with the treatment of 'voice' as synonymous with political participation (Kidron 2009) the US's relative withdrawal from climate discourse was taken by many as an abdication from politics. This apparent failure to live up to expected terms of engagement can easily be read as *dis*engagement. These dynamics are well explored in other chapters. What is of interest here in a methodological context however is – firstly – the practical matter of designing fieldwork in a locale specifically chosen for the constituents' apparent reticence on the subject at the centre of the thesis. In other words, how and even *whether* to talk about climate change with people who ostensibly do not wish to. Secondly, and more subtly, how researchers themselves must avoid attributing the second, 'disengagement' form of silence when research does not meet their expectations. In approaching this I drew a great deal from past experience conducting fieldwork in Iceland, as I shall now summarise.

For my masters dissertation, I designed a project around reports of Icelandic infrastructure projects being altered or indefinitely suspended because of the discovery of elves (or more accurately, 'hidden people' (*huldufólk*)) living in the bulldozer's path. It was to be an exploration of political interactions between folk ontologies and the forceful dictates of industrialisation. Upon arriving in Iceland however, I was dismayed to find my questions about *huldufólk* were met with irritation and eye-rolling by some, and dramatic performances of mystical belief by others; in all cases, it was clear this was not the first time these questions were being raised. A parade of journalists, tourists, and now masters students applying the same exoticising gaze had the dual effect of disenchanting the Icelandic landscape as a modernist terrain in denial of its folk history, and re-enchanting it as a self-essentialising honey pot for credulous foreigners. Initially ashamed of my naïve insensitivity, I allowed myself to learn a lesson, and began asking altogether different questions; questions about modernisation, family history, resource extraction, spirituality, local knowledge and tensions brought about by often unsustainable growth. Very quickly I found that a more holistic image emerged than before, with interlocutors frequently bringing up stories about *huldufólk* to illustrate their points, which I could then explore further because they had brought it up, not I. I left Iceland with a rich picture of *huldufólk* as an actor whose story typifies the full ambivalence of Iceland's rapid industrialisation. In this example, I ran into both forms of methodological silence mentioned above: firstly I realised that the topic of *huldufólk* would be methodologically unspeakable owing to its tendency to trigger strong reactions, and secondly the failure of my interlocutors to confirm my expectations (of an Iceland unaltered by its own representations) meant the research landscape I came to study essentially did not exist.

My research in North Carolina drew several lessons from this experience; first and foremost, to arrive holding my methodological assumptions with a loose grip. It is, after all, the radical contribution of participant observation to offer researchers the 'methodological

possibility… of being "surprised", of reaching knowledge not prefigured in one's starting paradigm' (Willis 1980, cited in Shah 2017). Several colourful ethnographic accounts describe researchers' bemusement upon arriving in the field to find an apparent absence of awareness about the research topic (De Wit 2020), of relevant answers (Cruikshank 2012), or of any memory of a crucial period in history (Passerini 1979). In all these cases however, it was interrogating their own received notions before assigning incoherence to discussants that represented a key turning point in the researchers' respective projects. In my own participant-observation, I was deliberately open – where appropriate – about my hunches and hypotheses, and on several occasions was politely challenged on my basic assumptions. As chapter 6 will describe, even with all my prior critiques of the denialism discourse, I arrived in NC hypothesising that a lack of adequate representation or institutional listening was the cause of feelings of climate apathy. I did *not* question whether denialism even described something real, or realise that 'people here vote for the representation they want' (i.e as little as possible) until a straight-shooting colleague from Sea Grant began asking me challenging questions. As in Iceland, many of my ultimate findings (indeed all of chapters 6-8, as well as the research's approach to 'denialism' as an analytical object) have been enabled by a disciplined methodological humility and an amenability to being told 'you are asking the wrong questions.'

Learning to ask the *right* questions (and recognise their answers) came next, and again past ethnographic experiences well illustrate this process. In her monograph on Tlingit glacial knowledge, Julie Cruikshank evocatively recounts her confounding interviews with female elders who, asked seemingly straightforward questions, would answer in long orthogonal stories that wondered freely between myth and anecdote (2012). It was in realising that these tangential tales were in fact structured around a key ontological weft that Cruikshank understood the elders' defiance of her enquiries to be offering the right answers to the wrong questions. As Cruikshank's account suggests, one might read an apparent failure to

answer questions posed as a lack of knowledge, understanding, or interest in the matter presented, but not only can the answer be coded in unexpected ways, it can reveal a person's truer conceptualisation of the issue at hand. Such moments can thus be substantive as data, but crucially also methodologically instructive; forcing a reconsideration of the very tools of research. This is especially pertinent for studies of the unspeakable (such as *huldufólk* or climate change) because when the most direct route is unavailable, a more circuitous path may offer alternative access points, or even present a more sophisticated perspective. In NC, trying to allow interlocutors to bring flooding issues up by their own inspiration and framed in their own words, I got a clearer sense of the role it plays in their lives than if I had asked leading questions. As in Cruikshank's case, stories in particular present a key medium for interlocutors to set the terms of their own engagement and challenge certain expectations of the interviewer. In telling stories, a person chooses what is important to express and be understood (Shopes 2002) and, further, infuse their own values, experiences and perceptions in the interpretation of events. Regardless of one's ideas of veracity, stories, to paraphrase Portelli, 'lead us through and beyond facts to their meanings' (2010: 2). In this fieldwork, as in Iceland, this meant adopting a wide view of what constitutes 'relevant' discussion; following interlocutors into topics seemingly unrelated to any of the core concerns of the research. For example, a conversation with one resident of Harkers Island turned into a detailed review of a local controversy concerning golf carts and what should be the minimum age required to drive them on the island road. While this clearly had no obvious relevance to questions of flooding or climate change, the interview proved one of my most memorable for what it revealed about the agonistic style of public decision-making in an unincorporated community (more on this later), and the lack of formal channels for establishing what constitutes 'consensus', or 'the public good'. Further, as the issue cropped up again in other conversations and in county commissioner meetings, a picture emerged of the political alliances and cleavages that existed locally, and most interesting of all for this research, how people relate to (local) government in the first place.

From past scholarship and my own experience then, I knew to see in methodological 'silence' the possibility of my own flawed approaches, and as a result I tried constantly to think how I could ask better questions, or even allow interlocutors tacitly to answer the questions they wish to be asked.

A final lesson from Iceland was that frictions of fieldwork brought about by the diagnosis of apparent *absences* are themselves potential research objects around which foci and priorities of the entire research project reorganise themselves. Recalling Shah, not only does participant observation offer the conditions for 'surprising' the researcher, but its inductive approach allows those surprises to be the *start* of the learning journey, not the sabotaging death-blow to a core hypothesis (2017). My first fraught interviews in Reykjavik, whilst undoubtedly anxiety-inducing, became pivotal evidence of the (dis/re)enchantment, ambivalence and ontological politics that would be the basis of my thesis. Similar examples include Carol Kidron's research on intergenerational trauma, in which repeated assertions from the children of Holocaust survivors that their parents never discussed their experiences nearly derailed the whole project, until she realised that communication is not synonymous with verbalisation. Kidron's strikingly original 'ethnography of silence' that resulted from this realisation instead explored the possibility of the Holocaust's unspoken 'presence' in survivor homes previously invisible to logocentric paradigms of communication (2009). Likewise, a defining contribution of Luisa Passerini's 1979 study of oral history and social memory was its focus on the gaping holes in working class accounts of life under the period of Italian Fascism. Despite being among the most studied and narrated periods of Italian history, Passerini found that 'silences and jokes' appeared as placeholders for twenty years of popular memory. The experience became not only central to how she understood the experience of workers in that time, but prompted a robust critique of the tendency for analysis to passively follow an 'inherited conception of history'. In a similar vein, my encounter with the communicative silences of DE transformed this

research – previously set to become an exploration of institutional listening and alternative routes to climate enfranchisement – into an excavation of what it even means to believe in or deny climate change, and an attempt to prize open the black box of participation.

Research Design

Fieldwork for this research was concentrated in one year from August 2021 to August 2022, between the villages of Down East in Eastern North Carolina, the (predominantly) academic and governmental institutions of Raleigh, and the despatialised platforms of global climate change politics. Nevertheless, the slow process of building the narrative of the thesis began roughly two years earlier, and has continued since through continued communication with colleagues in the US.

At one end of the conceptual field, the communities of interest embodying and performing the global climate change narrative were a critical component of this research. I started this project with more knowledge and experience of this domain than any other, having been professionally active in global climate diplomacy (as part of the Seychelles UNFCCC delegation), activism (in assorted youth movements), research (working for the Climate Action Network secretariat) and communication (within the NGO Climate Outreach) for several years prior. I drew heavily on my own knowledge and contacts in planning this part of the research, which proved invaluable as this was to be the component by far the most beset with access issues. My initial research timeline was structured around two weeks of attendance at COP26, conveniently located in Glasgow, but with the onset of the pandemic this was quickly postponed and my own issues with funding desynchronised the whole timeline further. Beyond the acute challenges of Covid19 and financial shortfalls, being able to draw on a long personal experience of participant-observation helped mitigate the asymmetries of 'studying up' outlined above. Finding, decoding, and interpreting an array of meaningful sources became a process of reappraising the analyses, vocabularies,

newsletters, protests, briefs, satires, scientific models, party statements, political claims contested on the world stage or moral ones uncontested in the pub – all of which I was already routinely exposed to – as anthropologically loaded acts of world-building. I 'attended', transcribed, and coded roughly two dozen side events at COP26 with a particular focus on subnational action, the differentiated roles of state and non-state scales; high and low emission countries; scientific and social knowledges. I paid particular attention to the language used by policy-makers, IPCC authors, activists, and journalistic voices for what claims they made explicit and assumptions they left implied. And crucially, I held this realm of discourse as being continuous with the more geographically localised fieldwork I would eventually undertake in North Carolina, reading (mostly institutional) interlocutors there as themselves reproducing globalist constructions of climate change and its political conventions.

The presence of this institutional layer was important, and became a crucial part of how I narrowed in on a site for study. The paradox zone identified by the comparison of the two heat maps highlighted the whole southeast region as showing an interest in climate change incommensurate with their degree of risk, and the location I first identified as typifying this contradiction was McIntosh county in Georgia. It was, however, the relative absence of institutional attention to public engagement on sea level rise in Georgia and its abundant presence in North Carolina that focused my attention further north. In the two or so years between identifying my research topic and designing my fieldwork as an enrolled PhD student, I sat in on dozens of webinars, community meet-ups, and scoping interviews with actors from Florida to Virginia all from my bedroom in Hackney, and gradually became a familiar presence in certain coastal resilience circles. This allowed me to suggest a partnership with North Carolina's state climatologist that eventually saw me take up residency as a visiting Fulbright scholar at the state climate office (NCSCO).

Though I did not know it at the time, the NCSCO's location on the NC State University campus would prove to be a huge boon. As chapter 8 will explain later, NCSU's status as a Land Grant University gives it a unique mission to bridge state sanctioned science and public life. This proved to be the perfect setting for a multisited exploration of how ideas about climate change travel and do or do not take root. After the relatively accessible academic and institutional networks that brought me to the NCSCO, I was able to leverage the latter's networks and connections with coastal communities to establish a footing on the coast. My first 2-3 months in Raleigh were spent doing this, whilst simultaneously taking the university as an important research site. During this time I learnt about the Land Grant and Cooperative Extension models which became the basis of chapter 8 through extensive archives and arcane literature at the university libraries, I attended meetings between the many imbricating agencies governmental and academic, state and federal who communicate regularly and learnt about the highly networked structures of scientific and political management, as listed earlier this chapter. I undertook roughly 30 formal interviews in this setting, but interacted in many more informal contexts from lunches and campus tours to conferences and sitting in on catch-up calls. My interests were broad, amenable, and indiscriminate during this period, but many of my questions specifically sought to excavate actors' relationships with the climate change narrative, with what they held as true, as evidence and as morally good in relation to that narrative and the public audiences they interact with. In the spirit of methodological symmetry, I aimed to take no claim as self-evident, and asked challenging questions of my colleagues on how they think about their institutional responsibilities, how they identify audiences as relevant for engagement, or in need, or misinformed etc. A rare anthropologist in a largely scientistic community, I believe I quickly became an odd but thought-provoking and well-intentioned presence, and I found people to be generally fascinated by matters of knowledge politics.

It is important to note that even during this first stage of fieldwork (itself coming after the lengthy prologue of *getting to* NC) it was extremely hard to create momentum in any network-building. Unlike previous research projects where institutional and especially academic settings proved a wide gateway to other communities, the effect of the Covid19 pandemic was to stop all snowballs rolling. Regular trips from the state climate office to rural areas – trips that I had hoped to accompany – ground to a halt as office policies worked to avoid exposures. And the office itself lay empty day after day, the wall-mounted storm tracker chart still showing Barry's movements from 2019's hurricane season (see figure 5). Fieldnotes from that time depict an anxious ethnographer wondering how one conducts anthropology in the absence of humans. Disease was but one obstacle though, and the very act of being alive (finding and maintaining accommodation, accessing healthcare, and crucially being mobile in a car-dominant society that does not recognise foreign driver's licenses) put a significant drag on progress building a base on the coast. Whilst I negotiated the bureaucracy of acquiring a car and the right to drive it, I felt no closer to the protagonists of my research than I had in London, yet I continued to build remote contacts in a number of coastal counties until I could reach them.

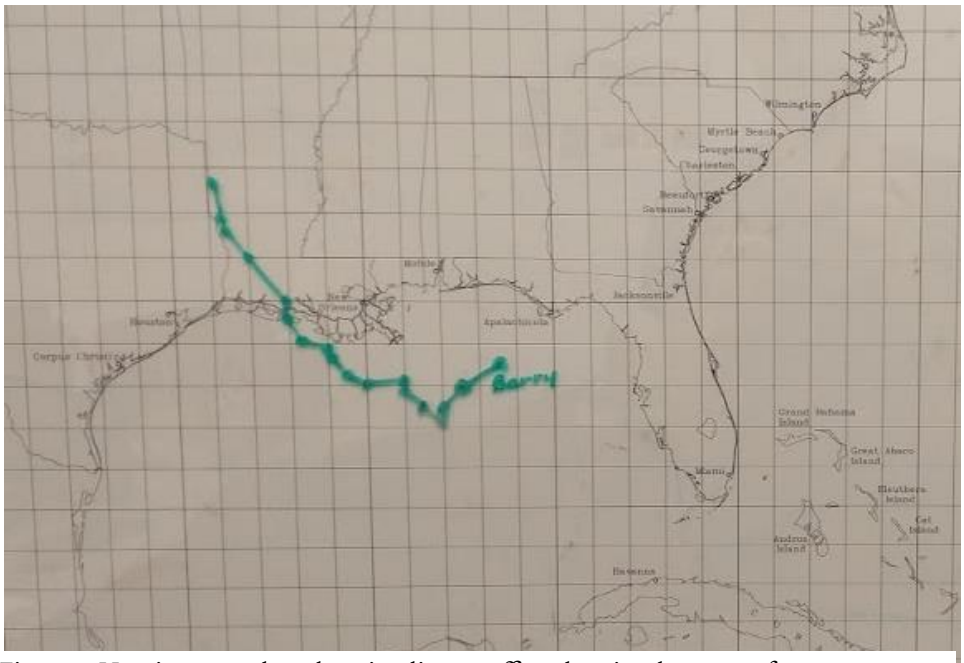


Figure 5 Hurricane tracker chart in climate office showing last entry from 2019 storm season



Figure 6. 'The Oysterhouse' - my accommodation in Down East, located half a mile into a marsh. Screenshot taken from www.google.com/maps

Having finally settled on the jurisdiction of Carteret County, and in particular the unincorporated villages of 'Down East' as the coastal end of this single contiguous 'fieldsite', I had to navigate a new set of dynamics in planning methods and questions. First, access problems shaped what was methodologically possible. In particular, access to accommodation was scant and expensive, especially in summer months when coastal tourism is at its peak. As I became more established and acquired allies on the coast (one especially) I was generously given free but occasional access to a guesthouse built half a mile into a vast marsh (see figure 6). The combination of these opportunistic, availability-dependent short stays with the general impenetrability of Down East social life meant that the long, inferential contact of traditional ethnography had to give way to more planned encounters, at least initially. To this end, I managed another roughly 30 interviews in Down

East, supplementing many more unstructured interactions in markets, on ferries, beaches, or porches, at community events, government meetings, lunches, or in someone's SUV.

Not all unanticipated fieldsite conditions were obstructions. My foreignness – and in particular my hailing from the UK proved to be a significant boost to my perceived credibility. There were, I believe, several reasons for this. Firstly, residents of DE have a strong cultural connection to Britain, and unlike the more heterogeneous ancestry of wider US society, it is commonly claimed that isolated Core Sounders descend more-or-less directly from British settlers. The eponymous family that first settled Harkers Island originated from the village of Sibsey, in Lincolnshire, and I often heard it said that the distinctive brogue heard up and down the banks and sounds is in fact English as the Elizabethans would once have spoken it. Regardless of the facticity of any of the above, that it is held to be true perhaps means Britishness holds something between enchantment and intrigue for many. Secondly, a more concrete reason is that I was difficult to situate. Arriving with an essentially illegible accent, clothing, vernacular, biography - all clues to my social and political status to those initiated in my own culture – meant that I was not burdened with the sociocultural baggage that might have hamstrung the same research project undertaken by a US citizen. Despite Core Sounders' wariness of outsiders, my undefined positionality (or perhaps recipience of a stereotype of British refinement) rendered the other side of the North Atlantic in effect less 'outside' than that of the North River Bridge.

Beyond the influence of practical constraints, however, the style of interaction across all encounters in DE consciously drew on the patience, nuance, and interest in 'actors' categories' all endemic to the anthropological toolkit. As the above literatures on researching silence anticipated and chapter 6 will recount, I quickly found that – even with my critical approach – I was arriving with inherited concepts about affirmation and denial, representation and political participation that had to be abandoned and rebuilt. My questions, while always interested in relationships with the environment, change, the future,

or flooding, quickly opened up to much broader areas of interest based on what people seemed to *want* to talk about. From there, a picture of social relationships with the climate change narrative could be reconstructed from what individuals did say rather than based on extrinsic categories they failed to love.

A great debt of gratitude is owed to Alice, the director of a local museum dedicated to promoting the heritage of Core Sound. A woman of matchless energy and endurance, with deep roots in the community, Alice believed in my work and called in many favours to secure interviews for me. There is little question that my access to and knowledge of Down East would have been much the poorer without her support, though it is of course important to place this curated representation within a wider context of the community. Alice is a relatively liberal voice who has put her faith in the potential of science and institutions to help save her people. Like any banker, she has finite patience for outsiders and their ways, but her desperation to 'buy more time' for Down East has girded her with a seemingly bottomless appetite for collaborations. Those who I met through Alice tended to be of a mind closer to hers than others in the community, relatively open to meeting outsiders like me, and less likely to balk at veiled references to climate change. Even so, being of an old family counts for much in Down East. I therefore do not feel that my sample of interviewees is misrepresentative of the whole, as the communities of 'old-timers' are just too small and too tightly networked for such discrete camps to exist.

Finally, a crucial focus of this research being the interactions between institutionalised climate globalism and putative denialist publics, the many employees from universities, government agencies and foundations operating in Carteret County were central to examining that relationship. As self-described 'boundary-bridging' actors, these individuals were professionally invested in creating the spaces of mutually transformative encounter that are of special interest to me. Fortunately, they were also generally very interested in my research because of how central communication and public relations are to their work, and

so were generous with their time and perspectives, and very inclusive of me as a participant-observer of their activities. I thus became a regular face at knowledge exchange events in Carteret County, site visits, meetings and informal conversations on the porch or the oceanfront.

All names in the thesis have been anonymised for the protection of informants, unless they refer to actors and activities in a public context. The research was conducted in accordance with an ethics plan (ref no.: SAME_C1A_21_113) that was compliant with and approved by the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC). In institutional settings, formal interviews, and naturally anonymised group settings, this was observed without issue. Elsewhere, however, the matter of ethics presented its own logistical and – indeed, ethical – questions in need of additional care. As the thesis shall show, residents of DE are often wary of institutional and external systems, and in any case respond to a different set of standards of trustworthiness and honourable practice than what is necessarily defined by university bureaucracy. According to the latter, 'informed consent' is an ethical state reached via the abundant provision of information to interlocutors concerning their rights and my intentions, and solicitation of permissions concerning the use of their information. It quickly became apparent that the presentation of a dozen information sheets and requests for signatures would not only trigger negative responses from members of this largely libertarian community, but also fail to function as the assurance of good intentions it is designed to. As such, I had to take even greater care navigating compliance with two distinct ethical codes simultaneously (that of Oxford University and that of Down East, NC). In practice this meant making use of the option of oral consent that permits a more conversational exchange regarding rights and data use etc. to stand as evidence of consent for DE interviews. As an additional measure, I also decided to include fewer direct quotations in the thesis itself, and refer to interlocutors either with

a pseudonym, or by vague profile identifiers (e.g 'a DMF employee from a dynastic DE family').

Field Sites in North Carolina

Raleigh, NC

Raleigh is North Carolina's state capital. Founded in 1792, it is also one of the state's oldest cities, though most evidence of its age is relegated to a few affluent oak-lined neighbourhoods, however. For the most part Raleigh observes a typical US distinction between residential and high-rise areas, which line its roughly 4 street downtown like a stack of bar charts. As one point of the famed 'Research Triangle', it receives a constant flow of (literal) traffic with nearby towns of Chapel Hill and Durham. Each is home to a respected university (NC state university (NCSU), University of North Carolina (UNC) and Duke, respectively), and with Raleigh in particular also being seat to government agencies and offices, the area represents the greatest concentration of academic and government research activity in the state. NCSU, where I was hosted, has a particularly strong relationship with government as the state's primary Land Grant institution (more on this in chapter 8). As such, the academic, the governmental, and the public imbricate more seamlessly here than anywhere. Amongst its teaching labs and fraternity houses there are regional offices for federal agencies such as the National Weather Service, the US Department of Agriculture, and the US Forest service; institutions funded by state and federal departments such as NC Sea Grant, the Southeast Climate Adaptation Science Centre (SECASC) or the NC State Climate Office where I was based; and dozens of corporate partners too. Trying to understand the meaning of 'research' and its institutional and political contexts and agendas was bewildering here, not only because of the complexity of the university's governance structures, but because of the physical

emulsification of the institutions on campus to the point of indistinguishability. Between the North campus with its genteel southern magnolias, impossibly perfect lawns and striking red-brick façades, and the vast, glass and steel complexes of the larger Centennial campus, I pushed my bike around the sprawling university grounds each day trying to figure out where the private ended and the public began.

As a visiting Fulbright scholar, my presence necessitated an institutional affiliation, and I therefore was granted not only access rights to facilities, resources, and a formal affiliation, but additionally treated to a private office and institutional support like nothing I had received from my own university. I was introduced to other individuals and areas of work within the university, and invited to join weekly seminars and discussions as an honorary member of a graduate scholarship programme in environmental research. I moved in with two undergraduate students in a flimsy house relatively close to campus, and a stone's throw from a 6-lane highway. Each day I cycled from my haphazard accommodation to my ample desk in the state climate office in a conscientious attempt to participate physically in the research community. As mentioned already, the long tail of Covid19 ensured I encountered almost no one, however. The newsroom-like wall of screens that usually flickered with offsite sensor readings and various heatmaps of North Carolina stood blank, and Academic activity was largely migrated either to a digital plane, or to prearranged meetings outside a cafe. The effect of this was to confuse even more the boundaries between institutions, as cognitively organising an already promiscuously networked field of actors could not be aided by engaging with it in a number of physically separated offices and environments. Everyone seemed to work on similar issues and projects, and appeared in the same meetings.

As well as the most educated, Raleigh and the Triangle are among the most liberal areas in the state. It is a destination for domestic migration because of the growing commercial presence there, and the many educational and research institutions likewise have drawn a relatively cosmopolitan academic population. This has only grown with a recent boom in

jobs. While I certainly did meet many people – especially students – raised in North Carolina while living in Raleigh, in general I could not claim that my urban and university contacts were 'representative' of Southern or North Carolinian culture or experience, hailing as they did from across the country (but never further). Prior to getting established on the coast, I was at times concerned that my research on conservative attitudes towards climate change had been ill-planned, as my interactions with academics, students, and institutional figures all returned a similar portfolio of progressive values. I was not to know that this would have an interesting bearing on my research findings.

Down East, NC

It is the US's west coast that holds a reputation as a 'landscape'; route 1 presenting a rolling diorama of whorling waves and rocky giants striking dramatic poses. The east by comparison is unassuming. North Carolina is a long and gradual slope from the Appalachian peaks of the west, through the undulating 'piedmont', where Raleigh and 'the Triangle' are situated, to a long and flat coastal plain. By the state's Atlantic edge, the land is largely amphibious, its actual contours obscured by a ruff of saltmarshes and mudflats that extend in vast fields out to water. Watched from firmer ground by forests of oak and pine, the marshlands may lack the sculpted grandeur of Big Sur, but amid their glassy pools and tufted grasses lives a microcosmos of astonishing dynamism. A rolling cast of migrating birds stalk the channels; juvenile Atlantic fish sit out their youth among jagged colonies of oysters; turtles and snakes patrol the water's edge; and the bristling grasstops brush the bellies of innumerable insects. This universe playing out within the metre either side of the water's surface is protected from the wild ocean currents by barrier islands that run the length of North Carolina. It is the insulating effect of those 'Outer Banks' that has created thousands of square miles of relatively sheltered sounds where communities of marsh dwellers have been able to flourish. Among these, the dozen or so human settlements that make up 'Down East' represent the coastal focus of this research.

The name 'Down East' (DE) refers to the eastern portion of Carteret county which, jutting out between Core Sound to the south and east, and the mouth of the Neuse river to the north, forms a wide peninsula. Despite this geographical definition, DE generally refers to the 13 villages that perch on the edge of Core Sound: Bettie, Otway, Straits, Harkers Island, Gloucester, Marshallberg, Smyrna, Davis, Williston, Stacy, Sea Level, Atlantic, and at the far northeast point, Cedar Island. These communities, varying in size from a couple of hundred to the 2000 inhabitants of Harkers Island (the only actual island among them), almost all face out to the sound, joined together by a single road, and running roughly parallel to the sinuous barrier island of Cape Lookout to the east. The houses – some raised on stilts, most not – are in many places set so far back from the road and from each other, that judging where one village becomes another can be as challenging as saying where land becomes sea. It can furthermore be difficult to assess with an outsider's eye what the economic status of these communities might be, as buildings consist of a mix of traditional wooden bungalows (many of which in various stages of being reclaimed by the coastal metabolism); trailers and temporary structures belonging to less affluent residents; and multi-story ocean-view villas at the other extreme.

This architectural diversity is the result of rapid changes taking place DE, as intensive land development more advanced in other parts of the county has begun to take off here. Indeed, DE's relative lack of development is one of many ways in which it is set apart from other nearby communities. Bogue banks, the barrier island in the west of Carteret County that goes by the sunny pseudonym of 'Crystal Coast', is heavily developed with holiday homes and tourist infrastructure catering to beach-goers. Between this and DE are the towns of Morehead City and Beaufort, populous areas hosting more long-term residents. Unlike DE, they are well-resourced with conveniences and amenities like supermarkets, restaurants, and cafes, and are each served by their own municipal governments, administering local regulations, services, zoning measures and working with the public on important planning

decisions. They are also unique on the coast for hosting a large number of institutions' coastal offices and buildings. All three of the primary universities in the Research Triangle own land between Morehead City and Beaufort where their coastal campuses house students and activities related to maritime research. I was to stay in these campuses on numerous occasions. As in Raleigh, they are posted cheek-by-jowl with state and federal government agencies, advocacy and research foundations, and regulators, sometimes in the same buildings. Naturally, the programmes of activity of these institutions – whether conducting research, administering federal funding, or attempting to develop new resilience strategies – looked locally for participants. With this constant flow of tourists, retirees and academics to the area, Carteret County is one of the more closely linked to the rest of the state. It is against this relative cosmopolitanism that DE casts such a striking contrast, as the thesis will explore. My focus here was the relationship between the many institutional actors based in Morehead City, Beaufort, and to an extent Raleigh, and the residents of DE they were often attempting to establish working relationships with.

As mentioned already, Alice was a key figure in my research design. Though she regards herself as a 'black sheep' of the community for her openness to positive changes and a frank conversation about climate change, she is a prominent and established figure in the community. She is also a common entry point for external institutions to conduct work Down East. A 'trusted communicator' in the opposite sense to its usual application (namely a spokesperson for local knowledge able to communicate effectively with scientists and decision-makers, rather than the other way round, see Dudman and De Wit 2021), Alice sustained strong links to the universities and agencies I was also following. As such, the network of activity she maintained became central to my investigations.

As partners more generally, DE (or Core Sounders as they are often known) are a tight knit, fiercely independent, and endurant community. There is a strong relationship there with their own history, which extends some 300 years to its settlement by European colonists

from the North, and with the sea, which has been an economic and cultural mainstay for the duration of that history. Like the rest of Carteret County they are generally strongly Republican, but with an additional libertarianism that historically has driven them to repel all efforts at political interventions from outside the community (and more than a few from within). Despite this, interventions are likely to become increasingly pressing, as coastal flooding worsens.

DE's extremely low elevation means it is at chronic and worsening risk from sea level rise. The US Climate Vulnerability Index places Carteret County in the 96th percentile for flooding risk (Tee Lewis et al. 2023). Despite the sheltering effect of the Outer Banks, which stabilises the sound waters, DE experiences frequent storm surges (both 'nor'easters' and summer hurricanes) as winds push the trapped sound water towards the inner banks. In one of the stranger effects of oceanic warming, as average sea levels rise, normal tidal variation is flooding coastlines on otherwise calm days with increasing frequency. This so-called 'sunny day flooding' was a frequent occurrence during fieldwork and, often referred to as 'nuisance flooding', its regularity represents an even greater strain on local life than more severe but infrequent hurricanes. Vulnerability indeed has to be understood in the context of multiple intersecting factors. Unlike Outer Banks communities with their ample beaches and strong tax revenues from properties and tourism, the Inner Banks' marshy coastline brings in little monetary income as they are. Whilst more affluent areas spend millions on beach renourishment schemes, options appear few for Core Sounders looking to adapt. A historic reliance on fishing as the key economic mainstay has declined in recent decades due to competition, dwindling fish stocks and tighter regulation. With soaring house prices, high flood insurance costs, and regular disruption to daily life such as closed roads, residents are less and less able to withstand shocks to the community.

II. Correctives

Chapter 3 – Populism, post-truth, and deficit politics



As the introductory chapters have shown climate change has become embroiled not just in partisan politics (so much has been known for a long time), but in the new politics of expertise, representation, and truth-making that has come forcefully into view since 2016. In the Anglo-American context, acrimonious public debates erupted when historic democratic votes not only signalled major yet uncertain changes to the institutions of government, but in their results and preceding campaigns undermined established conventions about the methods of collective decision-making and the types of knowledge deemed valid as a basis for it. These moments were thus constitutionally significant in both a formal and informal sense. They are illuminating because they directly altered the shape of political consciousness and climate governance both in the US and globally (as the next chapter shall explain), but also because moments of controversy unearth and make visible things that were previously settled; in this case, the historic privileging of certain

knowledges and forms of political personhood as the basis of legitimate politics. This short chapter situates the contribution of this thesis within the analytical conversation that has followed in public and academic fora, by reviewing some of the responses and tools that have emerged for making sense of it. It shows that these responses have not only waived opportunities for a critical review of how legitimate political participation has come to be constructed, but instead both revived hierarchical concepts (populism and the 'paranoid style') and devised new ones (post-truth) that have in fact further entrenched an idea of 'truth' as the preserve of an established and black-boxed epistocracy. The chapter suggests that a symmetrical analysis remains underdeveloped.

The YPCCC concern maps that inspired this research were not an isolated study, but form part of the programme's broader project of establishing where concern and activity on climate change are greatest and least, and advising governments, institutions, and advocates how they may increase it. Indeed, there is a significant precedant of quantitative opinion research serving scientific advocacy. When, in the 1970s, popular perceptions of risk threatened the development of nuclear power, despite the reassurances of scientists, it led some scholars to consider more deeply how scientific knowledge could be effectively transmitted to the public (Slovic et al. 1986). Decision sciences and communications studies have since flourished, deployed to circumvent or in some cases manipulate channels of public meaning-making. Work in psychology has sought to quantify the human experience; tracing patterns of perception into cognitive biases and heuristics, and producing somewhat deterministic maps of values (Schwartz 2012) employed to explain societal behaviour from afar (Corner et al. 2014). That climate change specifically has 'joined a short list of issues such as gun control or taxes that define what it means to be a Republican or Democrat' has been well understood for some time by social psychologists (Nisbet 2009: 14). In turn, they have charted the distribution of values like 'care' and 'reciprocity' that explain why liberals do worry about it and conservatives do not (Graham

et al. 2009, Dickinson et al. 2016). As with the nuclear example, communications theorists have again stepped forward to develop strategies for overcoming these uneven landscapes of engagement. Variously adapting pro-environmental messaging for evangelical Christian (Zak 2019) or fossil fuel-dependent communities (Marshall et al. 2018), studies from climate change communication offer policy-makers new linguistic toolkits for translating scientific facts for otherwise unwilling audiences. These studies, though often based on sustained, patient listening exercises with public groups, exist not to help policies serve those groups better, but to imitate them well enough that 'citizens might be governed in terms of their values' (Rose 1999: 189). As such, this kind of listening can be described as 'instrumental' rather than truly 'receptive' (Dudman and De Wit 2021). Even prior to 2016 and the start of this research's timeline then, climate 'disengagement' in the US was generally accessed via surveys and psychological studies, and rendered legible as percentages and value types whose steady reduction could be measured. Whilst social science did occasionally pursue deeper engagements with dissenting or ambivalent voices, often this merely fed into a 'grab bag of story-telling templates' that helped diagnose and treat public irrationality (Kahan 2013).

Following the electoral shocks of 2016 in the UK and US, which to many minds rewarded such irrationality, the subject of public opinion and relationships with expertise became a much larger, more diverse and prominent discussion. Polemic analyses abounded, and a glut of popular sociology emerged catering to 'those trying to understand the political, economic, regional and social shifts that drove one of the most stunning political upsets in the nation's history' (New York Times 2016). The proliferation of non-fiction works addressing questions of political polarisation (Sides et al. 2019, Hochschild 2016), rural disenchantment (Cramer 2016, Wuthnow 2018) and white, working-class identity politics (Gest 2016, Isenberg 2016) coincided with a period of explosive discourse in Anglo-American politics on populism, in which such topics were hotly embroiled. These accounts

vary in their critical rigour, positionality, and motives, but all formed part of a growing explanation economy that searched for causes for this upset to established norms of political participation and democratic expression. At their best, they handle 'paradoxes' like the one driving this thesis as the starting point for more critical investigation. Arlie Hochschild, in one example, devoted a whole book to this goal. Through years of independent research in the Louisiana communities most ravaged by industrial negligence and exploitation, she aimed to understand how her informants can reconcile deep grievances over environmental and health losses with an abiding support for the petrochemical companies responsible and libertarian mistrust of government regulation. Initially bewildered by this 'Great Paradox', Hochschild identifies frustrations at being rewarded for a lifetime of hard work with relative poverty and immobility, seeing other marginalised groups benefit from state largesse, and feeling condescended to by derisive liberal media as fatal insults to the notions of fairness her informants were raised believing in[7] (Hochschild 2016).

At their worst, however, much discourse circulating in the late 2010s seized upon existing class stereotypes. 'Left behind' regions like Appalachia, historically 'more affected by than influential upon important political decisions' (Lyson and Falk 1993), had already become

[7] In some respects, it is the humane proximity Hochschild achieves (but few others have) that breaks the seductive language of paradoxes and replaces it with ambivalence and politics. Literary genres, trading explanatory for descriptive power, have thus been some of the best at communicating this complexity. On sea level rise, the wandering, poetic vignettes of Elizabeth Rush's *Rising: Dispatches from the New American Shore* (2018) use a largely apolitical, literary voice to evoke the human dimensions (loss, trauma, hope, memory etc.) of this slow disaster. Earl Swift's more sedentary non-fiction gives space to the history and particularity of a small and doomed island community, showing with new clarity how environmental change attacks and undermines the very roots of sociality (2018). Swift crucially also portrays in detail how the people of Tangier Island reconcile the tragic incontestability of their vanishing home with their committed conservatism: choosing to engage the issue not as 'climate change' but through less contentious explanations like soil erosion.

useful symbols of a regressive 'other America' against which progressivism could define and reify itself (Eller 2008). As such, the figure of the white, working-class voter, disempowered and resentful, represented an accessible archetype for anti-elite 'Trumpism' (Smith 2017, Penaluna 2018). In this new articulation of the distinction between a 'narrator class' and 'America's perpetual bigot class' (Hubbs 2014), the impoverished, rural Trump supporter became the subject of rhetorical partisan warfare at the national level, whilst rarely realising opportunities for self-representation (Metzgar 2016).

The literatures presented so far have all sought to explain a fraught political present widely defined as a period of right wing populism. Whatever the particular merits of this terminology, this thesis is as concerned with how rural communities are seen as how they themselves see. A historic view of populism, its characteristics, and the wider politics of knowledge production in the US is therefore warranted here. Populism, whilst at a basic level meaning a form of politics geared towards fidelity to public interests over that of a hegemonic establishment, has come to describe (especially in the present context) a *style* of political engagement; one that combines a chaffing of the underclass against its socioeconomic restraints with a political discourse characterised more by hysteria and rhetoric than rational analysis. Populism now is understood predominantly as an anti-establishment stance, rather than one tied to any specific political affiliation (Kazin 2016). A good example comes from the two-pronged attack of erstwhile Chief Strategist for the Trump administration, Steve Bannon, who identified 'corporate Republican interests' and 'Democratic political correctness' as conspiring to 'short-change the American worker' (Jasanoff and Simmet 2017: 762). Populism as a space for public discourse has deep roots in US history however, first emerging in the late 19th century as a left wing movement of rural workers protesting the monopolisation of agricultural commerce by a small number of corporations (Kazin, 1998). Small 'p' populism entered common American vernacular in the 1950s, when historian Richard Hofstadter's scathing depiction of the Populist

movement as a group of regressive conspiracy theorists was used to draw parallels to the 'paranoid style' of McCarthy era anti-elitism (Hofstadter 1965). Populism has thus gradually acquired an association with pervasive feelings of civic disquiet, and perhaps even canalised such feelings into perceiving an antagonism between public and elite knowledges.

The epistemic branch of discourses around populism has undoubtedly been the notion of 'post-truth', a term whose usage and contemporary salience has closely paralleled the development of populism itself (Flood 2016). Denoting 'circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief' (OED 2016), post-truth has widely been used to signal a popular abandonment of objective reality. Lay and scholarly theorists have pointed variously to campaign trail cynicism and the proliferation of new media platforms for causal explanations, but most agree that peoples' gut feelings and personal experiences had been leavened with a legitimacy previously unrecognised by existing hegemonies (Bates 2016).

Given the centrality of knowledge politics and perception to this turn, one might expect a tidal wave of interest and investigations from anthropologists and STS scholars into post-truth society, but in reality this has been somewhat limited. As explained in the previous chapter, the idea of methodological symmetry dictates that different tools and standards should not be deployed in seeking to explain claims deemed either rational or irrational, true or false (Bloor 1976). By taking an agnostic approach to facticity, a symmetrical treatment pays attention to the ways in which some forms of knowledge gain ascendency over others. Clearly, populism and post-truth have been expressions of such dynamics in action. Yet, whilst some STS scholars have duly pointed to the politics behind how post-truth as a diagnosis valorises some epistemologies and pathologises others (Jasanoff and Simmet 2017), more prominent in the discipline was a dispute over whether or not STS may have accidentally *caused* the post-truth phenomenon by eroding public faith in

expertise (Fuller 2016, Sismondo 2017, Lynch 2017). Likewise, anthropology's long dealings with ways of knowing that wander in and out of modernist conceptions of rationality (such as in ritual and religion, spirituality, death, or cosmology among so many others) give it an unrivalled position to challenge explanations that position 'post-truthers' as passive and credulous victims of external forces like misinformation or education disparities, and instead centre their own logics in representations. Instead, claims Jonathan Mair, 'anthropologists have had very little to say on the topic'; though they work to 'vindicate the Other by explaining away the strange', Mair suggests that for anthropologists, the post-truth Other might just be one too strange (or indeed 'repugnant') to warrant vindicating (2023).

