Rebelling For The Environment: The Case Of Extinction Rebellion

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Clarification of Terms

The British State
In this project, the term 'state' is used to encompass the three branches of the government, the executive, legislative and judicial, respectively. All three of these are applied according to context, classified under the umbrella term state.

Ecocentrism
Ecocentrism dictates that nature holds intrinsic value of its own and therefore has a right to exist independently of its connection to humankind. Humankind is furthermore seen as part of nature. (Boylan, 2014, p. 144)

Anthropocentrism
In an anthropocentric view on human-nature relations, nature is seen as separate from mankind. Nature therefore does not have a right to be protected on its own, but only as long as it holds value to humankind. (Boylan, 2014, pp. 121-122)

1. Introduction

"Only when it is dark enough can you see the stars, and they are lining up now to write rebellion across the skies. There is no choice. " (Extinction Rebellion, n.d.a)

Since the late 1960s, a growing number of social movements articulating environmental concerns have emerged predominantly in the Global North. Although doubts about the very existence of global warming remains prevalent among some circles of society today, a widespread acceptance of its actuality has emerged in the general public. Despite the fact that some states have taken action against climate change, a number of green movements believe this to be insufficient to meet the severity of the situation. According to these movements, the climate crisis is still raging on and many scientists, within a broad range of studies, argue a need for urgent action. (Extinction Rebellion, n.d.c; Crist, 2007, p. 33) Policy makers are criticized by social movements for inactivity and inability to restructure the treatment of natural resources and production of gas emissions (Giugni et al., 1999, p. 207). As a reaction, movements focusing on environmental issues are becoming increasingly active. Protests, occupations and other campaigns of environmental movements are becoming more present in public squares and on social media.

Modern environmental movements vary in their methods, demands and their reach, from locally embedded grassroots movements to established NGOs with global influence. The main divergence seems to be between those who raise concerns about the effects of changing climate due to its catastrophic consequences for humankind, while others condemn the anthropocentric approach of humanity towards the environment and demand preservation for the sake of nature itself (Sandler & Pezzulo, 2007, p. 58). Common for environmental movements is, however, the demand for a sustainable handling of natural resources (Giugni et al, 1999, p. 205).

One of the modern environmental social movements, which has been rising in prominence and notoriety since they were created in 2018, is Extinction Rebellion (XR). Despite being a rather new environmental social movement, XR has gained considerable traction and media attention. As the name implies, the self-designated 'rebels' emphasize the need for urgent action in order to prevent a climate breakdown, which, according to them, could put the survival of the human race at stake. The movements protests are mainly directed at governments, urging them *"to take immediate and drastic action to address climate change"* (BBC, 2019a). XR commits to an ethos that centres around non-violent civil disobedience. Their tactics include blocking roads, occupying public spaces and other manifestations in the public sphere. Due to the unlawful nature of their actions, the XR protests have consequently entailed mass arrests, and the delinquent activists have justified their actions by the perceived governmental failure to adequately address the issue of climate change (ibid.). XR thus challenges the morality of the state and brings the legitimacy of the state-civil society relations into question by arguing that civic misconduct in some circumstances can be morally justified. The case of XR activism therefore involves conflicting conceptualizations of justice and epitomizes a recently emerging question regarding the state-society relations; is the state neglecting to protect its citizenry from the potentially devastating effects of climate change?

Problem Formulation

This research encompasses a discourse analysis into the emergence, construction and composition of a counter discourse articulated by XR concerning the environment. This is done with the aim of illuminating the discursive contestation and renegotiation of the meanings embedded within the concept of the environment. XR's understanding of the inherent meanings that should be associated with the environment, such as the inclusion of notions of justice, are studied against the environmental discourse stemming from the British state. With this in mind, our research question is:

1.1 Research Question

"How does Extinction Rebellion contest the British state's environmental discourse?"

<u>Working Questions</u>

1. What elements constitute Extinction Rebellions environmental discourse?
2. How is Extinction Rebellions environmental discourse reflected in that of the British state?
3. How is contestation manifested in the interaction between Extinction Rebellion and the British state?

1.2 Project Outline

This study begins with a chapter presenting XR and its central demands and visions. The succeeding chapter outlines both discourse analysis and Discourse Theory, as these make up our theoretical framework for this study. Analytical concepts derived from these theories are presented and our application of them mentioned. Chapter four outlines the methodology utilized in this research presenting the data collection and analysis methods and (de)limitations. Chapter five is dedicated to outlining the main findings where each sub-section represents a main finding. This is followed by a broader discussion of different perspectives in chapter six, also outlining the relevance of the study. Finally, chapter seven summarizes the main findings and suggestions for further research.

2. Extinction Rebellion

This chapter shortly presents XR as an environmental social movement. It summarizes, 1) how the movement is structured, 2) what the movement's vision is, 3) what their demands are and 4) which methods the movement uses in order to create the desired change. Due to XR being a fairly new movement, most information on how they conduct themselves and their demands can only be found through various news sources and their own published material.

2.1 Composition and Strategy

On October 7, 2019, XR called for an 'international rebellion', which initiated two weeks of climate protests taking place in 60 cities across the world. The movement itself was launched in 2018 in Great Britain and has since then spread to other countries of the world, where hundreds of separate local factions of the same movement have emerged (BBC, 2019a; The Guardian, 2019a). Within a year, XR has become one of the fastest-growing environmental organizations in the world, as the movement is so focused on using civil disobedience as a method. An environmental politics professor stated that "[f]*or the first time, you have ordinary people engaging with radical action. It's unique – I can't think of any* [protest movement] *historically happening in that way*". (Clare Saunders in The Guardian, 2019a)

Despite being a rather new movement, XR has gained a lot of media attention, among other factors, due to their controversial usage of civil disobedience (BBC, 2019b; The Telegraph, 2019). The movement defends the use of such methods by stating them as necessary to bring about a real change. Arrests and jail time are seen as unfortunate side effects and as calculable risks that members are willing to take to create change (Extinction Rebellion, n.d.a).

According to XR, the act of civil disobedience should be strategically targeted towards creating *"economic disruption to shake the current political system and civil disruption to raise awareness*" (Extinction Rebellion, n.d.a). Recently, the British faction of the movement has proclaimed that they will initiate a 'twelve days of crisis' campaign. The aim is to affect the upcoming general election in Great Britain and put pressure on politicians to make climate change the defining issue of the election. This campaign will follow XR's usual modus operandi of non-violent protests, which "*could include staging 'mock emergencies' and people being glued to battle-buses in bumblebee costumes*" (Evening Standard, 2019).