This is not good enough. Insofar as the prevailing dictionary definition for the political culture dubbed 'post-truth' is so distinctly asymmetrical, diagnosing a departure from rationality and what the definer recognises as true, can we be intellectually satisfied by the ongoing purchase of such a concept? This reinscription of a 'narrator class' and 'bigot class' has given socioeconomic inequalities an epistemic dimension, by making truth a privilege of the powerful (Hubbs 2014). In the context of a populist sentiment towards elitism and institutionalised class invisibility, the term 'post-truth' is easily viewed as a high-handed condescension that turns 'truth' into yet another ill-distributed commodity for delineating class boundaries (Brown 2016). Instead of democratising 'truth' as a shared rhetorical space, the pejorative connotation of 'post-truth' instead 'overlooks people's manifest respect for evidence that matters to them' (Jasanoff and Simmet 2017: 752).

This thesis aims to help fill the gap still open in the academic canon by investigating climate denialism as a specific expression of this knowledge politics. I suggest that it, alongside populism and post-truth as frameworks for explaining public meaning-making, belong to a class of asymmetrical language that attribute irrationality while keeping their own rationales closely guarded. By definition they are instruments of boundary work that construct an uneven landscape of political legitimacy. A symmetrical approach, with its

ability to cut through constructed hierarchies and challenge complacency, will be a powerful tool for doing so, offering a view of how interests are differentially treated and (de)legitimised in American epistemic politics. This corrective to the language of denialism entails two simultaneous changes of perspective: first, recognising and expanding the fruitful discursive spaces the 'post-truth' moment has opened up for anthropological analysis (Zani and Byler 2017) and the need it presents for a rigorous humanity that 'leaves caricature behind and wades fearlessly into complexity (Darling 2009). This conversation, begun here, will continue in chapter 6. And secondly a critical portrait of the forms of political engagement on climate change that occupy the Truth that post-truthers are supposedly abandoning, and that denialists are denying. As Jasanoff and Simmet conclude, 'reality, indeed, *should* be up for debate, if that debate is about whose reality counts and by what measures' (2017: 763). No versions of reality should be understood as above the politics of values and the contingencies of history. The next chapter shall therefore turn its critical attention to the values and histories that have allowed a global imaginary of climate change to do just that.

Chapter 4 – Imagined States



Introduction

KATOWICE, 2018 – In the heart of Upper Silesia's coal basin, a diorama of flaming towers slides past my train window. As a Polish citizen raised on songs about the coal mines, I understand the powerful cultural status of this carboniferous seam to people. As a representative of the Seychelles' UN climate delegation on my way to the 24th Conference of the Parties (COP24), the stakes feel rather different. Indeed, amidst the smoking spires of industry, this year a furnace of a different sort is burning. The righteous anger of island nations like the one I am representing; the frantic trade-floor opportunism inside (and out) of temporary negotiating rooms; fiery rhetoric at the plenary stage; blazing optimism from every promethean technical innovation and market mechanism on show in the civic 'Green Zone' – all ordered into a controlled burn by careful diplomatic tongs. And all the while, the swirling demonstrations that orbit the conference centre fan the urgent flames of politics hotter and hotter inside. Being there, one could scarcely have felt a more marked

contrast between the frenzied activity within the conference quarter and the steady rhythm of quotidian life outside of it. For the residents of this medium-sized mining town, it may have felt as though the whole world had descended on their home and built a pyre on which to immolate their coal-dependent livelihoods. Indeed, between the delegations from every national government, business sector, NGO, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) authors wielding modelled futures of every region folded into the latest 631 page report, many would agree that all of planet Earth was in some sense represented here in Katowice. But what does this mean? If the whole world was present inside this white, plastic-clad Babel, what 'world' did the disgruntled coal miners outside belong to? In this seeming paragon of cosmopolitanism, where Coca-Cola sustainability executives queue beside indigenous activists in the canteen, are there nevertheless common imaginaries in play: from the infamous acronyms to the vocabularies of climate justice, carbon markets, or Loss and Damage that organise debate; to the nature and reality of climate change itself, made knowable by science? And further afield, among those not present, this place remains for many a focal point, a consequential moment whose outcomes matter, and whose prescriptions incite a collective will to act. For others it means nothing, or nothing good. Despite the chaos and heterogeneity, what is it that binds the interests of everyone there, but not the Poles shuffling to work outside? This global climate governance as a totality appears to have agency without shape, influence without a singular voice. People respond to the idea of it, but is there a coherent 'it' behind the idea, and does it even matter when ideas have their own performative power?

If the thesis as a whole explores spaces understood as *outside* the community of climate change concern, some considerable attention must first be paid to what it means to be *inside* such a community, and on what terms inclusion has been made conditional. One need not wait long in the company of scientists, activists, journalists or political partisans to hear that climate science is simply *the truth*, that climate change is simply *reality*, and

addressing it is simply *right*. But in these universalising utterances is a quiet masking of all the sociocultural steps that led to such conclusions, enabling a commonplace attribution of either good faith ignorance or bad faith denialism to any alternative rendering. The purpose of this second of the 'corrective' chapters is thus to drive a constructivist wedge with just enough force to decouple global climate politics from these totalities of truth, reality, and moral correctness; to observe it as a limited, weakly cohesive assemblage that was made, not discovered; and in doing so enable an exploration of ways of knowing climate that have hitherto been tacitly excluded from politics.

This thesis takes as its case study not rural Poland but the USA, where in 2017 an electoral majority chose to leave the Paris Agreement. Whilst this move marked the US government as formally outside of global climate governance, under Paris, national decarbonisation efforts could to an extent be taken up and represented by voluntary activities at the subnational and nonstate level. For the first time, US participation was to be determined not solely by the pledges of its elected leaders, but by how many of its citizens and institutions continued to *see themselves* as part of a global project and act accordingly. This cleavage through the US public imagination shall be explored more later, but to begin, this chapter asks what it *is* exactly that Americans embraced or rejected when choosing to leave or remain in this global climate community. It asks, in the absence of centralised executive choices, what compels some to situate themselves within a vast, planetary collective, and others not. I explore some of the dimensions of this planetary community-building through the metaphor of statehood: first of all exploring the role of the imagination in extending an idea of the Self beyond one's proximal social landscape; then examining how the globalisation of norms and institutions allows collective imagination to generate new forms of 'global citizenship'; and finally, asking whether the circulation and stabilization of epistemic and moral norms articulating globalist visions can be said to construct an informal constitution, both reifying an imagined 'way of things' and reproducing it.

Theorising a global imagined society

This section explores past literatures that help theorise the idea of an informal global society. It examines some of the qualities of nationhood and considers how they have been conceptualised and adapted to a planetary scope: the collective imagination as an instrument of recruiting and binding shared identities; citizenship as a formalisation of those identities; and constitutions as assemblages of ethical, epistemic and political norms that enroll the citizenry into a course of action. It is important to note that these concepts exist in multiple forms with their own highly developed disciplinary biographies. Though this thesis adopts them as metaphors for framing discussion, it does so at often orthogonal directions to their conventional usage.

Imagination

At its most fundamental, recognising and participating in any political collective is an exercise in imagining; where the human individual (at least in the Cartesian tradition) can look to a discrete biological body to define its own limits, any larger social organism generally requires conceptualising as such (Ezrahi 2012). But how have theorists articulated this claim, and can such a collective extend to the globe? A conventional place to start on the political power of the imagination is Benedict Anderson, whose seminal work on 'imagined communities' (1983) has come to dominate theories of the state. Despite the fervour of its citizens, Anderson argues, a nation state exists not because of any real, indisputable boundaries, but because enough people believe it does. This constructivist account claims that the nation exists only to the extent that it is performed by a community of citizens acting in the interests of an imagined whole, which they occupy alongside countless strangers they shall never meet. There are many dimensions to Anderson's argument, but foremost for this thesis is the idea that the coordinated uptake of ideas by a collective can result in the emergence of new facts, norms, and political communities.

Unlike more critically oriented thinkers, whose excavation of constructed categories often come partnered with a normative interest in disenchanting them (E.g Latour 1983, Haraway 1988), Anderson's constructivism assumes a more traditionally anthropological agnosticism. Despite its 'philosophical poverty and even incoherence' (5) as a theoretical construct, the enduring *power* of nationalism renders it sociologically significant. In his own historical critique, Ezrahi likewise dismantles the modern democratic state – like any 'political imaginary' – as a constructed fiction (2012). Crucially though, he does so while insisting that 'fictional' does not mean inconsequential or illegitimate, but rather refers to the story that captures and formalises the political mood of the age, justifying and animating a political regime just as divine right once did for monarchs. Instead of critiquing then dismissing this conceptual thinness with 'a certain condescension' (Anderson 1983: 5), Anderson and Ezrahi choose to attempt an account of it.

Employing a similarly quotidian approach in his concept of 'modern social imaginaries', Charles Taylor explains that what social *imaginaries* can do that social theories fail to, is attend to people's 'social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations' (2004: 23) The imagination, as conceptualized by these scholars, is taken in this thesis to be a conducive site for ethnographic modes of analysis, because it suspends preoccupation with the real in favour of a deeper understanding of reality *as lived.*

Anderson's contribution was centred on construction of the nation state, and Ezrahi's the governed democracy, but the self is not imagined purely at the individual or the national scale of course. Anderson's claim that the nation sits closer conceptually to 'kinship and religion' than 'liberalism and fascism' (1983: 5) leaves the door open for thinking of the construction of selfhood as being not a matter of theory-laden metanarratives or ideologies, but about the countless diverse sociocultural ways of experiencing belonging in general,

even regardless of scale. With the waning millennium, many scholars thought more expansively about what sociological formations could emerge from collective imagining, extending the imagined community beyond the nation-state. Scholars of globalisation and modernity looked to the planet as a new domain of collective imagination and community-building. Castells' identification of a discursive 'global public sphere' (2008) took Habermas's bourgeois coffeehouses to a planetary scale. Meanwhile, explosive innovations saw global networks of information technologies enfold the planet, enabling promiscuous communications unfettered by distance, and accelerating at once the cosmopolitanisation and homogenization of public discourses (Giddens 1990, Bauman 2000). In these networks can be drawn parallels to the second of Anderson's postulates: that particular symbols of the state (e.g print journalism, the museum or the map) act as instruments whose circulation binds otherwise distant constituencies together through exposure to common narratives and experiences. This idea of constructed representations producing universalizing truths through their circulation has had enduring resonances in scholarship on images (Jasanoff 2001), scientific knowledges (Latour 1990), racial stereotypes (Said 1978), and public opinion (Taylor 2004) among others. In the contemporary global climate context, might we trade the printing press and the museum for the IPCC report and the activist's chant, as the new materials of circulation? Pondering similar questions, Ulrick Beck claims that the globalisation of societal threats has turned shared risks into complex, nascent abstractions that exist only in the form of the knowledge about them; 'socially constructed and defined in terms of corresponding power relations of definition.' (2011: 1349). It is the circulation of these mediated representations that has the potential to create 'transnational risk communities' by training our collective imaginations around a common framing of the problem. Beck's formulation breaks free of the constraints of the nation by describing a society that exists not in any administrative form, but in its shared knowledge. It introduces the importance of epistemic authority beyond traditional political structures,

and it foregrounds the world-building mediations of science and technology, so important to the establishment of unitary, global vision of 'the climate' (Miller 2009).

Beck's cosmopolitan imagined community is also imposed however, held together by necessity rather than ideology, whereas the allegory of Trump in the Rose Garden and its aftereffects suggest something deeply normative in how the climate narrative travels, sticks, or slips. What makes Anderson's imagined entity a 'community' is the authenticity with which constituents consent to the given order of things; something Taylor calls a 'shared sense of legitimacy' that ensures a community cooperates even in absence of coercion (2004: 23). The idea of collective identities as something people do not simply acquiesce to but choose enthusiastically has captured sociological imaginations at least since Durkheim, whose 'collective consciousness' described complex, diverse societies bound together non-coercively in 'organic solidarity' by shared cultural codes (2016). Others have rather explored the potency of norms as instruments of government at a distance (Foucault 1995) including in relation to environmental politics (Agrawal 2005, Rutland and Aylett 2008). Regardless of whether normative programmes originate organically or are curated behind the scenes, these accounts all suggest that modern political regimes are stabilised by the mutual agreement – or at least tolerance – of a polity to a given political vision. Recognising politics as 'more than rational, purposive action', and in fact constituted – a la Anderson or Taylor – by collective social imagination, Jasanoff and Kim go further by reintegrating science and technology as both influenced by and influential of that imagination (2015: 10). Their concept of 'Sociotechnical Imaginaries' (STI) describes the constitutional order of things as a relationship between the epistemic and normative dimensions of society that is settled by virtue of being collectively consented to and stabilized by institutions. The strength of this formation in light of global climate change is that it recognises the forceful, politically consequential nature of collective imagining without necessitating formal

articulations of its dimensions, qualities, and boundaries. It permits these imaginaries to emerge contingently rather than necessarily by design.

In exploring the global climate regime as a limited, performed, and crucially imagined community, the STI framework comes perhaps closest to enabling the thesis's objective of detecting mass without articulating shape. Though the chapter excavates global climate discourse repeatedly in terms of its epistemic and normative assumptions, the co-productionist lens of the STI approach is a reminder that the two can only somewhat arbitrarily be separated. In the climate society, faith in science can become an ethical commitment in its own right, and the moral order underwriting concepts of 'environmental justice' or even citizenship can become almost as ontologically stabilised as the climate itself.

Citizenship

The language of imagination opens up the possibility that collective consciousness arises not just as a political effect of bureaucratic institutions, but as something consensual and socially self-cohering in its own right. But having encircled this conceptual territory, the question remains what it actually means to belong to it. This question of citizenship is one predominantly answered by political theorists with reference to membership, rights, and responsibilities, but do these institutions retain their explanatory power in relation to more mobile publics lacking a formal governing structure? In an age of globalisation, who establishes the model of the good citizen? What disciplinary scaffolding holds the citizenry together and stabilises it? The literatures in this section suggest that globalisation cuts loose the imagination from the ordering institutions of the state and enables diverse new mobile publics to form based upon newly circulated norms. These are often then restabilised at new scales by institutionalisation in transnational structures.

On a basic level, citizenship as a marker of one's belonging to the imagined state is essential for the latter's maintenance. Anderson stressed that the nation is both 'limited and sovereign', and so to demonstrate its boundedness, its constituent public must be in some way awarded a recognisable status that differentiates them from outsiders (Petcharamesree 2023, Anderson 1983). Membership, and the binary of inclusion and exclusion it performs into existence, is thus absolutely essential to definitions of citizenship, and indeed citizenship's function in defining the state (Bellamy 2008, Cao 2015). Practically then, citizenship is described as relational because the possibility of membership, *by definition*, relies on the existence of non-members.

As well as distinguishing inside from out though, citizenship also clarifies relations within the polity. Conventional theories from law and political science conceptualise citizenship as 'the relationship between the state and individuals, articulated through a language of rights and responsibilities' together constituting 'the social contract which forms the basis of modern life' (Desforges 2004: 551). This idea of the social contract codifies and formalises the agreement between public and government about what goods and protections can be expected in exchange for what duties. The payment of taxes and the obedience of laws are rewarded with the provision of rights and services; through the instruments of democracy, citizens actively participate in the co-production of their political personhood with their own regulation. Citizenship holds imagined communities together by more than just procedural bonds, however. The acceptance of a power relationship with government (Bellamy 2008), the model of the good citizen to be performed (Lazar 2013), and above all, a sense of a social identity beyond shared institutions and infrastructures (Cao 2015, Petcharamesree 2023, Desforges 2004) are all layers of normative subtext whose public consensus underwrites any legitimate bureaucratic agreement. Political theory, complains Jasanoff, continues to pay disproportionate attention to the formal instruments of nation-building without attending to the 'horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 1983: 7) between

citizens that enables it. She asks instead, 'what is it about political membership – not merely an imposed, top-down nationalism – that *means* something to people?' (Jasanoff 2020: 28, emphasis added); especially, one might add, in an increasingly post-national setting. Can, in other words, the institutions of citizenship, contracts, rights and responsibilities find new informal, post-national manifestations in a globalising world?

While traditional renderings of citizenship presuppose the existence of a formal state whose relationships of mutual obligation with the citizenry can be negotiated, codified and made concrete, globalisation has shown the limits of such assumptions. The emergence of transnational institutions and companies from Amazon to Greenpeace, the effects of displacement and growth of refugee or diaspora communities, and the proliferation of intergovernmental decisionmaking regimes all violated the sovereignty of the nation state as the conceptual domain where sociopolitical order had hitherto been organized (Miller 2009, Beck 2011). This 'hollowing out' of the state (Jessop 2004) frustrated prior conventions of participation, identity, and the government of citizens (Cao 2015, Desforges et al. 2005, Lazar 2013) as political life hybridized beyond their capacity to accommodate it. This correspondingly engendered more expansive and flexible thinking about what it means to be a citizen at all, and what one can even be citizen *of* (Ajani 2015). Whilst citizenship continues to be described as relational, scholarship has tied this less to relationships with an administrative state and increasingly to the accountability between individuals and their communities of belonging, both above and below the level of nationhood (Cao 2015, Desforges et al. 2005). Membership, still the play of boundary work that gives the collective self its coherence, was no longer just a bureaucratic exercise, and became 'a primary means through which societies assert, construct, and consecrate their sense of identity' (Gorman 2006: 1). Likewise, rights and responsibilities are less transactional, legalistic prerogatives negotiated with the state (Bellamy 2008), and more interpersonal, moral commitments generative of 'a sense of belonging which enables full

participation within a multiplicity of "communities"' (Desforges 2004: 551). These variously trans- and sub-national formations have been made possible in part by the emergence of nonstate movements and institutions such as NGOs that promote them, 'creating an arena for discussion and action on issues which operate at a global scale' (Desforges 2004: 550, Jelin 2000). Transboundary forms of public sphere offered new fora for explorations of 'membership' central to imaginaries of citizenship (Cao 2015). In place of traditional national foundations, these new geographies of citizenship have seen collectives decamp upon a host of imagined territories, whether based around knowledge systems (Haas 1992), ethics (Keck and Sikkink 1998), risk (Jessop 2004), or commerce (Iles 2004) etc.

The emergence of these transboundary communities is particularly visible in the case of ethical norms. The field of global governance scholarship observed early the challenges transnational institutions presented to state governments as new centres of 'moral authority' that could exert influence across sovereign borders (Stripple and Bulkely 2013). The accelerating circulation of new technologies and information enabled a vast proliferation of civic groups and movements (Jasanoff and Martello 2004) bound together not by nationality but 'values or principled ideas' (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 2). The blossoming of new shared moral consciousness happened no more organically than the image of a singular global climate brought about by international science (Miller 2004a) however. They were the careful work of what Keck and Sikkink call 'transnational advocacy networks' (TANs) aiming to 'change the behaviour of states and international organisations' (1998: 2). The very idea of 'concern for the environment' is, in this view, a 'cultural phenomenon' reliant on prior 'concept-building' (Jelin 2000:48). This narrative work, performed variously by international NGOs and environmental movements among others, entails ongoing and deliberate 'frame alignment' that standardises moral and rhetorical stances across a vast network, and guides future interpretation and action (Keck and

Sikkink 1998, Jelin 2000). Echoing Anderson's nation-building, this is again more than a process of bureaucratic or epistemic imagining, taking on a moral dimension as deterritorialised publics are bound together in a circulating story of mutual responsibility and 'relational citizenship' (Desforges et al. 2005).

As the discourse on imaginaries illustrated, the shared visions that enable collective identification and therefore coordinated action are not cleanly moral in nature, but also epistemological. Scholars have explored the realist backbone that the sciences have offered global social movements, providing a common ontological banner under which a range normative projects can rally (Sarewitz and Pielke 2000, Lorimer 2010). Scientific ways of knowing have become so entwined with contemporary moral community-building that a faith in science frequently crops up as not just an instrument of identity formation but a critical condition of membership and responsibility themselves. In the concepts of environmental citizenship or citizen science, for example, individuals are called upon to exercise their civic duty towards the enterprises of ecological custodianship (Jørgensen and Jørgensen 2021) or knowledge production (Eitzel et al. 2017) respectively (but often simultaneously), with scientific logics providing the justifications or the instruments for doing so.

Looking back, globalisation has demonstrated that forms of citizenship emerge not only at the level of nationhood, but at any scale where common identity can be constructed and perceived by a collective. While the structuring relations of rights and duties have become untethered from the formal institutions of national government, that is not to say that these mutual accountabilities and regulatory structures have not subsequently been codified at other scales. In fact, these political formations - as the STI framework suggests - routinely become 'institutionally stabilised' (Jasanoff and Kim 2015) at multiple sub- or super-national scales. One example is the UN declaration of human rights, which stands as 'the most influential expression of cosmopolitan citizenship to date' (Cao 2015: 60), another is

the European Network for Environmental Citizenship, which claims a specific configuration of epistemic, moral, and behavioural norms as the condition for citizenship of 'the environment' itself (Jørgensen and Jørgensen 2021). However informal, ill-defined, or even 'baseless' the global citizen may be, the effects of their construction are anything but trivial; encoded within major political institutions they acquire a 'fictive-performative foundation' for their continual reproduction (Ezrahi 2012: 3).

Some have termed this institutionalization of a global civic responsibility a turn to 'post-citizenship', as the conventional national scale is no longer the exclusive forum through which rights, responsibilities, and duties are experienced (Sassen 2002). Others are more critical, suggesting the global citizen is merely a neocolonial embodiment of the 'cosmopolitan, globalized, liberal-democratic Western world that constitutes the "centre" (Bowden 2003: 355). Still others have argued for the 'multi-level nature of citizenship (Painter 2002), insisting that individuals do not forfeit place-based identities when they subscribe to global ones (Lazar 2013). No matter the particular characterisation of globalisation's effects on citizenship though, the emergence of new opportunities for belonging inevitably continues to come hand in hand with ways of being alien. Just as in the national community, the citizen is – like light and shadow – inescapably born twinned with the possibility of its opposite, the non-citizen (Gorman 2006, Cao 2015). Indeed, returning full circle to Durkheim, deviance is as important as compliance in clarifying the boundaries of the collective Self (2016). As the following section shall explore further, when such collectives become codified by institutions like the UN, they take on constitutional qualities, and the outlines of a new statehood – both its centre and its margins – become discernible for imagined citizens and their Others to inhabit.

Constitutions

As we have seen, the globalisation of established concepts of community, risk, knowledge, ethics, and identity have inspired abundant reflection on concomitant changes to the foundational questions of citizenship, political authority and governing. Hitherto settled understandings of these pillars of society have been disrupted and undermined, necessitating more flexible, even postmodern theories of social order that can offer a surer footing beyond the destabilised nation state (Miller 2004b). With this in mind, a third theoretical concept of the constitution completes the metaphor of statehood that the thesis draws on. Referring to the rule books through which political authority is formalised, limited, and exercised, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenries codified and guaranteed, the modern constitution remains a critically active object of interest and negotiation. The great majority of literature on constitutions remains concerned with how these institutions are made concrete and real through technical and theoretical conventions of political science and law. It is not these mainstream discourses that this discussion hopes to tap into. Rather, following the despatialisation and globalisation of problem-solving, risks, and their communities of interest, these constitutional artifacts are at best implied, rendered real by being treated as such by a sufficiently likeminded community.

Constitutionalism here refers to the tacit orders that settle the relationships between the institutions of knowledge, ethics, government, and public action that define and respond to climate change. If national citizens are bound traditionally to systems of law, rights, and duties that are formally and literally codified, the global climate society describes a stabilization of these systems and relationships by less coercive – or at least less centrally regulated – means. Literature from STS captures the terms of interest well – '[Globalisation] points to the emergence of an ordered political realm that, by definition, supersedes nations. If such a transcendental formation is indeed in the making, can it, too, be said to rest on constitutional foundations?' (Jasanoff 2003: 159). As the prior (national) institutions for

organising life lose their monopoly, Jasanoff even directs us to look less to codes and laws for evidence of a new global constitution, than to 'constitutional ideas' in 'collective imaginations and practices'. But what does this informal settlement look like, and what gives it its cohesive power?

In their seminal book 'Empire', Hardt and Negri (2000) make an explicit case for the emergence of a global constitution that materialises the oft-discussed but less commonly concretised globalist imaginary. For them, Empire is 'a global order… a new form of sovereignty…composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic' (xii). Combining the concept of a global 'order' that rescales problems and their solutions into post-national formations, with the modes of institutionalisation and juridical codification through bodies like the UN that turn a logic into a regime, Hardt and Negri certainly engage Jasanoff's question on the existence of global 'constitutional foundations'. But to some scholars of STS their story of abstract, planetary flows of power paints this shift as too much a play of raw politics, with insufficient attention to the more intimate processes of how such settlements come to be desirable or imaginable in the first place (Jasanoff 2003, Miller 2004b). Citizens, of the kind discussed so far, are not passive objects of state-building after all, but actively animate and stabilise it through their consent. Constitutionalism of this sort asks rather, if modern politics is truly leaving the nation state behind, what happens to the constitutional concepts of deliberation, participation, regulation, norms, rights, and responsibilities that were previously defined there, and that holds regimes together? (Miller 2009). What forms of knowledge drive governance of the globe? What of the relationship of the public to the state; indeed who is the public? And what is the state? Insofar as regimes like the Paris Agreement have governing power, they have decided on answers – albeit tacitly – to such questions. The politics of imagination enable an exploration of this quasi-constitution that more established discourses, rooted in formal state systems, are less inclined to perform. This discussion will thus explore not the

documents and institutions that constitute the brick and mortar of traditional constitutions, but the prior, unspoken conventions of knowledge and ethics that they codify. These conventions can thus, in the first instance, be excavated in terms of their epistemic and normative dimensions.

i.Epistemic constitutionalism

On the epistemic dimensions of these imagined constitutions, literature from STS has thoroughly explored how science and political authority have developed alongside and in support of one another. It details the careful work of turning the heterogeneous noise of the world into standardised and mobile scientific representations, so that the particular can be reproduced and 'seen' from any place, at any distance (Latour 1983). This ability of scientific methods to pull facts from their particular social moorings confers on them an epistemological portability. The purification of reality into ideas and models that can 'fit conveniently into [a] pocket' (Gramelsberger 2006: 78) extends scientific authority far beyond its places of origin. In this way, diverse political interests could be enrolled to a common definition of both a problem and its solution, such that scientific knowledge could become 'indispensable' (Callon 1984).

This has allowed the logics of science to appear natural rather than made, and disguised the social origins of now unassuming concepts – from cost benefit analysis (Porter 1996) to statistics (Desrosieres 1990) – that today order daily life. Indeed, the apparent disinterest of science has long made it indispensable for the exercise of politics. By inserting rationality and process between decisionmakers and their decisions, Ezrahi describes how science became 'instrumental' to the construction of legitimacy in early modern systems of government (Ezrahi 1990, also Shapin and Schaffer 1985). Not only did it permit the performance of objectivity, it rendered the governed landscape more governable through logics of standardization that could erase heterogeneity (Scott 1998). This possibility of

'action at a distance' made the instruments and infrastructures of science, for liberal modern regimes, an accessible 'grammar of power,' and an indispensable co-author of the stories those regimes tell of themselves (Visvanathan 1987, see also Bauman 1989, Anderson 1983, Haraway 1984). These literatures show collectively that scientific knowledge has been productive not only of previously unseen worlds and unimaginable forms, but also of social and political constitutions. Science tells a compelling story of the world around us, and in the process defined what is to be governed, and how.

On the global scale, Miller adapts Ezrahi's language of instrumentalism to describe how global scientific institutions have served as a tool for the depoliticisation of governing, and the establishment of a right way of knowing the problem at hand (2004b). Against Hardt and Negri's focus on institutions like the International Monetary Fund or World Bank as epicentres of governing power, Miller's interest is rather in the norms and techniques that establish the globe as the irreducible conceptual stage for knowing and addressing risks in the first place, and how these norms have been able to establish a latent 'globalism'. As per his STS orientation, globalism here refers to the concurrent scientific and political developments that rendered risks like climate an 'ontologically unitary whole capable of being understood and managed on scales no smaller than the globe itself' (2004a: 54). But has the same rise of the nonstate actor that influenced the 'epistemic constitutionalism' of global order (Miller 2009) yielded equivalent moral effects?

ii.Moral constitutionalism

Returning to the language of citizenship, it is important to note that neither the untethering of collective personhood from nationality, nor the proliferation of 'global' identities has resulted in some postmodern anarchy free from government or the mechanisms of power. The rising of the 'community of interest's' political star has rather altered the nature of political authority (Jessop 2004). Following the thinning of the

association between citizen and state, a recalibration from the national citizen as the primary unit of government to the so-called 'active citizen' has in certain domains seen commitment to shared norms, values and ideas – rather than adherence to laws and regulations – become the key to public compliance (Dean 1999, Marinetto 2003, Desforges et al. 2005). Enrolling both subnational and supranational collectives, a turn towards 'governing through communities' has made identity the reins with which power – governmental or otherwise – can be exerted indirectly (Rose 1996). In place of discrete geographical publics, moral constituencies are constructed and subsequently targeted by activist movements, local governments, or INGOs 'engender[ing] a sense of collective global responsibility' to commit to a prescribed public good (Desforges et al 2005: 441, Jelin 2000, Rutland and Aylett 2008, Lorimer 2010).

There are, in these articulations of government beyond the state, strong resonances with Foucault's writings on governmentality. Governmentality is a mode of governing that downplays the idea of direct control by the state over its citizens, rather curating the norms that circulate within society to inspire the public to internalise the interests of the state and thus effectively govern themselves. With a less direct emphasis on the role of science and technology than the STS canon, Foucault powerfully illustrates the utility of normativity, values, and the most private realms of social life as remote instruments for political control. Crucially, because of the harmonisation of public and state interests, the polity does not see itself as governed, but voluntarily pursues a centralised - yet obscured - prescription of the good society because it is also their own. Many have since reflected on applications of Foucault's ideas on discipline and governmentality in diverse contemporary settings (Rutland and Aylett 2008, Agrawal 1995, Stripple and Bulkely 2013). Governmentality was developed largely prior to theorisations of the globe as a governable object, but in this model of power as diffuse and broader than the classical state-oriented conception, a path for thinking about moral norms as levers of transnational political influence opens up.

Much as scientific knowledge – as a source of ontological facts – has become a pillar of modern government, so too then have moral facts proved to be a currency of constitution-building in their own right. Just as scientists create the worlds they describe, the prescriptions of activists and advocates alter the political terrain on which issues are negotiated.

One need look no further than the discourse of citizenship itself. Globe-spanning concepts, from 'planetary humanism' (Nussbaum and Cohen 1996 in Lorimer 2010) to a 'cosmopolis of earthians' (Cao 2015) describe inclusive, cosmopolitan models of participation in a universal polity, but come each with their own embedded prescriptions of individuals' relationships with and duties to humanity and nature. Indeed, examining scholarship of citizenship more critically reveals a tendency to reproduce the very assumptions they describe. When political scientists write about 'environmental citizenship' they are often not talking about the politics of multiple diverse relationships with the environment, but refer plainly to expressions of personhood that cohere around an 'international motivation of justice' (Jørgensen and Jørgensen 2021) or 'embedded ecological justice' (Hayward 2012: 104) without always explaining whose vision of justice is being universalised. Cao lets example collapse into definition when, in a book titled 'environment and citizenship', he defines environmental activism through the politically situating 'three posts: postindustrialism, postmaterialism, and postcolonialism' (2015: 5). To be an 'active citizen' – that is to say engaged and proactive in the pursuit of the common social good – in Cao's definition refers not to just *any* understanding of the good, but to a specific programme of moral order that is given in advance (Marinetto 2003). Another example is Andrew Dobson's influential definition of 'ecological citizenship' (2003) whose vision of redistributions between Global North and South contexts resonates with the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibility' popular among progressive advocates. Yet in tying a theory of 'citizenship' – with all the out-of-frame social norms, rights and

responsibilities that get theorised with it – to a particular post-colonial programme, Dobson's definition is arguably an act of boundary work of constitutional proportions.

Theorists' impregnation of concepts with their own assumptions is not inconsequential. Much like the 'frame alignment' of activist rhetoric, definitions articulated by scholars today become tomorrow's terms of engagement. Authors have noted the somewhat contingent developments that led to the historic convergence of environmental and social justice movements (Sarewitz and Pielke 2000, Cao 2015) yet such alliances fuelled the emergence of concepts from 'environmental rights' to 'sustainable development' which have become narrative foundations on which global governance are built (Jelin 2000). Scholars of environmental citizenship, like other academic work in social sciences and humanities (Rudiak-Gould 2013, De Wit et al. 2018) have thus not merely described but been an active part of the ecology of nonstate networks responsible for this moral world-building.

The intrusion upon the moral sovereignty of nations by TANs is powerful, Keck and Sikkink claim, because sovereignty is built on a foundation of shared norms (1998). The emergence of putatively universal standards for just government of civil rights, war, or the environment has created instruments for legal and moral challenges to domestic politics, marking the rights and duties of the 'global citizen' as at times prior to those of the national citizen (Israel 2015). By extension then, the establishment of new moral norms thus implies new forms of transnational sovereignty. But sovereignty in turn implies borders, if only imagined, and the articulation of an inside and an out. The non-citizen has long played a crucial role in the reification of the self, giving definition to the Good by being its relational opposite (Durkheim 2016). Though it has scarcely been written, one might imagine that in the global polity, any entity embodying qualities different to those of, 'environmental justice', 'sustainable development' or indeed 'climate change' to name a few, or more specifically who *fails to subscribe to them as they are given*, marks themselves as non-citizens of the globe.

How then to reconcile the inclusive language of *human* rights, or *global* problems on the one hand with, on the other, terms of inclusion that are essentially conditional on consent to a circumscribed moral order?

Conclusion

What this chapter has attempted to articulate is that, despite the ambitions of cosmopolitan ethics, global citizenship theories, and even planetary regimes which presume to do away with the traditional inclusion/exclusion binary (Cao 2015), such globalist imaginaries are nevertheless limited, and internally replete with normative assumptions and conditions. The concept of constitutions has served to demonstrate the signs of the globe becoming its own governmental territory. Instead of the formal language of conventional studies of constitutionalism, it has rather used evidence of more or less tacit norm-setting for the establishment of collective goods, realities and identities. Though they manifest themselves in quasi-expressions of rights, responsibilities, duties, laws, authority, participation, membership or exclusion – all traditional hallmarks of constitutionalism – it is primarily at the level of the imagination rather than the text that such negotiations take place. As such, discussion in the proceeding chapter, which aims to excavate the above themes in relation to global climate change and the Paris Agreement, does not posit a discrete or coherent global constitution capable of being mapped and explained. Rather it concerns the reach of global or transnational political space as an enduring and alluring rhetorical object around which climate change has come to be understood and acted on (Tsing 2000).

The theoretical framework I have developed here touches on and overlaps with several theoretical variants – Sociotechnical Imaginaries, modern social imaginaries, imagined communities, imagined democracies, etc. Clearly there is no shortage of concepts for framing this research, yet I have chosen instead to let all the above inform a metaphor of imagined statehood. My motivation in pursuing this metaphor and its facets of citizenship

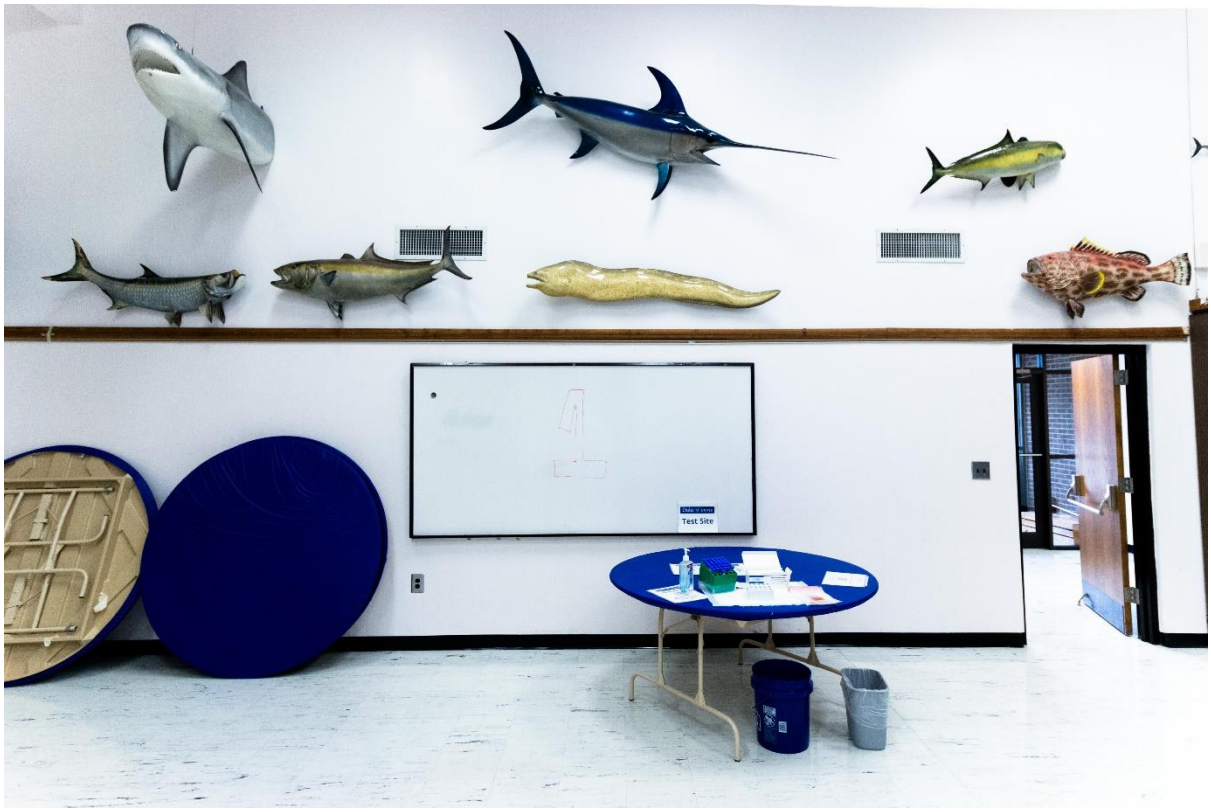
and constitutions comes from its suitability for extending respected constructivist accounts of the nation state to the scale of the global regime, where it can replace realist narratives of climate change governance with ones that acknowledge its contingencies, architectures, and limits. The familiar and intuitive image of the bordered nation also aids a focus on the politics of inclusion and crucially exclusion, which shall be a dominant concern of this thesis. What it means to belong to a political community, the relations of accountability that regulate that belonging, and the performance of values and actions that constitute legitimate participation each describes the mechanisms through which an imagined whole is given shape and longevity. As shall become apparent, the metaphor can be extended below as well as above the national level. While a culturally-oriented analysis of the structures of social life at the village level is no great innovation for anthropologists, it is precisely this fact that necessitates a framing that situates the village and the globe on a more symmetrical conceptual footing, emphasising that imagined communities at any scale rely on a stabilisation of moral and epistemic standards.

This is not a theory to be tested, nor a map that describes. The global climate society has no embassy, its citizens identifiable by no passports, nor are there any explicit laws or constitutional texts I can offer as proof in defence of a well-armoured and inflexible claim. But this is also not my aim, any more than it was Anderson's in describing the imagined community. His framework made no promises of homogeneity or even similarity among national citizens, who need only perceive rather than perform comradeship to make it real. Likewise, as any COP president knows only too well, there can be precious little that a Coca Cola executive and indigenous activist might find to agree on besides the astonishing stodginess of Polish cuisine. But it is precisely this 'capacity for disagreement' that – according to Christopher Kelty – marks two actors as sharing an essentially commensurable understanding of the problem at hand. Deploying the same vocabularies; thinking with the same concepts; choosing the same IPCC reports as epistemic authority, the same fora

as site for contestation, the same concentrations of power to lobby, the same texts to influence the writing of. If executive and activist disagree on every opinion and priority, they do so at least within the same 'grammars of participation' (Kelty 2018). The framework of constitutions and citizenship then, like that of imagined communities, holds tight to no single expression of participation, but rather is concerned with the fundamental assumptions, the conceptual common ground that permit actors to agree or disagree, but which routinely go unexcavated.

III.Collectives

Chapter 5 – The global climate society



Having established a theoretical framing for thinking through the construction and stabilisation of imagined states beyond the nation, discussion now turns to climate change governance post-Paris Agreement as a specific empirical context where these concepts can be identified. First, a summary of the important developments in the history of the UNFCCC will contextualise the emergence of the Paris Agreement as a new paradigm of governance: i.e a globalised governmentality that put the imagination at the centre of climate politics like never before. The section after shall situate these changes in the context of the US case study by reviewing how President Trump's withdrawal from Paris illuminated a radical reconfiguration of US participation in global governance, towards voluntary contributions by a subnational community of 'climate citizens'. As in the last chapter, citizenship here is presented as assembling around a constitutional order composed of moral and epistemic norms. Finally, the chapter will move to a more explicitly empirical mode by identifying how the global climate society is expressed in a very local

context of North Carolina, in particular demonstrating that the network of science-based institutions I worked with was continuous with and performative of the constitutional norms of climate globalism.

Paris, Washington, and the responsibilisation of climate action

There is nothing 'natural' about the way climate change is governed. Despite its planetary purview, the UNFCCC is neither homogenous nor immovable. As a 'framework convention', its institutional size, qualities and functions are not set in stone; rather it serves as a platform for intergovernmental dialogue, with the specific terms and obligations of engagement negotiated latterly (Kuyper et al. 2018a). Indeed, the institution has, in its short history, been one capable of adaptive and iterative redefinition, subject to questions regarding the extent of its powers, and its interpretations of relevant expertise. As suggested previously, the globalisation of politics that brought about international regimes like the UNFCCC in the first place had profoundly destabilised the boundaries of executive power and responsibility; in climate change was a huge challenge to incumbent world order with a scale and complexity beyond the scope of individual nation states (Miller 2004a). This turbulence of new scales and politics meant the evolution of the UNFCCC was thus one of trial and error.

Despite the unique challenges and opportunities of multilateralism and the globalisation of politics, the Kyoto Protocol of 1996 (Paris's predecessor agreement) had pursued a narrowly nation-oriented approach. Industrialised countries were compelled to work within carbon allowances for a centralized global market, and abide by individually allocated emissions targets; measures that could only be implemented through the mechanisms of national government (Prins and Rayner 2007). Kyoto's inflexible vision of the climate issue, its over-reliance on prescriptive top-down measures, and a consensus-

based governance approach meant that 'decisions represented the will of the laggards' (Kuyper et al. 2018b). The US never ratified the treaty, and for this reason among others, it failed.

In 2009, the infamous negotiations held in Copenhagen were a pivotal moment in the shift towards a new paradigm of governance. COP15 is generally remembered as a failure of diplomacy, but alongside the dying throes of Kyoto, its successor framework was emerging. While headlines augured stalemates and apathy in the official negotiations, a parallel meeting of nonstate and subnational actors at a nearby Crowne Plaza quietly resulted in joint agreement by a number of ambitious subnational states, cities, and businesses in but a single hour of deliberation (Hoffmann 2011). A growing body of prescient analysis (e.g Prins and Rayner 2007, Selin and VanDeveer 2011) anticipated a shift away from the heavy-footed quagmires of consensus-based 'megamultilateralism' and towards more nimble and experimental coalitions of 'like-minded actors' (Hoffmann 2011). And finally, the Paris Agreement, as laid out at COP21 in 2015, thus brought about a significant change in the *culture* of global governance under the UNFCCC. The 'command and control' strategies of Kyoto were replaced with a system of voluntary, 'nationally determined contributions' (NDCs) that allowed governments to define the nature, ambition, and implementation of their own commitments (Kuyper et al. 2018b). Where Kyoto had previously prescribed specific decarbonisation goals to a handful of industrialised 'polluter' countries, the new framework would incorporate *all* nations in a more holistic programme of mitigation, adaptation and climate finance. This was a radical departure from the rigid structures of Kyoto, placing the UNFCCC in the role of 'coordinator' rather than 'enforcer' (Kuyper et al. 2018b).

The annual 'conference of the parties' (COP) remains fundamentally a negotiation between national governments, whose choices set the bar of global ambition, but there was now also greater flexibility to the nature of participation in climate politics in a broader sense. Part

continuity, part change, Paris had a dramatic impact on how communities of concern are established. On one level, the 'creative ambiguity' of the agreement offered states the interpretive freedom to adapt its principles to their particular political, economic and cultural landscape – a long called-for concession (Jasanoff 2010, Prins and Rayner 2007) that nonetheless underscored the discretionary power of national governments. On the other, the change in emphasis, whilst superficially localising governance, engendered a subtle but fundamental realignment of units of engagement from national communities to global ones. A 'laggard', as defined by Kyoto-era international relations theorists, once meant *industrialised* nations pulling the global effort back by failing to decarbonise their economies to a degree commensurate with their allocated targets (Andresen and Agrawala 2002). *After* Paris, the 'global ambition' approach saw all state *and* nonstate stakeholders (including businesses, cities, religious institutions etc.) enlisted to contribute to the global effort according to their differentiated need and capacity. Entrenching the power of governments while giving new responsibilities to civil society, this scheme of 'hybrid multilateralism' (Kuyper et al. 2018b) even formalised the role of transnational, unquantifiable phenomena like protest movements or interventions of Pope Francis within its rhetoric of 'contributions' (Jacquet and Jamieson 2016). In this more granular view, the laggard becomes *any* global actor so disengaged as to ignore our shared, global climate imperative (Hale 2018). Thus, even as the language of Paris sought to reframe collective ambition as a cumulation of 'local' actions, it did so on a presupposition that its basic vision of shared responsibility and global consensus had universal salience.

Despite the enduring multilateral character of the Paris Agreement then, the decentralisation and pluralization of climate participation, the emphasis on self-regulation, the broadened role of market mechanisms and voluntary action, and the diminished reliance on national mechanisms are suggestive of a partial neoliberalisation of climate

governance. As the last chapter already explored, this switch from direct to indirect modes of control necessitates new instruments of disciplining. The cultivation of a moral-epistemic landscape in which politics can take place serves this purpose of moving towards a more generalized and indirectly managed political milieu, and is of course redolent of the conditions for a Foucauldian 'climate governmentality' (Stripple and Bulkely 2013, Rice 2010). The rhetorical shift towards engagement with climate change organised according to transnational ideational values rather than discrete state jurisdictions has in places manifested itself in tangible, quantifiable ways – such as the $36 trillion pledged to mitigative action by non-state and subnational actors that may never have materialised without these channels (Kuramochi et al. 2020, Hale 2020). In others however, it has had more subtle effects of redefining the UNFCCC and global climate regime as a voluntary club for the already-engaged.

Paris thus presents something of a contradiction. Whilst the evolution of the UNFCCC has ostensibly expanded the range of relevant actors and actions, a question remains to what extent this represents a democratisation of the climate narrative which engages new communities and legitimises diverse ways of knowing climate change. As this chapter will go on to suggest, the apparently open-borders of the global climate 'state' belie the presence of tacit conditions for counting among its citizens. In the meantime, it helps to distinguish here between geographical and conceptual understandings of 'local'. Whilst the Paris Agreement certainly promotes smaller, more situated administrative units of societal engagement than were permitted under Kyoto, these units are not in any way parochial or isolated, but remain as 'enmeshed in global flows of capital, labour, products, ideas and practices' as ever (Katz and Nowak 2017). This geographically local – as opposed to local*ist* – formation is spatially constrained but taps into highly networked ideological and epistemic dialogues. Variously conceptualised as 'the modern local' (Jasanoff and Martello 2004) or 'the new localism' (Katz and Nowak 2017), these entities of the globalised age, as

the trope goes, 'think globally, act locally'. But more precisely, Paris's gambit was that its vision of climate change will serve as a universal imaginary, that binds global society to a common perception of the problem and – through individually tailored actions – a shared motivation to find solutions. In a clear resonance with the global imagined communities described during the previous chapter, the imagination here emerges as the currency of participation in a new political collective.

Effects in the US

On the 1st June, 2017, President Donald Trump formally announced his intention to withdraw the US from the Paris Agreement and mothball the nation's contributions to global decarbonisation indefinitely. The isolationist gesture was not unexpected, since Trump had made retreat from multilateralism and the currents of globalisation a central part of his campaign platform. Nevertheless, it was an indisputable blow to the progress of global climate dialogues. Just four days after officially entering the international pact, the US electorate, representing nearly a fifth of the planet's greenhouse gas emissions, had voted for a programme of nationalism and deregulation over the globalist agenda, ending with it an era of diplomatic leadership in the coordination of global decarbonisation. Within hours, the widely anticipated move had been flatly denounced by heads of state and global leaders as a dereliction of moral responsibility (Mathiesen 2017). Yet where the US's quitting of the Kyoto Protocol process 16 years prior had triggered the slow death of the entire treaty, pundits and officials alike were vocal in their determination that, this time, Paris was not to be revised for US inclusion (Kemp 2017). In response to Trump's indication that he would seek to renegotiate more favourable terms for the US, the UNFCCC itself moved quickly to state formally that '[Paris] cannot be renegotiated based on the request of a single Party' (UNFCCC 2017). After the initial pessimism, this stoicism quickly permeated the international climate policy community, with analysts widely concluding that Paris would be better served *without* the obstructive influence of a participant yet

hostile US government (Hoffmann 2017, Kemp 2017) and actors in general 'adjusting to the notion of US withdrawal' (Farand 2019). At COP23 later the same year, media outlets openly mocked the half-hearted promotion of 'sustainable coal' at the US's single panel engagement (Aranoff 2017), and more significantly, many parties actually responded with redoubled zeal, introducing greater ambition to their pledges (Hale 2016).

Given the size and significance of the US economy, and its diplomatic clout in past multilateral agreements, American non-cooperation might have derailed Paris altogether, just as it had with the Kyoto Protocol. So why was it able to move on in a way that Kyoto could not? This thesis suggests it was largely because of the unique way that the Agreement was structured: around a broadening approach to climate action that sees a voluntary global consensus over imaginaries of climate change politics as the currency of climate action, rather than exclusively the compliance of states to prescribed targets. Thus, while an electoral majority can reverse an entire nation's political programme, under Paris those who still subscribe to the project are able to continue informally to participate in it, independently of their governments.

How then did these changes affect US participation, after a democratic shift ostensibly towards anti-globalism brought the US government out of the climate conversation? The same day as President Trump's Rose garden address, a joint communication by the governors of New York, California and Washington established the United States Climate Alliance; a network of states and territories committed to upholding US responsibilities towards global decarbonization. At COP23 five months later, media coverage mockingly compared the US's cupboard-like official delegation office to the grand, new, Bloomberg-funded pavilion proudly introducing the world to America's Pledge, a conglomeration of domestic nonstate actors (NSAs) jointly committed to upholding the nation's NDC commitments (Irfan 2017, see figure 7). Businesses both small and multinational, tribes and churches, universities and counties all swiftly declared their intention to join the

pledge. The remarkable proliferation of these subnational efforts encompassed over half of national emissions within carbon reduction pledges by 2019, with estimates suggesting they could achieve a 25% reduction in national emissions by 2030 (Hale and Hultman 2020).

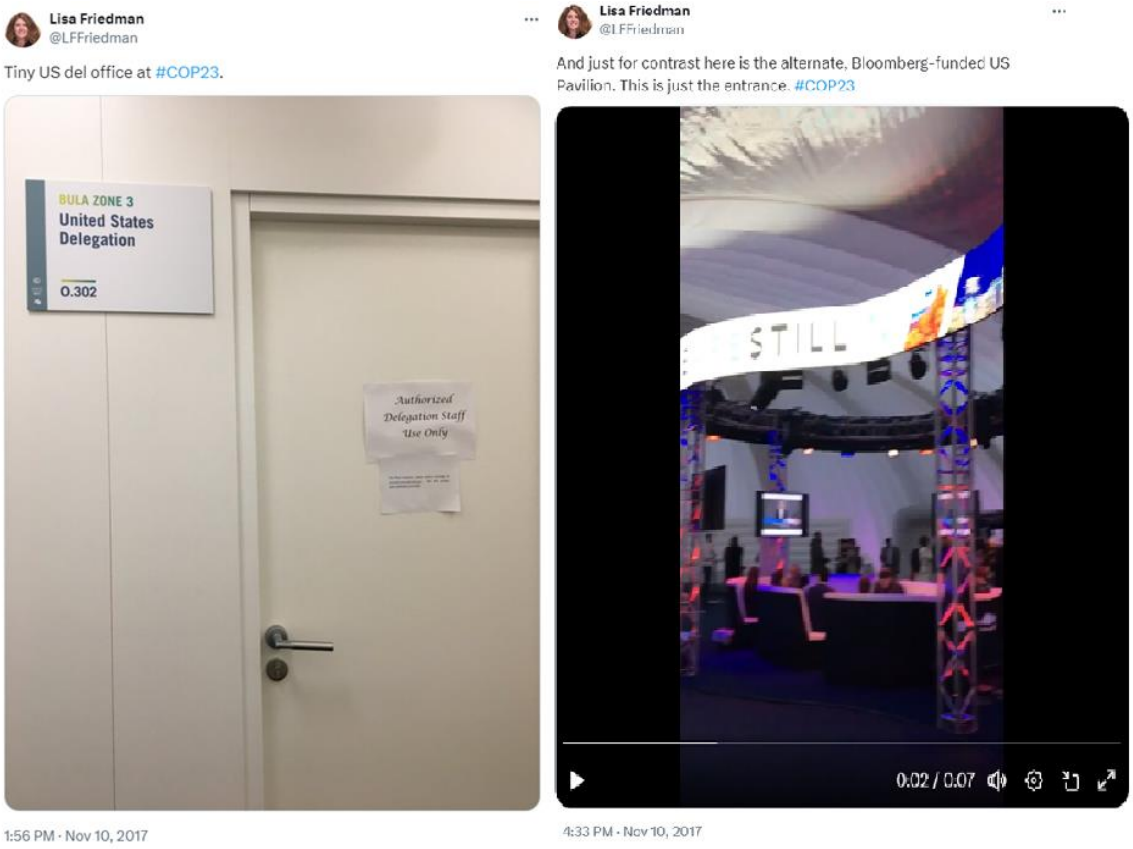


Figure 7 - Comparisons made between the official US delegation office and the non-state, Bloomberg-funded pavilion at COP23

It was the flexibility of Paris that rendered Trump's election and subsequent withdrawal decidedly *not* a governance disaster, because existing ambition within the US could still find channels for expression. What this suggests is that the delicate diplomacy and narrative compromises that were previously seen to hamper progress for the sake of achieving consensus between governments (Falkner 2016, Hoffmann 2011) could to a degree be replaced with a more uncompromising approach outside the conference centre. Recalling the 'hollowing out of the state' (Jessop 2004) discussed previously, the tacit redrawing of

political boundaries means less hangs on the ability of national compatriots to reach consensus when new post-national fora have become available. Indeed, closer examination of the domestic landscape during this period suggests not that Paris represented a dissolution of conceptual borders, but rather a shift from one set of borders (national) to another (ideational).

Within the US and the global climate change regime, climate action in the wake of Trump's provocative and unapologetically partisan move seemingly became a platform for political resistance, oddly vindicating Slavoj Žižek's contrarian promotion of Trump as a conduit for radical political awakening on the Left (Žižek 2019). The reverse may also be true. Scholars have long recognised climate change as an 'organising principle', not just for a broad and assorted coalition of globalist, liberal or environmental advocates, but also the former's ideological opposites (Sarewitz and Pielke 2000). As with scientific expertise generally, the strong partisan currents of US politics can pull propositions with no intrinsic left-right stance into relationships of opposition (Katz and Nowak 2017). Examining the early signatories to America's Pledge for example – a collection of largely Democrat states, cities and mayors, and businesses with strong urban or pro-environmental brands – it is debatable whether the proliferation of collaborative nonstate and 'local' projects represented a galvanisation of new American communities of concern, or merely a formal alliance of existing ones. Insofar as nonstate projects like America's Pledge carve up publics by alignment to a globalist cause, they serve to reify the global climate change regime as a bounded entity. With borders that run straight through US society, this articulation of a shared imaginary redefined membership of the climate project.

In Paris is a system of governance organised around voluntary allegiance to an idea, not just extrinsic pressures or traditional diplomatic incentives. The actors who rushed to rejoin *saw themselves* in the loosely defined project of global climate action that Paris made available to Earth's volunteers, and those who did not, did not. This ethos of voluntary participation

will be a recurring theme throughout the thesis in descriptions of the science-based climate resilience organisations of North Carolina attempting to build a public discourse on climate change in communities who do *not* identify with the global climate cause. In a fractal miniature of the Paris Agreement, a widespread preference for noncoercive, participatory, and collaborative interactions led practitioners to work only with public partners who demonstrated an interest in doing so. This arrangement was intended to ensure the public legitimacy of a given project, and its democratic credibility. The *un*intended consequence was however, like Paris, a new conceptual border between these communities of interest and everyone else. On this, more shall be explored in the remaining chapters.

The global regime is far from homogenous, and far from free of contestation among its participants. Yet even without a discrete form, it nevertheless seems to have mass enough to pull actors into orbit, to exert influence on the world, and to offer salient imagined boundaries within or against which actors can position themselves and their identities. Politically it served to cede governing power to something resembling an imagined community, which volunteers become citizens of by their own consent. In all respects it resembles the globalised regimes of citizenship explored in previous discussion, but in order to understand how this manifests itself in terms of rights, responsibilities, the conditions of participation – in other words, to what extent Paris exhibits constitutional qualities – we must go deeper.

The next two sections shall explore in what ways epistemic and moral norm-setting within global climate change governance has resulted in circumscribed visions of what is to be governed, and how. Drawing on empirical examples both from international discourse and from my fieldwork, they shall begin to illustrate the normative landscape in which US public life had to organise its responses to the climate question. By describing the institutional cultures of academic and public outreach activities I observed in North

Carolina, I also demonstrate how they embody the norms and conventions of the imagined global climate community.

Epistemic Constitutionalism in the UNFCCC: One global climate

Historians of science have written at length about the evolution of the climate change concept (Edwards 2010, Howe 2014). Though environmental matters are understood with as much cultural diversity as humanity itself, it is how that diversity is handled by institutions that has come to define the logics of environmental governance (Borie et al. 2021). Beginning with the cumulative stacking of localised meteorological observations, the 18th and 19th centuries saw 'weather' gradually aggregated and scaled to the level of 'climate' (Hulme 2017). This trajectory of aggregation continued to enfold the world's weather systems until climate was 'an ontologically unitary whole capable of being understood and managed on scales no smaller than the globe itself' (Miller 2004: 54, Edwards 2010). This view, detached from the sensorially particular or the personally verifiable (Rudiak-Gould 2013) enabled the establishment of a presumptive climatic 'normal' against which future readings and policy measures could be calibrated (Hulme 2017). With the ontological monopoly the sciences have acquired in characterising climate change (Hulme 2008), discrete boundaries have been established between the 'impersonal, apolitical, and universal imaginary' posited by science and the 'subjective, situated, and normative imaginations of human actors engaging with nature' (Jasanoff 2010: 233). This purification of climate change to indices of Global Mean Temperature (Mahony and Hulme 2016), carbon emissions (Sarewitz and Pielke 2000), or economic risk (Hulme 2010) isolated a descriptive view of climate change at the expense of a normative one. The separation of the 'is' from the 'ought' brands the situated relationship of a people to their changing climate as less relevant than the raw fact of its changing (Jasanoff 2010). Scholars and activists alike have claimed that

universalist framing can in fact do 'epistemological violence' to place-based knowledges (Radcliffe et al. 2010: 102) and prove incommunicable to sociocultural contexts where the aforementioned climate 'normal' has no currency as a baseline for recognising environmental change (De Wit 2020). Climate change, the concept around which this research orbits, is the construction of a particular 'knowledge infrastructure' which is inextricably global in its outlook (Edwards 2010).

This ontologically global paradigm of 'climate' has become the foremost framing among efforts to understand and address global warming (Miller 2004, Howe 2014, Lövbrand et al. 2009). In 1988, an international coalition of environmental and scientific bodies established the IPCC. Completing its first assessment report in 1990, the IPCC's enumerated description of global climate change both predated and directly informed the creation of the UNFCCC in 1992 (IPCC 2021). As such, the IPCC was positioned as the epistemic engine that would drive political action in the UNFCCC to this day, all but 'trademark[ing] Climate Change™' (Hulme 2008). Charged with furnishing the global dialogues with 'reliable knowledge' (Jasanoff and Martello 2004: 6), the IPCC had to determine what forms of expertise were capable of speaking for the world and the future of all who populate it. The result is written in the UNFCCC's constitutional objectives: to 'stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system' (UNFCCC, Article 2). In its characterisation of climate change's problematic agent ('greenhouse gas concentrations'), its geography ('the climate system'), and its remedy ('stabilis[ation]'), the convention faithfully embodied a uniformly scientistic vision in its very purpose.

The reach of science framing extends beyond the diplomatic and global policy landscape. Speaking at COP26 on a panel entitled 'How has science influenced climate action?', former president of the Royal Meteorological Society David Warrilow remarked that the IPCC communicates far beyond its formal informational channels with the UNFCCC, playing a

profound role in setting the terms with which public discourse around climate change takes place. The IPCC influences political decisions not just through its reports, he reflected, but also through their influence of the social mandates that democratic publics give their representatives. The hyper-visibility of the IPCC's interventions gave a common home to a diverse church of environmental concerns once thought unrelated but now constituent of a larger, holistic story of environmental decline (Sarewitz and Pielke 2000). Global climate science thus not only provides the epistemic scaffold to UN negotiations but acts as a sociological lighthouse, by whose signal wider society orients and organizes its engagements with climate. This is crucially important in light of the growing role for *voluntary* action. The public legitimacy of climate science, as the 'epistemic hand in the UNFCCC's political glove' (Dudman and De Wit 2021), was thus more important after Paris than perhaps ever before. During the same discussion as Warrilow's comments, IPCC author Oswaldo Lucon was asked whether the body should, instead of publishing a giant assessment report every 6 or 7 years, release smaller updates annually. His answer was no, arguing that it is the 'thick brick' reports that make headlines and win Nobel prizes. The regular, dramatic unveiling of the 'state of knowledge', he suggested, plays a vital role in both setting the tone of climate politics and ensuring the IPCC's ongoing visibility.

It is doubtless no coincidence that, in giving her 2004 treatise on co-production the same name, Sheila Jasanoff left some ambiguity: between the type of 'state' Lucon here referred to and the kind that signs treaties. The state of things, the natural order, made knowable by science, is always and forever formative of modern political realities, Jasanoff claims. So much was clear to me as a party member for the Seychelles delegation at COP24, when the IPCC's SR15 report was published. Detailing the impacts projected for 1.5c degrees of warming vs 2c, the report gave an immediate and powerful tailwind to the world's most vulnerable nations in pushing for greater ambition, furnished their negotiators with a righteous legitimacy, and injected new urgency to the political process. At the same time,

Jasanoff explains, scientific work is as much influenced by political forces as influential on it. A pertinent example in the climate context is that of Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSP). Developed from ongoing efforts to model the impacts of possible global emissions scenarios into the future, the SSPs were devised as an attempt to tie these scenarios to broad social narratives that might accompany and precipitate each pathway. This is already a striking inclusion by the IPCC; long excoriated for its neglect of social and cultural considerations (Hulme 2010, Beck et al. 2014, Dudman and De Wit 2021). It is also an exercise in absolutism most social science would recoil from, as it serves to establish essentially which political lifeways are compatible with a safe climate future and which not. Indeed, the set of 5 scenarios produced are explicitly assessed by how much they challenge mitigation and adaptation respectively (see figure 8),

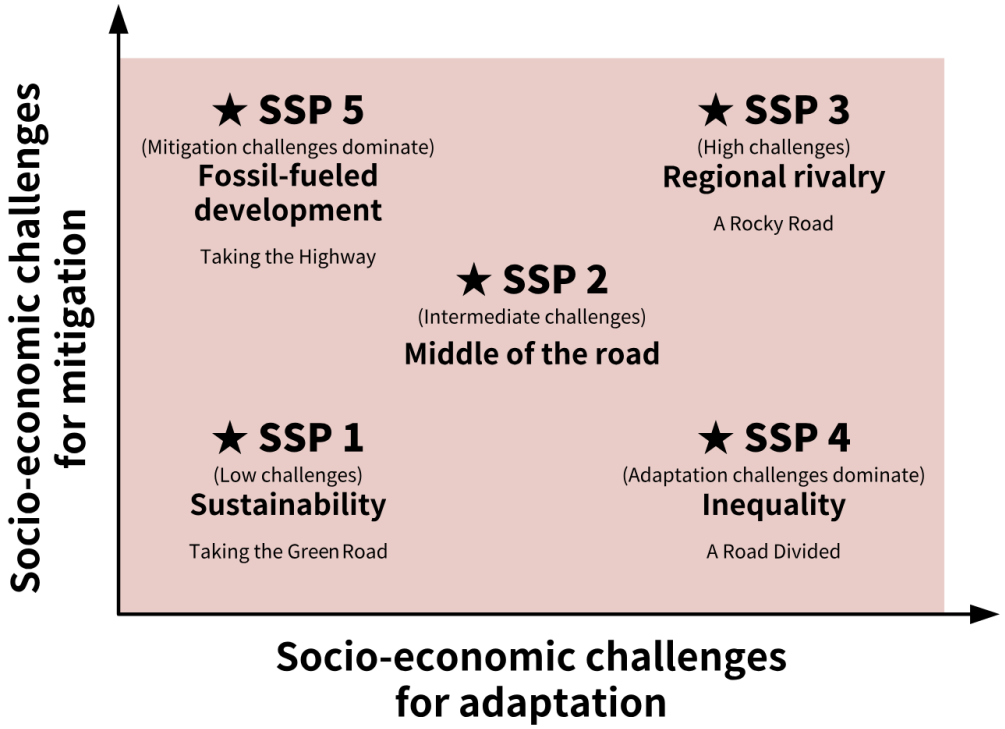


Figure 8 - socio-economic challenges associated with different SSPs (O'Neill et al. 2017)

SSP1, titled 'sustainability', is the scenario most compatible with meeting global climate goals, and describes a rapid coordination of global efforts, aligned to sustainable

development goals and involving a measured decrease of industrialised states' material consumption alongside redistribution and capacity-building assistance to developing countries. By the end of the century the world's major economies have transitioned to a circular economy. By contrast, the 'resurgent nationalism', 'weak global institutions' and 'uneven coordination' accompanied by reduced international trade mark 'SSP3: Regional rivalry – a rocky road' as presenting the greatest challenges to mitigation and adaptation (O'Neill et al. 2017). The SSP framework clearly invokes recognisable political cultures and implicates them in the success or failure of global environmental governance, but by using scaled out methods they avoid the partisanship of stating so explicitly. The wider discourse that the SSP framework has enabled has been more specific. A report by the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology tying the 5 storylines to a British context described in SSP3 a gradual distancing from international partnerships, reductions in free trade and immigration, nationalisation of industrial production, independence for Scotland, and polarisation of the political left and right, all leading to mass poverty and anarchic violence by the end of the century (Harrison et al. 2021). In the context of Brexit, the Scottish Independence movement, and other prominent fault lines in contemporary British politics, the profile reads like a list of the worst anxieties of a neoliberal centrist.

By binding sociological futures to quantified emissions outcomes, the politics of articulating a good (or bad) climate society is partly resolved long before the scenarios are made known to the world's decisionmakers. Indeed, the SSP framework was developed consciously as an exercise in 'backcasting' (O'Neill et al. 2017). Also called 'normative forecasting', this method starts with an existing idea of an (un)desirable future, and establishes what possible pathways could lead to it (Vergragt and Quist 2011). In the SSP case, the emissions scenarios give a quantified hierarchy of good (low) to bad (high) outcomes, and the socioeconomic storylines describe plausible routes to their achievement. Reinforcing the concepts of sustainable development, global cooperation and circular

economies championed in global fora, and undermining them respectively, SSP1 and SSP3 not only present best- and worst-case scenarios, but implicitly advocate for a particular globalist governance imaginary. It would take dedicated research to interrogate how and why this imaginary and its Others came to impregnate the SSP storylines – the normative elements of the framework are blackboxed in a methodology described thinly as 'expert judgement' (O'Neill et al. 2017). Nevertheless, previous work on sustainable development (Du Pisani 2006) and circular economies (Völker et al. 2020) among others have shown that such concepts may deploy scientific research in their dealings with social and environmental problems, but from a starting point of pregiven agreement with the problem framing itself.

The SSP example illustrates the role that climate science has come to play in shoring up claims to global authority (Miller 2004), and in buttressing those claims provides the crucial 'epistemic dimension' to a global 'constitutionalism' (Miller 2009). This is not the first time scientific knowledge has played a constitutional role in the formation of political systems of course. Ezrahi charts science's 'instrumental' functions in objectifying claims to political authority during the transition from monarchic to modern democratic forms of government (1990, also Shapin and Schaffer 1985). In climate science is a new instrument for lubricating another transition, this time to governmental forces that transcend national boundaries (Jasanoff 2003, Miller 2004). It is thus another constitutional moment for science, but whereas in the past its role has been to support the muscle of governments, under Paris that coercive element has been weakened and devolved to a diffuse community of individually empowered actors bearing a common cause.

Looking at the institutions operating in North Carolina, it is clear that they subscribe to many of the epistemic assumptions described here. It is important to reiterate first of all that, as a community of activity, the organisations – both governmental and non-governmental – working on public engagement with climate change in North Carolina are

unique among states for their quantity and their dynamism, but also in their progressive interest in public opinion and the social legitimacy of science. In national panels on climate resilience and public engagement, I have observed over the last 5 years an overrepresentation of speakers from North Carolina, from any number of sectors, and it was this active conversation that drew me to the 'Tar Heel' state in the first place. Even so, the discourse emanating from this community – whether it is agricultural science advice or a community consultation on coastal infrastructure plans – is fundamentally grounded in an ontologically scientific construction of environmental change. As chapter 8 shall elucidate, NCSU is a Land Grant university, and as such specialises in research in the sciences and technological innovation. Very few of my contacts there would consider themselves a social scientist or humanities scholar, the exception being two sociologists who nevertheless employed large scale quantitative research methods for their work. Many of my colleagues, especially in the State Climate Office, not only embedded a vision of NC as connected to or part of global physical systems within their communications, but their research contributed to the construction of this framing. The IPCC was a common reference point of reliable knowledge about change, the language of change drew on the same ontological framing of an enumerated climate on its way to 1.5 or 2 degrees, and naturally their research was designed around the usual set of modelling methods. Several were also authors of national climate assessments. At a very fundamental level then, the 'localised' activities I observed in North Carolina were consciously framed as contiguously connected to the epistemic fabric of the UNFCCC.

This finding is not surprising given the historic remit of these organisations, yet in subscribing to a scientistic vision as the 'state of knowledge', they carry throughout their work certain basic elements as being the settled, uncontested building blocks for knowing and acting on the world. I was shocked by how often researchers and federal employees expressed an interest in non-scientific forms of expertise, valuing diverse engagements with

a topic like fisheries management, for example. Such an interest typically took shape at the level of dissemination and communication, however; on their own research the same individuals were very clear that the science itself is 'apolitical'. This was partly, I inferred, a defensive stance regarding their professional legitimacy, but it was also a statement that making governance or knowledge production more inclusive of other perspectives could supplement but would never come *at the expense* of scientific primacy as *the* policy-relevant knowledge. An agricultural specialist who travels for half a day to listen to a farming community's mixed bag of social, technical, economic, moral concerns on unseasonal wet weather, will respond with new adaptive soil management techniques and recommend resilient cultivars. The resources and tools published and disseminated to a statewide public audience define a range of available actions originating in the university, and this remains the dominant direction of travel. As with Lucon's comment that the IPCC report loudly asserts the epistemic landscape on which a climate politics can be acted out, the good society that NC climate institutions are attempting to cultivate is similarly seen as being accessible through the application of cutting-edge scientific research. In short, if NC's public-serving institutions are engaged in a form of state-building, scientific facts are the epistemic part of the constitution they work from.

In another parallel with global climate politics, climate scientists in NC, like the IPCC, maintain a keen awareness of their own public legitimacy. Though it was never put in such cynical terms, those involved in public engagement were clear that they hoped to influence public behaviour even while committing to non-coercive approaches. Strenuous efforts were thus made to 'communicate' the science. Training webinars were frequently held and guidance circulated among public-facing professionals on how to broach difficult topics like marine conservation or sea level rise without turning people off; an employee at a coastal NGO admitted to making a point of going to local restaurants in the community she was working with to be seen out and about locally; and a Sea Grant officer described

the different 'hats' she wears when giving lectures to different groups, emphasising climate models, the economic benefits of a healthy environment or a love of the outdoors depending on her audience. Ultimately, these were merely cosmetic alterations to the same fundamental facts, applied to ensure that institutional efforts were not hamstrung by a loss of trust. A nascent interest in knowledge politics was sincerely felt among practitioners, but this generally became an issue of communication rather than upsetting the established epistemic order. There were exceptions to this, with scientists exploring collaborations with holders of alternative knowledges, but as the next section shall illustrate, what constituted eligible knowledge was uneven and circumscribed.

As a localised instantiation of a globe-spanning epistemic community[8], the activities undertaken by the assorted organisations in North Carolina were constitutionally committed to a version of climate change that is unitary, global, and knowable through the language and tools of science.

Moral constitutionalism in the UNFCCC – norms and narratives

Recalling the last chapter, the rise of post-national institutions and publics has come with new modes of disciplining collective action. Under the Paris Agreement, the transition to a non-coercive, 'facilitator' style of governance has hung the framework's success on the reach of a global climate governmentality. This has meant that, alongside the stabilisation of epistemic claims about climate change, a set of normative standards would have to motivate actors to participate, and prescribe how. Paris's expansion of the climate state (from just the industrialised 'Annex 1' countries to a global community of nations and its

[8] I use this term in an obvious reference to the formulation developed by Haas (1992), but referring primarily to the shared ontological understanding of such a community rather than the more ambitious collection of political and normative identities Haas refers to, which has been subject at various times to critique (Martello 2004).

countless nonstate networks) introduced a much grown population of nascent climate citizens, and the need to negotiate roles, responsibilities, and a new moral topography that came with it.

The role of the Global South and interests in the 'local' simultaneously experienced boosted prominence within the dialogues running up to Paris. The status of emerging economies had become a sticking point for negotiations under Kyoto (Brunnée and Streck 2013), and more broadly, calls for an inclusive debate on matters like adaptation (Prins and Rayner 2007), equity (Morgan and Waskow 2014), and alternative forms of expertise (Beck et al. 2014) gave a strong impetus for the next framework to address these issues together. As a result, a limited discussion on 'Loss and Damage'[9] and an emphasis on financial flows for developing countries coincided with a growing amenability to 'bottom-up' governance as a pathway for sustainable development. From the start then, the moral orientation of international climate discussions – how rights and responsibilities are understood and acted upon – thus took a sharp turn with the arrival of Paris, in part because of a radical expansion in who could participate and how. These circumstantial changes to the organisation of climate politics were not mere coincidence however, but occurred as part of an ongoing negotiation of the geopolitical landscape. The following subsections point to narrative-building, the construction of epistemic stereotypes, and the economy of blame as three examples of this political boundary-work that has been a recurring feature of global climate governance since its inception.

i.TANs and narrative building

The association between local knowledge, climate adaptation and the 'developing world' is attributable to more than their simultaneous arrival to global climate politics under Paris.

[9] The idea that developing countries facing severe climate impacts should receive remuneration for damages they have next to no responsibility for causing.

Like climate science, the construction and stabilisation of moral narratives comes with its own history of norm-alignment and coalition-building. For example, the fact that struggles against the erasing effect of centralised authority has been a historically defining feature of the indigenous experience near universally has given otherwise heterogeneous groups cause to work towards shared political agendas (Niezen 2003). Likewise, a common opposition to the excesses of capitalism and corporate negligence has seen many indigenous groups find a ready place alongside environmental activist and antiracism movements, spurring a growing discourse on 'climate justice'. Recalling the power of TANs to establish networks of moral authority, these alliances have often provided a powerful normative force in negotiations. In 2018 for example, climate pressure groups championed two Marshallese and Greenlandic poets whose multimedia protest against sea-level rise portrayed a globe-spanning indigenous sisterhood built on shared precarity (McKibben 2018). Released in the run-up to COP24, the protest articulated an unambiguous moral topography of victimhood and responsibility against which political discussion would unfold.

As with discourse on environmental citizenship, climate norm-setting is not restricted to professional advocacy networks, but is present in all acts of authoritative narrative framing**.** The abundant scholarship of social sciences and humanities – whilst routinely excluded from global pools of 'policy-relevant' knowledge (Szerszynski and Urry 2010, Obermeister 2017, Dudman and De Wit 2021) – is not uninfluential in the construction of a globalised climate discourses, playing a role alongside activists and advocates in establishing and stabilising a moral economy around climate change.

Critical social scientists have observed that their own disciplines have relaxed into an 'orthogonal reading of climate' in which culture and science operate in separate, hermetic domains (Hulme 2008: 7). For one thing, social research is disproportionately focused on 'communities that are generally under anthropological climate change scrutiny (i.e. those

in the Global South)' (De Wit 2020). Much as science, speaking for a globalist vision of climate, has been deployed as an elite language of the Global North (Edwards 2010), interpretive sciences have historically mined local environmental knowledges like a resource only found in the developing world (Baer and Singer 2018, Crate and Nuttall 2009, Strauss and Orlove 2003). This may in part be the legacy of anthropology's (and more broadly modernity's) gaze from a rational Western 'centre' to a global cultural 'margin' (Peirano 1998). It may also relate to a commonplace positioning of particularly anthropologists as champions of the subaltern and activists for decolonial or other anti-hegemonic interests (Baer and Singer 2018, De Wit et al. 2018 etc.). The major late-century developments of feminist and postcolonial theory brought preoccupation with power relations and alterity to the heart of socially-oriented disciplines, whilst the popularisation of 'engaged anthropology' more recently has challenged the 'false neutrality' of traditional methods (Sheper-Hughes 1995: 411) in favour of a partisan – even activist – defense of social justice (Goldstein 2012). This has certainly changed over time, with anthropological work unpacking the complex and ambivalent ways contemporary environmental problems entangle industrialised settings from New Mexico (Masco 2006) to Norway (Norgaard 2011). Nevertheless, the structural focus of the most socially attentive disciplines on geographically circumscribed and politically virtuous sites of interest sets a particular tone for their own interventions in global discourse.

As the previous chapter laid out, the 'frame alignment' undertaken implicitly or deliberately by TANs – be they activist, advocate, academic, or otherwise amounts to so much normative worldbuilding, establishing common moral vocabularies that constrain and enable what is morally imaginable, and therefore what becomes institutionally possible. The mapping of postcolonial geographies onto a global moral economy of climate change has helped stabilise the ethical framework undergirding the regime. This is most literally evident in the inclusion of moral concepts in political discourse. 'Climate justice' for example – a

norm-laden and nebulous term in need of prior construction by the rhetorical work of civil society – was ultimately enshrined in the Paris Agreement itself (albeit weakly consigned to the Preamble, rather than the main text (Claeys and Pugley 2017)). With a growing space for civil society and nonstate activities, these counter-cultural narratives were able to bring post-colonial imperatives more firmly to the negotiating table than ever, turning local knowledge and bottom-up governance into actual instruments for empowerment.

ii. Indigenous knowledge and the permission to be cultural

The coordinated activity of TANs has not only been productive of concepts and political agendas, but has arguably influenced how actors within the governance landscape are constructed and their available ways of participating framed. The particular attention given to postmodern and postcolonial ethics by 'scholars, activists, and journalists' has cultivated an influential narrative of climate change's heightened visibility to non-Western lifeways (Rudiak-Gould 2013: 125). This notion that indigenous and Global South communities possess an intuitive sensitivity for environmental health and sustainability is not new, having been active within development studies for decades (Agrawal 1995). The emergence of 'indigenous knowledge' in the 1990s as a popular new instrument of democratised governance however, whilst laudable for its pursuit of participatory methods, tied a population (the already problematic community of 'global indigeneity') to a particular ethical-epistemic programme (local, ecological, cultural, sustainable) structurally antithetical to the science, capitalism and modernity of industrialised humanity (Martello 2001).

These 'topological stereotypes' have visibly informed key discourses surrounding climate change today, despite neglecting commonalities between these populations and differences within (Appadurai 1988, Agrawal 1995). Journalistic tropes present developing economies as 'early warning systems' of change (Bravo 2009), dubiously implying that climate changes

from the South up; while discursive changes in approaches to sustainable development (Agrawal 1995), and gender and climate (Arora-Jonsson 2011) have similarly modelled themselves around North/South and West/East binaries (Lorimer 2010). Independent think tanks like the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) have become prominent champions for the role of local knowledge in equitable, community-led adaptation policies (Warren and Cashman 1988). At the annual COP dialogues too, parallel conferences such as the Development and Climate Days bring advocacy of the same principles to the heart of UNFCCC negotiations. As successful as such channels of discourse are in bringing particularity, locality, and a sensitivity to the social into an otherwise uncompromisingly scientistic conversation, it is notable that this treatment is not universal. While indigenous and marginal groups risk being typecast in their own policy track of 'alternative' knowledge and a bottom-up methodology (Martello 2001), the same attention to local knowledge and cultural dimensions has not been in evidence for industrialised, Global North contexts.

iii. 'Slots', blocs, and the allocation of roles in climate theatre

A final way in which the normative dimensions of a climate constitutionalism are constructed is the performance of political roles within global governance. The organisation of a messy world into discrete, morally and politically coherent units forms part of the 'necessary political fictions' that hold a modern regime together (Ezrahi 2012) and projects a correct way to participate in the negotiation of the future. Orlove et al. (2014) have been especially effective in showing how historical and geopolitical developments have produced an uneven global geography of concern, in which climate vulnerability sticks to certain landscapes in public and even scientific imaginations and not to others. These oversimplifications, they suggest, risk establishing binary roles of perpetrators and victims within the global climate regime, which in turn easily map onto similarly siloed

policy pathways of mitigation and adaptation. In reality, attributing culpability along 'cardinal points' belies climate politics' complex, overlapping and negotiated identities (McDermott 2017: 122). Demonstrating the careful political character-building behind performances of national personae at UNFCCC negotiations, McDermott references Trinidad and Tobago, an oil-rich small island state that points either to its eroding coastlines or overflowing oil wells according to how its interests are best served. 'Alienated by the bluster of Tehran, Trinidad performed the suffering of Tuvalu' (127). These constructed regions and roles thus struggle to contain the full complexity of the field they describe.