The usage of disruptive means of civil disobedience has led to many arrests of activists in different countries, and the Metropolitan Police banned the protests in London. This was later overruled in High Court (BBC, 2019b). When asked why they would risk arrests and public disorder charges, members of XR proclaimed that it was mostly due to a feeling of urgency and that "*time is running out*" (Louis Brijmohun in The Guardian, 2019b). The increased effects of climate change in their own country and abroad allegedly opened many of the activist's eyes to how severe the situation is. Hence, they felt that they could not ignore the situation any longer and that the livelihoods of future generations had to be considered.

2.2 XR's Vision and Demands

XR describes themselves as "*an international movement that uses non-violent civil disobedience in an attempt to halt mass extinction and minimise the risk of social collapse*" (Extinction Rebellion, n.d.a). The movement believes that a climate crisis is imminent and that society, as we know it today, will falter as a result of the pressure the climate crisis will inevitably put on nation states. Not only our own species but the species of all life is facing a tragic breakdown, from which it will be hard to recover. (ibid.)

In order to prevent ecological collapse, XR has created certain demands, which they believe will help address the upcoming climate crisis. Their frustration is mostly directed towards the perceived inaction of governments and political officials. XR urges these "*to take immediate and drastic action to address climate change"* (BBC, 2019a), which the British branch argues should be done through, 1) declaring 'climate emergency', 2) a legal commitment to eliminate carbon emissions by 2025 and 3) creating a 'Citizens Assembly' to oversee the implementation of the proposed climate policies (Extinction Rebellion, n.d.b).

The idea behind the proposed Citizens Assembly is to bring together ordinary citizens to "*investigate, discuss and make recommendations on how to respond to the climate emergency*" (Extinction Rebellion, n.d.b). Similar to a jury service, members would be randomly selected all across the country, yet the process will as well be designed so that the assembly reflects the state's citizens in terms of characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, education level and geography. These members would then gain access to experts, from which they would listen to balanced information and discussion would l also be facilitated by professionals. The Citizens Assembly should have independent oversight, which XR believes would empower citizens to take responsibility for the climate emergency and circumvent power falling into the hands of scrupulous political parties. According to XR, these three demands are among the first steps that should be taken in order to try to meet the challenges that the imminent climate crisis will create. (ibid.)

In sum, XR opens a new chapter in the history of environmental social movements. The loosely connected affiliations of XR stage theatrical and disruptive protests, which are being vindicated based on an argument of urgency and revolutionary rhetoric. The fact that ordinary citizens are engaging in civil disobedience and public disruption represent a challenge to the legitimacy of state authority, and the relative righteousness and justification for this is being debated and contested in different fields. The standoff between activists and authorities are manifested by physical confrontations in the public, which is accompanied by a contestation between competing discourses contestation between competing discourses. Both will be subject to analysis in this study conducted by a discursive inquiry.

3. Discourse Theory

This chapter briefly outlines this study's chosen application of discourse analysis (DA). DA is presented first outlining the ways in which this research views reality and science. Discourse Theory (DT) is then presented as an analytical tool based on the chosen scholars followed by an outline of the concepts used in analysis.

3.1 Characteristics of DA

The ontology of DA is not categorized as either strictly idealist or realist (Torfing, 1999, p. 94). The realist character of the world is not denied, rather, the world is assumed to be structured by the embedded meanings within objects and phenomena appearing in the form of discourse, and it is assumed that all objects and actions carry meaning (Howarth et al, 2000; Howarth, 2000, p. 8, p. 111). This research does not differentiate between the non-discursive and discursive elements, but includes all aspects of reality, including acts as discursive practices, arguing that actions are discourse as well (Howarth, 2000, p. 8).

Within DA, as understood in this research, it is assumed that knowledge is situated in space and time and relative as discourses change and are shaped by culture and history (Egholm, 2014, p. 145; Torfing, 1999, p. 12). The purpose of studying discourse is to understand how meanings are developed and negotiated by existing social practices, including, but not limited to, language (Howarth, 2000, p. 8). However, the purpose is not simply to understand different existing meanings through interpretation but to additionally detect the rules and norms creating discourses situating meaning in a broader context. This will thus bring forth new interpretations of meanings and show the plurality of discourses created by different actors with different interests (ibid., pp. 11-12).

In addition, science is not assumed to be value-free and the researcher is acknowledged to have a subjective approach to the object of study as researchers themselves are embedded in the discursive field and operate according to their own subjective logics (Howarth, 2000, p. 122). Lastly, regarding the validity of research, a representation of reality, in other words the correspondence of findings to existing reality constructs, is seen as a verification of knowledge (ibid., p. 132).

3.2 Discourse Theory

This section outlines the theoretical aspect of discourse analysis based on the concepts of Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek in particular. This section begins with a quick introduction to DT, followed by the analytical concepts used. Finally, the application of DT and attached concepts in the analysis are explained. This version of DA theory is founded on a combination of linguistics within a post-Saussurean framework and a post-Marxist social school of thought, fused together by Laclau and Mouffe *"into a single all-encompassing theory of the social world"* (Rear, 2013, p. 3). Arguing that they are post-Marxist, these scholars claim that there is no distinction between the classes, rather groups within society are composed of discursive practices where hegemony exists only in the form of a dominant understanding of the meanings within the discourses.

Discourses are defined by these scholars as "*a decentred structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed*" (Laclau, 1988, p. 254 in Torfing, 1999, p. 40). However, there is no inherent connection between an object or phenomenon and its representation, which are purely constructed and consequently not natural or apolitical (Bryman, 2016, p. 531; Torfing, 1999, p. 41). Discourse *"is an attempt to fix a web of meanings within a particular domain"* (Rear, 2013, p. 6) and therefore often appears natural and objective. Deconstructing discourse carries an empowering element, which facilitates an understanding of the intentions, purposes and origins of a representation of a phenomenon (Egholm, 2014, p. 145). Discourse is not permanent but infinitely negotiated, reproduced and

filled with new meaning, hence it is never completely solidified (Torfing, 1999, p. 92; p. 42). DA, through DT, investigates the process by which meaning becomes perceived as natural and objective (Rear, 2013, p. 5). Lastly, as different groups within society associate meaning concerning similar topics differently, DT identifies discursive fields where different discourses compete, and/or negotiate meanings between each other.