Nevertheless, stereotypes retain powerful traction in global climate politics, where they are naturalized through circulation and performance. Described by McDermott as 'slots', they are 'enduring categor[ies] of thought… that canalise and discipline' our thinking and lend artificial simplicity to the task of attributing victimhood and culpability (2017: 121). Risk and responsibility are not the sole currencies traded in this global negotiation. Diplomatic blocs representing nations with common interests (e.g Small Island Developing States (SIDS), or the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)) suspend national borders to coordinate common agendas and opportune political strategies. Gathering into 'translocal' formations, 'the "holder of indigenous and traditional knowledge" has [likewise] emerged as a new actor in international discourse' to defend their cultural rights and knowledges (Jasanoff and Martello 2004). Under this imagined framework, presumptively emancipatory policies can be applied to a global 'victim slot', yet populating this slot entails prior normative judgements regarding what constitutes vulnerability in the first place. Bound together by epistemic synchronicity, political opportunity, and shared (colonial) history, the participation of Global South and indigenous parties collapses into a programmatic role constructed around expectations of vulnerability and 'local' knowledge, and the latter are legible primarily only where they are present in the former.

By contrast, in the Global North, the constructed global moral landscape places polluter countries on a policy pathway of decarbonisation and remuneration to victim states for past emissions. Observing either the promises of senior officials in office and at UN meetings, or the language of delegates discussing progressive policies in the more informal 'Green Zone', it is striking the extent to which the focus lies in infrastructure development, economic drivers and (often Promethean) scientific innovations. NSAs – usually businesses, mayors, or local government representatives – draw on the language and levers of climate science to frame their achievements and aspirations, deploying economic terms like 'Net Zero', 'carbon budgets', or 'climate finance'. Any reference to public engagement or opinion is overwhelmingly centred at a societal scale, with social sciences generally only enlisted where they can promise 'behaviour change', and communications specialists deployed to find persuasive framings for otherwise technocentric policies.

At the civil society level, expressions of individual responsibility in the climate mitigation discourse likewise presuppose a requisite faith in the authority of climate science, with the latter becoming, for many, synonymous with climate concern. Figure 9 shows one particularly common performance of this in the US: a popular lawn sign which allows individuals to situate their climate citizenship within a portfolio of moral indicators including antiracism, pro-immigration, anti-homophobia and feminism. The statement that 'science is real' moves to align scientific expertise with the progressive agenda. Opportunities for non-science-centred expressions of social life are, by contrast, observably common within activities fitting within the adaptation agenda, with the language of grass roots, co-creation, and 'listening exercises' being a recurring feature when discussions turn to matters of vulnerability. Focusing as they do on populations characterised as victims rather than perpetrators of climate change, these instances arguably behave more like satellites of the Global South programme, however**.** For example, the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) is a UNFCCC working group that focuses on

cultural matters of knowledge and engagement not represented by national governments and economic models. The platform works to ensure that the interests and expertise of sub-national peoples and 'local knowledge systems' are included in climate politics. Every population in the world has a designated representative for its 'regional group', except for North America which has only ever participated as an 'indigenous sociocultural region'. The only UNFCCC working group dedicated to localist and cultural engagements with climate thus forecloses any reading of settler populations as having cultural or non-technoscientific relationships with climate change.



Figure 9: Common US yard sign pitting trust in science as part of a portfolio of left wing values

Developments in international relations; the narrative-building, alliance-cultivating work of TANs; the conflation of certain 'types' of actors with certain 'types' of knowledge; and the strategic performances undertaken by a diverse, dynamic, and ultimately competitive ecology of political players. Whether by happenstance or design, these processes and mechanisms have grown – coral-like – a normative landscape upon which responsibility can be attributed, rights can be protected, and above all modes of participation can be

defined. As we have started to see and the thesis shall continue to demonstrate, emerging epistemic and normative constructions land and are metabolised in particular, situated ways in the US, as everywhere. But it is precisely in such moments of encounter that identities are formed with and against each other; communities extended and closed off.

Thinking about how these patterns manifested in the NC context, organisational climate action again appeared both influenced by and performative of moral norms increasingly embedded within global discourses. First on narrative building, the existence of tacit social alliances between certain groups created an uneven landscape of sympathy within organizational work. I can say with some confidence that the majority of my institutional discussants were of a firmly Democrat or at least left-wing orientation. This is either because on a number of occasions people let their professional impartiality slip to say highly critical things on Trump, Republicans, and their voters, or because it was simply treated as assumed that everyone in the room were of one mind on political matters. Despite presenting a rehearsed non-partisanship in their institutional personae, it did not take long to infer individuals' allegiances. In a political context where partisanship is so influential upon interpretation of sociocultural issues, it was then not surprising when the same discussants showed an amenability towards certain perspectives and struggled to digest the moral logics of others. In one example, the recently installed Biden administration had implemented a raft of new federal priorities, which percolate through all federal agencies and inform the kind of institutional priorities that get encultured across the organisational structure. In a strong break with Trump, the White House announced new federal spending commitments on resilience and adaptation, and a signature commitment titled the 'Justice40 initiative', promising that '40 percent of the overall benefits of certain Federal investments [will] flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened' (EO14008 2021). At the time of fieldwork, no methodology had yet been published to clarify exactly what would be meant by the terms 'marginalised, underserved,

and overburdened'[10], yet they took on a prominent role in institutional language both publicly in panels and seminars, and internally within meetings. These words were invoked frequently as morally self-evident justifications for certain courses of action, and taken implicitly to mean black, indigenous or other marginalised groups generally endemic in US left wing sympathies. When I enquired about what constitutes 'marginalisation' or which populations speakers were referring to however, there was never a clear answer given and sometimes the question caused confusion. As a contrast, the infamous 2012 bill passed by NC Republicans that banned the use of sea level rise forecasts in government planning and communications to protect business interests (Durkin 2018) was invoked frequently as emblematic of the darkest days of the state's past. In sum, despite the good-faith professional commitments of many institutional actors in NC to political neutrality and nonpartisanship, there was an observable difference in how moral propositions travelled with or against the current of actors' own normative assumptions, which were generally progressive. As with the influence of TANs and advocates in global discourse, the ease with which some normative concepts become constitutional and others not is influenced by (and influential upon) their alignment with existing moral codes.

The patterns around indigenous knowledge and 'slots' at the level of global discourse were evident in my fieldwork too; in particular an uneven attention to social or cultural ways of knowing in communities classed as marginalized or quasi-non-Western. Fieldnotes recall my confusion time and again when, describing my research interest in climate vulnerability, 'denialism' and white rural conservatives to university-based interviewees, they would invariably offer me leads concerning black or indigenous communities. I found myself

[10] There is now a complex online tool grading all parts of the country along a series of intersectional indices, the sum of which scores populations a vulnerability ranking which determines their eligibility for assistance. The publication of this tool immediately prompted critique from academic and advocacy sectors because it does not explicitly name race as a determining factor in vulnerability outcomes.

perplexed and frustrated that, despite the wealth of research projects, seminar series, and academic profiles tying climate change to sociocultural questions in North Carolina, these overwhelmingly took people of colour, women, youth, and transgender people as their vessels of the 'social'. My own in-state supervisor – the state climatologist of NC – recommended I shift my focus on environmental inequalities to urban black communities in Raleigh. On another occasion, when colleagues at NCSU won a very significant grant for a project facilitating community engagement with climate, health and equity, the communities approached for participation passed over countless precarious communities like DE in favour of the Gullah Geechee (an African-American ethnic group) on one end of the state and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee on the other.

Initially disheartened by the apparent irrelevance of my own research interests, I began to recognise this confluence of academic knowledge-production with cultural progressivism as indicative of some kind of settlement; a particular alliance of the 'is' and the 'ought' worth acknowledging in its own right. I could not confidently assert why this interest in the qualitative and social was more legible coming from some populations than others, but it showed how a normative 'state of knowledge' – like the epistemic counterpart discussed above – seems to prepare the ground for a certain kind of conclusion. My experiences among NC institutions suggested a strong continuity with the narratives and tropes endemic to global climate discourses: specifically the association between vulnerability, ethics, a sociocultural lens on governance, and postcolonial and progressive ethics. As the following chapters will suggest, the earmarking of sociocultural 'slots' in NC for certain sociological profiles left the available tools for attending to the cultural life of white, conservative communities in this global north context rusting from under-use.

Conclusion

There is nothing discrete about the assemblage I have here called a global climate society, nor anything homogenous. It has no *real* boundaries or codes, and while it is certainly institutionalised, circulated through vocabularies, concepts, and norms, it exists only in an observable perception that it does. It is impossible to claim it is experienced in the same way by any two people, and unlike the constructivist parable of the blind men – each touching a different part of an elephant and imagining a different animal – this story does not presume a realist 'correct answer' at the centre of it all. But this is not the argument being made. In understanding how representations get constructed then entrenched and naturalised, we can see how informal constitutions emerge not by design but as a stabilisation of a status quo between epistemic, normative and political settlements. By excavating the assumptions embedded within common climate discourse, a picture emerges of the perceived and performed dimensions of such a constitution, as well as its *de facto* boundaries at the edge of consensus. Climate change has emerged as an ontologically global phenomenon, productive of a similarly globally oriented politics, and populated by a cast of stereotyped characters each attributed with epistemic and moral natures, and allocated certain rights (for the Global South - climate finance, capacity-building, but also the right to be local, cultural, non-scientific) and responsibilities (for the Global North – decarbonisation, but also to believe the science). Its citizens are those who recognise and tolerate this social contract (even if they labour to contest or modify it), and its territory is only as extensive as its consensus.

The Paris Agreement stepped back from command-and-control governance with a gamble that such a settlement would become the basis for a global climate governmentality, and in many respects it has. As the example of US withdrawal and the uneven attentions of NC's climate institutions has shown however, there are limits to the salience of the Paris proposition, and thus limits to its reach. Despite its planetary aspirations, the global climate

society fails to recognise the full diversity of human experience; whilst the homeless of New York may face a bleaker future under climate change than the nobility of Tonga (Barnett in Orlove et al. 2014), this story and many others will remain invisible as long as participation in the regime is predicated on the pairing of certain geographies with specific moral states, ways of knowing, and political functions. Above all, the use of the society as a metaphor for the transnational climate community is important for its ability not just to illuminate conditions for inclusion and 'citizenship', but, recalling Anderson, for its 'limited and sovereign' nature (1983), and thus its capacity to exclude. Despite regular invocation of 'truth', 'reality' or the 'good' among its participants, understanding these claims as situated rather than universal offers an opportunity to repoliticise climate change, and recast dissent from 'barbarism beyond the gate' to 'politically significant pluralism'. The remainder of the thesis will take place in these putative climate hinterlands, bringing: anthropological specificity to a sociological context prescribed a techno-economic role in managing the climate crisis; an interest in representation and powerlessness to a setting criticised for ignoring its polluter privileges; and a right to incoherence withheld by simplistic theories of denialism flung carelessly from within the walls of the climate society.

Chapter 6 – Searching for denialism in Down East, North Carolina



Introduction

The town of Beaufort is the nearest to Down East (DE), crowning a small peninsula but hidden on most sides among islands that shield its 18th century harbour. It is a short and fast drive north and right over the North River bridge that takes one to the strung out villages of DE, but something about the bridge holds significance as a boundary marker, for those on both sides of it. Beaufort is clean, smart, and historic. Though its residents set up here no earlier than those DE a few miles away, only the slatted facades of Beaufort's federal and Queen Anne style houses report their age and first inhabitants on small plaques beside every door. Information boards abound, buxom Boston ferns dangle over well-maintained wraparound porches, and in the summer months, rows of SUVs nose up to the knick-knack shops barely twice their height along bustling Front Street. I talked to several people from Beaufort and its surroundings, largely because it is the home of many of the

NC State academics, coastal resilience specialists or state agents based at the nearby Duke Marine Lab, NCSU coastal campus or government offices. As such, they are largely transplants from other parts of North Carolina or indeed the country, and join a healthy and growing population of urban retirees, second-homers and Covid-era rusticators who have chosen civilised Beaufort as their home. Despite its relative cosmopolitanism, there is no question that Beaufort remains a generally Republican constituency, but unlike other parts of Carteret County, it was easy to find vocal environmentalists with a particular concern about climate change. Volunteers, community organisers, academics, artists, scientists and government employees spoke frankly to me about the need to adapt Beaufort's historic waterfront for the future, and to each other about how. I talked to a retired man in his 18th century living room, who explained the arduous process of restoring its period features after the devastating damage of Hurricane Florence three years prior. He described teaming up with some well-heeled friends to consult university scientists and mobilise their local clout to petition their local government for a more robust plan on climate resilience. Living so close to Down East brings these concerned residents into fairly close and frequent contact with the county's most established communities; among those I spoke to, this was occasionally a source of confusion, exasperation, and sometimes dismay. 'Everyone depends on the environment there, they claim to love the marshes and the sea,' went a common puzzle, 'and yet they just trash it at the same time.' A teacher working in one of Down East's dwindling primary schools described with disappointment that the regular beach cleanups in the area are peopled near exclusively by Beaufort volunteers with time on their hands. As for Down Easters, he recalled his alarm moving here from Durham, and finding bumper stickers bearing catchphrases like 'if it flies, it dies,' or 'I love to see turtles swimming… with carrots and potatoes' on the windows of school parents' cars.

The greatest contradiction that appeared to puzzle residents about DE was their unwillingness to engage with climate change, for a population so threatened by its effects.

'Nobody really cares about climate change', said the teacher. Children tend to bring conversations from home into school like pollen on a bee's coat. But of climate change there was not a trace among the catchphrases and precocious opinions inherited from parents. He hoped that by cultivating an open conversation about it in class he might just influence by reverse-flow when the kids go home. A government employee who moved to the coast from out of state explained to me that there was a prevailing cognitive dissonance experienced by people here between their values and their interests, one that she had to navigate through delicate communications strategies when trying to introduce an awareness locally. Others tried in their private capacities to 'educate' their neighbours on the need for more active engagement, 'explaining to them that in order for things to stay the same, other things have to change', as one local volunteer put it. Despite a very modest political presence in the county, local liberals organised various activist initiatives to give important social issues a foothold. I spoke to one man who helped set up a local chapter of the Sierra Club in order to boost public support for green initiatives, though he admitted that their membership were 'almost exclusively liberal', that they had very little interaction with conservatives, and actually did not invest in any kind of outreach activities at all. By installing rooftop solar units and driving electric vehicles, he hoped the club members would at least set a good example. By contrast, another Beaufort-based group called Eastern Carteret Collaborative aimed to set up a forum for grassroots conversations that downplayed partisan politics in favour of open, empathetic communication 'across the aisle'. While the member I spoke to reported some success in this effort to 'hold space', it came at the expense of discussing anything specific like climate change. She regretted what she described as a 'defensive posture towards Beaufort' among residents of Down East, which she felt inhibited opportunities for collaboration. 'Clannish' was a word I heard more in my 30th year of life than in all the preceding 29, and usually from exasperated liberals feeling shut out by their strong-willed neighbours across the North River bridge.

These references to scientific consensus, the fluent use of vocabulary like 'resilience', 'adaptation' and 'holding space', and the faith placed in technology all resonated with the epistemic and normative conventions of the global climate society. And remarks about cognitive dissonance, duping hypotheses, and a lack of 'understanding' of the situation, coming in near the start of my fieldwork (it took longer to get established in DE than the universities and Beaufort), were all playing to my expectations. Such attitudes were consistent with liberal analysis of denialism circulating since 2016 (and probably beyond)[11], and reproduced across the English-speaking world. My task – as I understood it then – was to find the *real* reason for this climate silence which, I hypothesised, would be rendered visible by the proper degree of sensitivity, patience, and open-mindedness. While it certainly proved true that there was an apparent absence of speech on the topics that so easily roll off Beaufort tongues however, this silence was – like many things in DE – wayward and inconsistent. At times climate change seemed like something buried, an elephant in the room; other times it seemed never to have come up before now. From some it appeared to stir a passionate response, from others a distant gaze, as though recalling a far-off memory that will soon be forgotten again. On discovering the subject of my research, DE locals occasionally offered pet theories of their own; often unflattering towards their kinspeople, some two dozen hypotheses from 'it's too close to home' to 'it's too distant a concern' painted a still more incoherent picture. Though the sum of these responses added up to one common denominator – the lack of a full-throated engagement with climate change

[11] Admittedly it was largely my dissatisfaction with the deficit model subtexts of much of this language that inspired the PhD in the first place and spurred my curiosity all the way to the coast. This is sometimes visible in my fieldnotes. After one of the many big community events in the Down East calendar for example, I wrote in my notes about a conversation with a volunteer: *'Everyone was nice to me, so many wrinkled ladies had something to say, though they were a mix of Down Easters and recent transplants. A couple of times I would get an analysis from one of the latter about how things work down here. The usual pitying, almost evangelical distain, about small mindedness, (lack of) education and worldly wisdom. One complained of the heels that dug in at the [North River] bridge as though she was making a donkey cross water. I found her language so condescending I was almost personally offended on Down East's behalf.'*

in eastern Carteret County – there was nothing else that they shared, either in terms of that silence's causes, or in terms of the form it takes. Finally, I concluded that even the language for describing the object of my interest was beginning to disintegrate. Having rejected 'denialism' for its asymmetric connotations, apathy, disengagement, ambivalence, and even silence each in some way failed to accommodate the diversity of perspectives I was encountering.

This chapter, contra early research proposals and thesis outlines, offers no comprehensive explanation for why people 'reject' climate change DE, rehydrating parched and lifeless representations like the YPCCC maps with a more nuanced anthropological one. Rather, it describes what I found to be important and salient to the citizens of Down East once I had had the sense to let go of inherited concepts of denialism altogether. By following the trail found over the one sought, the narrative that emerges is one more coherent to a Down East constitution or way-of-being, and thus may or may not resonate or jar with extrinsic constructions of the rising tides. Ultimately, this will also demonstrate that as much as America's 'disengaged' are not taking adequately seriously the 'facts' as understood by the global climate society, the latter can be seen as failing to live up to the 'facts' constitutional to life DE. This mutual incomprehension made itself most visible in two areas: the first is via the cultural and environmental circumstances specific to DE and its unique history. Amidst the strong and distinctive relationships these 'Core sounders' have with place, with time, with a pronounced sense of self and with the concept of change, the tenets of climate change are quickly neutralised and lost, like stormwater in the marshes. The second is through the *political* relationships with actors and ideas arriving in DE and destabilising its lifeways. The interventions of science, government, and climate change's advocates embroil the climate narrative in complex boundary work. Organised according to this categorisation, the chapter shall conclude that scientific climate narratives arrive Down East (if and when indeed they do) on a complex interpretive landscape, in which unique

relationships with environmental change and political representation respectively produce diverse and ambivalent responses. Understood as such, denialism is shown to be a weak concept unable to hold together the breadth of responses to sea level rise in just one small part of North Carolina.

'Salt in the blood' – Place attachment in Down East, NC

Kinship - 'Who do you belong to?'

Gillikin, Willis, Brook, Chadwick, Styron, Fulcher. There are names that start to appear again and again as one drives the hopscotching road through the villages of Down East; on a billboard, on a car dealership, a mailbox, or embossed in a dozen polished headstones huddled by the road in a knee-high concrete pen. Among the earliest settlers who colonised Eastern North Carolina in the 17th century, several spun family lines that trail to the present day, carefully woven into material and oral records of modern Core Sounders. It is, I was told, common to be asked 'who do you belong to' in DE, and this is more than an act of nosiness. Reminiscent of Matei Candea's experience setting up fieldwork in Corsica (2010), introductions appear to be less about establishing an individual identity than situating the acquaintance within a larger social landscape. In Candea's case, it was a name that was conspicuously missing from people's introductions where in Down East the name is the currency, but in both cases what matters is to which part of a known and networked social whole two people *belong* to, and how each thus relates to the other. Belonging is a critical qualification in the villages, none of which are managed under a structured system of municipal government. One's credibility in being able to speak on behalf of the social whole (formally or informally) seems to correspond with the depth of one's roots in that place. In many cases, interlocutors were able to claim a continuous line of ancestors resident

of this or that 300-person village for several hundred years, and so much was often explained to me in the course of an interview or by others before it, like a badge of certification. 'I am from here. I'm the least dingbatter of dingbatters[12]', was the assurance offered by Kayla, the daughter of a dynastic fishing family. A rare socialist, employed by (deeply unpopular) state regulators, it was her place in the DE cosmogeny that secured her legitimacy and, as she put it, prevented her being ostracised as the village witch.

The politics of names enters into all aspects of life in DE. One academic living and working in Beaufort described the difficulties experienced by her child in a DE school, where playground hierarchies were already beginning to emerge based on surnames. Another described assimilation taking considerably longer for her than her husband, whose apprenticeship to a notable local shipbuilder furnished him with a legitimacy by association. Even at the level of local government, it was (if amalgamated scraps of gossip are to be believed) the incumbent commissioner's marriage into 'Down East royalty' that powered his ticket; without it, I was told, 'he'd be changing tires'. In an expression of kinship dynamics ripe for its own anthropological enquiry, an economy of names was a prominent basis for the boundary-work of belonging and exclusion in Down East. Who is speaking seems to matter at least as much as what is being said, and the knowledge of relatedness (that you're talking to 'mom's best friend's granddaughter') offers a ballast to even turbulent political disputes. For the 'dingbatters' of Beaufort, the view from the outside is something altogether more 'clannish'.

Writing from the other, better known Down East, Philip Conkling, the founder of Maine's celebrated Island Institute, has long claimed that there is a special psychological and

[12] 'Dingbatter' is perhaps the most prominent word within a vocabulary of belonging, that articulates explicitly the politics of inclusion and exclusion in DE. It refers to a person 'from off', i.e not from DE. Its use, as I encountered it, could connote a variety of meanings from affection and distain.

cultural discreteness that enfolds island communities. His concept of 'islandness' (Conkling 2007) aptly captures the feeling that Down East is set apart from the rest of the world, and thus produces a social universe that is similarly introspective. 'Islandness' describes a social isolation born of physical isolation, giving a unique intensity to relationships between islanders, and a deep and rich significance to those with the environment. For Core sounders, the sea – ostensibly the cause of their isolation – has traditionally been more road than any of the miles of marsh, scrub, and forest that actually connects them to the rest of America. Before bridge and highway, the routes to neighbouring villages, up and down shallow marsh channels or to Beaufort for supplies were all run by flat-bottomed skiff. These boats were the lifeblood of the sound; built by the same communities they moved and fed. Older villagers still recall summer nights before air conditioning, when the roar of a hundred shrimping boat engines would float off the sound through open windows. Commercial fishing was central to both the subsistence and the economic vitality of the area too, and though it was never wildly lucrative for most, the productivity and quality of the Core Sound and Outer Banks fisheries earned them a reputation that drew in buyers from across the state and beyond.

For many here, the water is not only an economic boon, but a conduit of sociality. In a strung-out collection of villages with next to no restaurants, cafes, or other conventional sites for the crossing of paths, being out on the boat at the weekend sits alongside the porch and the church parking lot as essential places of social exchange. The water is both a barrier to an outside world for the conceptual 'island', but also a channel of communication for the individuals of that island and their collective identities. On a tour of some of the Outer Banks villages, I was invited to join the boatmen of Hatteras for their morning coffee before the day's work. Of course, morning means something different to fishermen, and I rose at 4.45am to the sounds and light of activity already seeping through my waterfront window. I found them perched on a wooden bench like a row of cormorants looking out to sea.

Steeling my wits to navigate the subtle variations in dialect and accent, I spoke to each in turn. Asking if crews from across the region knew each other, one Hatteras native answered yes. They often venture down south to Morehead City, north up the banks, or into the sound towards Oriental, and all throughout the crews are well known to each other, like a village in the sea. But being on the water was also a private and solitary experience they valued deeply. With the exception of one man who was drawn here from Chesapeake Bay by 'marlon and pussy', several described a near-spiritual quality to the open water, where 'you make all the decisions, and every little change you make alters your course. It's absolute independence, where you can shut off the radio when the world gets heavy and be alone.'

These reflections on sacred isolation struck me as profound, being uttered under still dawn light in one of coastal NC's most voraciously developed villages. For all the fluency and resilience of these fishermen to the vagaries of the ocean, any of them would say that it is other, more human forces that challenge them the most. Regulation, overdevelopment, burgeoning tourism and recreational fishing all signal pressure on traditional practices from governments and monied individuals in Raleigh and out-of-state. The second half of this chapter explores the politics of DE encounters with the world beyond the North River bridge in greater detail, but suffice it to say that the flow of retirees, holiday-makers and second-homers to Core Sound has dramatically altered the political economy of the area, and destabilised the lifeways of its residents.

Peter, whose invitation brought me to the dock, is the son of Hatteras's first charter fisherman, and though he spent his life taking paying clients out on his boat, he has described with dismay the choking effect that recreational fishing has had on his neighbours and friends. 'Already, homes are being built on what was once a place to mend nets, sell fish, and store crab pots', Peter wrote in an article titled 'Thoughts on watching a village die', following the failed attempt to place a moratorium on local development. 'Now there are complaints from the new owners about the smell of fishing. When you have a

place where, if you actually work and make your living there you cannot afford to live there, then you have a strange place indeed'. As prices have continued to rise on local properties, some villagers have given up and left for other towns and cities, while others have had to subsidise their earnings by taking on charter work with recreational clients. These changes have struck the fishing industry like a storm front, but the effects on the community were everywhere to be seen among my fieldnotes and interactions, rushing into every gully and inlet of daily life:

In a pizza restaurant, Alice contemplates the long arc of her community, its contract with the ocean, and steady disappearance. Her words are bitter with loss as she describes the young residents leaving the community behind for jobs in Raleigh and beyond; an ebb without flow. Between rising tides and dwindling fleets, she says parents in Down East must watch as their children leave their history behind.

In a county board meeting, a commissioner wistfully holds forth about the blight of opioid addiction in the county. Studiously avoiding mention of systemic causes or indeed the board's own political powers in tackling the crisis, he invokes a traditional conservative bouquet of failed parenting, federal corruption, and open borders as the true culprits. The meeting adjourns without motion.

In NCSU's coastal marine lab, a Sea Grant employee walks me past flasks of bubbling green water with a pleasant vegetal smell, tanks full of frilly fish, and an instructor and his students gathered around trays of clams with blobby white penises protruding from their brittle calcium lips. They are researching new pathways for marine industry so that communities historically reliant on commercial fishing can continue to make money from coastal resources, and young people can maintain their traditional affiliation. 'The alternative', she says squarely, 'is depression and drugs'.

On the streets of Beaufort, model boats are painted, varnished and propped up on trestles for the annual wooden boat show. The docks are a row of nodding schooners, sails elegantly stowed like

folded wings. I wander between traditional knot-tying demonstrations and waxed open-top cars, and note with confusion that none of the boats (or indeed boatmen) on display look like they have ever seen a day of graft. Have the old ways of Down East gone up in the world, I wonder. Are these merely smartened up versions of the scuffed working boats, like so many material culture studies of everyday tools and their ornamented and gracile reproductions reserved for ceremonial purposes? Or are these Beaufort's wealthy retirees, playing the part of the salt-seasoned fisherman?

On the dock in Hatteras village, I talk to the perched boatmen, white goggles stencilled onto their faces from long sunny days behind sunglasses. One by one they trail away as their charter families turn up, until I am left alone on the boards.

Taken together, these recorded moments paint a picture of compound crises. Core sounders' feelings on the coming and going of physical land appears enfolded in a philosophy of acceptance of the ocean's intractable ways, whether or not they consider SLR to be occurring, and to what degree anthropogenically. The erosion of social ground is felt much more acutely, as they struggle to keep their footing on an economic and political landscape that has changed rapidly. Today, there are roads in Down East and the Outer Banks. Highway 70 threads the ruffled coastline like a curtain pole, and Core sounders need more or less half an hour to pull up their trucks at Lowes in Morehead City, but many still identify a feeling of estrangement from life west of the North River bridge. 'We still feel like bankers,' Alice told me on a trip to the Outer Banks. Her ancestors fell back to the mainland after Shackleford banks and Portsmouth Island became uninhabitable, but she thinks of her generation as having inherited their place as the front line. To her, the barrier islands and the open ocean feel a great deal closer than anything the highway can take her to, not least because it seems like every time something 'from off' arrives in DE, something cherished seems to be taken away. As Foley et al. (2023) observe, 'Islandness,' is experienced and constructed as various different things, but a crucial one is 'otherness,' as in feelings by

islanders of structural separation from that which surrounds them. This certainly rings true of Down East in relation not to water, but just about everything else.

Place - 'Holding on while letting go'

The Core Sound landscape was made by the sea and is uniquely adapted to its capricious behaviours. The Outer Banks - 200 miles of barrier islands and spits that encase the NC coastline – drift over time, flailing left and right like an inverse river. The islands themselves are naturally held together by an astonishingly complex ecosystem of dune-building sea oats and the maritime forests that shelter behind them, but they are effectively migratory. And on the mainland, miles of amphibious marshlands neutralise the beating waves, and twice daily welcome saltwater in via its countless waterways. Driving through the Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge for the first time during a king tide, I was bewildered to find the road flanked by water – one horizon to the other – where the map had promised land (see figure 10). This landscape can withstand the ocean's rough treatment to a degree, even surviving spells like this of total briny submersion, but like the barrier islands, they survive by adapting. As seas rise and fall, marshes migrate up and down, always making their home where land and water meet. In recent times, it has been the building of roads, bulwarks, and other impermeable backstops that has barred many marshlands' flight to higher ground, trapping them against the rising tides where they drown.



Figure 10 - The flooded road to Cedar Island during a king tide. The surrounding water is usually dry land.

Bankers too are adapted to a life among storms. Whether it is hurricanes barrelling across the Atlantic, or winter nor'easters, they surge and howl through people's stories, both contemporary and from the cracked voices of oral archives. I myself became accustomed to watching cumulonimbus clouds blossom slowly over still fields of cordgrass on summer afternoons, only to collapse in violent, flashing torrents by nightfall. But among the dynastic families of Down East, stories of past storms assume the status of folk knowledge, exchanged and revisited collectively as if tapped from a singular ancestral experience. A fisherman from Hatteras village recounted a past I heard in various versions: when the hurricanes hit, his family would open the doors and windows of their bungalow to let the water in, lest the house float off its moors and get carried into the sound. When it was all over, they would pull a plug out of the living room floor, the water flowed out, and 'life was good' . New stories wash in with every inundation, however, creating an ever-shifting landscape of narrative drama as dynamic as the physical one. One fisherman recalled just that year watching from his window as green water came down the street, 'not the brown

water out of the sound the green water out of the ocean' (Ori). For Outer Banks communities especially, the threats come from every direction. During Dorian, a powerful hurricane that in 2019 ran up the barrier islands like a zip, it was not the high winds on the notorious 'right' side of the storm that caused the most damage, but those returning southwest like a whip of the tail as Dorian moved on. Travelling down Pamlico sound, these 100mph winds herded its vast waters, kettled between islands and mainland, onto the Outer Banks. Twice I was told stories of Inner Banks residents in Harkers Island or Swanquarter calling friends in Ocracoke (an Outer Banks town) and warning them ominously to 'get ready, 'cos all the water's disappeared over here' (Ori).

Life in coastal NC is characterised by its dynamic, unpredictable, and dangerous environment. As two local residents expressed it in a biography of the community, 'for this place and these people, change has always, *always* been the constant' (Garrity-Blake and Amspacher 2017: 113, emphasis in original). Sudden and radical topographical changes are held onto in shared memories and woven into local history, such as the hurricane of 1899 that washed much of the island of Shackleford Banks into the ocean, forcing its 500-strong community of Diamond City to almost entirely disintegrate within just 3 years, or the storm of 1933 which blew a new inlet through the same island, severing it from Core Banks. The landscape's different historic configurations are pinned in collective memory to particular eras and the associated condition of the community (Harrison 2004). As such it acts as a very tangible vessel for engaging with the sound's past; its social transformations bound to those of its topography.

It is notable that claims by scientists or advocates about climate change and sea level rise are here interpreted against an understanding that things have always changed. In several conversations I had with residents, an otherwise amenable appraisal of the science of climate change was coloured sceptical by this deep perception. On one occasion I spoke with a marine scientist who grew up fishing in Down East. He noted that major storms

'reset the landscape', such that people grow accustomed to significant changes and simultaneously *less* able to discern more incremental ones. One example of this might be visible to an observer following US highway 70 between the villages of Davis and Stacy (see figure 11). On the inland side, a vast grove of what looks like thousands of sun-bleached bones protrude needle-like from the ground. They are trees. Erect, candid, yet utterly lifeless; as though death surprised them in the act of being a forest. This is what coastal ecologists call a 'ghost forest', and is caused when the water table becomes saturated with salt, poisoning whole woodland ecosystems where they stand. Though scientists are unequivocal that these slow-grown graveyards are evidence of sea level rise, there is less consensus locally. Some, offered the term 'ghost forest' stared blankly, or held the fussy 'dingbatter word' limply ('we call them dead trees'). Others, if they had even noticed the change, chose from a range of folk theories from invading pine beetles to salty overwash from the successive storms. As the local marine scientist had described, something slow and systematic appeared to disguise itself here as something piecemeal and random, because explosive change events are that much more visible.



Figure 11 - Ghost forests visible from Highway 70

Nevertheless, 'change' of some sort is something nearly all my informants recognised and could speak at length about. Whether it was the frequency and intensity of storms, or the eery 'sunny day flooding' increasingly spilling into coastal lawns under still, clear skies, there was little reticence about such observations. These usually came with a story of past floods that broke records of family memory: 'my daddy always told me that the tide never come past this tree. "Don't worry about it" you know, all the storms he's ever experienced never went past that cedar tree. With Florence, the water came at least to the tree, way past the house and back to the woods.' (Rachel) Others would similarly point to landmarks for an emphasis only salient to those with an intimate familiarity with the place. It was likewise frequently said of fishermen that they, better than anyone, could 'read' the changes in their nets. The Outer Banks divide the Atlantic fisheries into a Northern and Southern stock where they point their sandy, wave-sharpened elbows out to sea, putting banker communities at the junction of an astonishing variety of species. Lately, however, that invisible boundary has begun to move north as the water warms, forcing local fleets to

follow. Academics and resilience specialists alike talked with equal parts reverence towards fishers' deep ecological knowledge, and a wistfulness for the climate allies they could be.

To their frustration however, merely seeing change rarely appeared to make automatic advocates of the seer, because what change means and how people understand their own agency in the face of it is different Down East. A recurring observation I made was a tendency to downplay self-efficacy in resisting extrinsic forces (on matters internal to the community, people were on the contrary quite obstinate to change). Among fishermen, for example, changes like those described above are understood in the context of the ocean's immeasurable unknowability. I was told that natural cycles arguments against the scientific narrative of climate change (i.e, this has all happened before and eventually it will change again) appealed to fishing communities because it reflects their own experience of nature, as something whose patterns can be seen but whose motives are ever mysterious: 'the ocean's gonna do what it wants to do'. The deep knowledge and capability of the watermen of Core Sound is thus exercised against a backdrop of professional – even ontological – humility, in which one's efforts succeed or fail at the whim of a force larger than themselves. In a strongly religious community, there are parallels in the ways that people talked about God, offering up prayer freely and frequently to friends and neighbours after a tragedy as a caring but ultimately limited expression of agency in the face of divine providence.

This perception of diminished self-efficacy was not a resignation to passive victimhood, however, but a pragmatic view on which changes can be averted through the expenditure of energy and which cannot. In a turn of phrase I have come to find deeply pertinent for the DE story, Core Sounders are described as 'holding on while letting go'; working tenaciously to survive, but with an acute sensitivity to what is beyond one's power (Alice). This appeared to me with great clarity on two occasions, one as a message of wisdom, one of doom. Flying over the northeast states at the start of my year, I could see from my window seat the endless expanse of New York's Fire Island, floating in the water like a thin strip of

torn paper. Beyond, the interminable ocean merged into the sky, and I was overwhelmed by the precarity and powerlessness of these islands against the great water (See figure 12). This, I realised before even setting foot in North Carolina, was surely understood at a most profound level by any community making their life on the water. The second occasion was whilst volunteering at the annual Shrimp Fry festival on Harkers Island, at which hundreds of local residents arrived to enjoy fresh seafood and entertainments. Clearing the vast bins at the end of the event and seeing the extraordinary quantities of plastic and Styrofoam wasted after their brief careers carrying a hot dog or slice of cake, I was consumed by the smallness of all the environmental policy progress made in my own island country when this was what recycling looked like in one of the world's largest economies. Where the significance of the first realisation to understanding Core Sounders' relationship with a changing climate hit me immediately, this second took much longer. A couple of times, interviewees who belong to the community but have a life outside of it reflected that people do not waste time thinking about things they cannot change. One of them told me, 'It feels big, right? Like, in Portland [Oregon], you see everybody's recycling, and lots of people are carrying canvas bags and driving electric vehicles. And it's kind of like, part of the culture. You see a lot of other people doing it. You feel like, alright, we can do this, because we're all doing it. Down here, nobody's doing it.' Reflecting on this, I realised that my own feelings in observing the total absence of motivation or infrastructure for recycling or curbing carbon emissions were of disempowerment and hopelessness; that this is, after all, a problem perhaps too big to solve.

Both of these realisations thus articulated a kind of fatalism that helped me to understand the feelings of many Core Sounders regarding change. In one, the deep cultural knowledge that 'ocean's gonna do what it wants', rehearsed in every story and fishing trip, entrenches the notion that this environment is to be endured, not reasoned with. In the other, the

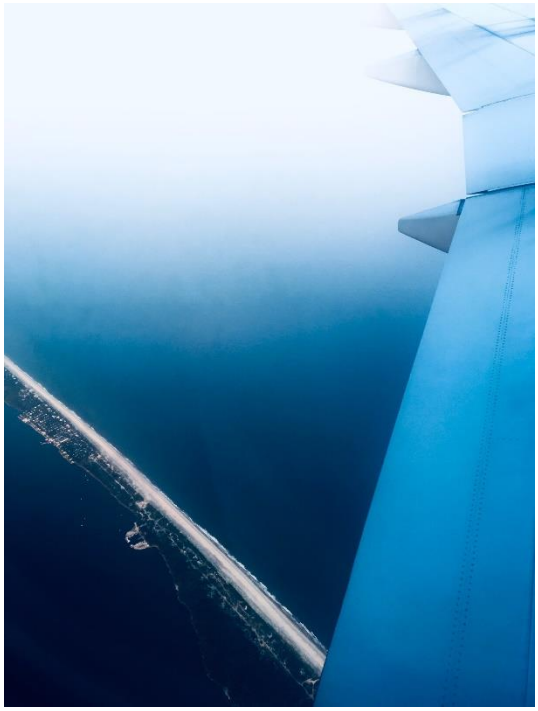


Figure 12 - View of vulnerable Fire island

feasibility of climate action itself appears tied to a self-fulfilling performativity, as the more (or less) people are seen enacting the environment's changeability, the more (or less) easily the environment is imagined as itself changeable. Even if climate change is understood as global, and anthropogenic, and happening now, the scale of the problem is, in an ironically circular way, blown up beyond fixability, and the possibility of effective action diminished by the very fact that so little is visibly being done.

Time - 'I'll be covered in Penny weed by then'

Over the course of fieldwork, an increasingly clear discrepancy between how Down East residents and climate scientists handled change was the concept of time. Central to the scientific understanding of climate change is trends; past trajectories and present observations are extrapolated to enable a modelling of future developments, either positive or negative. The future thus holds inextricable significance within a scientific ontology of environmental change. By contrast, among local perspectives the past was a rich and fruitful

domain for contemplation, and change was recognised as a departure from old ways in the present. Storms, as points of great rupture, are moments of cosmic ordering. 'These storms mark time, dividing life into "before" and "after." Fishermen say, "the blue crabs have never been the same since Floyd"… A realtor might shake her head and say, "those were pre-Isabel prices." Life on the coast is not only affected but transformed by the weather.' (Garrity-Blake and Willis Amspacher 2018: 4). Rarely, however, did thought of changes extend into the speculative future, nor weather contemplated beyond 'the next storm', a recurring phrase that functioned as a symbolic landmark for assessing current preparedness. I had been initially surprised by people's *lack* of reticence about things having visibly shifted in their lifetimes, as I had been led to expect otherwise, but this was perhaps because those changes are talked about not as part of trends that will continue beyond the present, but as isolated events, like the flipping of switches. Indeed, while illuminated as always with evocative stories, unvarnished clarity and a characteristically acerbic humour, reflections on the past and its changes – however traumatic – for the most part were accompanied by neither fretting nor dread, as though the changes were contained within the past. It was later that the absence of the future in our conversations became a recognisable pattern, indicative of a unique relationship with time and change.

Much is made in Down East of a culture of stoicism, by its narrators both inside the community and out. Residents have had to endure much, and like salt-blasted sea oats, have found fortitude in deep roots and adaptability. A deep historic consciousness of this fact has produced a frontier mythology that provided the backdrop to many conversations. The harsh conditions, it was often suggested, had cultivated a hardiness of character over the communities' long life on the water's edge. 'Salt in the blood' and other naturalising rhetoric would paint a picture of coevolution of place and people, each belonging to the other. But this narrative of endurance seemed to be, at least historically, a tool for coping as much as a rhetorical exercise in identity building. Down East's isolation and its exposure

has, over time, taught its residents 'hard-earned lessons of self-sufficiency' (Garrity-Blake and Willis Amspacher 2017), and oral histories of past storms are populated with outlandish stories of improvised adaptations to the loss of electricity or getting stranded on this or that island. In a legend that typifies both bankers' characteristic dryness and their legacy of stoicism, a man took his fishing boat out during the storm of 1933 that would kill him, claiming 'you can't eat bad weather' (ibid: 43). Though it didn't serve this fisherman well, his actions illustrated juxtaposing truths: the folly of standing up to the forces of nature, but also the common view that 'getting on with it' is the only reasonable way to survive in such a capricious environment. It was suggested to me by a man from Atlantic that this legacy had become something of a burden to Core Sounders, who felt a pressure to live up to the stoic heroism of the past and thus might not admit to themselves when their situation was beyond repair, or required action. Whether or not this was true, a close attention to history has clearly supported a widespread perception that cycles of crisis are a feature of normal time, and the upheavals of responding to them simply the 'price of paradise.'

A still more dramatic thesis is that disruption, suffering, and even trauma have come to play a defining role in expressions of self-identity. I was constantly aware, over the year of my fieldwork, of the presence of tragedy in the community. The ravages of Covid19, the scars of recent hurricanes, a missing person found deceased in an inlet etc. These appeared to be felt acutely and collectively by local people, memorialised in long tributes on the community Facebook page and typically accompanied by images of a setting sun. Catching up with Alice after a short trip away, I learned that 4 local boys and 4 adults had recently died when their small aircraft crashed on the way back from a nearby duck-hunting trip. The incident shook all the villages of Down East profoundly. For months, roadside lampposts wore blue ribbons of remembrance, and the many fractured church communities bore a common message on their parking lot billboards: 'Down East Strong.'

As I shall discuss more later, public discourse in Down East is notoriously agonistic, but in moments of collective strife, that disunity reliably gives way to remarkable displays of solidarity. 'We're at our best', Alice heaved with a solemn pride, 'when things are at their worst.'

In both the above cases, time figures itself as an ongoing encounter with – or else anticipation of – crisis. The regularity of jeopardy seems to inspire or necessitate swift and pragmatic reaction, while social ties and identity are rehearsed and reified in regular cycles of tragedy. When crisis is a constant state, change becomes easily imagined less as a transition from one time to another, and more as the ongoing present in an environment that is, at an ontological level, changeable. A preacher opens a county government meeting with prayers and reflections on 6 years of hardship – 'Florence, the pandemic, and the plane crash'; a summer fete is told by the event's guest speaker – a local conservative radio host – that 'tragedy, stoicism, survival are the foundations of this place.' Core Sounders are routinely reminded even by their own language that what they are doing is surviving, and the future is just the out-of-frame prize won by the heroic fortitude of the present. Never guaranteed, the future is a contested time always in the making. Meanwhile, each crisis endured today adds a new layer to a long and well-remembered archive of shared adversity in the past; a deep history of near constant imminence.

What change can mean, even when acknowledged, is circumscribed by available ways of making sense of life. Perhaps the absence of 'the future' in the conversations I witnessed was in part due to its lack of practical importance beyond being earned by present action. There was perhaps one exception to this, where a trauma had prompted people to think about their situation more long term: Hurricane Florence. Less than three years before my arrival in North Carolina, Hurricane Florence lashed its northeast arms over Cape Lookout and inland as far as New Bern in what was to be one of the most devastating storms ever to hit Carteret County. While the community was well used to storm surges, for many there was

a sense that this event had breached psychological defences, and inflicted lasting wounds. I spoke to one woman from another of Down East's oldest families, who described the harrowing experience of being holed up in her house with her partner, parents, two dogs and three cats while Florence consumed Harkers Island. Having torn off part of her roof, the hurricane had slowed to a category 1 storm and proceeded to crawl glacially overland, pouring 30 inches of rain into her home. Barely a house on the island escaped major damage, repairs took years, and many residents were left traumatised by the experience. 'Florence never went away,' she told me; she meant the interminable rain, but it was a versatile statement. Her grandparents had been part of the Diamond City generation that left Shackleford Banks; Hurricane Bonnie 'took a can opener to the roof of my mom's trailer home' in 1998, yet there was a sense that 'Florence completely changed the conversation.' Several residents described feelings of vulnerability that previously they had not known, and some admitted that, after their experiences of Florence, they would hesitate to remain in the event of another storm of that magnitude.

In Florence was a confronting episode that forced the ineffable future into view; what many residents saw was something not just uncertain, but finite. For a lot of people this compelled a response beyond stoicism. Many households have moved inland since 2018, others have spent their savings elevating their homes. For Alice, who always said what others in Down East did not, this manifested itself in redoubled efforts to enlist the expertise and interest of researchers and practitioners to find solutions. She hosted regular full day meetings on the coast, enlisting academics and resilience specialists from across North Carolina in Down East's plight with characteristic energy. In long, emotive introductions, she spoke often as the only local resident present, and the recurring catchphrase she proffered to visiting researchers – 'buying time' – was what she identified as the best result of these institutional collaborations. Confronted with the inevitability of an end to the future, all she feels she can do is attempt to extend it a little.

For others perhaps less inclined to argue with fate than Alice, this confrontation resulted in another common response: pushing doom to the *deep* future. One day, accompanying her on a trip to Ocracoke, I was able to watch Alice do the porch rounds. Speaking eye to eye with an old friend (she on the porch, he on the ground) I watched as they 'caught up' via a ping pong of names and the smallest shreds of news and gossip. This done, she struck up a conversation about sea level rise as she often did as a favour to me. The friend mumbled a few vague things and then, upbeat, said 'well I'll be covered in Pennyweed[13] by that time anyway' Alice found this hilarious, but later told me the stance was common here. I myself heard others call sea level rise a problem for their grandchildren, or something that will appear long after they have died. If great storms organise time, climate change seems to represent the greatest storm of all, and belong to a perennial future. Later that day, as we drove up highway 12 surrounded only by sand, water, and a lacework of dune plants, I wondered aloud to Alice whether relegating the end of the community to a horizon beyond death makes it somehow psychologically easier to live with. She said very much so, adding that the changes endured by the community through overdevelopment and economic decline are enough of a trauma to contend with on their own, so the additional prospect that they might lose the land altogether is simply too much to bear contemplating. In that moment the Core Sounders reminded me of their own marshlands; catching a glimpse of the concrete bulwark ahead, what is there to be gained by dwelling on what cannot be changed?

Florence *was* ever-present during fieldwork, but the open reflections on tenability of life in the future were brief, occasional, and often only implied. Certainly there was no hand-wringing to be seen in these conversations. More common was the diffuse notion that Florence had 'changed things' at a deeper level of collective thinking, even while on the

[13] Pennyweed is the local term for pennywort, a ground-hugging plant that grows on sand dunes.

surface most of my conversations were populated with unemotional reflections and/or jokes like on the porch in Ocracoke. The contrast between the grave prognosis for Down East and the jokey style of so many of my conversations reminded me of Luisa Passerini's confounding encounters with the 'silences and jokes' of Italian peasants she was interviewing about memories of life under fascism. Their irreverence, as well as their preoccupation with mundane routines of domestic life and indifference to the grand narrative of fascism as academic representations knew it, challenged Passerini to revise her 'inherited conceptions of history' (1979). Transposing these observations to the NC context, I was likewise left asking what purpose flogging science's own inherited conceptions of the future would serve, an ineffable time that cannot be altered or disappeared by staring it in the eye or even discussing it. Responses to Florence offered the first discernible evidence that people had been moved to think about the future of the banks communities and their places in them. That these intimations continued to be so implicit though suggested to me that these apparent 'silences' surrounding the future – such an obvious object of concern for institutional actors interacting with the coast – were less absences of thought, interest, or speech, than a presence of something meaningful yet hard for those outsiders to decode. Evaluating these meaningful absences in the context of Core Sounders' much narrated relationships with their own landscapes shows that change and time cannot be evaluated by the same ontological standards as scientific discourse, and an endemic philosophy of fatalist pragmatism and circumscribed self-efficacy gives 'action' radically different stakes. The 'change' conversation here is not the one held in Raleigh, or New York, or the UN, where time is understood as a diminishing resource to be spent wisely on fixing and mitigating. Change here, if you are to engage with it, is something that will happen *to* you. It portends irreversible decline and disintegration of the community. People here largely do not fight those forces; they ride them out, open the doors and let the floods in.

Politics and relationality with people and ideas 'from off'

On 11th May, 2022, two houses fell into the ocean in the Outer Banks community of Rodanthe, after storm waves undermined their foundations. A video of one of the collapses – showing the building teetering on its spidery wooden stilts before being launched boat-like into the grey waves – made international headlines. It felt to me like an iconic moment, symbolising with total visibility all the loss, fragility, and inexorability that I felt had been just beneath the surface of every conversation. In the days that followed I was at the Oysterhouse for a run of interviews, and I thought about how to handle the subject sympathetically. To my surprise, sympathy was in low demand as person after person scoffed at the idiocy of the dingbatters who built on the beach. 'No old timer would be stupid enough to build on the oceanside; you fish on the oceanside, build your house on the soundside, everyone knows that' railed one, 'There's World War II bunkers that were built 33 yards inland which are now 500 yards out to sea. If that's happened in 80 years what did they think was gonna happen to their beachfront properties?' asked another. Various people expressed bemusement that it was the oceanview land that brought in the most money when once this was considered the lowest grade real estate, and time and again, the parable of the man who built his house on the sand came up to lend Biblical emphasis to the point.

Regardless how much Core Sounders may want to avoid change, change has certainly come to them, from the ocean but also from the land. People across Eastern US have long chosen to holiday on the NC coast, for its endless beaches, good fishing, and hot weather. Friends in Raleigh were full of fondness for the childhood memories visiting the Crystal Coast, where a local in his 60s told me the population of the county had grown some 300-400% in his lifetime. Recently however, that growth had accelerated statewide. Drawn by a boom in jobs (with Google and Apple both building east coast campuses in the Research Triangle)

that has outpaced changes to the cost of living, and the allure of the sparse South during the pandemic, net migration to North Carolina in the 2020s has averaged about 100,000 a year (1.1% against the national average of 0.1% (US Census Bureau 2024)). Among these a substantial number have been retirees moving to the coast, with 2000 of the state's 20,000 senior migrants of 2021 settling in the beach town of Wilmington alone. In Down East, evidence of the holiday home property boom is everywhere, and particularly visible because the 2-4 storey pastel-coloured houses tower over the bungalows and squat live oaks that have defined the skyline for generations. Residents have agonised for some years over how to respond to rampant development, what good development even means, and whose opinions on these issues matter (Boucquey et al. 2012). Various attempts have been launched to halt or steer the growth. In 2006 a group of residents presented a proposal to the county government – accompanied by a short film celebrating the culture and community of the area – in which they requested a temporary moratorium on new developments while the community decided how to proceed. The proposal was rejected, however. Another project sought to establish the Down East villages as part of a national scenic byway running to the top of the Outer Banks. Presenting DE as an area of outstanding cultural and environmental integrity would, it was hoped, cultivate a more sensitive kind of tourism that reinforced existing traditions and lifestyles instead of competing with them.

At root, DE's defencelessness against wanton development stems from the fact that they are unincorporated. This means that, where most communities are represented by a county government *and* a municipal government, DE has only the former, meaning they lack all but the most essential services, and crucially no zoning restrictions that would regulate building. This has historically served the widespread preference among Core sounders to be free from government oversight and outside intrusions, but for many, this has now backfired. 'Beaufort looks pretty much the same as when I was a kid', a middle-aged resident

told me casting his eyes over the 18th century facades. 'meanwhile Harkers Island is unrecognisable'. And this is largely down to the fact that residents of Beaufort, as part of a municipality, can place restrictions on land use where unincorporated areas cannot. Other unincorporated areas such as Ocracoke have been able to secure planning ordinances restricting the height of buildings by collaborating with the county government, but this relies on the board being amenable to such measures (which clearly they were not in the moratorium case) and the community being able to speak with one voice. Moreover, as Alice observed, Ocracoke's remote location (on the tip of a barrier island) and vulnerability to storms makes settling there a test of mettle that soon exposes the non-committed. 'You move to Ocracoke, you buy Ocracoke'. DE's attachment to the continent makes it more accessible to what she regards as a lower calibre of investor. As a result, DE residents find themselves stuck on this path of unchecked growth, too late to incorporate because of the political clout developers would have over any new government, and the 'will of the community' itself more murky than ever because of the quantity of pro-development settlers who have moved in. In response, many long-term residents in communities further along the development process like Hatteras must simply adapt as they can, incorporating a mix of recreational and commercial fishing jobs, or working in one of the handful of restaurants that alternate open hours because so few staff can afford to live nearby.

These compounding threats to the stability of life in DE were a constant preoccupation for many of the residents I got to know, and in many ways presented a more tangible and tractable concern than the abstractions of sea level rise. Because of the clear exacerbating effects of clearing marshlands and other permeable landscapes on flood defence, overdevelopment also had the effect of wicking much of the political energy and public concern that might have found a home in other causal issues otherwise. Instead, a ready culprit for many emerging environmental problems presented itself in poorly built villas trying to tame the wondering dunes and ultimately spreading their carcasses across the

coastline. The hubris of the Rodanthe beach home builders demonstrated to many of my informants yet again that nothing good comes 'from off'.

Republicanism and politics

Much about DE's relationship with the climate narrative has, as we have seen, concerned a complex interweaving of circumstances particular to this community; from the unique dynamism of the landscape to the legacy of endurance, isolation, and contemporary threats to cultural integrity. In other ways however, DE is more recognisably part of a nationwide story of political identity construction. It is necessary to talk briefly about the significance of Republicanism as an influence on local imaginaries of climate change, as partisan language plays a huge role in the construction of public life, and however Core sounders may feel, they are not hermetically cut off from national discourses.

Carteret County is a deeply conservative constituency. As several informants were swift to note, this was not always the case, and among past Democrat members of state government, the coast and its fisheries once held much greater clout and visibility. In 2021 however, the flags mounted over eave and lawn coded a different story: US for patriotism, Ukrainian for anti-Communism, Confederate for any number of reasons including southern libertarianism, and Trump 2020, as a tribute to that brand of antipathy towards an imagined establishment. Naturally, such discourses with a national or even international circulation, like the climate change narrative, come with a homogenisation of talking points. On my long drives to the coast, I often flicked through radio stations upon entering Carteret County until I heard indignant male voices, and there was able to hear how local broadcasters were responding to current events. From Roe v Wade to the Inflation Reduction Act, it was invariably an echo of the arguments and values disseminated by indignant male voices on national outlets. Yet whilst hardline analyses like this clearly did circulate in DE, nobody I spoke to appeared to adopt them wholesale, but rather

incorporated such arguments and sensibilities within more nuanced and often ambivalent positions. For one thing, conservativism here means many things. 'There's people who are conservative because their parents and grandparents were, there's the emboldened MAGA crowd, there's social conservatism from the church crowd, there's the "don't tell me what to do" libertarians…' someone explained. Or, as someone else put it succinctly 'sometimes it's a business thing, sometimes it's a Jesus thing'. None speaks for the other, and many are not Republicans. Even in just 30 miles of coastline, party lines fail to contain the breadth of political identities.

What was clear, however, was that changes in the style of mainstream political discourse over recent years had affected how people communicate with one another, and the sensitivity of typical 'culture war' topics like mask-wearing or climate change. I spent a long and raucous afternoon in a fish tackle shop, chatting with the family who own it. What they told me, and the people of Straits confirmed, was that the tackle shop acted as more than an aid to local fishing; it was a stopping off point for catching up on news and gossip. The tatty sofa I was sitting on (and the porch swing out front in warmer months) was a 'magnet' for passersby who came to trade in information, stories, and many, many jokes. Occasionally too there were disagreements, as one of them told me: 'We've had some arguments here in the store. I mean, we used to have them with her [his wife's] father and her grandfather and stuff, and we had a county commissioner that lived right down the road from us, and we had other guys that would come in and they would be on the other side, but at that time we could have a hard discussion, holler, scream, but when you walk out that door, you're shaking hands, you're buddy buddies.' Now, they felt, disagreements had become more acrimonious and less quick to resolve. DE, despite its lack of spaces for dense intersocial encounters, has a very active Facebook community, and it was a common observation that people go further, louder, and meaner in that forum than face-to-face encounters generally would, and this only got worse during the pandemic. The regulating

effect of close kinship networks weakened in online communication, and the effect for some of my discussants was a greater reticence about contentious issues or even simply politics with neighbours and acquaintances. People attributed this change to various things from social media, to the pandemic, to Donald Trump. But the effect was a silencing; a simultaneous entrenching of political divisions and a depoliticization of discourse on certain topics as people try to avoid conflict situations.

Science and knowledge politics

Another question fundamental to the reception of the climate narrative is the status of scientific knowledge Down East. Complaints and concerns are voiced constantly among scientists and climate advocates that rural communities politicise science, do not trust expertise, or are selective in their scepticism ('they don't trust it until someone gets cancer, then they want the best science they can get' was a complaint I heard in various forms), but viewed through the lens of local history, scientific narratives have never arrived (and it is always an arrival, from outside) free from politics. The earliest instance of encounter with an institutional Other relayed to me was the legendary burning of the Park Service office. When the National Park Service, acting on the advice of marine scientists and their own cost-benefit calculations, took the decision to designate Cape Lookout a protected area, it meant the dismantling of local residents' beach fishing huts on the island. Core sounders (who take their traditions extremely seriously, generally regard themselves as sustainable users of natural resources, and loathe being told what to do) were incensed, and one night communicated their displeasure by burning down the offices.

From that near-mythic event on, the Park Service has been the object of an intergenerational grudge, but more generally, references by residents to interactions with scientists have near exclusively focused on restrictions placed on local lifeways in the name of outside expertise. Despite the many conscientious efforts of academics, state agencies,

and foundations to develop productive, trusting relationships with public communities, I was surprised to find that often, Core sounders reported having interacted with or even heard of almost none of them. The exception to this was regulators, about whom a sizeable majority appeared by contrast to hold strong opinions. The Division for Marine Fisheries (DMF) building, whose tinted windows stare across the sound from Morehead City's campus of university, government, and civic institutions, is responsible for overseeing and managing access to the state's fish stocks and other marine resources; fishers must regularly apply for licenses from this bureaucratic agency, and adhere to its often snap decisions to open or close the season for this or that species. This forced deference rankles sorely for an economic community proud of its unrivalled depth of expertise on the ways and patterns of ocean ecology. 'Voodoo science', one fisherman called the regulatory knowledge-base in a remarkable expression of boundary work that situated regulatory science in the realm of superstition and speculation, and distanced it from the legitimate science of his own embodied knowledge. He told a story of a case he was involved in bringing against the National Marine Fisheries Service for closing the mackerel season early. At one point, he described with a dramatic pause, the Federal Court judge turned to the government scientists and asked 'tell me sir, just how many fish are there in the sea?'. This he regarded as being exemplary of the scientific conceit of countability as opposite to the deep intuition of fishermen drawing on subtle knowledge of natural cycles, weather, and generations of experience. Many coastal residents holding an affiliation with the water had ready stories of gormless inspectors bearing misinformed claims about low stocks, when if you just go to the correct side of Oregon Inlet you'll be 'catching them on the beach'. This mutual dismissiveness of one another's illegitimate folk science was elegantly summarised in the mediation challenges facing Kayla, the aforementioned DMF employee from a long line of fishers. She described herself as a constant knowledge ambassador for scientists and for locals. 'Raleigh and Down East don't understand each other… Fishermen say to me, "we're

on the water every day, they don't understand it like we do", and I say "you're right, but you don't understand science the way they do either"'.

For a practice as central to local lifeways to be suppressed by outside agents is galling for many residents, but when driven by what they regarded as misguided claims, these restrictions are taken to be the height of government overreach, jeopardising relations with all actors representing state-sponsored science. The effect is still more potent when the issues at stake assume a more explicitly normative character. The research in marine ecology and resource management being deployed for regulatory purposes has also been taken as an evidence-base by more advocacy-oriented groups looking to promote conservation action in the area. These environmental organisations, which one informant preferred to call 'resource reallocation organisations', have identified sea turtles as a poster-child for their campaigns in order to 'interfere with fishing under the guise of conservation'. These efforts (a mixture of private and volunteer projects, public agencies and universities) have been very active in instigating protective measures to mitigate deaths from bycatch, marine plastic and fishing equipment entanglement, and disturbances to nesting habits. Beaches across Carteret County (where driving SUVs on the sand is a popular pastime) are regularly fenced off in known nesting sites during the summer months to protect hatching turtles. These measures, as well as placing restrictions on fishing and recreation, also butt up against a local tradition of eating turtles. 'People here have eaten turtles for generations, as did I growing up, but with research now saying they're endangered people are very resistant to give that up', Betty told me. I asked if this was only about losing access to a prized foodstuff and she said it was as much about not wanting to be told how to live life and conduct themselves in their own environment. 'People here aren't educated' she went on. By this she was not making a deficit argument that people could not understand the legitimacy of robust science, she was saying, as others did, that environmentalism and other liberal, post-materialist values may circulate freely in places of higher education, but not

here. Instead, there was at times a tacit sense that anyone who *did* receive such an education was a kind of class traitor. 'People would say, "oh he must've learnt *that* at college"' complained Dan, who had earned degrees in marine science before returning to DE, and now lamented a culture of anti-intellectualism there. Those who work on conservation in particular can be subject to jokes or even resentment. Betty told me about her nephew, a scuba diver who spent some time on turtle conservation efforts, and the flack he got from islanders for becoming a 'turtle person'. Likewise, a Sea Grant employee whose husband worked at the DMF recounted how he was warned to remove turtle themed bumper stickers from the boot of his car before driving through rural areas, or he might find the paintwork scratched one day.

Whether from regulators, environmental NGOs, developers, or tourists, a strong recurring theme of fieldwork was a sentiment that every encounter with external groups, their knowledges and agendas seemed to bring with it new restrictions on local ways of life, and a protection of interests that are always someone else's. This is the crucial point here, that epistemic conflicts can be and are extrapolated into a relational politics, where certain markers like a bumper sticker or job title become emblematic of the holder's allegiances and status. Education, environmentalism, or even scientific logics can become relegated to a structural 'outside', and by no means always treated with hostility, but characterised nonetheless as Other. It was in this context that the climate change narrative was described throughout the fieldwork as having taken collateral damage from its association with other political actors and contexts. Existing animosity towards regulators and governments was inherited by the climate project when the former deployed it as a further justification for restrictions, and what came to be referred to in my notes as 'turtle politics' has widely seen environmentalist ethics in general associated with an attack on traditional ways. The origins of a moral cause in an outside world that has shown itself to be extractive and self-interested are enough for people to cast sceptical eyes on that cause as another possible Trojan Horse.

Just as one person claimed that sea turtles remain on the endangered species list despite a great recovery because they are 'a cash cow for some environmental groups', another speculated with an air of fair-minded objectivity that we must take seriously the possibility that climate change is just an instrument for politicians and insurance companies to make money from flood victims: 'In my time down here I ain't heard the first person talk about "sea level rise", "global warming", nothing like that… common people you're not going to hear about it but when you hear global warming sea level rise in my experience it's politicians, it's big business, it's people in positions' (Robert). It is true that, while developers and migrants have appeared to be as often conservative as liberal (some even claimed the community has become significantly more Republican with their arrival), the residents who spoke unprompted or with zeal about climate change were near exclusively liberal transplants whose language, habits, and ideas were often spoken about with bemusement by more long-term inhabitants.

This discussion has focused on common instances of antipathy or distance between Core sounders and the institutions and knowledges of a world beyond its perceived boundaries, with a view to unpacking the role of reaction and relationality in solidifying ideas about discrete Self and Other identities, and guiding how claims and narratives get interpreted and situated within that dichotomy. It is important to note however that these arguments were generally not made in strident expressions of antagonism towards the 'outside world' and climate change in particular, but rather in more subtle and often ambivalent language. Theories of elite conspiracies were often counterweighted by conventional scientific narratives as another plausible theory, as if to say 'who knows what's going on?'. Nor did I find people taking hardline stances towards institutional science, but rather assessed the legitimacy of their expertise or opinions as the case presented itself. Locally visible and active scientists were respected for their insight because an assessment of their character ensured that the *application* of their knowledge – rather than the knowledge itself – could

be trusted. Indeed, whilst despairing at the 'clannishness' of DE, institutional actors conceded that locals put their trust in scientists or anyone who they could believe is on their side. One programme manager at a coastal conservation foundation gave two contrasting stories to illustrate this point. In one, old-time oyster farmers became vocal advocates of a habitat restoration project upstream despite its management by liberal graduates from the Triangle, because the improvements it would make to downstream water quality directly benefited their stocks. In the other, the foundation was attempting to persuade local residents that rewilding a network of canals would be better for avoiding future flooding than dredging them. Despite strenuous outreach and trust-building efforts, the accidental mislabelling of one of the canals in a public document fatally undermined the foundation's credibility. The knowledge base had not changed, yet the project failed because the community did not trust that a robust defence of their interests could follow such a basic error. In this light, public adjudication of outside interventions appeared not to be governed by entrenched prejudices, but continually reevaluated according to how they felt their interests were being served.

Discussion

Each year, the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication issues an updated 'Climate Opinion map' to show the (usually) 'progress' made towards an American consensus on climate change. From the tire-tracked beaches of Emerald Isle's western point to the deserted porches of Portsmouth Island, Carteret county reappears on successive year's maps in a subtly different shade of unconcerned lavender; but always uniform, and always seemingly incommensurate with its vulnerability. In place of this paradox in purple, a year of fieldwork in Carteret County has offered a more complex picture. Occupying almost half the county but just a fraction of its population, the communities of Down East sit atop centuries of relative isolation, which has given them a highly developed sense of self, and almost as discrete an idea of the Other. Living, working, and sometimes dying by the whims

of a dynamic and unpredictable maritime environment, Core Sounders are generally acutely sensitive to changes in their richly storied landscapes, often memorialising them decades after their features have been submerged or permanently altered. Whilst no clear picture emerged whether such a relationship makes people more or less able to take up a narrative of anthropogenic, global sea level rise, this makes little difference because of the many ways in which change is simply an accepted part of daily life. Whether from an intimate knowledge of the capricious ocean, a steadfast faith in God's Plan, or a model of time that is naturally punctuated by cycles of crisis, the future featured to only a very limited extent as a domain available for negotiation, contestation, or alteration. The lack of zeal I encountered either for or against a discussion of climate change and its attendant programme of action can be put down therefore to its lack of political utility; at best it describes something there is little use in trying to change, and at worst it forces residents to confront a traumatising truth about the community's likely demise.

On top of these place-based factors, the circumstances of the climate narrative's arrival Down East have seen it become embroiled in an existing relational politics. Downplayed to different degrees in Republican messaging, reduced to a stagnant tribal issue by national politics, but most importantly monopolised as a *raison d'etre* by regulatory and environmentalist groups with whom the libertarian Core Sounders have existing animosity, the climate narrative is battered by crosswinds from every direction before it can even come in to land. Where the climate story does gain a foothold, it must then compete for attention with a host of more visible and immediate threats from development, tourism, economic decline, and seemingly unending depopulation.

Returning to YPCCC maps then, my aim was always to break open the bland representations of communities like DE that reduces them and their engagements with climate change to a hierarchy of hues. To say that more qualitative research methods yield more complexity than a national survey is a truism, and indeed my initial search for a more

nuanced, or just explanation for denialism misguidedly sought to break up an unconcerned purple into a full pallet of subtle reds and blues. As fieldwork would reveal though, the map's problems go much deeper than its low resolution. The binary of concern/unconcern – and by extension all discourse preoccupied with public acceptance of preordained facts – isolates consensus as the single currency for subsequent conversations about the state of public engagement with climate change in the US. It does not distinguish between the many social realities that do or do not produce that consensus: Whether people have literally heard of climate change and its many accompanying claims; whether these embedded values and logics resonate with people's own experiences; whether their relationships with the environment or history accentuate or obscure the concepts; whether the messengers and advocates bearing the narrative are enrolled in existing relationships of trust or suspicion; whether people have the psychological wherewithal to wake up each morning contemplating the death of their community, the economic capacity to undertake ambitious adaptation projects, or the energy to fight the global carbon economy for tomorrow when developers are tearing down their neighbourhood today. With enough effort, a single thread *can* be strung through all of these intersecting planes to spin an explanatory narrative of public 'disengagement' in Down East, but to do so, this chapter concludes, is to act in bad faith. This is because denial is a loaded concept that implies a complete and standardised understanding of a claim, followed by the rejection of that claim, yet the moral-epistemic programme of climate change has travelled to Carteret County in an uneven and incomplete manner, meaning this idealised reception cannot be achieved. Second, denialism is a negative concept, meaning it does not distinguish between disagreeing and failing to agree; it all simply comes out purple. Finally, denialism is a gravely asymmetrical concept, judging culturally diverse ways of knowing for their ability to subscribe to a contrastingly uninterrogated set of claims about what climate change is and how one ought to respond to it.

In the end, my mistake was of little consequence, because Down East broke denialism for me. My notes drew ever denser webs of logic as I tried to reconcile diverse and inconsistent stances in new frameworks, only to have them torn open afresh by the next interview. Apathy, ambivalence, disengagement, rejection were all taken up and discarded quickly as failed terms for describing what exactly it was that I was researching. To paraphrase Levi-Strauss, denialism proved itself not to be 'good to think with', at least for this thesis and its ambitions for a symmetrical representation. For the bewildered believers of Beaufort, denialism may very elegantly explain the vagaries of wayward and irrational DE because for them, the reality and urgency of climate change is beyond reasonable dispute. Methodological symmetry demands, however, that no analysis treats some claims as beyond contestation and others not. In this light, attributions of denialism are acts of boundary work that install one's own constitutional priors as the conditions for membership of a political community, and in so doing disqualify alternative renderings from the possibility of participation.

Previous chapters have made the case for recognising globalised climate discourse as a constructed, 'necessary fiction' like any other (Ezrahi 2012), combining a set of ontological and moral facts into a *de facto* constitution around which a global climate citizenry organises itself. This chapter has focused on a community not participant in the global climate society. Instead of framing this community as non-citizen at the margins, the chapter has sought via modest ethnographic means to reconstruct it as the centre of its own constitutional order. As climate science has constructed the interconnected systems of a global climate as the base reality that policies act on, so too do Core Sounders' constructions of temporal cycles of storm and crisis represent the 'natural order' against which change of any kind is assessed. Where the moral codes of sustainable development, environmental justice, or loss and damage steer international politics towards certain futures collectively understood as desirable, Down East residents repeatedly articulated a life free from

coercion where traditional modes of cultural expression could be enacted as their most basic vision of a good future. In place of denialism, I suggest a model in which the Core Sounder and the global climate citizen each see themselves as part of their own imagined communities, observing their own constitutional orders, and participating according to unique standards of citizenship. They are not the same communities, the same constitutions, or citizenships, and when one is measured against the standards of the other, accusations of denialism become easy to reach for.

IV: Contact

Chapter 7 – The wayward participant



Introduction

'A Core Sounder they say is a strange animal.' A voice floats in from off screen, speaking in a slow, instructive brogue. 'He can't be driven nor he can't be led.' The voice dissembles into laughter as the listening face *on* the screen concedes a single unsmiling chuckle. 'Yeah. They're an independent group, I'll tell you that.' This fleeting moment comes from 'Core Sounders' – a documentary film portraying the clutch of villages at a time of accelerating change. Its self-deprecating humour and sardonic delivery are typical of exchanges in DE, but it also articulates another of Core Sounders' infamous qualities: their stubborn ungovernability. It came up particularly often in conversations with researchers and government agents well-used to the slow trust-building work that must precede any local collaboration. 'My old boss used to call them the "Down-in-flames crowd", because they're stubborn to the point of being self-harming." one researcher told me in a Beaufort café. Their pride, she said, saw many an economic opportunity prematurely shot down,

describing by way of example the case of a local man who started a successful boat-building business for recreational buyers. Not only did his neighbours conclude he had got above himself by 'making good', but that his successes came at the cost of the erosion of DE culture; they responded by sabotaging his business. The head-shaking dismay at their public partners' undying stubbornness was a recurring burden for these institutional actors. As another told me, 'Down East folks will welcome you warmly, until you want to change something'. If it is a stereotype though, it is one recognised not only by despairing outsiders, but by residents themselves. As the men from the film clip demonstrated, there is a pervasive sense that agonism is a political culture worn often with humour by Core Sounders. The astonishing case of Harkers Island and its many churches was a recurrent example. Often in group conversations, the story would be told about how petty disputes – a feud between brothers, or a disagreement over whether earrings constitute appropriate churchwear – had repeatedly led to fractures in a congregation and the establishment of a whole new church. Today, the 1200 or so islanders have no fewer than 11 to choose from. The story was always told with a strong dose of humour ('people would get mad and move to this church, get mad and move to that church—', Alice interrupts, 'I got mad and went home') but within the laughter nevertheless was a subtext about a particular relationship with independence and political hierarchies.

On one occasion I sat with Betty in the back room of the museum as she folded leaflets for an upcoming event. She was quick to corroborate the stubbornness reputation: 'you can take folks around here outside and point at the sun, and they'll wanna fight you and say it's the moon'. But our conversation – which started with her profuse apologies that she had very little of use to tell me about climate change or sea level rise – became a profoundly informative one for how it situated Core Sound waywardness as an expression of a political identity. Her feeling was that this contrarian tendency was part of the general resistance to instruction, interference, or anything resembling control, even in interpersonal interactions.

It was what ties turtle politics to the burning of the Park Service offices, the low opinions of 'dingbatters,' or the dubious credibility of regulators' 'voodoo science.' She explained how difficult this could make collective decision-making on even the most seemingly banal issues. Recently, a local controversy had erupted over the use of golf carts on the island. Among the small and slow roads between houses these had started to proliferate as a preferred mode of transport in recent years, but with their popularity new questions were emerging about their proper use: should they be restricted to the side roads or are they safe to drive on the faster Island Road that runs along the south shore? What, if any, should be the minimum age limit for driving them? These unregulated questions had begun to draw out confusion and acrimony in the community, and so Betty decided to host a meeting to iron out some of these issues. Of course, without any official legitimacy as a governmental decision, the conclusions of that meeting were soon disputed once more, the process harpooned for its lack of representative legitimacy, and Betty was openly attacked on the community's vociferous Facebook group.

It was here that the political and democratic implications of Down East's unincorporated status came alive to me. Being unincorporated, as outlined briefly in previous chapters, means the villages of Core Sound lack a layer of political representation given to most other American communities, and as standard in almost every other country in the world. Being outside of the political jurisdiction of a municipal government means that many basic services (such as water supply, transport, or wastewater treatment) are not available publicly, but by the same token that restrictions like zoning, land use and building regulations are not imposed either. Beyond extending rights and responsibilities however, municipal governments also fundamentally change the nature of politics, how interests are balanced and diverse public perspectives are managed. Through systems of consultation, representation, and orderly processes that spin public opinion into a singular political voice, municipalities enact a particular vision of citizenship as coproduced with a centralised

authority, embodying principles of democratic representation and consensus-based decision-making. Without any of these things, as Betty's experience demonstrated, Core Sounders are in all procedural respects a political 'bag of cats'.

This was an important finding. Engagement, I could see long before getting to North Carolina, is the foundation of so much institutional activity, and treated as an unambiguous good. In meetings between concerned researchers or published guides to effective communication, a lack of engagement to this day appears synonymous with a lack of voice. This 'residual realist' treatment of the concept is pervasive across institutional actors (Chilvers and Kearnes 2020), even including more critical social scientists like myself before meeting the Core Sounders. Understanding that many publics felt unrepresented by current discourses around climate change, my assumption well into fieldwork was that their consequent 'disengagement' was a direct product of this, to be remedied – in an emancipatory reentry to politics – by finding the *right* representation, and the right systems of institutional listening. This ultimately naïve assessment was put to rest in one of many long conversations with Nicole, a NOAA Sea Grant employee based at the coast, who took an interest in my perspective and proved an invaluable ally within the coastal resilience community. One evening, after a meal in Beaufort, Nicole drove me the short distance back to the Oyster House in her company car. After studiously listening to my hypothesis she returned: 'but… people here get *exactly* the representation they want.' As the car left Beaufort's municipal reach and passed into the unlit section of Highway 70 to Down East, Nicole said that people vote for laissez-faire Republicans who leave them out of all manner of significant public discussions *because* they want governments to leave them alone. In other words, non-participation – she suggested – is not in this case the result of a democratic oversight, but precisely the achievement of a constituency's wishes by democratic means.

This became clearer still during an interview with David, a prominent figure within the county government. During a frosty half-hour interview in which most of my questions

were answered with terse responses under 10 words, one inspired a more generous answer. I had asked whether the county government ever feels a need to pay greater attention to communities in unincorporated areas because they are lacking the additional representation enjoyed by residents of municipalities like Beaufort. He interrupted me with a correction: 'It's not a matter of more or less representation. People in incorporated areas just accept a higher level of tax for a higher level of service.' Conversely, people Down East do not want to pay these taxes, and so they are happy to receive only the barest attention from local government. I was shocked at first by this transactional framing of democratic politics, and what it said about society more broadly. Recalling earlier discussions on the bases of citizenship, basic elements of social life like taxes, services, voting, laws, and protections are all the procedural scaffolding of a contractual relationship between a governed state and its public (Cao 2015). On such a skeleton though, a collective consciousness, culture, shared history, or common ethics then adds the flesh and warmth that binds the collective under a shared, imagined selfhood. None of the latter was present in David's description, and even the former procedural elements were stripped back to their most basic possible form.

He went on that, even without unincorporated areas, Carteret was 'without a doubt' one of the most conservative counties in the state, with by some way the lowest tax rates. And in any case, this is 'just a rural thing… most of them would be happy if they never saw us again.' This claim – corroborated by consistent anti-government and insular sentiments throughout fieldwork – might easily be read as an abstention from society and politics itself; an identification with an individual rather than collective pursuit and experience of selfhood. As this thesis has repeatedly suggested though, such attributions of absence dangerously foreclose the possibility of alternative settlements by drawing on inherited concepts, whether of environmental knowledge, citizenship, or in this case participation.

Rather, what the above vignettes suggest is a difference in political culture that challenges theories of citizenship predicated on a major role for governments and institutions of the state. Indeed, by far the strongest and most consistent sentiment I experienced throughout fieldwork was a wariness towards interventions from outside the community, especially from governments, but also academics, tourists, developers, or advocates. This was far, far more consistent, coherent, and explicit than any discussion of climate change or SLR, and I suggest represented an organising principle in local assessments of environmental and other facts to a much greater degree than the palatability of the climate narrative's embedded concepts. While these concepts (the epistemic norms of science and the moral norms of globalism or environmental justice) are central to the successful or failed constructions of shared imaginaries, as explored in chapters 5 and 6, the legendary waywardness Down East reminds us that constitutions are more than a settlement of beliefs and values about the world. They also codify the relations between citizen and collective, what good politics looks like, and how one ought to participate in it. For any project as reliant on expansive and inclusive participation as the Paris Agreement, this compatibility of political cultures is clearly of critical importance. What then do Core Sounders' unique style and circumstances indicate about their candidacy as citizens of the global climate? What is expected of them? And what can a failure to meet those expectations mean for their ability to participate in the governance of the future?