This study identifies differing discourses concerning the environment (i.e. one discourse stemming from XR, and one discourse stemming from the British state), and investigates the (re)negotiation of the meanings attached to discourse concerning the environment. It facilitates an understanding on how new social orders are constructed and how actors and interests are positioned in a discourse (Howarth, 2000, pp. 109-110).

3.3 Concepts

This section outlines the concepts utilized for analysis. DT was developed by Laclau and Mouffe in their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, but is, in this study, combined with the scholarship of Žižek. Žižek was a post-Marxist, who collaborated with Laclau and Mouffe, especially in developing the concepts of nodal points and empty signifiers. (Rear, 2013, p. 3)

Nodal Points

Developed by Žižek as well as Laclau and Mouffe, a discourse is understood as a web of meanings surrounding a topic, which includes central privileged points (nodal points). Within a particular discourse, these nodal points are the central reference points binding together *"a particular system of meanings or 'chain of signification', assigning meanings to other signifiers within that discourse"* (Rear, 2013, p. 6). For example, within communist discourse, the signifier 'communism' combines other signifiers, such as; state, democracy and freedom, altering their meanings to fit discourse concerning communist ideology (ibid, p. 7). This concept can be used to analyze power, as *"not every discourse has the same chance to dominate a discursive field"* (Kolankiewicz et al, 2012, p. 130). When analyzing a discourse, one of the first steps, when using this concept, would be to identify the nodal points, and its process of conventionalization.

Empty Signifiers

Drawing from Žižek, the concept of 'empty signifier' entails a concept where the meaning attached exists differently within different contexts via its relative positioning within a discourse. It can thus be described as a nodal point that exists simultaneously within competing discourses, and by doing so loses its meaning, since there are different usages and interpretations of the concept. The concept, or empty signifier, is either void of meaning without the surrounding context, or the meaning changes depending on the discourse it is used. For example, the concept of the environment is conceptualized within the context of climate change and climate governance when utilized within XR's discourse, while its meaning may take on different forms when used to explain the social relations or social 'environment' existent in university life (Rear, 2013, p. 7).

Objectivity and Hegemony

Hegemony understood within DT entails the invisibility of a constructed reality to the point where the discursive practice is perceived as 'common sense' (Rear, 2013, p. 8). Here the origins of the concept or discourse are forgotten usually due to the fact that the discourse

is used so often and by so many people for an extended period of time (ibid). When ideology or discursive constructions are taken for granted and assumed as truth, the discourse has reached a hegemonic state.

Hegemony can also be used when there are multiple discourses on a topic and one discourse is believed or used more than the others. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985) deny the existence of objective reality, the concept of objectivity refers to a discourse *"whose contingency has become invisible* [and is] *called objective"* (ibid.).

(Dis)Articulation

Articulation is defined as *"any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice"* (Rear, 2013, p. 7). The discourse is thus the sum of these articulation practices. The concept of disarticulation furthermore entails that any hegemonic discourse may be *"susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices which attempt to disarticulate it in order to install another form of hegemony"* (ibid., p. 8). The state of hegemony is constantly challenged and changeable. While articulation is the act of asserting a discourse, disarticulation is then the act of unravelling, or delegitimizing another discourse with the intent of asserting a counter discourse.

Antagonism

When a discourse is competing with the hegemonic discourse within a specific field, it can be considered antagonistic. Antagonism entails that an entire discourse is competing with or contesting a hegemonic discourse rather than the act of an individual or group unraveling the logic of a discourse - i.e. disarticulation. Antagonism is made visible through the disarticulation of certain discourses towards the hegemonic. (Rear, 2013, p. 8)

Application of Theory

The concepts explained in this section enable the researchers to illuminate the meanings within the discourses by identifying nodal points within discourses and how they are linked together to create it. These tools help this research to investigate the discourse of XR as well as that discourse's reflections within state discourse. This is done by identifying the links between nodal points as well as comparing the nodal points between the discourses of XR and the British state. The nodal points appearing in both XR and state discourse, though linked in different ways, are called empty signifiers and help the researchers understand the differences between the two discourses by enabling the understanding of the differences in how the nodal points are linked. The concepts of antagonism and disarticulation provide the tools for understanding XR's strategy of unraveling the state's discourse to assert their own. These strategies include acts and practices such as protesting or redefining concepts such as the environment, climate change or the human/nature relationship. Antagonism is used when assessing XR's entire discourse as opposed to the state's dominant discourse. Articulation is used to express the methods XR uses to assert their discourse as truth and disarticulation is used when showcasing the unraveling or de-legitimizing of state discourse by XR with the aim of replacing state discourse with their own.

4. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology of this study as well as the (de)limitations. Data collection strategies are briefly described as well as the deemed relevance of various types of data. Data analysis methods are additionally elaborated upon giving a short description of the steps involved in the interpretation of data. Finally, (de)limitations are presented showing the scope of the study, choices of research design and limitations in methodology.

4.1 Data Collection Methods

The nature of the acquired data for this research is purely qualitative, since the character of discourse is inherent in the choice of language and actions that should be captured. For the chosen approach to discourse analysis, Laclau and Mouffe deem qualitative data suitable for the kind of research that their approach leads to (Howarth, 2000, p. 140). Data about XR's discourse on the environment and their reasons for the emergence of their discourse has been gathered from material on their webpage and in their published vision paper. Apart from written language, pictures and videos with speeches and interviews and illustrative depictions of their actions have been collected through internet searches.

This research focuses on contestations of various aspects within state discourse such as justice, and the collection of data reflects the areas of contestations this research set out to investigate. The research team attempted to gather pieces of data that illustrate contact between XR and the state and data illustrating contact between the actors was deemed an essential element to represent the arena of contestation. Pictures and videos of protesting were chosen in an attempt to include the discourse embedded in XR activism. This was deemed essential to represent the whole of XRs discourse, where protesting is viewed as important in hegemonic discourse contestation.