This chapter focuses on participation as another embedded facet of the climate society, replete with assumptions and conditions that – consciously or otherwise – guard admission. It begins with an expanded discussion of outsider-sceptic sentiments touched on in chapter 6, and situates them within a distinctive political culture in DE. It then goes through the available ways for people to participate in climate action in Carteret County as expressed through the dominant framing of 'resilience', detailing the cultural and practical barriers that invisibly block entrance to an otherwise wide-open door. In the discussion, I consider

how better to theorise acts of political distancing or refusal, attending to their counter-narratives instead of dubbing them non-participants.

Invisible participation

As has been a recurring finding throughout this thesis, positionality counts for much in the political culture of Down East communities. As Betty put it simply, 'it matters who you are'. Marine science holds greater sway when it comes from a son of Atlantic who came back after college and is a regular face at the fish tackle shop; a fisheries regulator will have an easier time developing a trusting, collaborative relationship with local fleets if her kin have been fishing among them for generations. This is not just an empty psychological bias. The individuals I met who belonged to these 'boundary-straddling' categories expressed an ambivalence that was as critical of their institutions' high-handedness as their community's bullishness; as sympathetic to the cultural values they inherited locally as the scientific ones they acquired professionally. As the next chapter shall illustrate clearly, even among dingbatters, those whose relationship and understanding of a public was more ethnographic than statistical seemed consistently to feel a greater compulsion to honour their interests in practice. To a degree then, expertise or its epistemologies are not blanket attributed or denied credibility based on dogmatic biases, their facticity is co-produced with their demonstrable commitment to a *morally* salient programme. I witnessed very little antipathy towards a whole system of knowledge as a matter of principle, but a great deal of suspicion towards those systems' institutional champions based on negative past experiences or their reputational reverberations. As practitioners found in chapter 5, it is as much the clout of the messenger as the allure of the message that determines one's credibility as a participant in local politics.

The agonistic and confrontational style of political communication within DE likewise seems chaotic and disorderly from outside, but with the long view of extended participant-

observation this again becomes situated within structured practices of social ordering. For one thing, social interactions in the everyday are kept 'light'. Encountering one another at church or the supermarket, neighbours keep abreast of local news, but with grave or controversial topics generally avoided where possible. I witnessed this often from the sidelines, as friends file through mutual acquaintances like a list of stock prices, a brief descriptive sentence for each serving as the 'catch up' before returning to the list. In recent times, I was told, this code has increasingly weakened, with both confrontational interactions and cold avoidance becoming more commonplace. In general though, as discussed in chapter 6, kinship (or at least interfamilial history) has a stabilising effect on relations, however fraught. Family trees, as one man described it, often more closely resemble ' a pine thicket'; among those with the deepest roots, today's quarrel may be turbulent, but it shall ultimately be viewed against the *longue durée* of close intergenerational ties. Where politicians and visiting scholars build their activities on a precarious foundation of trust always in the making and always under review, the bonds of history bring an almost unconditional quality to relationships among many Core Sounders that generally ensures a route back from acrimony. Like siblings, those between whom the bonds of kinship are strongest can indulge in the most vociferous fallouts.

A still more exceptional aspect of social order made visible in previous chapters was the cycle of disaster. Recalling chapter 6 again, disasters and tragedies seemed to mark social time and organise collective memory around fixed points in their shared history. On a political level though, these events also brought about profound changes to the social fabric. Many stories recount the solidarity between community-members and even communities in times of emergency, when quotidian matters are set aside and a single-minded focus on survival rallies whole villages into coordinated action. Perhaps the most striking example of this was during Hurricane Dorian, which charged into the Carolinas as a category 2 storm in September 2019. Sitting with me in a fish restaurant in Ocracoke, Alice described

how Dorian was initially forecast to make landfall on Harkers Island, triggering trauma responses from residents still reeling from Florence the previous year. At the last moment, the weather system swung east and hammered into the Outer Banks head on. Alice recounted a dramatic 4a.m phone call with her friend here in Ocracoke as Dorian tore up the waters between their handsets. Instead of enjoying their relief however, DE residents loaded their boats and brought as much aid to their island neighbours as they could carry, significantly outperforming the Hyde County government whose jurisdiction Ocracoke is formally in. The latter especially was a source of dual pride and contempt towards the county, which Ocracokers and their allies considered ineffectual and negligent. By contrast, Alice described a kind of special solidarity that comes over people here in moments of adversity. I had witnessed the same remarkable unity following the plane crash in 2021, and heard many other examples of the great lengths neighbours would go to in order to help one another during crisis, whether individually or as a community. 'We're at our best when things are at their worst' – I thought about this phrase again and again when listening to these stories. It was a kind of interrelationship, Alice mused, that was hard to communicate, and hard to understand for outsiders. 'Debbie and Lydia (social anthropologists who moved to Carteret County) tried to capture this in their own ways, but how do you communicate it, the importance of it?' During this conversation at the fish restaurant, a man appeared from a neighbouring table, and a soft and warm exchange began as he – the husband of her cousin – came over to talk. Alice had not returned to Ocracoke since before the pandemic, and so there was much to catch up on. It was affecting to watch, and when the waiter also knew her by name, I knew I was seeing the tightness of these intercommunity social webs flashing their threads; threads that get buried under the sand, but spring taught in times of need.

To conclude, many of the hallmarks of DE's notorious waywardness shed their lawless reputations when viewed in the wider context of social life in this unincorporated

community. The ways that legitimacy is constructed and recognised Down East, unlike in science-policy discourse, is not based on depoliticised ideas about expertise, but drawn from one's demonstrations of loyalty to community interests. These kinship networks in many cases are the ballast that stabilises and regulates social interactions in place of codified bylaws. Finally, collective action is not found in the orderly rituals of council meetings at the town hall, but in the cycles of disaster that activate a strong sense of solidarity between bankers, in deed if not always in word. These form part of a stabilised political culture that is both meaningful and coherent to those enrolled within it; the extent to which this political culture is recognised or even legible to attendant institutions is another matter, however. In a remarkably prescient passage from his history of US agricultural industrialisation, David Danbom showed an intuition for both this social self-regulation of tiny rural communities, and the illegibility of such structures to concerned outsiders:

'With little effective government above the neighbourhood level and few levers of control there, rural America could reasonably be perceived a practical anarchy, a fact which disturbed urban observers. Its lack of formal organizations of amelioration and control meant to many city people that "The country, like an uncharted sea, is mysterious and terrifying." The practical anarchy functioned, though, because of a general equality of property, self-reliance, respect for the rights of others, a high regard for personal character and morality, local racial and ethnic homogeneity, and the fact that everyone in the neighbourhood personally knew virtually everyone else.' – Danbom 1979: 18

As the next section shall show, Danbom's observations of rural life in the early 20th century have proved apt for today, as a proliferation of public outreach and aid efforts on climate and SLR have struggled to accommodate DE modes of political participation. Rather, localist forms of social regulation are often taken for anarchic anti-structure in these institutional climate projects, which mark certain kinds of political citizenship as the conditions for participation even as they try to maximise inclusivity. In making this argument, there is no intention to romanticise or essentialise DE agonism as a noble or even successful mode of politics. Many informants regretted the impasses it often lands the

community in, and others reported that it has recently got worse to the point of dysfunction under the toxic culture of 'identity politics'. The important point is that the absence of conventional political structures does not equate to the absence of order or coherence.

Taking horses to (sea)water

By a considerable margin the predominant type of engagement attempted by institutions was related to adaptation efforts. *Mitigation* (i.e attempts to reduce communities' production of greenhouse gas emissions) entails interventions that decarbonise the atmosphere without necessarily offering localised rewards for the effort. Whether because the climate agenda lacks traction in settings like DE, or because decarbonisation is so often constructed as a technoscientific project to be tackled at the economy-wide scale (recall chapter 5), mitigation was practically non-existent in Carteret county[14]. What *were* extremely prominent, however, were initiatives promoting *adaptation* to coastal flooding, which pivots on a comparatively uncontroversial agenda of protecting local livelihoods from harm. 'Adaptation', admitted a panel convenor at the 2021 Carolinas Coastal Resilience Conference, 'is a safe space for public engagement'. Its ability to solve locally defined problems without needing to discuss their causes made for relatively straightforward communication. The discourse of 'resilience' especially was a framework that had become hugely popular in the 2-3 years prior to my arrival, because its narrative vagueness was suitably nondescript to both encompass all manner of problem areas while referring explicitly to none. In a private conversation, one resilience officer satirised the trendy yet ill-defined centrepiece of her job title by pointing to the street corner and saying

[14] Except for where decarbonisation actions could be introduced under the radar as a co-benefit of some other action (e.g an agronomist might suggest a crop management technique which improves yields and has the additional utility of sequestering carbon).

'those leaves are definitely being resilient' (see figure 13). The inoffensive language of resilience enabled more inclusive public discussions to take place by avoiding thorny subjects, and as such has became a staple framing for public-facing activities. Under the



Figure 13 - a meme about the vagueness of 'resilience' that was circulating among colleagues

Biden administration, as mentioned previously, federal funding schemes for reducing public vulnerability to environmental hazards proliferated. Even earlier though, NC's governor Roy Cooper made the same goal a signature policy of his tenure when, following Hurricane Florence in 2018, he issued Executive Order 80. Out of this legislation came an initiative called the Resilient Communities Program (RCP), which would encompass and fund efforts across the state government's departments and agencies to prepare vulnerable communities for future climate change. The structure and mandate of the RCP is complex and uniquely built around the NC context, but its overarching goals, vocabularies, and even personnel and infrastructures overlaps significantly with a network of similar activities by federal agencies (NOAA, Sea Grant, Cooperative Extension), universities (NCSU, UNC, Duke) and non-state actors (Coastal Federation, US Climate Alliance) working under the banner of resilience.

Though formally belonging to separate institutional bodies, these initiatives largely drew on the same epistemic and normative goals and assumptions, often leading them towards endorsing a common set of projects. These included 'living shorelines' as an ecologically sound alternative to concrete bulkheads, which prevent erosion whilst restoring coastal habitats and preserving public amenities; or low-impact economic development strategies like oyster farming. Crucially here though, the institutions also mobilised the same philosophies of public solicitation; an ethos of 'co-creation', involving community-led and participatory approaches. The bland and inoffensive language of resilience thus proved doubly useful, as it could help enable this democratic turn by maximising reach and having the flexibility to be whatever people want it to be. The above solutions would thus typically be designed and developed in conversation with individual or public partners in light of their stated concerns, or pitched during public consultations on 'future-proofing' town waterfronts. The latter was especially typical of the Resilient Coastal Communities Program (RCCP, a subdivision of the RCP) which in recent years launched phased projects

leveraging government resilience funding to improve coastal areas based on vulnerability assessments and – crucially – public aspirations solicited in lengthy and comprehensive consultations. This process of public engagement, designed to identify community needs and wants, current capacities, and appropriate bespoke solutions, is intended to minimise barriers to accessing resilience resources and expertise. Informational workshops invite community-members to learn from a panel of experts what unique problems they face and what range of solutions might be feasible, while being asked in solicitation exercises and break-out rooms to feed in their own concerns and desires. Also part of this process was the creation of Community Action Teams (CATs) who, once the project was underway, would act as representatives of community interests. The CATs, as a 'diverse' and representative group of relevant stakeholders, would sometimes consist of existing members of municipal government, sometimes a collection of engaged citizens with a good standing locally. They were an essential and active part of the decision-making process thereafter.

An implicit but clear requirement of the RCCP framework and other 'co-created' efforts is that the public in question are active and enthusiastic partners in the scheme; therein, after all, lies the legitimacy of the process. In a statement of its core objectives, the programme describes its intention to 'support a proactive, locally-driven, and equitable approach to coastal resilience planning'. Its democratic credentials dictate that participation is well-informed and uncoerced – in other words, voluntary. Thinking how this arrangement might be reproduced DE, as vulnerable as it is, it is clear that such voluntary action could not be relied upon. As previously shown, for Core Sounders with a deeply insular political culture, the prospect of a coordinated and unanimous collective enthusiasm emerging for participating in a government-sponsored, externally organised initiative to implement a raft of potentially radical changes to their community is extremely remote, perhaps even impossible. Not only does a voluntary engagement with political authority figures contradict every tendency of Core Sounders described by themselves and others, but the

prolonged and orderly modes of iterative engagement envisioned by the RCCP has no precedent in Down East. Concentrations of authority are not merely challenging to organise but actively resisted. Devising a CAT would necessitate not just a willingness to see collective interests embodied in a panel of quasi-elected representatives, but also an agreement over how to go about agreeing on the populating of such a panel. Planners, engineers, ecologists making up the expert voice would be exposed to scrutiny by the intimate environmental knowledges already present here, and the very idea of outside assistance comes with its own baggage. Where the RCCP process in Beaufort took the form of a thorough, multi-meeting public consultation in collaboration with an attentive and focused public community, collective single-mindedness Down East appears generally reserved for spontaneous occasions of urgent and total need.

Despite its expansive and inclusive processes with opportunities for public input built in at almost every stage, institutional resilience projects nevertheless had conditions for participation. The capacity for consensus, a respect for certain forms of expertise, and a political culture where coordination and delegation are possible were all consistently present if tacit demands of the process. What had made the cycle of agonism and unity DE especially striking to me was the fact it seemed to exhibit all the coordination and consensus sought after by resilience specialists and funding schemes, but somehow in the wrong moments, or on the wrong timescale. The orderliness of the engaged citizen, who moves from New York or Durham to Beaufort and becomes a regular attendee of municipal council meetings in a reproduction of their previous political cultures, is the peacetime orderliness that so much institutional activity relies upon being able to replicate. But, as my fieldnotes from Ocracoke conclude, 'there is a different metabolism to this social organism; not regular and organised, but cycling through discord and unity at a pace and rhythm unfamiliar to outside agents, and thus easily mistaken for a lack of any order at all. The trouble for hopes of a coordinated response to SLR is that these solidarity events are

triggered by moments of shared trauma, not the slow creep of each wave climbing onto the shoulders of the last. This is the wrong challenge for DE.' The very goal of a singular, collectively held vision, and the creation of CATs presupposes the possibility of a community's representability and its willingness to be represented, but these are political concepts that rankle with the realities of politics in an unincorporated community. As Betty's story about trying to arrive at consensus over the safe use of golf carts illustrated, consensus is itself a moot concept when no system exists for determining when such a thing has been reached, how the interests of the community are to be measured, or who indeed has the authority to speak on its behalf. At a simply conceptual level then, the nature of participation itself is blackboxed in institutional efforts to increase it, and other cultures of participation thus go quietly unrecognised.

Participation behind paywalls

In other ways, participation was inhibited by more tangibly procedural barriers like access and capacity. On one occasion I had an opportunity to attend a conference hosted by the NC Beach, Inlet and Waterways Association, held in an oceanfront hotel in Emerald Isle. As a political advocacy organisation, the NCBIWA event was unlike academic conferences I had attended, and just to cross the threshold came with a $300 entrance fee. With some lobbying by Nicole, who was in attendance, I was tolerated, as long as I performed my non-fee-paying status by standing at the back of the room for the full day. The conference, which served largely to discuss the technological avenues for protecting threatened coastal communities and the state and federal finances available for funding them, had a peculiar mix of attendees. According to Nicole, regulators, scientists, engineers, and town planners spoke, while the coast guard, policy-makers and local governments listened. When I entered, a spokesperson of the RCCP was in full swing of his presentation, outlining the nascent projects underway in a number of towns along the Inner and Outer Banks. Duck, Avon, Nags Head, I recognised most of them as highly developed and affluent communities of

second-homers, and wondered if these were really the 'underserved' communities referred to in the abundant new federal funding packages. As the presentations went on, outlining new funding opportunities and engineering innovations, or advising attendees how to access red-taped government resources, I became increasingly conscious of who was and was not present in the room, either physically or in representation. The full-time Down East population is considerably less affluent than neighbouring communities or recent transplants (Boucquey et al 2012). With the steady economic decline facing its key industries, many residents have resorted to commuting further afield or taking on multiple jobs. Notwithstanding the $300 paywall, full-day conferences and lengthy public consultations prove too time- as well as cash-expensive for a reliable showing of Core sounders.

A series of Republican politicians opened and closed sessions with improvised speeches. There was a protracted tribute made to Pat McElraft, a state Representative retiring after 8 terms in office. Effusive speeches and the gifting of flowers showed that McElraft was hugely popular in the room, celebrated as a committed servant of Carteret county who had worked tirelessly to bring funding opportunities not just to county and municipal governments, but coastal communities themselves. Speaking to the crowd, McElraft finished by imploring attendees to take full advantage of the surfeit of federal funding available under the current administration – 'if we don't use it, we'll lose it!'. Later, keynote speaker State senator Norm Sanderson, absent because of the conference's clash with National Day of Prayer, was replaced by Congressman David Rouzer, who used his slot to argue against federal regulations and social security. Making a case for a limit to federal spending (with the exception of the military), he claimed that '90% of this country's problems come down to moral fibre; institutions of family, marriage, the church and community. People tell me to fix Washington, well I say fix those institutions and Washington will fix itself'. I later discovered that McElraft and Rouzer had worked together on the notorious 2012 bill

banning the use of sea-level models in government-sponsored activities. On McElraft – who sponsored the bill – the conference would be the last good word I heard spoken about her, as Down East she is better known for harpooning a proposed local moratorium on housing developments that for once had received a degree of local consensus. I thus found the unbridled libertarianism of these political speeches – the same *laissez faire* ethos which extends to the heart of the county government – challenging to square with the advice to attendees to take full advantage of federal funds. The clear contradictions between McElraft and Rouzer's record of putting coastal development before public environmental safety and their attendance at a coastal resilience event did not make DE cynicism seem any less justified. But it was also indicative that widespread conservativism in the county did not mean there were not active networks of political influence working to instrumentalise state resources to their private ends, nor that the very politicians promising small government were not zealously intervening in public life behind closed doors.

Finally, a young advisor from a D.C-based consultancy, despite being introduced as 'Miss Stephanie', presented a serious and detailed walkthrough of the bureaucratic processes of applying for government grant schemes, offering to give bespoke advice in the break to anyone present who needed it. I asked her what sort of barriers might exist for unincorporated communities in pursuing these resources. She said that, while there was nothing formally preventing them from doing so, the amount of expertise, personnel, and financial backing needed just to apply for grants can exclude many communities lacking the bureaucratic infrastructure of municipalities. 'You need at least an engineer and a professional grant writer to do it, or you can pay thousands for consultants, but it's such a high risk of not getting the funding it's just not worth it for a lot of low-income communities'. She closed with a point that, despite the marked increase in federal attention to 'underrepresented communities', there remains little understanding of unincorporated communities and the challenges they face.

The conference proved an enlightening example of a self-perpetuating social topography that sees finance and political connections pool in some places locally and not others. DE repeatedly exercises its democratic voice to vote for candidates who will keep government out of their way. Even while championing small government in areas like DE, these politicians appeared elsewhere to cheerlead participation in government schemes by helping wealthy tourist towns to undertake high-cost, low-permanence beach nourishment projects paid for with public money. Those same communities, composed largely of politically engaged retirees or remote workers from other parts of the country, are often blessed with a familiarity with processes of local government, access to the bureaucratic support and – through events like this one – the expertise required to pursue these opportunities. This is not to say that Core Sounders were passive victims of an exclusionary plot; as was put to me time and again, their state of isolation is one that was chosen. The case does illustrate however the kinds of capital recognised by institutional schemes dispensing support for climate impacts – social, knowledge, economic – as currency for participation, and how a lack of it forecloses political involvement before any such decisions can even be contemplated.

Discussion

Climate change has failed to matter in Down East, North Carolina. Where I sought rage and rejection, I found a mix of apathy, ambivalence, ignorance, curiosity, amenability, fear, resignation, dis- and uninterest that raged only against the stereotype of denial, and rejected only coherence. What proved, by contrast, an incontrovertibly present narrative, was an attitude of suspicion, disappointment in, or outright disavowal of centralised government. Through a political culture of unincorporation, a strong aversion to regulatory or coercive structures, and a vigilant policing against monopolisations of power even within the community, Down East appears to show every desire to renounce its membership of society. But does such a conclusion hold in light of everything that has been discussed in this and

previous chapters? Looking again at the role of kinship ties and solidarity in crisis but now through the lens of participation, they show that systems of social regulation and mutual accountability do exist in Down East, animating a political culture of their own. Well-meaning initiatives like the RCCP (on top of a particular epistemic-moral repertoire) hold certain expectations of their own about what constitutes participation however, and despite an often very clear-eyed awareness of these incompatibilities, they have been unable to adapt existing participatory structures to be more accommodating. What then does this add to our understanding of constitutions and their citizens? And does it bring us closer to an alternative for the deficit-laden language of denialism?

Returning once more to chapter 4, citizenship is itself described by political scientists as a relationship between the public and its governments; a contractual agreement of mutual accountability in which both parties commit to regulate the other through an exchange of rights and responsibilities. Around these more technical elements of the social contract grow, importantly, a sense of belonging which is equally central to the experience of citizenship. These affective bonds – what Levy-Bruhl called the 'soft parts of the social fossil' (Levy-Bruhl in Kelty 2020: 81) – encase procedural bone in social flesh, giving the collective a more recognisably human likeness. Identifying with a collective, according to traditional citizenship scholarship, means accepting and participating in these relational exchanges as the terms of society's ongoing reproduction. The encounter with the county government official mentioned earlier – which I read as an 'iconic story' (Shopes 2002) of DE-government relations – does not, however, suggest that this is the case here. By reframing the relationship of mutual support and accountability as one of payment for a service, the officer disenchanted that relationship entirely, turning a social organism with an identity, vision, and sense of self, into a lifeless pile of bones. In choosing to have the thinnest association with government and political representation possible, Core Sounders move themselves to the very margins of legibility to democratic political theory, becoming all-

but non-citizens, but therein is the limitation of such narrow definitions of citizenship and its currencies of participation. Taxes, regulations, laws, legal rights, democratic elections might be the familiar trappings of a healthy social contract, but as this thesis has suggested repeatedly, the imagination elevates citizenship and its communities to something more than the trading of bureaucratic favours. More than that, as scholarship on post-national politics and 'global citizenship' has shown, this experience of belonging has proven itself eminently *detachable* from such formal manifestations. If the 'hollowing out of the state' (Sassen 2002) can take citizenship to super-national scales, it surely can to sub-national ones too. Here again then, if we decouple the concepts of rights and responsibilities from their textbook foundations in government, it becomes possible to acknowledge and validate other forms of social regulation, collective identity, and thus also citizenship and participation. In Beaufort, citizens participate by queueing out the city hall doors at monthly municipal council meetings, by paying their taxes and having their rubbish collected. But Down East, 'rights' shrug off their legal prescriptions and become the freedom to live without coercion or control; to expect protection from peers and kin in times of dire need. 'Responsibilities' no longer change with each administration, and instead become the duty to respect long-held social codes, honour institutions of family, faith, or the community itself.

In his book-length portrait of the figurative Participant, Christopher Kelty borrows Wittgenstein's concept of 'forms of life' to frame his discussion of the flexible meaning of participation. Forms of life refers to the totality of historical, social, and cultural context that together shapes how words and concepts are interpreted and used. Originally a linguistic concept, the term has become a powerful tool in constructivist social sciences (alongside imaginaries) for describing the interpretive backdrop against which social phenomena take place. In Kelty's hands, the concept seasons descriptions of diverse, constructed political cultures, the ability to engage with which relies on being part of their

respective 'grammars of participation' (2020). To hold such a grammar in common with another is to hold 'shared judgements about the world' (56) and how one can and ought to participate in it. To hold different grammars is to enter a state of 'perplexity' in which, put simply, things do not 'make sense'. This terminology is helpful here because it does similar work to that which I have elsewhere allocated to concepts of constitutions and imaginaries, but in a specific context of participating in those collectives. On politics generally and climate change in particular, Core Sounders and institutional professionals never get to the stage of agreeing or disagreeing, because they are starting from radically different assumptions about the proper role of government, consensus, or collective decision-making. Where the RCCP or Biden administration envision a grammar of active, interested, and talkative communities as the ingredients for democratic success, DE forms of life largely see freedom as entailing the opposite. Perplexity was made visible in the frequent confused utterances as either side fails to make sense to one another, and the collaborative public consultations set up by institutions and modelled on a grammar of participation no DE village lives up to.

By extending the thesis's symmetrical analysis to the domain of participation, Kelty's discussion allows us to reinterpret perplexity as distinct from non-participation. A picture of political disengagement by one party because of its contrarian waywardness gives way to one of mutual incomprehension, where two versions of constitutional order articulate their own modes of participation, but fail to make sense of each other's. In this light, exercising one's 'right to have rights' – a hallmark of citizenship (Bellamy 2008, originally Arendt 1958) – by choosing to *renounce* those rights might be more productively read as a positive act of participation that protests the non-representation of the abstainer's form of life. The endurance of unincorporated status or the gutting of the DE-county government's relationship would indicate then the same perplexity as a spoiled ballot, which does not

mark the disgruntled voter as non-participant in democracy, but shows that democracy is not democratic enough.

The political meaningfulness of acts of refusal or abstention in contexts of power imbalance has been well explored in recent discussions from Black scholarship and geographies of racial violence. In particular, the concept of fugitivity explores the characterisation of black individuals, from the slavery era to today, who escape or otherwise refuse the status and roles allotted them by hegemonic superstructures (Best and Hartman 2005, Hesse 2014). Fugitivity reframes these acts of flight as a mode of resistance, casting off the pathologising connotations of 'the fugitive' as someone on the run from the law, because such a law articulates a 'rightful order of things' (Jasanoff 2015: 10) they never consented to being part of (Sojoyner 2017). The scholarship emerging around fugitivity and refusal are highly instructive for thinking through 'non-participation' both as an oppressor's category, and as a channel of refusing that designation in favour of one's own. I make mention of them here not to appropriate the concepts (which are inextricably associated with a particular context of historic black oppression in the US) for new uses, nor indeed to imply that the state employees and resilience professionals are in any way agents of oppression. Rather, despite the obvious circumstantial differences, their ability to destabilise received logics of engagement and participation make them evocative and heuristic analogues for thinking through the DE case.

In particular, fugitivity perfectly describes the interpretive double life of acts of refusal, seen as either recalcitrant and pathological by a liberal hegemony, or defiant to subjugation by a critical minority. It also articulates the change to our understanding of a person's agency and identity when their flight is framed no longer as a flight *from* (i.e marked by their transgression of an established structure) but as flight *to* (i.e towards a truer version of themselves independent of those structures). Where in DE non-participation was often synonymised with an obdurate and self-sabotaging loss of voice, the claim that 'people get

the representation they want' challenged me to reimagine refusal to participate in one political forum as a strategic means of being able to participate in another they choose for themselves.

But the fugitivity and refusal framework not only permits the refuser to explore and live out their own forms of life; it also brings critical attention back to the previously unquestioned systems they distance themselves from, the tacit demands those systems make of their citizens, and the norms they promulgate. It is here that parallels with the fugitivity literature abruptly end, as despite clear power asymmetries between federal or transnational movements and a dozen rural villages, there is nothing oppressive or even coercive about their relationship. In fact, local institutions went to great lengths to cultivate an open-door approach that gives the public freedom to participate as they wish. Even so, as the chapter has illuminated, they still harbour expectations of their prospective participants. In the DE case, and commonly within much US 'resilience' or public participation work, visions of successful, democratic governance are predicated on the existence of an enthusiastic public that *wants* to be helped; one that has faith in the epistemic instruments of marine ecology or cost-benefit analysis, and ideally shares a concern for 'future-proofing' their own communities. The case of unincorporated communities shows additionally that these expectations are not just based on ideological or epistemic norms but extend to cultures of political organisation. For many funding schemes such as the RCCP, an existing orderliness to public life (in which collective opinion can be rendered visible, organised into consensus, and represented by an elected body) is also pre-requisite to participation. And as the NCBIWA conference illustrated, the cost of entry is in some cases still higher, demanding financial wherewithal, political connections, and a proficiency in the labyrinthine architectures of bureaucracy.

The almost constitutional commitment across institutional activities to a democratic style of environmental governance thus produced an unintended and peculiar effect. The

motivation behind the democratisation of resilience opportunities was unambiguously about increasing the reach of such programmes to the many vulnerable communities in greatest need, however conceived. Understanding the importance of trust and public empowerment in productive and equitable public partnerships, there was therefore a pronounced and pervasive consensus within the wider resilience community that interventions of any sort had to be strictly voluntary in nature, to ensure the former were being protected. This defanged and passive approach to public engagement, combined with the high expectations placed on any presumptive participant, meant that, in reality, it continued to be those publics already engaged in the same grammars of participation who benefited. This dynamic (which I observed so frequently that it began appearing in my fieldnotes by the shorthand 'the voluntary dilemma') was very much known to many of the professionals I spoke to, who often felt great concern over its unintended effects on inclusivity. Despite my regular questioning, there was little that any could think of to do differently however, so embedded were these expectations in institutional imaginaries of public solicitation.

The outcome of this liberalisation of climate participation and its attendant dilemmas, as the thesis has already begun to show, has generally not been a vociferous rejection or disavowal of the climate narrative, nor a zealous awakening. Rather, like any voluntary act, people engage with institutional offerings or not as befits their interests and preferences. Without any need for mutual antipathy or even awareness, the mere fact of both sides pursuing their divergent choices begins to form a gulf of silence. This is not because one is the problematic absence of the other, but because each is preoccupied by their own form of life, and either unconcerned or unable to compel the other to convert to their own. Core sounders and the climate resilience community are thus both 'participating', just in different projects. Despite the strenuous, good-faith efforts of institutional actors to be inclusive, the difficulty in enrolling one into the other is one born as much of tacit exclusion as of refusal.

Already, parallels can be drawn and resonances felt between the state of public climate discourse in rural NC and the curious fracturing of American participation in the Paris Agreement that inspired this research, both in the trade-offs that come with liberalising participation, and these inert silences that follow. This shall be further explored in the final empirical chapter however. For now, it remains only to conclude that constitutions are not just epistemic and moral in nature, but procedural. Whilst earlier explorations of collective imagination have focused on the values and norms that construct shared worlds, this chapter has shown that grammars of participation determine how we go about performing citizenship of those worlds. Far from a technicality, it was Core sounders' relationship with each other and the wider landscape of political actors that accounted for their seeming non-participation in a climate change imaginary, much more consistently than any qualms about the narrative itself.

The final empirical chapter will feature all the elements explored so far (the global climate change society, the putative deniers of Core Sound, and the epistemic, moral, and procedural norms that make up their respective constitutions) as they converge in one historic institution. By telling the story of this institution and its attempts to cultivate a climate discussion in present day Carteret County, it illustrates in action the attachment of the globalist climate narrative to its centres of agreement, and its steady atrophy as it strays into other constitutional territories.

Chapter 8 – Cooperative Extension, climate change, and the quest for the public good



Introduction

> *"County agent come by last week."*
>
> *William looked up from the red-and-white-checked oilcloth spread smoothly over the round kitchen table. He did not speak.*
>
> *"Says they have a new school at the University in Columbia. They call it a College of Agriculture. Says he thinks you ought to go… Seems like the land gets drier and harder to work every year; it ain't rich like it was when I was a boy. County agent says they got new ideas, ways of doing things they teach you at the University. Maybe he's right."*
>
> Williams 165: 5

This unassuming passage from the novel Stoner describes a turning point, both for the titular character, for whom this moment heralds a new life in academia, but also because it marks the very real historic moment that farmers like the Stoners became part of a

nationwide project to modernise US agriculture through state-sponsored science. Our protagonist ultimately chooses a different path to the one offered him here, disappearing into a world of English literature, but the story he left behind was one countless rural Americans lived through over the last 150 years. This chapter tells that story through the history of a national institution called the Cooperative Extension System (CES), because it helps tell the story of this thesis. Despite never having even heard of CES before arriving in North Carolina, I was quickly to find that its agents, infrastructures, or crucially the pedagogical culture that has been its greatest legacy were everywhere present in the spaces between Core Sounders and the institutions of environmental science. From the porch, to the cornfield, to the town hall, to the classroom, to the lab, to the university, to the state governor, to the federal agency, to the executive order, CES peopled and mediated every niche and scale of American life this research concerned itself with. To devote a chapter to its work then is thus, firstly, no overstatement of its importance. But as I was to discover through my interactions with employees at every scale of this enormous instituiton, the story of CES is also a fractal miniature of the themes and concerns of this thesis itself. The instrumentalism of science, the construction of a centralised 'constitution', and the strain placed on that constitutional order by alternative local interpretations of the good; all these were at play in the landscape of North Carolina long before the politics of climate change.

The CES was established in 1914 as a public service designed to bring American farmers and rural labourers firmly into the 20th century via a system of cutting-edge agricultural science advice. The policy was remarkable both for its scale (an office in every county in the nation) and for the fact that it established a model of science as 'public service'; both aspects remain central to CES to this day. But precisely because of CES's extraordinary reach, both geographically (from the hill farms of Appalachia to the fisheries of the Yukon delta) and bureaucratically (from federal budgets to after school clubs), pursuing the 'good' has proven to be a wildly interpretive exercise, necessitating all manner of adaptations and

compromises. This chapter traces the evolution of the CES mission from a centrally managed agenda to one responsive to a diverse American landscape of interests, and asks what this has done to its constitutional vision of science as an instrument of the 'public good'. NCSU, where I was hosted, is the seat of NC's CES network, and as I quickly discovered, the work of extension was everywhere entangled with the questions of communication, participation, and knowledge politics so central to the climate issue and this thesis. In their various attempts to open up conversations with DE residents about sea level rise and climate change, extension agents exercised much older yet parallel tensions within their own institution.

Thus, a left turn through the history of US agricultural science advice shall offer an important empirical manifestation of the themes explored so far. Rejecting the language of knowledge deficits and denial, previous chapters have excavated two scales at which climate change have been constructed through complex but internally coherent social and cultural negotiations – one globalist in outlook, one looking out to the sound. Each has yielded its own tacit constitutions: a codebook of norms about reality, morality, and participation that together articulate a vision of what it means to be a citizen of this world – whether that world is the planet or everything this side of the North River bridge. Each constitutional settlement has presented a set of behaviours and values as normal within its own confines, and misguided, immoral or otherwise pathological when pulled into a different constitutional context. The CES case study investigates the political effects when these two sociological wholes are forced to contend with one another in just one institutional setting. In catering to these divergent scales, institutional actors must consider to which 'public' and for what 'good' they hold a duty of service. Looking at how these dynamics played out in the NC context, the chapter offers an important development of the empirical story laid out thus far, because it portrays this established and locally

respected institution's attempts to navigate the tensions between the prescriptions of global science and Core Sounders' defence of their cultural sovereignty.

This is an instructive case study for a thesis about global climate governance, whose burden it must be to navigate similar political conundrums in achieving a successful path out of environmental crisis. The analogue to the central, national Extension mission here is the Paris Agreement: both have clearly visible histories of normative packing in their construction, but both also rely on a localisation of their principles across socioeconomically diverse settings. This leads to a common dilemma when those principles do not stick: honour the integrity of the centralised narrative and forfeit public 'engagement', or prioritise local interests at the expense of the narrative? Ultimately, the chapter finds that catering to the values and preferences of all personhoods within this organisational remit produces a vast and differentiated landscape where the constituent parts are unable to communicate with each other on the same terms. It concludes by speculating that the puzzle of 'climate silence' that inspired this project might in fact be the result of all publics participating in the changing climate in the ways they want to.

The chapter begins by setting the scene with an explanation of the cooperative extension movement and its historic foundations. It goes on to compare how the organisation's devolution to an agenda-setting national scale and a hyper-local county scale have resulted in divergent articulations of its goals. Arriving at the present day, the chapter presents two illustrative cases of this speciation from my fieldwork in NC: one a national network of university staff concerned about climate change; the other a senior county extension agent based on the NC coast. Discussion explores the emergence of climate change as a grave but politically volatile object of concern, and how – in my fieldwork – representatives of CES's diverse institutional subcultures have interpreted what the public good means in light of climate's nascent threats. The chapter concludes with an analysis of different forms of institutional accountability, which determine how much of the climate change narrative

is conveyed in public communication. As different audiences have their interests reflected back at them by CES, the gulf of climate silence is reinforced and stabilised.

Background

The Land Grant mission

In 1800, the US was a nation of farmers. With roughly 90% of the labour force employed in family farms and micro-scale agriculture, the overwhelmingly agrarian, low-density nature of early modern American society represented more than just a young colony's practical need to expand its claims and feed its growing population. It was to many colonial thinkers, including soon-to-be president Thomas Jefferson, the very foundation of democracy. According to this 'Jeffersonian ideal', it was only through self-sufficiency that a republican people could truly secure their own freedom from the coercive and corrupt interests of kings, governments and plutocrats. As such, farmers at the start of the 19th century were generally 'beholden to no-one' (Marcus 1985), and enjoyed a privileged status as the anchoring root of not only the nation's economic prosperity, but its liberty, and moral integrity (Henke 2008). This was not to last. With the surging technological innovations of the industrial era came tectonic sociological changes. Swelling cities seduced rural youth from their family farms, rapidly upending the balance of political power and creating a hungry urban market that low-tech, low-productivity and fast depopulating agricultural communities were unable to satisfy (Bonanno 2022, Danbom 1979). Whilst US agriculture continued through this period of explosive development to be considered central to the moral condition of the nation, it did so first as buttress, then as millstone within a few short decades, as rural life came to be seen as a drag on the rapid modernisation occurring in cities.

It was with this motivation to bring modernity to the countryside that the Morrill Act of 1862 was passed. The act offered every state in the country a parcel of federally 'owned' land

(nearly 11 million acres of which, it should be acknowledged, was expropriated from native ownership for the cause (Lee and Ahtone 2020)) for a public 'Land Grant' university dedicated to 'such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts'(Morrill Act 1862). Beyond its economic aspirations, the 'Land Grant mission' (Henke 2008: 25) hoped that access to an education in rational science would bring sweeping improvements to rural life; a nebulous goal whose 'mission ambiguity' (Marcus 1985, Henke 2008) immediately opened the door to diverse and interested interpretations of what constitutes 'improvement'.

Among farmers, concerned foremost with their declining political and economic status, the promise of Land Grant Universities (LGUs) was as a practical improvement to the conditions of work. They favoured vocational courses and practical guidance in new farming methods (Henke 2008). For others however, the Land Grant mission was seen as part of a wider opportunity for social reform. Concerns had continued to grow among a burgeoning class of liberal, affluent urbanites that the isolation of rural settings had left agricultural communities in a state of cultural stagnation (Markussen 2002, Roth 2002). For these early proponents of what would be called the Country Life movement, the 'farm problem' that had initially centred on calculations of rural supply and urban demand was growing into a widely perceived crisis of American character. A powerful mythology of rural degeneracy took hold, populating serious historical and sociological accounts with a class of 'ignorant, mean, despicable, and diseased white man' well into the 20th century (Cathey 1956: 12), and arguably beyond.The modernist philosophies of a new Progressive Era thus saw declining productivity and moral health as every bit as amenable to the same solutions as they were part of the same problem (Henke 2008: 28). LGUs, promising a simultaneous building up of rural infrastructures (Marcus 1985) and inoculation of farmers with both robust scientific knowledge and a respect for expertise, were widely endorsed as cultivating a 'systematic mental culture' (11).

The birth of Cooperative Extension

Despite the enthusiasm with which states had taken up the Land Grant project since the Morrill Act, the young agricultural colleges had found limited success in influencing the wider community of rural life (Marcus 1985, Henke 2008, Bonanno 2022). In response to growing calls for an expansion of the programme, congress passed the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, establishing the Cooperative Extension System (CES). 'Extension' meant increasing the reach of LGUs beyond its enrolled students to the whole public, while the system was 'cooperative' because it initiated a tripartite relationship between management at the federal, state, and county levels (Bonanno 2022, NC State Extension 2019). This addition of a local dimension was the defining innovation of the Act, as it mandated the establishment of an 'extension office' in every one of the country's nearly 3000 counties. Staffed by 'extension agents' employed to bridge central management and local community, the offices were to act as a base for instruction not just in agricultural science, but home economics, youth education and community development. This expanded programme reflected the ever-stronger progressivist ambition for rehydrating rural 'mental culture' by strengthening its institutions and popularising efficient, modern and productive habits.

Alongside the credibility earned by being geographically present, extension agents sought to give their recommendations local legitimacy through a methodology based on demonstration. Where farmers had often shown distrust of 'book farming' devised from afar, extension agents were encouraged to conduct *in situ* field trials that allowed farmers to measure successes by their own judgement (Henke 2000). In a statement that has become an unofficial motto within the CES institution, extension pioneer Seaman Knapp claimed that 'what he does himself, he cannot doubt' (Bull et al. 2004). Much as the modern state sought to employ the public's 'attestive gaze' to hide the arbitrary power of governments behind the universal authority of science (Ezrahi 1990, Shapin and Schaffer 1985), the field trial and other CES interventions effectively collapsed the issue of trust between farmer and

federal interests to one between farmer and agent, or even farmer and their own senses. By bringing the aspirations of the Land Grant mission to every county in the nation, integrating it into the fabric of quotidian life, and cultivating its own legitimacy via the enrolment of farmers' senses, the state – in effect – made itself a neighbour.

Whether motivated by market concerns, a nostalgia for the 'agrarian myth' of Jefferson's nation of farmers, or a less sympathetic distain for rampant degeneracy, the Land Grant mission institutionalised the moral visions of a powerful yet remote political community. Science, education, and productivity became rationalist instruments in service of an elite minority's normative choices about what constitutes a good society. The LGUs and CES were radical because they introduced a new paradigm of scientific work as public service. Nevertheless, a critical historical lens shows that 'science', 'public' and 'service' were all categories in need of prior definition. An epistemic hierarchy that chose science over informal local knowledge and envisioned a relationship of public deference to enlightened county agents; a construction and demarcation of one public for emulation and another for improvement; and a cultural vision of the good life as productive, efficient and organised each represented constitutional foundations of CES.

This was the opening gambit, but now stretched over vast scales and geographies, localised adaptations would be inevitable. Indeed, what is of interest in this chapter is less the founding ambitions of CES in 1914, than how the diverse conditions felt across this vast and devolved institution over the intervening century has resulted in mutations, adaptations, and compromises among contemporary interpretations of that constitution.

Which public? What good? The speciation of CES

Returning to the present day, this extension ecosystem was very much visible during fieldwork, with NCSU – North Carolina's historic Land Grant college – replete with

extension 'specialists' and public-serving research, and the coast dotted with county offices. Though there was prolific communication between sites, they nevertheless illustrated the divergence between central and county extension as each interprets its mission in light of their respective conditions and pressures. CES is a multiscalar organisation, with each layer enrolled in its own relationships of financial dependency and professional accountability either to other parts of the organisational structure or to external actors (see figure 14). The chapter will go into illustrative case studies of national and county level extension later, but first it shall throw dye in the network to demonstrate what influences are shaping contemporary extension work today, and where it has departed from its early mission. Doing so shall help contextualise the different institutional responses to climate change and its communication.

Pressures from above

So far it has been clear that, regardless of its presumptive grounding in rational scientific knowledge exchange, the inception of CES was suffused with the normative ideas of its time. Technological instruction issued from the LGU was supplemented with lessons in citizenship and proper participation in American life. From youth education to community development, this expanded programme was intended to fertilise rural society with the Progressive Era virtues of industriousness and of course productivity. Children attended educational youth clubs to prepare them for work life; women were invited to home demonstrations where they learnt housekeeping tips and ways to supplement family earnings. Through these curricula, extension could implement the economic ideals envisioned from afar, but also enrol participants as self-regulating agents of the state.

The CES's social engineering outlived the concerns of the Country Life movement or Progressive Era, however. As economic conditions evolved, so too did constructions of the

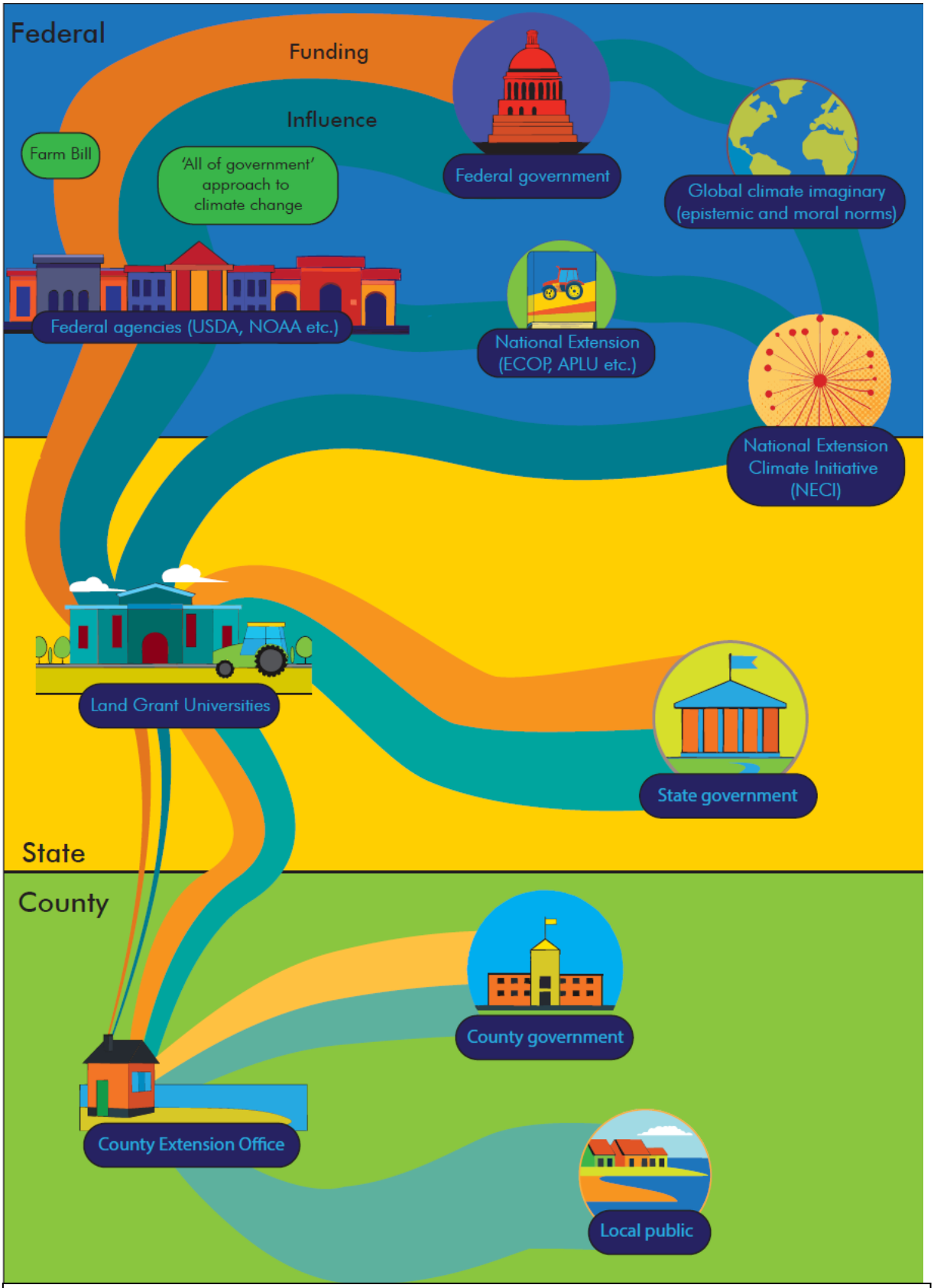


Figure 14 - Basic graphic representation of flows of finance and political influence across levels of CES. Made by author

good citizen, and of the instructing expert. During the second world war, the extension machinery was enlisted to establish a nation of victory gardeners, and in times of endemic disease, county offices became pop-up community clinics (North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service n.d)[15]. This would go on throughout the 20th century, with CES adapting to broader sociological tides, from the social unrest of the 60s to a diminishing role of the state in the 80s (Warner and Christenson 1984: 133).

With each successive government, every jolt and drift of the zeitgeist, The CES network has stood as a reserve institution for supporting centrally ordained goods, and for enrolling citizens as informed participants of that national infrastructure. The mechanisms that bind CES to the broader national sociopolitical dynamics are, of course, still active today. LGUs remain almost entirely publicly funded, and these dollars invariably come with conditions. The Farm Bill for example, renewed once per administration, dictates not just the size but the priorities of the federal budget for agriculture. Whereas under President Trump, the 2018 bill made no mention of climate change, the 2023 budget promised a raft of programmes for carbon sequestration and conservation in line with Biden's other climate pledges (Snell 2023, Greenfield 2022). More indirectly, political currents in government set the normative tone for state-sponsored work. Couched explicitly in the language of scientific and progressive moral imperatives, the Biden administration adopted an 'all-of-government approach to tackling the climate crisis' (The White House 2021, Joseph 2021: personal communication, The Nicholas Institute 2021) with the expectation that remedying social inequities and boosting low carbon technologies should be diffused into

[15] Given the tensions expressed in many of the rural settings I visited surrounding contemporary state-sponsored public health interventions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability of ostensibly local county offices to represent and deliver centrally mandated health policy should not be regarded as apolitical

the topic priorities of federal agencies like NOAA, USGS, as well as the USDA, where land grant universities and ultimately CES gets much of its funding.

Whilst these federal appropriations come with centrally prescribed priorities and systems of accountability, state governments are expected to match the allocations, meaning land grant research and activities have simultaneously to appease a more local political environment, potentially creating competing pressures. The infamous 2012 NC ban on sea level rise forecasts was a good example of this. As extension specialists repeatedly recalled in interviews, the ban forced all state employees to redact references to climate change in outreach and communications, alter research proposals and reports, and professionally advise members of the public based on outdated or misleading scientific information, even as President Obama was signing the US into the Paris Agreement. In contrast, before a month had closed on the catastrophic Hurricane Florence, the now Democrat governor Roy Cooper had not only done away with the controversial bill, but implemented a new executive order (EO80 2018) instigating a similar 'all-of-government' approach to climate change as president Biden would implement three years later. It marked a bold commitment to climate-conscious policies, and meant state employees once again had a political mandate to openly frame coastal flooding within a narrative of long-term trends. Even the sizeable influence of the private sector on the research agendas of LGUs is driven according to politically salient currents among economic actors. As one extension specialist described it to me, 'every time a [commercial] call is put out, it's addressing a need that somebody has identified' (Marchmont 2022). Whether in relation to federal and state government interests, or general commercial demand, the research and communications of actors within the land grant system is and has always been subject to extrinsic pressures. Despite its missionary devotion to the dissemination of policy-neutral and cutting-edge science, the matter of *what science* and *how much* is not merely susceptible to the vagaries of politics, but systemically bound to them. A century after the CES's establishment, extension

work may no longer be legitimised by the ideals of the Country Life movement, but it remains as porous to dominant political currents as ever.

Pressures from below

Extension scholars are unequivocal about the institution's origins as a richly normative federal project (Iles et al. 2016, Henke 2008, Danbom 1970, Markussen 2002), and the CES remained umbilically connected to federal agenda-setting to this day. But the introduction of the county level brought a new scale of operation with its own associated interests, accountabilities and political cultures. Historical accounts note that, from the start, county agents found they could not take their learned authority for granted, but that success would rest on earning the trust of their partner communities, and respecting local lifeways. Adaptation would prove essential.

Much like contemporary NC, early county agents discovered that the idea of government assuming extended authority over local affairs was 'repugnant to farm people' (Danbom 1979: 18). Thus while their mission was ostensibly to reconstruct the rural in a centrally mandated image, to achieve this agents had in effect to reconstruct themselves in the likeness of their host communities. Examining the language, practices, and pedagogical values of extension work in contemporary North Carolina and the US, it is clear that a model of engagement based on the performance of localness has since become normal; albeit less paternalistic. At the county level, it became institutional knowledge early in CES's history that its legitimacy as a source of science advice was determined by its ability to solve problems as conceived locally (Warner and Christenson 1984). Indeed, more than an occupational necessity, Susan DeMarco claimed that 'the major strength that Extension has going for it is the perception, at least among its own clients, that while government is something out there somewhere, Extension is local and responsive' (1980: 3). During fieldwork, this claim manifested itself noticeably in two ways: firstly through a strong and

consistent attention to the idea of 'need', and secondly, in constructing extension's identity as government's relational opposite.

Where at the turn of the century extension was a prescriptive education that 'few congressmen pretended… was intended primarily to aid farmers' (Danbom 1979: 72), the problems to be solved were – in my fieldwork – consistently framed around 'user needs', to be established through *public* consultation. In one example, an employee of the State Climate Office described a plan to devise an alternative to the famous Farmer's Almanac, to be populated – as she put it – not with folk knowledge, 'hocus and astrology' but cutting-edge climate science. To this end, a survey was being prepared to solicit the informational needs of North Carolina's farmers – be it flood projections, pollen counts or conditions for beekeepers - so that the Almanac might maximise its utility. Elsewhere, both in interview settings and in professional contexts such as meetings, presentations and conferences, 'listening' to public interlocutors was brought up repeatedly, and communication was described as a 'two-way street', meaning scientists ought – in theory – to be as receptive to education as they are quick to educate. Whether as a practical measure for earning local legitimacy or out of a newfound epistemic humility, it is today a core philosophy of CES's most public-facing actors that 'public need' should be a concept the publics in question have a stake in defining.

The second echo of DeMarco's statement is extension's rhetorical position as *opposite* to - rather than extended from - government. Whilst county agents are all based full-time in county offices, many Raleigh-based extension staff (known as subject specialists) do public-facing work on a more *ad hoc* basis, taking calls and offering one-off demonstrations across the state. Many such actors lacking a permanent relationship with their audiences described rhetorical manoeuvres that would distance themselves from the often-mistrusted institutions or geographies such as government, academia, the capital Raleigh, or outsiders in general. One resilience specialist grew up in Ohio but introduces herself as living in the

nearby coastal town of Beaufort; several others lived in Raleigh but stressed that they grew up in coastal North Carolina, Charleston, and Florida respectively. Locality and emplacement are critical to extension's approach to public legitimacy. In other federal agencies like the Park Service, employees are required to move between national locations to progress in their careers, ensuring they remain guided by centralised knowledge and interests rather than those of local residents (Marchmont 2022). For CES the opposite ethos is true, with NC State Extension's glossy annual reports regularly profiling a county agent demonstrating their egalitarian respect for the communities they serve, or detailing their extraprofessional (sometimes heroic) commitment to local wellbeing during times of crisis like hurricanes (NC State Extension 2018). Rhetorical constructions of localness such as these, that downplay connections to distant decisionmakers and foreground the importance of place, are central both to extension's institutional philosophy, and individual employees' improvised efforts in trust-building, at both county and LGU level.

The imagined wedge between local concerns and governmental directives is in other cases more substantive than performative, especially among those with more direct and long-term relationships with a given public audience. It came as a surprise when a senior federal employee responsible for mediating between the USDA and regional extension partners admitted to largely ignoring the directives of central policy, and instead taking his cue from the 'grassroots' and his own experience. 'Washington' he explained, 'just needs to justify its existence.' This tone of defiance towards top-down programming was one that I encountered frequently among actors who spend a significant proportion of their time with a public audience. The USDA employee had been a forestry specialist for many years before acquiring his agency role, and described learning of the futility of meta-narratives and locally irrelevant moral arguments in effecting collaborative relationships with his forester clients. In a phenomenon he described as 'crossed-arms syndrome,' once a threshold of narrative credibility was reached and a forester adopted this defensive stance, there was

no longer a future to the conversation. In his current work, he has thus resolved to let governments, farm bills and federal programme priorities come and go, knowing that they change faster than they can be implemented, and are in any case built on nation-spanning standards that lack any understanding of place-specific conditions. Instead, he takes his cue from what county agents and his own experience tell him. This attitude suggested a more fundamental sympathy with clients' perspectives than the epistemologically more instrumental focus on 'needs' and the performance of localness. Whilst it was often similarly born of a practical attention to what types of communication do and do not work, this stance showed evidence of these considerations actually changing the nature of science's utility as an instrument of public service, from a vessel for the transmission of centralised messaging to a farmer's tool. This neglect of LGU priorities was occasionally perceived among university-based agents as a lack of professionalism. One cast doubt on the reliability of county level agenda-setting, which could be overly swayed by local interests or hearsay, another suggested that 'community capture' was a hallmark of CES's old-fashioned, diffuse structure that inhibited progressive policies achievable by more centralised systems.

Conclusion

At their inception, the structure of the Land Grant and Cooperative Extension systems was imagined as a continuous and coherent machine, where national agendas could act upon and improve the remotest parts of rural life. Yet examining how its devolution to federal, state, and local levels of agenda-setting and implementation have manifested a century on, a more disjointed picture emerges with aspects of continuity and others of change. At a national level, the regular tides of governmental politics and social change have continued to direct from afar how the public good is to be interpreted by Land Grant's institutions. For the most public-facing among those institutions however, the currents are not so clear. At the county level, interactions with complex and occasionally resistant publics have

instead necessitated a realpolitik interpretation of the Land Grant mission, with agents often even cutting ties with the state agenda – be it rhetorically or substantively – in deference to local ways of knowing. The reinterpretation of 'need' from an extrinsic prescription derived from distant elite interests to something routinely left to public audiences to determine for themselves is a sharp break from the hierarchical approaches of the 1910s. Indeed, by the late 20th century, the county office had largely 'gone native', no longer functioning 'as a franchise or a branch office of a large, centralised organisation' (Warner and Christenson 1984: 101), but rather beholden to local interests over state and federal ones. So how is it that CES seems to have simultaneously maintained its status as an instrument of centralised social engineering *and* moved towards its own institutional culture of 'listening'?

The very multiscalar quality that made CES *cooperative* in the first place seems over the 20th century to have caused it to speciate. Like an evolutionary population separated by a river or mountain range, CES's different sites and their respective conditions and pressures have yielded diverse interpretations of the Land Grant mission. The language of 'public service' (Kellogg Commission 2001), 'putting knowledge to work' (NC State Extension 2020), and 'meeting public needs' (Extension Foundation n.d) is as ubiquitous in contemporary statements of Extension's purpose as it was at its birth. But texts are more stable than their meanings, and divergences within the organisation of CES have shown an accompanying interpretive plasticity to its 'public service' model of science, as voices within the organisation begin to ask: With US agriculture well and truly industrialised, should the nation's 3000 county offices still prioritise 'service' for a dwindling population of farmers over more diverse publics? A century after the county office became a semi-independent satellite of the Land Grant university, have initial knowledge hierarchies and systems of accountability remained continuous between scales? To what extent is the contemporary CES powered by the same Progressive Era normativities over more recent socio-cultural

changes? And crucially, how has the emergence of new ontological forms like climate change brought all these questions into visible contention? Forged in science and yet profoundly partisan, how has climate's place in public service been negotiated by the science-based but apparently value-neutral institutions of CES?

In the following section, the internal conflicts present in today's CES will be more deeply explored through the narrative of global climate change, and specifically what role it does or should play in the work of CES. As the last two chapters have shown, climate change cuts a deep and bitter line through American politics, with atmospheric physics being but a proxy battleground for more substantive political and cultural disagreements. Against this, CES's discretion is put under interpretive strain like perhaps never before, as it weighs up the prescriptions of the science-fuelled global climate society against the often contradictory wishes of a diverse citizenry, trying to discern which represents 'public interest'. Drawing on case studies again comparing national and county scales, discussion will begin from fieldwork with on one hand a nationwide network of extension professionals advocating for stronger institutional messaging on climate change, and on the other county extension agents and residents of Carteret County, NC and surrounding areas. The case study aims to demonstrate how, despite maintaining an unbroken faith in the project, mission and institution of extension, almost any component of that project can be rendered either essential or contingent depending on how the imaginary of public service is constructed.

Contemporary CES and (not) talking about climate change

NECI and campus Extension

It is August, and I am awaiting a call in a stuffy Connecticut living room. Whereas air conditioning is regarded as basic infrastructure to Southern buildings (in a way that, say,

pavements or shade-giving trees are not), in the homes of New England it is a rather less automatic feature. And so I mop my sweat-spangled forehead and avoid eye contact with my own image in the Zoom waiting room. Eventually Paul Lachapelle's head appears, hovering about 200ft above a green hill bearing a giant white M in a classic collegiate font. It stands for Montana State University, where Paul is a tenured professor. I knew of Paul as a writer on rural sociology and climate change, but it was his leadership of a young but vocal national network of extension employees working on climate change issues that led me to get in touch with him. The National Extension Climate Initiative (NECI) is a channel for agents from all states to share knowledge, resources, questions, concerns and ideas about building a discussion on climate change in their state. It is not, Paul explained, a formal part of the national CES structure, and nor is participation in it legible (and thus creditable) by the Land Grant system as an extension-related activity. As such, NECI exists as a voluntary community of mostly university-based extension professionals who tend to feel strongly about the importance of incorporating the climate narrative into extension work. Paul decided to form the network after a dramatic episode in which a colleague at MSU was instructed to remove references to climate change in a school curriculum she was devising. Paul came out in support of his colleague, and later excoriated MSU's act of censorship in the press. For this he was fired from his role as an extension specialist but, having made tenure, was able to remain in an altered capacity. It was after this incident in 2019 that he established NECI as a regular webinar among close colleagues; the network now has over 800 members (including several I worked closely with at NCSU), a steering committee, monthly meetings and a website.

Alongside my interviews with Paul Lachapelle, I sat in on NECI meetings, interviewed other members, followed email correspondences and resources disseminated, attended webinars and a 3-day conference. Consisting mostly of university-based specialists (rather than county agents), discussions within this group were explicit in their framing of

anthropogenic climate change, and centred mostly on the exchange of resources (e.g school curricula on climate related topics), the sharing of personal reflections and larger policy conversations about embedding the NECI agenda within national CES governance. As well as functioning as a support network for its members, NECI thus also aims to build pressure for a national policy change in the way that climate change is broached at all levels of CES. Operating outside of the organisation's formal architecture, NECI is able to take on a more critical, outspoken style, though admittedly this was approached with varying degrees of caution. Some members I spoke to were troubled by a seeming contradiction between their professional prohibitions on advocacy and their responsibilities to serve the best interests of the public. Such individuals were more reserved about describing NECI as an activist group. Meanwhile, Paul was happy to go on record playfully nicknaming the NECI project 'extension rebellion.' His bold language of moral imperatives and institutional corruption called on NECI members, in so many words, to speak truth to power; their ongoing participation, though usually less forthright, centred likewise on a modernisation of CES's founding mandate.

The basis of this impassioned argument is thus essential in nature; in invoking the public interest, NECI claims to be speaking for the ethos of extension itself. The strong convictions expressed by Paul and other NECI members is grounded in the perception that their arguments continue the epistemic (science) and normative (public service) promise of cooperative extension. For many, the calculation is straightforward: there is an unprecedented consensus among scientists that human activity is precipitating climatic changes at a global level; these changes bring grave risks to human and environmental wellbeing, including in the US; it is thus incumbent on universities to deliver clear, unbiased communications about climate risks that face public communities. Any decision to obfuscate this fact for political reasons was thus not only a bastardisation of the science but a failure of CES's most basic fiduciary responsibilities.

Against this backdrop, actions by state or national extension administrations that downplay or curtail climate education are easily presented as capitulation to denialist pressures or a moral cowardice that prioritises money or political favour over public interests. On this point, it is worth reiterating that what makes CES 'cooperative' is the joint involvement of federal, state and county level governments. States provide half of the basic 'formula' funding that pays for the upkeep of the LGU and its employees, and the LGU administrations and presidents who appoint the state extension director are answerable to the presiding state government (see figure 14). State politics has significant influence on the sociological status of scientific knowledge in their jurisdictions. One example offered by Paul is the 'science standards' that dictate for each state the shape and contents of science education in schools; from the Greenhouse effect to Creationism. Another, already described, was the 2012 bill prohibiting the use of all but historic data on sea levels by state employees of North Carolina. Recalling the dramatic chilling effect this had on all organisational climate work, it is clear that politically commissioned science by definition does not speak for itself, but gains its shape and force by the permission of its commissioners, and indeed the publics that elect and tolerate them. The 'autonomy' to define their own research and dissemination agenda that Paul charged LGU administrations as having and squandering is thus arguably an autonomy under duress. When pushed, he even accepted that university leaders who act in contempt of their state funders are likely to face negative repercussions. Nevertheless, his conviction is such that he believes the courageous are sooner moved by their scientifically ordained duty than the threats of temporary governments.

NECI, as much as any state government, predictably represents its own marriage of ethical and epistemic priors. The membership is a large, geographically and disciplinarily diverse, and growing network. As such it is difficult to make fair generalisations about its participants. Nevertheless, there were some observable patterns in the claims made, the

matters contested and those taken as settled, especially as compared to similar discussions among meetings of county agents. A majority of NECI members are not based in counties but LGUs, meaning they are typically not affiliated with a specific geography or administrative population[16], but are subject matter experts advising those who are. Aside from discussion of federal policies that necessarily bring up current or past administrations, professional conversations and activities within the network are carefully non-partisan in nature. Nevertheless, discussions are noticeably richer in normative and ideological content than comparable fora among county agents (which never stray far from technical questions) and tended to resonate with traditionally progressive areas of concern.

One notable example of this comes in the tacit constructions of the 'public' invoked in 'public service'. As I have observed many times among climate change professionals and activists, annual studies of US public concern conducted by the Yale Program for Climate Change Communication (YPCCC) are a popular resource for any NECI discussant making majoritarian arguments for frank conversations about climate change. In particular, the '6 Americas' report, which divides the nation's 332 million citizens into six attitudes towards the climate narrative from 'alarmed' to 'dismissive', is much cited evidence of a public so near consensus as to make downplaying the climate narrative democratically unjustifiable. The 29% who do not fall within some version of 'concerned' are, the argument goes, so slight that attempting to engage them is an inefficient use of time and resources and an overrepresentation of a marginal social group (Fine 2022). On the other hand, as the introductory speech of NECI'S first national conference stated, concern *is* clearly evident among non-white constituencies who in any case 'are more vulnerable'. Vulnerability here appears to be conceptualised in much the same way as concern: organised such that all

[16] That is, besides their affiliation with a given state, though specialists routinely share knowledge and resources with specialists from across the country.

forms of precarity can be understood in a single, enumerated, continuous and commensurable plane from vulnerable to not vulnerable; and aggressively simplified into near-binary categories (more vs less becomes yes vs no) in order to triage publics for institutional attention. The effect of this conceptual work, however, is that 'the demographic groups statistically experiencing the most frequent and/or extreme vulnerability' can become synonymised with the accessible shorthand of simply 'vulnerable'. This means that in dialogues about public climate resilience, prioritisation of groups euphemistically described as 'vulnerable', 'underserved', or 'historically marginalised' become blackboxed bywords for black and indigenous populations most frequently occupying the highest levels of economic deprivation, and little else.

Returning to the NECI conference's opening remarks, the move of invoking these purified renderings of vulnerability and climate 'concern' together then projects an imaginary of the 'willing needy' that is overwhelmingly prevalent among the US's majority left-wing climate advocates (Fine 2022). In terms of establishing *who* is the public referred to in the 'public need' and 'public service' of the CES constitution, this arrangement correspondingly makes for a compellingly straightforward moral calculus. Combined with the majoritarian argument that 'most Americans agree' on climate change, the identification of a class of individuals who are not only 'the most vulnerable' but the most willing participants provides an obvious focus for outreach efforts. This is evident in the views expressed by NECI members that agriculture is actually overrepresented in contemporary extension work. With the farming sector so reduced since its inception, and the locus of 'need' apparently lying in a different demographic, staying relevant in the 21st century by this view means almost entirely revising the founding premise of the cooperative extension system.

This fundamental question is not specific to NECI either. It has long been a contested subject how CES can demonstrably justify its enormous public price tag, and the interpretation of public service it operationalises has been constantly under scrutiny

(Warner and Christenson 1984, Harriman and Daugherty 1992). In 2002, CES's Extension Committee on Organisation and Policy (ECOP) commissioned a national level study of modern sociological changes and what it means for extension to remain relevant to them (Bull et al. 2004). In it, the committee acknowledge that radical transformations in public life and political representation have permanently altered the landscape of need since CES's foundation, with the politics of race and gender in particular necessitating a fundamental review of the extension model. This sentiment could hardly have been more prominent in my experiences of the university setting, as suggested by previously discussed tendencies among discussants to jump straight to race and gender topics in conversations about the social implications of climate change. Though this thesis does not prioritise pursuing a clear explanation for why, it does register an observable continuity between academic narratives of social vulnerability and a wider discourse of environmental equity within policy, narrative-setting organisations like ECOP, and left-wing activism.

ECOP's latest realignment of advocacy topics has identified 'Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion'; 'Climate Mitigation, Resiliency, and Adaptation'; and 'Urban Programs' as a priority for extension work nationwide alongside the traditional agricultural focus. This intervention is continuous with concurrent shifts in federal policy towards climate action twinned with social justice, as well as the lobbying efforts of university networks like NECI, which has a permanent liaison within ECOP. Suffice it to say that an observable concern for a certain rendering of social justice consciousness has become part of a national level discourse in which campus staff are both informed by the moral standard-setting of macro-organisations like ECOP, and actively involved in curating those standards through networks like NECI. This co-productionist picture, enabled by the densely networked and iterative relationships between national academic and policy discourses, has generated and circulated a particular imaginary of climate vulnerability which combines realist claims

about the nature, cause, and distribution of climate risk with moral convictions about victimhood and injustice.

The county Extension office

As with many rural towns in North Carolina, there is little beyond a reduced speed limit to tell the passing driver that they are entering Havelock. Fast food restaurants and autorepair shops line the motorway like so many pop-up silk route tents hoping to exploit a steady current of custom. The road meanwhile gets neither narrower nor any less straight, but pushes undistracted through Havelock and back into the loblolly pine forests. Usually I would go with it, either onwards towards Down East or home to Raleigh, but today I had a date in Havelock to meet James – a local county extension director – for lunch. Of the choice he had offered me between McDonalds, Cook Out and Taco Bell, I felt the latter sounded the most vegetarian-friendly, and so we shook hands in a dusty car park and I presented my first question over a black bean Crunchwrap Supreme®. James explained the hiring processes for county agents; the unique composition of specialists in each office, corresponding with the 'story of that particular county'; and most interestingly, the role they play in mediating between the LGUs and the residents of their county. They must prove the credibility of both their expertise and their loyalty, not just to the university but to the community they serve. Whereas once a high premium might have been placed on a county agent being of local origin, he explained that the priority now is 'quality individuals' with the right expertise and training, regardless of their other background. At the same time, he also stressed that the job of becoming visible, trusted and useful to local residents was never complete. Despite the century of local collaboration, the extension office had continually to cultivate its relationships and prove its legitimacy. As with the other county director I interviewed and many others within the extension network, he described a keen awareness of his responsibility to 'reach' a broad set of citizens as part of his professional responsibilities. As such, he was attentive to the conditions and relationships that would

permit him to do so. As the conversation turned to the matter of climate change (his jurisdiction, like all its neighbouring counties, was disastrously affected by Hurricane Florence in 2018), I was unsurprised to hear that it was not a topic that he pushed in conversations with clients – many less public-facing agents than he expressed hesitance about doing so. What was surprising, however, was that this was not some adaptation to carefully frame issues in the terms and vocabularies chosen by public partners, nor was it even because of a particular local hostility towards the subject. In fact, he explained, he rarely faced any kind of negative reaction on the occasions that he would mention effects of a changing climate; his feeling was that people had largely accepted it. Rather, it was his own conviction that communications should be restricted to the topics and matters that he was solicited to advise on.

It was a common discussion among university-based extension and other institutional actors how the language and framings of public partners could be emulated to start a conversation on a subject they deem important. In discussions with county agents however, there was little interest in rhetorical devices. Among those that I interviewed in Eastern North Carolina, there was a preference – implied or stated explicitly – for technical, dispassionate and apolitical communications that did not venture into sensitive topics even in disguise. In one interview with a county extension director, I employed my usual indirect line of questioning to try and inspire voluntary remarks on the subject of climate change, but my question about the frequency of storm surges received in reply only an anecdote about a local woman's issues maintaining her asparagus plants after influxes of salty water (as well as a detailed account of the advice he gave her). When I eventually enquired more directly about the role of the climate narrative in his communications, he said that he does not raise it because people do not ask; 'it doesn't come up in needs assessments'.

For James, the same conclusion was reached but as a matter of principle. Attempting to feed any kind of agenda but that of the client was, to him, an abuse of his position and a

betrayal of trust. He described a contract between agent and public that holds disinterest as fundamental to service. To infuse science with normative or ideological elements would breach that contract and risk making extension an exclusive resource for those of one orientation or another. As such he resolved to be 'as inscrutable as possible about what I think', otherwise it is 'insulting to people who don't agree with me, and kind of, in a sick way, ingratiating myself to people who do agree with the message'. Notably, he complained of growing pressure from the university and central CES network to incorporate resources and messaging that he felt compromised this stance. In particular, the inclusion of mandatory teaching on racial politics and youth activism were liable to present the county office locally as a 'social activist' organisation that chooses sides, and fatally harm the institution's hard-earned relationships. He described and later sent to me a document devised by ECOP and disseminated to all extension staff nationally, advising on how to inculcate an equity lens to extension's education activities with children (known as 4-H). The document's use of technical language from critical theory and references to Marxism were, to him, a dangerous intrusion of ideology at the heart of national extension.

The county director who had shared his story of the gardener and her asparagus showed none of this pedagogical zeal, nor indeed any readily available views on the political ramifications of his work. In another veiled invitation to read between the lines of my questions, I asked him about language, and whether care had to be taken in how he broached certain topics with his community. This question almost always yielded reflections on partisanship or identity politics, but the director instead nodded gravely and said he had to think carefully about avoiding unfamiliar Latin genus names when corresponding with non-farmers. There may seem little commonality between this and other exchanges with county extension staff I have described, but each in their way demonstrated a professional philosophy that seeks to exclude the influence of politics and ideology, whether globalist or localist in orientation. There was no evidence among county

staff of a corrective ethic that aims to improve upon public thinking as the institution's founding remit had, and of all the public-facing actors I got to know and work with, county extension expressed by far the least interest in a transformative agenda beyond the provision of unadorned information. Though reasoning varied, the result was the same: a learnt abstinence that allowed them to fulfil their purpose in the community they serve.

Analysis

Spending time both with the university and national level extension networks, and with county agents in coastal North Carolina, a picture emerged of sharply divergent attitudes towards the proper role of extension in public life generally, and the proper place of climate change in public communications specifically. Where James and other county agents felt that insisting on climate change's inclusion despite a possible lack of public demand politicised their work, Paul was adamant that it was its *exclusion* from extension programmes that rendered the science of climate 'political'. Where county agents I spoke to felt that ephemeral social trends distracted from their core mission serving the American agricultural community, NECI members conversely argued that a continuing emphasis on agriculture neglects its primary responsibility to a public that has long moved on from farming. Where the county offices claimed to be on the side of science by 'sticking to the

Priorities and concerns	Interpretation	
	County extension agents, NC	**NECI members**
'Public service'	To honour local expressions of need (if they do not ask about climate, do not bring it up)	To educate people about future risks (It is in the public interest to be made aware of climate risk)
'publics' served by extension	Mostly agricultural community	All Americans most 'in need' (often resulting in emphasis on black, indigenous or other marginalised groups)
'Peers' accountable to…	General public of the county (those within their assigned geographical remit)	Scientific community; professional academic network; global climate society
'Politicisation'	Including the climate change narrative in public communication	Excluding the climate change narrative in public communication
'Mission creep'	Moving towards identity politics instead of agricultural advice	Maintaining agricultural focus instead of public need

Figure 15: Comparing interpretations of common priorities and concerns among different scales of CES

facts' without additions, NECI's stance is that the science is only honoured and its facts complete by being open and clear about the scale and nature of the climate crisis. Where one claims to serve the public interest with objective advice that does not impinge on local values, the other insists the public are not being served by being kept in the dark. In short, both sides frame their duties and concerns in the same terms, whether decrying 'politicisation' and 'mission creep' or pledging loyalty to science and public service, and yet in doing so they achieve wholly divergent results, invoking all but incompatible philosophies. It is a striking case of interpretive flexibility that demonstrates how multiple internally coherent yet mutually conflicting realities can cohabit the same constitutional foundations. Something about the different relations and experiences of campus and county extension has thus produced this radical bifurcation of interpretations.

In her exploration of the rise of regulatory science – The Fifth Branch (1990) – Sheila Jasanoff draws a distinction between the machineries of truth-building that enable the creation of facts respectively in research and regulatory contexts. Though both may go by the name of 'science', the different institutional sponsors, time-frames of research, incentives of production and intended goals and outputs all have a strong bearing – Jasanoff argues – on the types of knowledge that regulatory or research scientists are primed to generate (see figure 16, ibid.: 80). The significance of social and political contexts to the formation of scientific knowledge is clearly likewise evident in the case of CES and its divergent agendas; in particular, the question of whose interests are being served. In Jasanoff's account, while regulatory science is sponsored by, serves the interests of, and is answerable to institutions of government, law and the media, the primary community that research scientists are accountable to are the jury of their own peers (1990). The premise then that the Land Grant system would establish a model of scientific work devoted not to a general pursuit of knowledge, nor as an instrument of control, but to public service arguably introduced an additional column with its own set of institutions, goals and networks of accountability.

What makes 'good science' in the Land Grant mission is not achieving compliance or finding novel discoveries, but improving the conditions of social life and fulfilling its needs.

Table 4.1. Regulatory science and research science.

	Regulatory science	Research science
Goals	"Truths" relevant to policy	"Truths" of originality and significance
Institutions	Government Industry	Universities
Products	Studies and data analyses, often unpublished	Published papers
Incentives	Compliance with legal requirements	Professional recognition and advancement
Time-frame	Statutory timetables Political pressure	Open-ended
Options	Acceptance of evidence Rejection of evidence	Acceptance of evidence Rejection of evidence Waiting for more data
Accountability		
Institutions	Congress Courts Media	Professional peers
Procedures	Audits and site visits Regulatory peer review Judicial review Legislative oversight	Peer review, formal and informal
Standards	Absence of fraud or misrepresentation Conformity to approved protocols and agency guidelines Legal tests of sufficiency (e.g., substantial evidence, preponderance of the evidence)	Absence of fraud or misrepresentation Conformity to methods accepted by peer scientists Statistical significance

Figure 16 - 'Regulatory science and research science' (Jasanoff 1990: 80)

From the start, the Land Grant mission represents its own, innovative scientific enterprise. What Jasanoff's framework really contributes to this analysis then is an attention to the enduring influence of networks of accountability in producing multiple and diverse forms of scientific knowledge even within a single paradigm. As even the earliest accounts of CES indicated, the chain of accountability has never been clearly demarcated, but rather forks ambiguously to the meta-institution of national extension one way, and to the desires of the county community on the other. As each case is now explored in greater detail, a distinction is made between accountability as a formal relationship with institutional

authority or an informal one with a community of peers, each with respectively formulaic and tacit systems of review.

Formal / institutional accountability

In its most visible sense, accountability is formalised at each level of CES by the measurement of individuals' effectiveness in what the director of NC state extension described to me as 'solving problems'. By this he meant the professional responsibilities associated with an employee's job, which they should be able to measure and present as evidence for institutional assessment. Perhaps the most familiar example of this is academic tenure, as practiced at all US universities and many beyond. Researchers are, under this system, assessed for permanent employment based on metrics such as publications, conferences attended, and grant money earned. Teaching staff, by contrast, are reviewed according to the class attendance, performance, and satisfaction of their students. In both cases, demonstrable problem-solving garners rewards, but *whose* problems are to be addressed (the research community vs the student body?), and *what* the relevant problem is (enabling new knowledge production vs imparting existing knowledge) are based on pre-given assumptions of what the good *means*. At LGUs, extension work is a third pillar of academic activity representing some ratio of employees' paid responsibilities, and as such is measured in various ways too. Whether it is a single county agent or the whole state administration under review, success and productivity is assessed according to metrics of economic benefit, optimised yields or otherwise quantifiable improvements to public wealth, health, or wellbeing. But despite these common goals and metrics, the stakes of problem-solving in this formal sense are felt significantly less for the campus than the county.

First, extension work represents just one part of campus staff's responsibilities, alongside research and teaching, meaning they may be simultaneously enrolled in multiple forms of

service and their accompanying standards of success. Recalling the previous discussion of state 'science standards' that inhibit extension activities, it is true that county and campus alike are constrained by the sociopolitical backdrop they operate in. Only county agents are on 100% extension contracts however, so for campus staff there is more professional flexibility in the form of (university) teaching and research. Indeed, Paul may have been fired from his extension post because his definition of 'problems' to solve misaligned with his employers', but he still had his teaching and research posts to fall back on[17].

Not only do tenure and diversified responsibilities buffer campus staff somewhat from institutional scrutiny, their funding is also often derived from multiple sources (see figure 17). Where 'capacity' (also called 'formula') grants are distributed by the state or local government for the basic funding of buildings and salaries, university researchers can also acquire 'competitive' funding from federal or commercial sources (Bonanno 2022) to fund their research. These commonly solicit projects that engage with prominent metanarratives and philosophical currents of the sitting administration (recall the influence of federal politics on research funding discussed earlier), or even broader national or transnational movements. The existing attuning of academic interest towards discourses on social justice, race relations and a climate consensus was, at time of fieldwork, thus strongly leavened by endorsements and financial incentives of the Biden administration and a host of pro-climate businesses.