The collected data from XR is listed with a reference to where it can be found in the appendices;
- XR's webpage in Appendix 1
- XR's a defendant guide for arrest in Appendix 2
- XR's three demands bill in Appendix 3
- XR's arrest training in Appendix 4
- XR's article: Courts gearing up to prosecute 1,000 Extinction Rebellion rebels - Extinction Rebellion in Appendix 5
- XR's article: Grandparents unite to protect the planet in Appendix 6
- XR's article: Lawyers for Extinction Rebellion Declare Rebellion in Appendix 7
- A description and interpretation of XR's pictures in Appendix 8
- A description and interpretation of XR'S videos in Appendix 9
- Spiegel Online's article: Interview with Extinction Rebellion Co-Founder Roger Hallam in Appendix 10

In order to attain an understanding of how XR interacts with the British state, discourse on the environment by political state institutions, and reactions towards XR by executive state authorities, such as the police, have been collected. The discourse about the environment of institutions, such as the ministry for environment and other political spokespersons, has been

analyzed in an effort to assess the similarities and differences to XR's discourse in order to compare the two. Reactions by the state to the environmental movement are to be detected in statements by the police, showing how Britain sees XR. As the scope of this study set out to investigate the mirroring of XR discourse in the British state, chosen pieces of data reflect the research teams attempt to represent the essential aspects of British state discourse needed. This data therefore shows how the British state reacts to XR's discourse on environment.

Data for the British state has been collected from these sources:
- Great Britain's 25 years environment plan in Appendix A
- Great Britain'S Environment Bill policy paper in Appendix B
- Speech of the Chief Executive of the British Environmental Agency in Appendix C

4.2 Data Analysis Methods

The research team followed the general steps presented in the following section. When assessing the various collected pieces of data used during analysis, each researcher read an entire publication, speech or policy document, searching for relevant pieces for interpretation. Pictures and videos of XR were analyzed by accessing elements within it relevant for interpretation of discourse. After a scanning of all pieces of data, nodal points were identified within the texts and media that the researchers deemed relevant and important. In interpretation of the texts and media, the researchers investigated how the nodal points were connected differently within XR discourse in comparison to how similar nodal points in British discourse are connected. This step of comparing the linkages between nodal points between the discourses gave the researchers a pivotal understanding of the ways in which XR contests British state discourse. The meaning of central concepts derives from the ways in which they are linked and illuminates the embedded meaning and logic of each discourse. Lastly, methods of disarticulation and antagonistic strategies of XR were analyzed and interpreted from the various pieces of data. This includes highlighting the ways in which XR de-legitimizes the discourse of the state in an effort to legitimize their version of reality.

4.3 (De)limitations

In the following section, limitations and delimitations for this research paper are outlined. Firstly, certain limitations developed as a result of our choice of research design. A case study allows us to exemplify knowledge on a detailed case (Howarth, 2000, p. 138). The conclusions cannot be generalized but they contribute with a new understanding to a broader dynamic in society and thus make knowledge more coherent (ibid., p. 131). This research design can be replicated but might attain different findings as researchers are subjective and their own embeddedness into discourses influences their understandings (ibid., p. 122). Our method for data collection solely using the internet limits our full understanding of XR, as we have not been in contact with the department in Great Britain and therefore rely on their representation on the web. As movements can be argued to mobilize a lot through

platforms on the internet, their representation and discourse is assumed to be synchronous with their representation in meetings and actions. At the same time, XR promotes having a loose inner hierarchy with unofficial leadership. This may affect the text pieces and other information shared on their website on other official platforms, since multiple actors within the movement may be contributing to the discourse without ensuring an internal coherence.

This research analyzes the negotiation process between XR as an environmental movement and Britain where the movement originates. The discourses of these political actors depend on the national context, and thus differ from other cases that could have been chosen. Both movements and states' behavior in encounters with non-state actors are shaped by political structures such as the nature of a state, it's history, characteristics of civil society and political culture. Despite the international reach of XR, each group operates in different political and social conditions. The protests in Britain, the subject of this inquiry, cannot be separated from the context of Brexit, the all-dominating issue that eclipses most other topics in contemporary British politics. It is important to emphasize the specific contextuality of the XR protests in Great Britain, which influences the generalizability of this research. It is also important to emphasize that green movements in Western Europe and North America differ from those in the Global South. There is thus a limitation on the degree to which we can generalize our case study to other contexts in the Global South in particular. Lastly, as XR is a newly emerged movement, the time frame of this research is limited from their founding up to the present date.

5. Analysis

The analysis presents the main findings. Each section takes a central finding with a few nodal points within XR's discourse and both interprets the meaning and links between them as well as compares them to British state discourse. The first section assesses the nodal point of climate *emergency* and illustrates the articulation of it within XR's discourse. Section two goes into the conceptualization of responsibility and this empty signifier's place within both XR and British state's discourse. Section three outlines the differentiation of the human-nature relationship as articulated within each discourse. Finally, the contestation of XR's conceptualization of justice is discussed in opposition to the state's version of justice. The physical interaction between these actors via protesting, arrestment and court hearings is analyzed.

5.1 Emergency

In this section, our first finding of XR's discourse is presented. XR antagonises the currently dominant discourse on climate change by creating the alternative nodal point of emergency arguing for the urgency of climate action. The movement further articulates the meaning of emergency by equating it with the *truth*. By creating these nodal points, XR challenges the hegemonic discourse in politics and media surrounding climate change. Additionally, the nodal point of state inaction is created and opposed to climate action by XR. These opposing nodal points disarticulate the state's discourse concerning climate change.

XR's discourse greatly emphasizes the emergency that they perceive us to be in due to climate change. This is, for example, seen on their webpage, where climate change is described with words like 'crisis' (Appendix 1, p.1) and 'breakdown' (ibid.). This indicates that XR perceives these changes not to be a naturally occurring change but a human-caused extraordinary state (ibid., p. 22). The wording 'climate change' hardly appears in the movement's discourse in contrast to dominant discourses and thus challenges the hegemonic discourse by articulating the nodal points emergency instead. This is further emphasized by the fact that one of their central demands is the insistence that the British government should declare a state of emergency (ibid., p. 26). Furthermore, the ecological crisis is argued to mean a crisis for humanity by showcasing examples on their webpage of how consequences of climate change affect society and all life on earth negatively. For instance, research is mentioned that proves the link between flooding, droughts and other extreme weather phenomena and the consequences these have on society, such as war, famine and disease (ibid., p. 3; p. 13).