By contrast, all county agents are funded exclusively by capacity grants and any additional funds designated by the local county government. As a result, where campus extension staff

[17] Parenthetically, Paul's critique of those within the extension system for not wanting to 'rock the boat' on climate risks should be taken within the context of his own protected employment status as a tenured professor. For others, provoking institutional superiors or challenging prevailing political standards may carry greater risks.

are part of a flexible, multiple, and diffuse negotiation of needs and solutions, 'problems' for county agents are defined, addressed, and reviewed within a single local jurisdiction and its particular sociopolitical circumstances. In sum, this formal mode of accountability is as encoded with institutionalised assumptions for one scale as the other, but county extension finds itself administratively and professionally much more tied to these codes and their systems of assessment than in the campus.

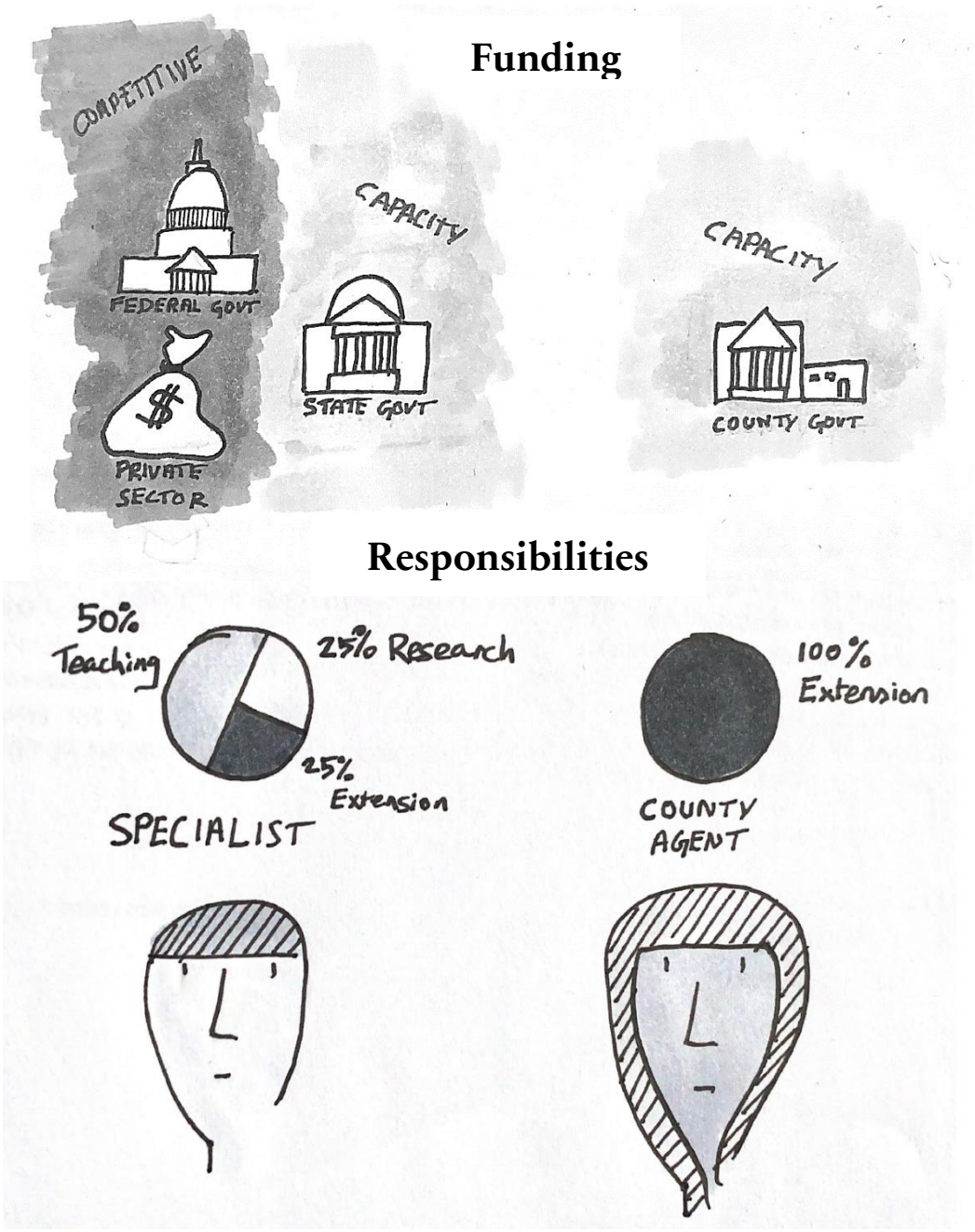


Figure 17 - Comparison of funding and responsibilities between university-based specialists vs county agents

Accountability to peers

All employees within the national extension system have certain extrinsic responsibilities; codified institutionally and assessed according to common standards. As this chapter has sought to demonstrate so far however, the 'land grant mission' and its offshoots have at every stage mixed the application of scientific facts with a normative vision of the good society. As such, implementers of that mission have had to hold in mind an idea of the public they serve and the good they strive for. Above and beyond formal ties of accountability then, discussion will now turn to how extension employees understand and construct their own responsibilities, and the audiences they address.

The community of university-based extension activity is a dynamic and cosmopolitan one. Just like 'teaching' or 'research' it encompasses many disciplines, though at LGUs the emphasis remains on the sciences and engineering. In the many conferences, seminars, and regular meetings I attended, these disciplinary perspectives were constantly cross fertilising in discussions about practical issues like addressing coastal flooding. Further, academic expertise was well integrated within a dense, multisectoral and geographically dispersed network, with campus extension employees collaborating closely with others from state and government agencies, government, foundations, coastal management, museums and other educational organisations, tribes and science communication. These circles, whilst diverse in knowledge and geography, were actually rather small, and key actors were well known across the knowledge ecosystems they occupied. Despite an apparent heterogeneity then, the flows of communication within the network produced common linguistic tropes, framings of problems and their solutions. Most obviously, the IPCC, its outputs, and the ontology of climate change it describes was a common reference point across all parts of the network; its authority naturalised in its regular invocations as a call to action. The same was true of more than epistemic assumptions. The nebulous but versatile boundary objects of 'resilience' or 'climate justice' constructed a common moral landscape for governing; the

intonements of catchphrases like 'meeting people where they are' or 'bouncing forward' both framed and informed the strategic planning for outreach activities from Hawaii to Alabama; and my conversations with activists and White House advisors alike found a common object of institutional concern in the euphemistic 'underserved' community. In an echo of the 'frame alignment' (Keck and Sikkink 1998) performed by transnational climate movements to establish a common set of concepts, vocabularies, and moral norms, this relatively small and highly networked community of actors has developed common terms for interpreting, discussing, and governing environmental risks.

Only nominally tethered to geographically bounded jurisdictions then, campus staff wielded epistemic, normative, and linguistic tropes – and acted, communicated, and circulated – as part of a community that is more coherent conceptually than it is spatially. The anchoring 'facts' treated as sacred and constitutional were not bounded geographies or the interests of those who inhabit them, but epistemic and normative principles. Similarly, while the 'public' itself is understood putatively to be all Americans, the pre-eminence of a progressive imaginary of climate participation within the academic community, and its influence on how vulnerability is constructed, means that in real terms it is those of particular legibility to this expert class who become the primary focus of 'service'. The YPCCC '6 Americas' framework was invoked repeatedly to justify populist arguments for prioritising the 'concerned majority' over those with more ambivalent or sceptical responses. The report acts as an instrument of boundary work in much the same way as it does for the (overwhelmingly progressive) US community of climate activists as they identify sites for public engagement (Fine 2022). In both cases it is not a geographically discrete (or even organised) constituency, but the community of (near) adherents to a particular set of goals, values, and assumptions about reality. In the arguments to realign the priorities of CES away from agriculture towards a more nebulous and generalist version of public service is a tacit statement about who agents see themselves as serving. The 'public'

then does not merely signify a number synonymous with 'population'. Like the concept of citizenship explored in chapter 4, it can be read as the community recognised as part of a particular constitutional whole, and thus the appropriate landing site for action as imagined by the actors.

County level extension is, by marked contrast, a profoundly place-based public jurisdiction. In a hyperlocalised setting, accountability is not only a question of institutional visibility to the local government paying an agent's salary; at stake is that agent's basic efficacy. As accounts of CES's infant years allude, agents found very early on that the muscular confidence of Progressive era reforms counted for little if a given community had no basic faith in the modern solutions being offered them, and the credibility of the agents themselves was not a given, but had continually and delicately to be earned and reaffirmed (Danbom 1979). As the county agents I interviewed attested, public trust continues to be the central asset and condition for success. As a result, the more my interlocutors depended on strong public relationships, the more frequently they reported contesting or even ignoring the directives of the university or centralised CES that jeopardised their neutrality. Relations of accountability here appear to run stronger in the direction of the county constituency. For James the county director, however, this is not a matter of strategically parroting local values instead (Walters 2021). Rather, in a moment of striking symmetrical reasoning, he described feeling equal distain for anti-vaxxers who dangerously distort scientific consensus for political ends as for left-wing advocates who reject GMO products despite a lack of compelling evidence to suggest they are dangerous; people's interpretations of science – he felt – would always be distorted by their own normative values. His coproductionist undertones did not lead him to abandon the possibility of value-free science however, but to conclude that the smallest intrusion of politics into his work was an unacceptable compromise of his professional even-handedness. His opposition to Marxist theory in 4H programming was matched by his disapproval of creationism in

school curricular, and while he conceded that excluding racial politics from trainings may turn a blind eye to racism, he could not justify imposing any extrinsic moral programme on people who are supposed to see their interests reflected in the institution.

As a result, James makes himself 'inscrutable', and county agents in similar settings attempt to purge their communications of normative content. In terms of accountability of peers then, these agents derive their whole mandate from the lifeways and interests of the publics contained within their county boundaries; presuming no special insight from their own expertise, their vision of the 'public good' is whatever 'comes up in needs assessments.'

These attempts to sterilise science render the 'good' equivalent to 'need', and reduce science to an agricultural tool to be used as one might a spade: as befits the farmer's purpose. Opposite the campus network, whose accountability to cerebral concepts selectively demarcates for them a public that can be engaged without compromising their moral or epistemic integrity, the county agents of Eastern North Carolina perceived their mandate as bound to a geographically discrete jurisdiction, and as such prioritised local framings and interests over all others.

A question that follows is whether this response is common to all county extension offices or just those who must face tensions between the prevailing narratives of science and society inherited from the LGU and beyond, and the constituencies they serve. Among the coastal counties at the centre of this thesis, extension exists in perhaps its most wan form, existing to answer questions and deliver 'the facts' when prompted - and nothing more. This should be unsurprising when compared to the governments of the same counties, however. As the short and tense interview with the county planner in the last chapter illustrated, in an ultra-conservative constituency, democratic processes actually mandate the gutting of public services, and the complete absence of a role for non-local forms of expertise in the management of issues like coastal flooding. County governments part-fund the county

extension office, and have the authority to bulk its personnel with bespoke expertise and services according to the needs of the jurisdiction, or starve it. In the Democrat stronghold of Durham, for example, the county office provides an aid programme for new parents, with free advice and provisions of donated food and diapers; elsewhere county extension implemented 'Teen Courts' designed to reduce the alienating impact of trial for young first-time offenders by presenting them to a jury of their peers. Matching the relative reach and dynamism of their governments then, the vigour of county extension offices appears to have less to do with any realist definition of need than the publicly agreed upon appetite for its interventions (Jasanoff 2005). Certainly this would reinforce the idea that county, unlike campus, defers consistently to the sociological imaginations of its constituents over its own, or those of a despatialised ideological community. But it also suggests that the break between county and campus described throughout this chapter is not universal, but experienced only where the good imagined by central CES does not match that of the public.

Conclusion

In its founding form, the land grant and extension mission presented a kind of constitution, whose moral, epistemic and philosophical tenets motivated and justified a century of public-serving science. As with all constitutions, interpretive decisions must be made about which of its aspects are to be held as essential and which incidental. Evangelical literalists may disagree with other Christians on the extent to which the biblical directive not to covet a neighbour's ox should be taken as a lesson on specifically bovine temptations; likewise, the US supreme court is an endless battle between Originalists who swear by the word of the nation's founding text, and Living Constitutionalists who abide by its spirit. Through its divergent environments, pressures, and networks of formal and informal accountability, the multiple layers of CES have, over time, yielded diverse interpretations of their founding mission to serve the 'public good', even while collectively marching under the same banner.

The networked campus extension – represented here by NECI – have substantially revised the 'public' from the American agricultural class to a despatialised community of the 'willing needy' that resonates with its own prevailing political, epistemological and moral allegiances. A radical change in one way, but in another, the curation of the 'good' as a hierarchical, prescriptive, and corrective agenda determined by an influential network of predominantly liberal, urban actors suggests a strong continuity with the social engineering of the Country Life movement. Meanwhile, county extension agents seem to have preserved their original understanding of the 'public' as corresponding to the boundaries of their (often rural agricultural) county. In their pursuit of the 'good' however, they have often forfeited their privileged insight in deference to local expressions of need, and sterilised their science of any centrally mandated norms or narratives. Each in their own way honours a settlement of the real and aspirational; settlements they are forced into serving by the relations of accountability they are enrolled in, either formally or personally. The institution of extension provides the scaffolding for all these efforts, but the role of science and the interpretation of its mission has proven to be impressionable to social forces.

The CES makes an instructive example for the thesis for two reasons. Firstly, because it parallels many aspects of the global climate change regime's evolution. Both emerged initially as centrally mandated projects serving the good of humanity, but encoded with specific ideas about what constitutes a liveable future, what counts as reliable expertise for achieving that future, and what kind of idealised citizenry can enable it. Like Paris, the CES liberalised and devolved its government of people and nature to ensure a more comprehensive reach, but in the process relinquishes its control to interpretive currents. A second strength of the CES example is that, alongside the 'resilience' agenda, it is one of the few major channels through which the global climate society actually finds a footing in rural NC; as a metaphor it thus features the same cast of actors as the case it illuminates.

Where chapters 5 and 6 together present a symmetrical view of two sociotechnical worlds, each honouring a settlement of the real, the aspirational, and the procedural, and displaying comparable internal coherence when understood on their own terms, the CES case illustrates the political effects of these settlements in encounter with one another. It shows the uneven realities that symmetrical analyses work to resist, where some imaginaries rule and others are ruled. Accepting that there is some realist dimension to climate change and the dangers it promises, the monopolisation of rights to define its nature, causes, and solutions; to talk, worry, or act on it by one constitution means others must choose between honouring their own lifeways and participating in the dominant fora for governing the future.

It is not only citizens who experience these trade-offs. Climate scientists and resilience agents find that science's carrying capacity for normative content varies according to the degree of agreement between expert narrator and public audience. Why is it that a public project in Raleigh can explore the convergence of historic redlining with urban flood risk, tying seamlessly the full-throated moral language of environmental racism to the unadulterated statistical models of the National Climate Assessment, when every step towards the coast appears to erode science communication's tolerance for narrative? There, institutional attempts to maximise engagement by focusing on the most palatable elements of the climate narrative appears to mean jettisoning the mitigation agenda that prescribes acting to prevent global warming. How can it be that 'engagement' Down East means giving Core Sounders *carte blanche* to leave their SUVs idling outside the hardware store, whilst resilience officers promote living shorelines as a way to insulate the community from rising tides?

The answer lies in the relations of perplexity that exist between different constitutional orders, and the processes of liberalisation that ease pressures to address them. The CES example illustrates this zero-sum relationship in its fraught multiscalar navigation of

climate change communication. Like Paris (and other local 'resilience' efforts in chapter 7) the CES has totally transformed from its own 'command and control' past, and embodied a democratic ethos of voluntary participation and non-coercive outreach, but the result is that representatives of CES are no more obliged to speak to the 'disengaged' than the latter are to listen.

A discursive rift begins to open up, where all parties are engaged on their own terms, spoken to in their own language, allowed to inhabit their respective imagined worlds unimpeded, and without compulsion to understand one another. Silence, the elusive and murky prompt for this thesis, continues to gain its shape, as the spaces left when a proposition is extended only to those likely to accept it, and quietly dismantled among those who do not. As a side effect of the climate change's 'voluntary dilemma,' silence is a constructive framing that can accommodate an explanation based on happenstance rather than deliberate action, and it is symmetrical because it cannot be pinned to one side or another. It is rather a mutual illegibility. Silence – I suggest – is preferable to loaded and uncritical tropes of denialism, which try to make coherent that which is chaotic, and render one side perennially responsible for the rift.

V.Coda

20th March 2024 – Dalston, East London

It is late when I leave the cinema. I am 31, in the final year of my DPhil degree, and spending most of my waking hours thinking about how to finish. I am fixated on my thesis, but already my mind is turning to the great and uncertain future…

Tonight though, I am wondering streets aimlessly, in a fog of distraction after watching 'Monster', the latest film to come from Japanese director Hirokazu Koreeda[18]. The film presents us with a simple premise: a mother becomes concerned when her son begins acting strangely. Suspecting one of his teachers, she confronts the school, who offer no investigation, and instead repeat a solemn but disconcertingly cold apology. By now primed to share the mother's frustration with the headmaster's inscrutability and defence of the guilty teacher, the audience is suddenly thrown into a second telling of the film's events, this time from the perspective of said teacher. In the remainder of the film, we revise our initial assumptions completely, before doing so yet again with a second shift of perspective.

The film draws attention to the lives we live inside a world of convictions, where the truth has been settled, the moral landscape secured, and all that remains is for us to distribute our sympathies and hostilities accordingly between characters. But the story keeps changing, and we gain one new perspective, and another, disrupting every effort we make to establish our alliances, to take things for granted. Monster appears to offer a modern-day homage to Akira Kurosawa's 'Rashōmon', which is often celebrated as a parable of interpretive flexibility (Jasanoff 2015). But arguably Rashōmon is the less successful demonstration of the plasticity of truth, because the characters' accounts of the central event are so inconsistent as to be incompatible, meaning that at least one of them must be lying. By contrast, Monster shows with confronting realism, that all its stories can be true at once, because 'the truth' is something that cannot survive a journey through another perspective unaltered. By the film's end, we are left not with a *different* enemy to what we started with, or even a different set of facts, but an abundant humanity that dissolves the very possibility of moral purity. Representing objective reality becomes not

[18] The reader is encouraged to take this opportunity to watch the film before proceeding, as it is best experienced with its twists unanticipated.

so much an unattainable feat as a pointless one, because at any human level that is not the lens through which life is experienced.

8 years and a couple of miles from my damp undergraduate flat, Monster communicated eloquently the lessons that shook me with such violence the day of the EU referendum: we inhabit our own worlds that only remain solid and certain as long as we are prepared to shut out all others. It got at what is at stake in this thesis, which hopes to do for 2016's moments of rupture what Koreeda did for a quotidian misunderstanding between half a dozen people in a small Japanese town.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion



A tradition has established itself in Anglo-American political commentary in which the analytical tools for adjudicating public discourse have been settled on by a privileged few. As we've gone through Progressivism, the disparaging language of populism to the post-truth disputes of today, we've seen a regular diagnosis of public irrationality, which has focused on grievances as a function of ignorance, style, or misinformation, rather than a substantive claim to be taken seriously. It is against this backdrop that this thesis has positioned its intervention, hypothesising that the same high-handedness has infected political discourse around climate change, in particular through the narrative of denialism. Recognising, in the STS tradition, this dynamic as being profoundly asymmetrical, and observing minimal efforts among interpretive sciences to counteract it, this thesis has attempted an alternative kind of scholarly intervention. If the YPCCC concern maps have been its catalyst, it was because of an interest not just in giving a more nuanced view of what colours publics purple with supposed unconcern, but indeed what conditions render others green with interest. Each lending definition to its opposite, the study identifies a

need to examine both together. It has aimed to develop methodological tools for understanding both despatialised metanarratives and their hyperlocal landing sites as equally socially implicated, and engaged in a mutually-shaping interpretive politics of their own.

To do this, I have developed a metaphor of statehood; an imagined collective bound by its subscription to a common constitutional order. This constitution – encompassing agreed-upon standards dictating what is morally good, ontologically real, and under what terms citizens should engage with these standards and each other – exists only to the extent that its observers treat it as such. Nevertheless, through the narrative-building work of actors individual and institutional, it can become codified and formalised to different degrees, whether in the Land Grant university or the UNFCCC. This theoretical framework draws heavily on scholarship of the imagination and social constructions of political communities (Anderson 1983, Jasanoff and Kim 2015, Ezrahi 2012, Beck 2011 etc) but deliberately sees it as neither tied inextricably to the national context, nor to any other scale. Rather, these informal constitutions are useful here precisely because they enable a framing of two vastly different scales – one far above the national, one far below – as each constituting their own constructed worlds, and as in some way commensurable. Thus have I sought to present the package of social, ontological, and normative truths that underpin references to global climate change as comparable to those of a few thousand Core Sounders:

First, I chose to examine the former through a portrait of the Paris Agreement because it, more visibly than ever before, put these values at the centre of what it means to engage with climate change. Paris changed the politics of global climate governance by weakening the primacy of national governments, responsibilising the whole world in the fate of nature instead of just political representatives, and accordingly recognising an expanded repertoire of activity as contributing to a global market of climate action. This decentralisation of

climate politics more than ever placed a tacit climate governmentality as the condition of progress, as its devolved powers relied on the spread of sanctioned articulations of responsibility and action. This global assemblage of the willing, projected by Paris, is not a country, and nor is it an institution or even a regime. So what is it? I have called it a state because it is bounded, encoding certain ideals and actions as viable and others not. It is an expression of Anderson's ideas of politically generative collective imagining, but it does away with physical territory and centralised bureaucracies almost altogether. This community of consent, stabilised by the normalisation of epistemic, moral, and political ideas into a tacit constitution, has the ability to reproduce itself as those norms acquire disciplining power. Because it is effectively a voluntary set up, the citizens of this state are invariably those who see themselves as such, thus articulating one of the central qualities of states – sovereignty and the possibility of non-membership. Under Kyoto, non-membership was a relatively straightforward question of which countries were signed-up parties to the agreement, but under Paris, the US was able to withdraw its signature and still leave a sizeable part of its economy as *de facto* participants. This more informal arrangement left the status of the country's remaining population rather more ambiguous. Were they now effectively non-citizens of the globe? And on what grounds?

Second, a close look at one such population shows a world built on its own foundations; one in which the ocean has always already been unstable, unknowable, and dangerous; in which time is predominantly a relationship between the past and the present, with the future discernible by only the faintest outlines; and in which contemplation of change is tied to a complex nexus of faith, predictable precarity, and more visible threats to daily life in the form economic decline, overdevelopment, and depopulation. In a community acutely conscious of and widely attached to its isolation, the arrival of *any* external agent or idea is a political event. Relationships with climate change are, like any narrative, thus tied to those with its advocates.

This suite of social, cultural, and cosmological commitments make more comfortable territory for anthropological analysis, but instead of succumbing to the allure of the *sui generis* local study, we continue to look at it as a constitutional world. In doing so, we can see that climate change is simply not an organising principle around which life is structured in DE. Its reception is rather determined by the extent that its embedded claims resonate with existing local priors. There is thus no consensus for, against, or of any kind about climate change in DE. Denialism is a flawed concept firstly because it assumes that the climate narrative's reception in places like DE is based on an even, comprehensive, and fully-intact communication. Second, it fails to differentiate between a rejection and a lack of agreement (or is unconcerned by the distinction). And third, it deploys the standards of one constitutional order to adjudicate the worth of another. As such, denialism cannot survive an encounter with the lifeways it so boldly describes at a distance, swiftly losing coherence on contact with the many incommensurable stories it must try and hold together.

Despite an often ungenerous and sometimes downright disparaging reception given to the Global Climate Society's non-members (i.e Trump voters, Brexiteers etc.) this framing (of two constitutions) suggests culpability for non-participation can hardly be said to lie among Core Sounders, many of whom are failing a test they do not know they are taking. Rather, it lies somewhere in the turbid waters between them; the perplexity felt between two incommensurable grammars. What then of encounters between these constitutional states? My choices of fieldwork were made largely to find the political interactions at the borders of these imagined collectives, to observe what the studious boundary work of climate scientists and resilience practitioners would achieve in terms of opening, closing, or moving these borders. Do they corroborate and reproduce the relationship of perplexity in the places where they meet? Or does one work on the other, expanding its territorial claims? The final two chapters focus on such interactions as institutional representatives of

climate globalism attempt to build supportive relationships with vulnerable populations like DE.

In chapter 7, we saw that participation in climate society is about more than resonant narratives; relying on a compatible style of politics too to ensure communication is possible. In many cases, resilience-building projects were hamstrung by an inability even to get institutional and local actors into the same fora. Gutted local governments and the unanswered calls for adaptation funding requests point to a public content to be non-participant. But closer examination shows that refusal of conventional modes of political personhood may just be the necessary means for Core Sounders to participate in their own political culture. Like denialism and post-truth before it, even 'non-participation' appears as an allegation that congratulates its own ideas whilst foreclosing other ways of participating. Constitutions are thus collections of more than moral and epistemic assumptions, they are also about the procedures that give a collective its shape and keep it running, the actions that constitute expressions of citizenship. In this light, the unexploited offerings of resilience efforts are better seen as stemming from mismatched 'grammars of participation' (Kelty 2020); as much the exclusionary expectations of the climate society as the waywardness of DE.

Chapter 8 by contrast described a forum where contact not only has been made but is guaranteed by national law. The deeply established networks of cooperative extension have less to fear that they will not capture public interest at all, but this is largely because this highly devolved institution has ended up watering down the language of climate change in order to secure public engagement. The multiplication of accountabilities within the organisation, based on its complex multi-scalar structure but also long exposure to diverse interest groups, has resulted in countless sometimes contradictory interpretations of the same extension mission. If a constitution of the kind developed in this thesis is a stabilisation of collectively agreed upon facts into something with its own disciplining

power, modifications to how we understand the collective results in changes to the constitution itself. The CES case thus shows that, under conditions of liberalisation, constitutions need not be rigid, but instead flexible to interpretation. This flexibility has allowed a faithful deference to local expressions of interest and concern.

Such flexibility has sought breadth at the expense of depth. Both resilience initiatives and CES efforts are practising a devolved and voluntary approach to engagement like Paris (resilience by leaving an open door to participate, CES by embodying the interests and language of their partners), but in both cases this localisation comes at the cost of a dialogue about climate change, either because the conversation has veered off course to guarantee engagement, or because no contact could be established in the first place. In both cases, this is because of a 'voluntary dilemma' in which, despite a laissez faire, democratised approach to engagement, stringent conditions for engaging with the climate narrative nevertheless result in *dis*engagement. In chapter 7, despite an open door policy, the high expectations of initiatives like the RCCP – that communities were enthusiastic and capable of the orderly, consensus-based, bureaucratic and collaborative processes required for support – meant the same well-connected publics benefitted as always. In chapter 8 this was more to do with the narrative compromises that allow county extension agents to enjoy trusting relationships with their public clients. By purging their communications of 'politics' and focusing squarely on 'needs', they ensure engagement, but at the cost of anything that public partners were not already talking about.

In both cases then, this voluntary dilemma produces a new silence, formed by all parties getting the type of engagement they want. In the CES case, relationships of accountability between institutional actors and their respective audiences meant that language, framing, and the political contents of scientific messaging were modified to flatter and resonate with the sociotechnical norms in question. This resulted in a profusion of tailored messaging that allowed those who already favoured a climate narrative to engage with SLR on those

terms, and those who for whatever reason do not, not to. In the participation chapter, a widespread institutional mandate to engage vulnerable communities in an active negotiation of risk and adaptation has led to a similar bifurcation, but not because of the *traction* of certain narratives but because of tacit demands they make on communities to adopt prescribed modes of political personhood. The fact that unincorporated communities may observe their own systems of social regulation, hold alternative political philosophies *vis-a-vis* relationships with the state and the concept of government, or simply lack the wherewithal to support time-, attention-, and resource-intensive consultations, all counts for little because funding schemes and outreach projects do not have a way of registering them within their processes. Anarchy and illegibility in this situation look indistinguishable, and the result is a diagnosis of 'disengagement.'

Opposite the intransigent Core Sounder, the climate society imagines an idealised citizen: convinced of a story of global decline in which they are implicated (either as repentant perpetrator or blameless victim), deferential to guidance of scientific expertise, mindful of the intersecting spectra of environmental injustices, and receptive to the organisational advantages of government and institutional collaboration. For the climate citizen, there is no trade-off between the prescriptions of scientists, the proselytising of advocates, and their own sense of how the world is and ought to be. Indeed, the closer public partners came to such an ideal – as the great catalogues of institutional projects shown at NC conferences and group calls demonstrated – the more actively they could participate, and this constitutional coproduction of epistemic, moral, and political norms became stabilised and reified. It is only those opposite the engaged citizen who have to live with trade-offs. Observers of different norms must choose between participation in these fora and their own identities; institutional facilitators must decide whether they are accountable to the climate narrative or to their public partners. As the non-citizen subsequently perceives themselves as shut out, and extension agents purge the language of climate, a buffer of

silence thus forms between poles; a hinterland that none have the means to traverse unmodified. This, I conclude, is the silence that goes by the name 'denial.'

Returning to Paris

Having moved telescopically from the diplomatic fall out of the Trump administration's renunciation of Paris, to the expressions of global climate governmentality by institutional actors in Carteret county, it is worth now zooming back out to consider what – if anything – the findings change. The Paris Agreement did not generate the global climate community; the formation of this planetary imaginary goes back many decades. It did bring the transnational community of concern into the heart of governance like never before however (Hale 2016), and introduce a neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility that would rely on the traction of norms as a key disciplining lever over more top-down prescriptions (Ciplet and Roberts 2017). Alongside this voluntary, more interpretive approach to allocating responsibility, the Paris Agreement encodes various mechanisms for ensuring that ambition continues to grow (Hermwille et al. 2019): regular stocktaking deadlines that peer-pressure states to 'ratchet' up their commitments, the appointment of 'high level champions' to coordinate and encourage cooperation between governments and non-state actors, and various fora for the participation of non-party stakeholders in global decarbonisation effort such as the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action. Paris thus compensates for the disciplinary vacuum brought about by this laissez faire approach with a host of new institutions, cheerleaders, incentives, and opportunities for peer-pressure intended to cultivate as widely as possible its set of normative goals.

At the nonstate level, this new facilitator persona may not be as non-coercive as it seems, however. Global climate governance's transition to a 'catalytic and facilitative regime' is predicated on a cohort of 'first movers' taking up high ambition targets and influencing the

widening market of actors from there (Hale 2020). Lured by the low bar of Paris's 'discretion and vagueness' (Keohane and Oppenheimer 2016: 16) a broad coalition of actors may be enrolled into a framework whereby initially modest pledges are collectively ratcheted up. Such optimistic narratives of collective buoying leading to bold, voluntary action come with a sting in the tail for parties that do not or cannot progress towards ambition as imagined, however; e.g those confronted with major socioeconomic transformations without proper preparation (Chan et al. 2019). As one senior official described of the COP28 presidency to me, despite Paris's devolved structure, its normative contents are essentially non-negotiable; it is merely expected that eventually, any remaining 'laggards' shall be forced to engage due to changes in international political economy following action by first movers.

The thesis gives important consideration to the ethical implications of this model. As we have seen, international regimes and the norms they formalise emerge from an extended period of narrative-setting and a unique but contingent history of epistemic and moral constitution-building. Little reflexivity towards that contingency is evident in the compliance mechanisms that close in around dissenters, however.

In the US context, we see these narratives stick in places where the ground is already prepared with an amenability to such sociotechnical visions. In constituencies where scientists, state agents, resilience specialists, or activists are broadly of one mind with their public audiences, the regime's imperatives to decarbonise the atmosphere, adapt to future risks, or indeed restrict global heating to 'well below 2 degrees' can sit alongside local institutions' mandate of public service without contradiction. These are perhaps the fabled 'first movers' of political theory – the NECI members helping cultivate sustainable services, or the affluent and politically conversant communities exploiting federal adaptation funding opportunities. On the coast, perhaps the hugely popular language of resilience embodies the same wide net of 'discretion and vagueness' to be reeled in with the right

ratchet. And perhaps the RCCP is the hand extended by institutional facilitators, attempting in its heavily mediated processes to incentivise engagement beyond the already engaged.

The preceding chapters have shown that none of these measures have succeeded in connecting the climate programme to communities like DE. This is because it requires scaling a distance of perplexed silence between constitutional orders that have (and sometimes *wish* to have) little to do with one another. Where institutions do make narrative compromises for the sake of legibility, they have typically elected to drop the climate message. Who then is to be the facilitator? When the local Sierra Club spokesperson's communications policy is to push for better roads to Raleigh so liberals can come and displace the coastal conservatives; when activists have deemed them beyond saving (Fine 2022); when resilience specialists have changed the subject; when NECI agents put their resources elsewhere; when local government agrees to stay out of the way, and federal government schemes are all but invisible, who is to oversee the groundswell of sub-national climate action? The rope intended to hoist all parties onto a common platform of ambition thus lacks any tension because it never reaches the bottom. Yet from the top, this may be hard to distinguish from the conclusion that Core Sounders are simply not pulling.

Herein, finally, is where the denialism framework becomes so politically instrumental, because it outsources responsibility for this failure to a silent Other – silent not because they are not speaking, but because their words cannot be heard. The metaphor of statehood and the ethnographic record have suggested a flaw in Paris's catalytic theory of change by showing that silences actually reproduce themselves when two constitutional regimes talk across purposes. Unfortunately, a symmetrical reframing does not change how climate politics is performed in practice. The Paris Agreement – naturally – does not recognise its role in producing the silences known as 'denialism'. Instead, it blackboxes its own encoded priors whilst identifying non-assenters as the 'laggards' in need of future change. The likely

consequence is that for such communities it shall not be the rewards of 'first mover' status but economic and environmental necessity that ultimately forces rapid change.

Implications

Indeed, numbers of 'unconcerned' responses have gradually gone down in the YPCCC surveys over the years. Though hailed as progress by the likes of NECI, for Core Sounders this has seemingly come from traumas like Hurricane Florence, forcing them to grapple with the future and available ways of making sense of it. Should this be considered a victory though? Will the problems raised here go away once the YPCCC graphs see the taxa of 'dismissives' and 'doubtfuls' finally go extinct? This thesis concludes no, because it would have been done through the epistemological violence attendant to a model of governance that works by quietly earmarking some ways of knowing for emulation and others for correction. As such, it is arguably less a crisis of atmospheric physics or even international relations than it is one of knowledge politics. Whether the topic is climate change, COVID19, immigration, or something else, the genre of political discourse called populism is not one receding in prominence. Though I make no judgement in defence of such discourses or against them, I do suggest that they should not be taken as an anomaly in an otherwise natural cycle of ideological tides; or worse, a deficit in public understanding. Rather, the persistence of simmering far-right movements, electoral upsets, conspiracy theories, or anti-establishment rhetoric may more favourably be read as indictments on the state of representative politics itself, and inspire serious introspection at a constitutional level.

This is, admittedly, extremely challenging. There is no utopian alternative that can be attained by merely making governance more democratic or pluralist. Indeed, the voluntary turn in environmental communication at every level of US institutional activity *has* seen publics invited to engage with the subject via a narrative, language, and ontology of their

choosing; including by not engaging at all. This is arguably democratisation at the most granular level, because all parties are able to participate on their own terms. Yet, insofar as one recognises some realist dimension to climate change and its effects, this arrangement (that sees half a population topple out of an urgent programme of collective action) hardly seems either effective at mitigating climate turmoil or likely to protect Core Sounders in the long term. Do the realist imperatives of climate change force us then to admit a basic incompatibility between democracy and action? Pluralism appears to resist settling on a single definition of 'preventing climate change' at a time when, like a bicycle, a gear must be decisively chosen so energy can be translated into movement. Is there just an inherent violence to the challenge before us then, where a course of action must be chosen – however obtuse and arbitrary – and run roughshod over people?

Naturally, this thesis aspires for better, even while accepting that a *realpolitik* assessment of the global regime will find little time or capacity (and still less appetite) for an overnight constructivist awakening. Nevertheless, the concept-building and frame-aligning work of TANs and scholars has shown that ideas and ethics can and do take on constitutional stability with the proper handling. My suggestion then is that cultivating reflexivity and humility within the networks of the climate society could prove generative of an alternative kind of political participation. To the climate constitution's protected tenets could be added a condition that recognises all of human life as deserving the privileges of membership, whether or not they imagine themselves as part of such a union. Such a change might reasonably be described as moving from climate society to climate humanity, as it encodes a concern for the ambivalent ways in which the sociotechnical imperatives of the climate regime land on diverse social contexts at the centre of its mission.

This may be put in less abstract terms with an example of existing policy pathways that move in such a direction. The Just Transition (JT) concept represents something of an anomaly within climate discourse because it disrupts the pattern of political stereotypes

that see Global South settings conflated with adaptation policies and place-based knowledges, and Global North ones with mitigation and techno-economic approaches. With its origins in labour and trade union movements (Hizliok et al. 2024), JT has acquired growing relevance within political discussions on sustainable economic transitions. With its social focus, the JT agenda prescribes taking care to insulate public communities from the shocks of these necessary but often rapid transformations; in particular the workers or communities that have historically relied on the industries being phased out. In time, the JT discourse has increasingly been deployed to carry advocacy on racial, indigenous, or development platforms that represent more comfortable terrain for environmental justice campaigners. What is unique and important about JT however is that it introduces a justice argument specifically in defence of workers from often the most conservative regions, well outside the climate society, and in the Global North where political discourse is otherwise dominated by macroeconomic and technoscientific language. Returning to the coal seams of Silesia, it was the 'Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration'[19] presented by the Polish presidency that offered the one entry point for local miners' interests to penetrate the conference walls. Communications research has spoken at length about the importance of creating such channels for fossil fuel-dependent communities to be involved in decision-making; both feeling and *being* listened to (Marshall et al. 2018). The extent to which such findings lead to empathetic policies (rather than merely informing how practitioners can more compellingly sell the climate agenda to communities) depends on the existence of an institutional culture of receptiveness (Dudman and De Wit 2021). Recent controversies arising from accusations of insufficient public consultation include the 'gilets jaunes' fuel tax riots in France, and in the UK, Ultra-Low Emissions Zones and Low Traffic

[19] A poignant echo of the massive 'Solidarność' (Solidarity) trade union movement that started in a Polish ship yard in 1980.

Neighbourhoods which, it has been claimed, disproportionately penalise low-income motorists (Verbeek 2024). This has seen crucial environmental issues ensnared within protracted culture wars, in turn entrenching a politics of mutual illegibility. The exact proportion of genuine public grievances to bad-faith fomentation by mass media and partisan politics in these controversies is near impossible to discern. Nevertheless, assuming the latter explanation then immediately dismissing it forecloses the possibility of the former (Ward 2023), and reproduces the asymmetrical hierarchies of public gullibility evident in denialism, post-truth, and populism before. Instead, this thesis would prescribe giving equivalent consideration to the social efficacy of climate 'solutions' as to their physical efficacy. Viewing public input as a fundamental parameter of action rather than a post-hoc communications challenge builds principles of symmetry and constructivism into climate's constitutional foundation without dissolving a commitment to act. Discourses like JT have come closest to situating needed transformations within a social landscape without robbing it of politics and complexity, and without abandoning political ambition. On the contrary, by making a feature of the ambivalence of those changes it permits a discourse that sees empathy as a serious instrument of fair governance.

Advocating for humility within the institutional black boxes of science and government is hardly an intervention without precedent (Jasanoff 2003, Wynne 1992, Hulme 2008, Beck et al. 2014, Callison 2014, Rice et al. 2015, Rayner 2016, Jasanoff and Simmet 2017 etc.). My purpose here has not been to add an ambitious new fix to this persistent problem; such would be to promote humility with hubris. Rather, through the metaphor of statehood and an emphasis on the imagination, I have sought to stress that such institutional problems are not merely reproduced remotely in the lab or the conference centre, but in constant communication with a wider community of public, institutional, epistemic, moral, or cultural actors. Categories like denialism that cause so much harm are potent not *because* they appear in widely read op-eds, but because they have become embedded in a collective

vision of how society is organised. By the same token, the tenets of the Paris Agreement have acquired such incontestable solidity not because a scientist discovered Truth and a global political regime formed around it, but because enough citizens have found common purpose in a portfolio of ideas that a community could be formed and stabilised upon it.

In this sense, the site of correction is perhaps no more the embattled clauses of multilateral treaties or the IPCC report than it is the ignorant Core Sounder. Rather, and more hopefully, it is somewhere much more mundane, in the moral logics and epistemic standards that become political cultures by virtue of our accepting them as normal. Watching a film, asking 'why do I think this', or meeting one's Others become acts of radical knowledge politics as potent as a vote or a protest, because they show in the most quotidian possible terms that reality is little more than the version of events we end up with when we stop looking for more explanations. It is to our own world-building imaginations then that we might most profitably look, knowing that we are all citizens of larger constitutional orders; orders only as real as we imagine them to be.

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