It is argued by XR that "[d]*ecades of corporate lobbying and party politics have led to a climate and ecological emergency that poses an unprecedented existential threat to humanity and all life on Earth*" (Appendix 1, p. 66). World leaders and governments are accused of having ignored scientific warnings on the effects of our current system on the environment and refused to act upon it (ibid., p. 5; p. 11). The discourse of XR strategically characterizes world leaders with lack of climate action, and by that disarticulates the current government politics concerning the environment. The discourse opposes state inaction and emphasizes the need for citizen action and XR's own rebellion.

XR's discourse around the climate emergency is tightly connected with their concept of truth. On their homepage and in their three demands bill, they state that the British "[g]*overnment must tell the truth by declaring a climate and ecological emergency*" (Appendix 1, p. 26). Their perception of truth is that climate change has progressed towards an urgent state constituting a threat of extinction (ibid., p. 4). XR, however, has discrepancies in their conceptualization of the truth. On one hand, XR asserts that truth is scientifically proven, cannot be questioned and should not be denied. They do so by referring to scientific research and authorized institutions, such as NASA and the UN (ibid., p. 1; p. 24). On their webpage, they, for instance, write that "[w]e *need to stop relying on instinct and to listen to scientists and the numbers they are giving u*s" (ibid., p. 23) in order to prevent ecological collapse and our simultaneous extinction. On the other hand, however, their version of truth, as established by XR, is limited to the truth that corresponds to the movement's own interest of advancing climate action. Having first highlighted the importance of following scientific research before, XR simultaneously, in other parts of their discourse, states that science does not in fact reflect the whole truth because "[t]*here are many times when the published science has underestimated the severity of threats and the rapidity with which they might unfold*" (ibid., p. 22). The inability for science to predict the future is linked with humankind's limited ability to understand the holistic character of the world. With this quote, XR thus argues that - in contradiction to elsewhere in their discourse - science is not able to predict the urgency of the state of the climate and that current reports are undermining the urgency of our situation. (ibid.) XR is strategically using scientific research to back their claim of climate change actually being a climate emergency, while simultaneously recommending that people should not *"wait until all the evidence is in before acting strongly to head off those risks: because by then it will likely be too late"* (ibid., p. 24). The fact that XR's perception of *truth* is so closely linked to their nodal point of *emergency* helps understand their emergence as a social movement and an oppositional force contesting the dominant discourse of politics in Great Britain. Their discourse assumes that people believe in scientific research showing that climate change is happening and that it is manmade.

As opposed to the emphasis on the emergency in XR's discourse, the discourse of the British government outlined in policy does not refer to climate change in a coherent manner and instead includes multiple words to describe the same process, such as climate emergency and climate change. By using words such as "*environmental decline*" (Appendix B, p. 20) and *"in a changing climate"* (ibid., p. 17), their discourse naturalizes the changes in climate and makes them appear almost inevitable and unproblematic. It is further mentioned that the environment can be improved and recovered as opposed to XR's impression of an apocalyptic scenario. The Environmental Bill of 2019 for instance gives the impression that Great Britain has already taken extensive action and thus prevented the worst. What the policies are referring to are actions such as the pricing of plastic bags, the hosting of climate summits in Great Britain and incentives for businesses to be more considerate of the environment (ibid., p. 4; p. 8; p. 9).

5.2 Responsibility

After assessing the relatively divergent perception of the current state of the environment, this part will outline the degree and the kind of responsibility that are deemed necessary, as envisioned respectively by XR and the British state. XR and the British state have divergent perceptions of the responsibility attributed to the government and the citizenry

in resolving the climate situation, and this section disentangle and disseminates the discourse proposed by both actors. There is a nexus between the paramount nodal points in XR's discourse - *duty* and *rebellion* - that disarticulates the government's discourse and underpins the justification for direct action and civil disobedience.

By characterizing the progression of climate change as a climate emergency, XR's discourse intends to justify their direct actions and methods such as civil disobedience, which support their idea of *rebellion* (Appendix 1, p. 33). Rebellion is described in highly romanticized terms, often linked with notions of love for both humankind and nature itself (ibid., p. 31). Loaded with revolutionary ethos, XR advocates "*a rebellion against the heartless, loveless and lifeless delusion of seeing Earth as dead matter*" (ibid., p. 35). The movement furthermore describes their own members as rebels, in which they seem to take pride. In their arrest training manual, XR states that "[r]*ebellion requires sacrifice. An act of shedding the norms of a destructive and violent system and stepping in to our vision of a compassionate and healthy future. Sacrifice comes from the latin root sacra and facere i.e. 'to make sacred'*" (Appendix 4, p. 3). This quote illustrates how XR perceives the act of rebelling as a justified act that is 'made sacred' by fighting for a perceivably just cause, i.e. the preservation of the environment. The rebellion initiated by XR is described as "*rebellion for the earth and all life inhabiting it*" (ibid., p.4).

XR's notion of rebellion touches upon an important nodal point for XR, which is *duty*. The Three Demands Bill (Appendix 3) thus often directly mentions the word 'duty' in relation to the duties of the; Secretary of State, Committee on Climate Change or the Citizens Assembly, in order to combat the climate emergency. Such duties include creating effective policies to achieve net zero gas emissions and halt the extinction of species. Regular citizens are encouraged "*to take the action that they feel is necessary to create the changes needed in society*" (Appendix 4, p. 13). XR seemingly provides people with a choice on whether to rebel or not, while never questioning the fundamental assumption that changes are in fact needed within British society. At the same time, XR describes the current inaction towards the climate emergency as a "*destruction of human and non-human life that is being perpetrated and will continue to carry on if we do not act to stop it*" (ibid., p. 11). Such statements contradict the former and leaves the individual with a dilemma. Within the framework of truth that XR has created in their discourse, the individual is left with the choice of "extinction or rebellion" (Appendix 7, p. 7). By XR presenting only these two radical options to choose between, they, in fact, create a non-choice for the individual, since it forces them to choose the one that is non-threatening to their very existence. This non-choice thus takes away the agency of the individual.

A significant part of XR's instructions to the citizenry is the importance of participating in the democratic process. XR aims to create a Citizens Assembly, where the interests of the citizens are supposed to be better represented in deliberative democratic processes, with emphasis on grassroots organization and bottom-up decision-making (Appendix 1, pp. 29-30). It would be the Citizens Assembly's responsibility to inclusively represent the citizens and hold the government accountable in the transition towards a green and sustainable economy (Appendix 10, p. 2).

In the state-sponsored discourse, the government is responsible for adopting environmental policies that 'protect' the British people. Part of this effort includes the necessity of regulating industries that damage the environment, such as the farming and energy sectors (Appendix C, p. 3), without elaborating on concrete policy measures. There is a commitment

to reducing emissions, which is one of the most contentious aspects of environmental policy. The target is a reduction of 80% in 2050 compared to 1990 levels (ibid., p. 11; Appendix A, p. 29), which is well below the XR demand. The notable aspect, however, lies in the scope and focus of the overall climate effort. The government urges *"urgent and meaningful action"* (Appendix B, p. 2), but it is remarked that environmental policies need to be *"designed for the climate we now anticipate"* (Appendix C, p. 8), an implicit recognition that climate change is to an extent irreversible. The environmental efforts thus become concentrated around *"mitigat*[ing] *the damage from climate change"* (ibid.; ibid., p. 11). These provisions include flood prevention, 'greening' towns and cities and improving soil health (ibid., p. 4; Appendix A, p. 10). The state greenwashes their discourse by including words, such as 'sustainable' and 'green' without assigning any meaning to them. The policies are directed towards securing a successful economic state rather than preserving the environment.

The most fundamental difference between XR and the government is the role and responsibility that citizens ought to play in stopping environmentally harmful practices. Although the government is charged with the task of drafting and enforcing environmental policy, Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, stresses that climate change "*is everyone's problem, and everyone needs to contribute to the solution."* (Appendix C, p. 8). It is further remarked how *"we all need to change how we behave. We need to live differently: so please have less stuff, share what you have, consume less, reuse more"* (ibid., p. 12). By emphasizing that *"*[s]*mall individual choices add up to a big impact"* (Appendix A, p. 20), the government projects a significant part of the responsibility onto the citizenry. This discursive imposition renders citizens as consumers, thereby responsible for adjusting their habits to pursue sustainable and environmentally friendly practices.

The government further commits to enabling sustainable use of resources. It is, however, worth assessing how the natural environment is conceived discursively, as it reveals ideological impositions. Much of the government-sponsored discourse on environmental efforts is structured around economic lingo. Natural resources, such as forests, are thought of as 'natural capital' of which 'benefits' can be derived (Appendix A, pp. 19-33). The government argues that conceptualizing the natural environment as natural capital would ensure that more *"efficient decisions that can support environmental enhancement"* can be taken (ibid., p. 19). In this approach to environmental regulation, the imperative is *"maximising the value and benefits we get from our resources"* (ibid., p. 27). The Environmental Bill focuses on the benefits of nature for the economy as in this example, where "[u]*rban trees in particular play a pivotal role in creating healthy and economically successful communities*" (Appendix B, p. 24) and "[p]*ollution also has major impacts both on the natural world and the state of the economy*" (ibid., p. 13). The fundamental problem, it is asserted, is that the *"value* [of the natural environment] *is not captured by traditional accounting methods and is too often ignored in management and policy decisions"* (Appendix A, p. 19). The government thus commits to build a market-based mechanism up around environmental policy. The imperative is to create *"a more sustainable and resilient economy"* (Appendix B, p. 3) by 'managing' the (sustainable) usage of resources in a way that can sustain the livelihoods of the British people. The chief responsibility for the government hence lies in preserving and improving the current form of management of the climate crisis rather than drastically rearranging it.

5.3 Human-Nature

This section focuses on the articulation of the nodal points; human and nature. These points are described within XR's discourse and the reader is shown how XR seeks to disarticulate the same nodal points within British state's discourse.

One significant way in which XR and the British state differ is their perception of human-nature relations. XR places great value on nature by, e.g. attributing it with near-human emotions with statements such as; *"the plants are confused"* (Appendix 1, p. 33) and by encouraging their members to *"rebel for the earth"* (Appendix 4, p. 11). XR's rhetoric thus hints at an ecological viewpoint. XR, however, focus on preventing a social collapse in order to secure the survival of humankind. The reason that they promote radical action against the climate emergency is due to the potentially devastating consequences it may have for humanity - not because of the damage it may cause to nature - which hints at an anthropocentric view (Appendix 1, p. 1). By not either appealing exclusively to ecocentric and anthropocentric perspectives, XR connects with a larger part of the population, which will inevitably increase its strength and influence in the overall discourse on the environment. The contradictions may also be a result of the fact that XR is a new movement and is thus still in the midst of articulating their discourse in this matter and their own identity. At the same time, however, it hints at a certain elevation of the human being in relation to nature without fully externalizing it from it. Instead, humankind's relation to nature is often described with notions of unification between the human species and nature. This is illustrated by XR encouraging their members to consider each breath as *"a gift from the trees and green plants* [...], *and as you breathe out you return nutrients and gifts back to the world"*. (Appendix 4, p. 12) This connection both among human beings and to nature is argued to be achieved by rebelling against the current structures in society.

Society's modern structure and values are demonized as opposed to the romantic depiction of nature. The modern system is described negatively with characteristics, such as being 'corrupted' (Appendix 1, p. 2) and 'causing irreparable harm' (ibid., p. 1), in order to disarticulate the current values of society such as consumption culture. In contrast to that, "*the beauty and diversity of nature that nourishes our psychological well-being*" (ibid., p. 2) is an outstandingly positive description. The contrast between these two opposingly constructed concepts stresses XR's expressed dissatisfaction with the current economic and political system and presents it as the origin of all ecological and social injustice. Furthermore, XR depicts nature as essential for our survival and well-being.

Conversely, the understanding of human-nature relations in the discourse of the British government is very distinctive from that of XR. Firstly, the world view in the British state's discourse can be characterized as anthropocentric in which humans are central and nature is assessed only in its value for humans. Natural resources are described as natural capital and as the *"elements of nature that either directly or indirectly bring value to people"* (Appendix A, p. 19). Secondly, the aims of climate action and the results of those actions differ extensively between XR and Great Britain. While XR envisions a human society that does not damage nature and lives side by side with it, the government intends to prepare for the strong flooding and other results that arise due to climate changes. The British state thus aims for adaptation processes that will deal with the effects of climate change, which points at a short-term prioritization rather than a long-term plan for the saving of the environment. The logic asserts that the intrinsic value of the natural environment can only be fully acknowledged when

conceived in economic terms. This discourse is heavily embedded in neoliberal assumptions of market logics and is in stark contrast to XRs deliberations of "*our very health – all are being corrupted and compromised by the human values behind our political and economic systems and consumer-focussed lifestyles*" (Appendix 1, p. 2).

5.4 Contestation of Justice

The main area in which XR and the British state are in conflict is their differing perceptions of justice. Justice thus becomes an empty signifier in the interaction between the two, since both discourses use the nodal point differently. Even within XR's discourse the conceptualization of justice is often used within different contexts, thus stripping the nodal point of its meaning. This section therefore presents how justice becomes contested between the respective discourses of XR and the British state and the different meanings and understandings they attribute to the concept. It furthermore showcases how this contestation is discursively manifested through, for example, court orders, arrestations and sites of protest.

Arrests

On numerous occasions, XR illustrates the state as an unjust system and disarticulates their operationalization of justice by, for example, painting the British state as a bully and XR activists as martyrs. This can be seen in the arrest preparation document where XR "*highlight*[s] *the inadequacy of a system that seeks to incriminate those who dedicate themselves to reducing the rate of loss of biodiversity and human suffering caused by this man-made climate catastrophe*" (Appendix 4, p. 4). Here, the 'inadequacy' of the British state in climate governance is stressed. In this quote, XR is addressing those of their members willing to be arrested, giving them validation for their actions of sacrificing themselves to support the limiting of 'human suffering'. This negative representation of the state continues through XR's arrest and defendant's guide (Appendix 4; Appendix 2).

A reaction of the state to the protesting has been the attempt to illegalize assemblies, including non-violent methods of protesting. XR calls the police and their act of charging more than 1000 people from the April rebellion with arrest order a *"ridiculous decision"* (Appendix 2, p. 2), which hints at an escalation between XR and the British state. Their interaction had become antagonistic. Every instance of the police discriminating against citizens or taking decisions that are debatable is an occasion for XR to present themselves as more reasonable and just and further articulate their discourse as true.

Disarticulation of justice discourse can also be seen when an ex-policeman was arrested during an XR protest. During the event he glued his hand to the pavement, which he called *"*[a]*n irrational thing to do"* (Appendix 7, p. 6). His reasoning for doing so was the political inaction against the many warnings the UN has given the last 11 years to halve carbon emissions. Instead, the UK government had just recently announced plans to expand the airport to which the police officer asked; *"which is more irrational, me gluing my hand to the pavement or encouraging even more people to fly?"* (ibid.). He stated that, if asked five years earlier, he would never have imagined himself being arrested and interviewed by the police. His young child is described as his main motivation for participating actively to prevent further climate devastation.

Other ex-police officers, who have joined the ranks of XR, have made similar comments critiquing the government's inaction and demand that *"[t]he government and the media outlets must tell the truth about how serious these crises are"* (Appendix 7, p. 5). One ex-officer stated that, in the event of societal collapse, the police and the military will be responsible for ensuring security and *"would be engaged in trying to stop people from basically killing each other for resources"* (ibid.). He thus fears the significant security threats - and the injustice that it will serve for regular citizens - if society were to collapse due to an ecological breakdown. All of the ex-officers expressed discomfort and amazement by the fact that they now find themselves *"on the other side of the protest line"*. (ibid., p. 6) One stated that he no longer saw any other choice than to rebel alongside XR. Change, according to him, was inevitable, the question was merely; *"what massive changes do you want? Changes that are being brought about by us changing the way in which we live. Or do you want those changes to come about by massive climate upheavals"* (ibid.). These cases show how ex-policemen, previously securing the interest of the state, have joined XR, which support and articulate the movement's conception of justice. XR is keen to present these cases to the public in order to attract more people and portraying themselves as more legitimized and less radical, as they intend to attract the broad masses of society rather than one specific political wing.

There are many disarticulations of justice discourse (as understood by the state) embedded within XR's protests. One example is the fact that individual members of XR aim for and accept the consequences of arrestment. Contrarily, the act of being arrested, according to the state, entails that a person has committed an unjust act, and must be either punished or taken out of society. XR puts themselves in positions where they will be arrested as an act of de-legitimizing the state and re-define what being arrested entails. Instead of seeing arrestment as a punishment or a consequence of unjust activity, XR disarticulates state notions of justice by asserting arrestment as an honor, where the individual attains a form of martyr status. Additionally, civil disobedience, when collectively mobilized, challenges the acceptance of state discourse by showing the state, via protesting, that there is a section of society that does not accept state discourse as true. This is an articulation of an alternative, antagonistic discourse, usually expressed through occupation during protest or with signs usually expressing ironic phrasing representing the alternative discourse.

Court System

A representation of the ways in which XR and the state are in contact with each other in the courtroom is illustrated in XR defendant's guide. The contact with the court is guided by XR in their Defendants Guide (Appendix 2), where they inform the arrested activists of how court hearings proceed. XR, for example, informs them of the time within which they can address the state via the court officials. In interpreting XR's logic, the nodal points of rebellion, state, and justice are identified. The interesting aspect of these nodal points are the ways in which XR is binding them together through imbedded assumptions of what is 'right and wrong' and pushing for a renegotiation of justice. They do so by creating difficulties for the state via the court system to uphold their discourse of justice as it is in relation to the act of protesting. XR states that, when arrested, *"everyone should exercise their right to make the state prove its case against them, and not make their life easy by pleading guilty."* (ibid., p. 2) This act of creating difficulty for the state is an attempt to disarticulate state discourse of justice and how this is related to the environment. XR furthermore calls the police and CPS "ridiculous" (ibid.) for having charged more than 1000 people from the April rebellion and state that *"the waste*

of court time and resource is unjustifiable" (Appendix 5, p.3). Such wording shows the embedded assumptions that link the nodal points, i.e. that the state's and police's decision is 'ridiculous', that people have a given 'right' to 'make the state's life 'difficult' and that it is 'unjustifiable' to use valuable resources and court time to criminally charge XR rebels. All of this shows elements of assumptions that are used to articulate and legitimize XR's environment discourse and notions of justice.

Part of XR's strategy is furthermore to have a large number of arrests, since it enables them to highlight the inadequacy of a system that seeks to incriminate those who dedicate themselves to *"reducing the rate of loss of biodiversity and human suffering caused by this man-made climate catastrophe"* (Appendix 4, p. 4). Another way in which XR challenges the British state's conceptualization of justice is through the Lawyers' Declaration of Rebellion, which was created by a subdivision of XR, Lawyers for Extinction Rebellion. This declaration seeks to redefine justice in relation to the environment by including notions of climate justice, intergenerational justice and ecological justice (Appendix 7, pp. 2-3). XR is thus fighting for a re-articulation of the overall justice discourse to include these three aspects.

Intergenerational justice is an important aspect for XR, which is seen often within their discourse and illustrated in their promotional videos and the pictures that XR shares from their protests. These often show people of different ages, races and national origins. Not only does this paint the movement as one of international reach, which emphasizes their statement that this climate emergency concerns all, but it also sends a strategic message to the viewer that all individuals are welcome in XR. The older generations are furthermore often portrayed as standing together and fighting for the younger generations. A subdivision within XR has been created, named Extinction Rebellion Grandparents. These elderly members of XR state that their main motivation for participating in the movement is to *"protect the futures of their grandchildren and of children around the world"* (Appendix 6, p. 1). Another way in which XR's discourse places emphasis on the younger generation is by showing children protesting in the street. This age group is often shown as innocent and as a large population group that does not have their voices heard in the higher political context while still being significantly affected by the effects of climate change. This paints XR in a positive light, since they are the ones enhancing their agency, while the government loses some of their illegitimacy by being seen as not representing all of their citizens. (Appendix 8; Appendix 7)

6. Perspectives

This chapter shows the relevance of this study. Afterwards several perspectives on our findings are discussed for which the discourse on climate change is relevant.

6.1 Relevance of our Study

This study has predominantly considered XR's discourse with only a few sources presenting that the British state. Hence this study should not be regarded as a comparative study, as the environmental movement and Great Britain have not been assessed to an equal degree. The analysis of XR's discourse also simultaneously illuminates the logics and interests of the hegemonic discourse. The findings of this case study contribute to an understanding of broader societal dynamics. XR exemplifies a movement that contests the state, and our findings can be used to further the understanding of other movements' discourses. It helps to understand how XR has constructed their narrative and how they have strategically mobilized so many people during their first year of its existence. Pointing out the focal points of XR's discourse, such as articulating a climate and social emergency, provides us with an idea of what makes citizens across different age groups willing to be arrested for civil disobedience.

6.2 Survival vs Profit

Having analyzed the discrepancies between XR's and Great Britain's discourse, which indicate different understandings of the severity of climate change's impacts on our society and influence the perception of necessary changes in order to secure the survival of humanity. Even though the British state's discourse points to the threats and effects of climate change, an increasing number of movements similar to XR arise, criticizing the pursuit of short-sighted environmental policies. These movements argue that the state of the economy is not relevant when climate change threatens our very existence. Contrary to that, the state might argue for the necessity to keep up 'business as usual' in order to gradually transition to a society with zero net emissions and other minimized damages to nature. This position does not assess drastic changes of values and the structure of society as productive and effective as society's functioning would be disrupted (Crist, 2007, p. 33).

The choice states seem to be making is to continue the 'business as usual' approach to the climate crisis, relying on neoliberal environmental governance which is dominated by market logics and the imperative of economic growth. Government and corporations have an economic interest in maintaining the status quo of capitalist consumer-based political and social structures. One might ask if society can and wants to imagine an alternative to our current political economy in favour of our environment. Though damaging to the environment, the continuous economic growth within Western society has contributed to the development and stabilization of life as Westerners know it, making an alternative reality seemingly unrealistic for much of the Western population. As this research encompasses investigation into the constructed but assumed objectivity of reality, this barrier to de-growth and green governance is an important aspect to consider.

7. Conclusion

This study has found that the main subject in which XR's discourse and British state's discourse differs is on their respective reflections on and interpretations of justice. XR seeks to redefine justice, as it is currently being dictated by the British state, by including notions of climate justice, intergenerational justice and ecological justice. The movement attempts to do so through e.g. their protests, where methods of civil disobedience are being used. The British authorities respond to these attempts of redefining the hegemonic discourse around justice by arresting the protesters, creating police bans against the movement and holding court orders against individual members.

The reason for the differing conceptualizations of justice stems from the two discourses' respective understandings of, a) the severity of the climate situation, b) on whom the responsibility for managing climate change lies and c) humankind's relationship with nature. Whereas XR maintains a view that the current changes within the climate is a climate emergency, the British state is less fixed in its conviction.

The two discourses differing perception of the severity of the climate situation is connected to their perception of who has the responsibility for handling the change of climate. Since XR perceives the current climate change as a climate emergency that will affect everyone, it is everyone's *duty* to prevent ecological collapse, including regular citizens as well as political leaders. Different responsibilities are allocated, but everyone has a duty to do their part to prevent environmental and societal collapse. Although there are admittances in the British state's discourse that the state plays a significant role in handling the outcomes of climate change, much of the responsibility is pushed onto the citizens, which are considered consumers in the state's neoliberal point of view.

Despite certain incongruencies within XR's discourse, the movement's main reason for rebelling is to prevent societal collapse - not to prevent the collapse of nature itself. The British state's discourse conversely describes nature as natural capital and in terms of it only having value in its relation to humans.

Further Research

As noted in the delimitations section, the British withdrawal from the EU has a major influence on current British politics, and the significance of Brexit has not been covered in this research due to its immense dimensions. In the final hour of the inception of this project, the Conservative Party won a landslide victory in the 2019 general election. Given the uncertainty of Britain's current political trajectory, the ramifications of this is still unclear, but it would appear that Brexit is set to finally occur in late January 2020. The fallout and exact consequences from this are similarly unknown, but Brexit will undoubtedly propel Britain into uncharted territory, which would presumptively have a considerable influence on British environmental policy. As the country has previously been subjected to EU environmental regulations, a sizeable policy vacuum is likely to open up, and further study could gain insights into the interplay between Brexit and environmental policy.

Further research could be conducted with equal weight attributed to British state discourse designed as a comparative study. This study could also be conducted on Greta Thunberg's Skolstrejk movement in replacement of XR. Additionally, the discourses, articulations and strategies of XR and the Skolstrejk movement could be compared and

analyzed with the aim of understanding the growing antagonistic discourses arising in opposition to the dominant discourse.

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