

THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Fuelling Denial

The climate change reactionary movement and Swedish far-right media

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Department of Technology Management and Economics

CHALMERS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Gothenburg, Sweden 2024

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Abstract

Fossil fuel industry has a long history of spreading disinformation about climate change science and obstructing mitigating policies. During the 2010s and 2020s, these vested interests have found a political ally in parts of the European far-right. This study explores how this has taken shape in Sweden, a country where there has been a political consensus about the seriousness of climate change. The ascendance of the far-right, however, has led to this consensus breaking down.

The four empirical papers of the thesis analyse the climate change discourses on five Swedish far-right alternative media sites during the years 2018-2019 and in connection with the release of the IPCC's sixth assessment report in 2021 (the physical science basis). The study shows how certain far-right media actors used literal denialist argumentation to renounce the science of climate change. This renouncement was used in the further far-right media ecosystem to designate climate change as a ridiculous topic using for example scare-quoting. Also, there was widespread, misogynistic opposition to Greta Thunberg.

The thesis' kappa introduces the term *the climate change reactionary movement*, to highlight how far-right opposition to climate change policies is connected to anti-feminism and nationalism. The nostalgic gaze of the Swedish far-right is towards the 1950s and 1960s and a society characterised by gendered divisions of labour, strong beliefs in technological innovation, and increased welfare for those deemed to be belonging to the nation. But this nostalgic gaze ignores that it was a society built on extensive exploitation of natural resources and otherised people, and fuelled by the carbon that today is threatening living conditions on the planet.

The empirical analyses are done using methods from critical discourse analysis and content analysis, and the interdisciplinary theoretical framework is built on concepts from gender studies (industrial/breadwinner and petro-masculinities), environmental sociology (climate change obstruction), sociology (states of denial), political ecology (far right), media studies (propaganda feedback-loop) and history (concerning nationalism, industrial modernity, and fossil capital).

Keywords: climate obstruction, denialism, nationalism, masculinities, modernity, alternative media, anti-reflexivity, Sweden

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Sammanfattning

Fossilindustrin har en lång historia av att sprida desinformation om klimatvetenskap och obstruera policys för minskade utsläpp. Under 2010- och 2020-talen har detta motstånd mot klimatpolitiken fått gehör hos delar av den europeiska radikalhögern. Den här studien undersöker hur detta har skett i Sverige där det tidigare har funnits ett politiskt samförstånd om allvaret i klimatförändringar. Det ökade inflytandet för den radikala högern har dock bidragit till att samförståndet har brutit samman.

De fyra empiriska artiklarna i denna doktorsavhandling analyserar diskurser om klimatförändringarna på fem svenska högerradikala alternativmedier under åren 2018–2019 och i samband med att IPCC:s sjätte arbetsrapport släpptes 2021 (den naturvetenskapliga grunden). Studien visar hur vissa högerradikala medieaktörer förnekade och misskrediterade klimatvetenskapen. Denna argumentation användes sedan av det bredare högerradikala mediala ekosystemet för att kategorisera klimatförändringen som en löjlig fråga, bland annat genom att använda ironiska citattecken. Dessutom fanns det ett utbrett misogynt motstånd mot Greta Thunberg.

Avhandlingens kapp introducerar begreppet *den klimatförändringsreaktionära rörelsen*, för att visa hur radikalhögerns motstånd mot klimatpolicys är kopplat till anti-feminism och nationalism. Den svenska radikalhögerns nostalgiska blick är riktad mot 1950- och 1960-talen och ett samhälle karaktäriserat av könssegregerade yrken, stark tilltro till teknologisk innovation, och ökad välfärd för de som ansågs tillhöra nationen. Men den här nostalgiska blicken ignorerar att detta samhälle byggdes på intensiv exploatering av naturresurser och minoritetsbefolkningar, och tankades med de fossila bränslen som nu hotar livsvillkoren på planeten.

Studiens empiriska analys är gjord med metoder från kritisk diskursanalys och innehållsanalys, och det interdisciplinära teoretiska ramverket är skapat med begrepp från genusvetenskap, politisk ekologi, historia, medie- och kommunikationsvetenskap, miljösociologi och sociologi.

List of publications

This thesis is based on the work contained in the following appended papers, referred to by Roman numerals in the text.

- I. Vowles, Kjell and Hultman, Martin. 2021. "Scare-quoting climate: The rapid rise of climate denial in the Swedish far-right media ecosystem." *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, vol.3, no.1, 2021, pp.79-95. doi.org/10.2478/njms-2021-0005
- II. Vowles, Kjell, and Martin Hultman. 2022. 'Dead White Men vs. Greta Thunberg: Nationalism, Misogyny, and Climate Change Denial in Swedish Far-Right Digital Media'. *Australian Feminist Studies*, April, 1–18. doi:10.1080/08164649.2022.2062669
- III. Vowles, Kjell. 2023. 'Talking Heads and Contrarian Graphs: Televising the Swedish Far Right's Opposition to Climate Change'. In *Visualising Far-Right Environments Communication and the Politics of Nature*, edited by Bernhard Forchtner, 253–273. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- IV. Painter, James, Joshua Ettinger, David Holmes, Loredana Loy, Janaina Pinto, Lucy Richardson, Laura Thomas-Walters, Kjell Vowles, and Rachel Wetts. 2023. 'Climate Delay Discourses Present in Global Mainstream Television Coverage of the IPCC's 2021 Report'. *Communications Earth & Environment* 4 (1): 118. doi:10.1038/s43247-023-00760-2 (supplementary material included).

Related output

Related publications not included in this thesis.

Peer-reviewed:

Vowles, Kjell, Kristoffer Ekberg, and Martin Hultman. 2024. 'Climate Obstruction in Sweden: The Green Welfare State – Both Progressive and Obstructionist'. In *Climate Obstruction across Europe*, edited by Robert Brulle, J. Timmons Roberts, and Miranda Spencer. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Popular science:

Vowles, Kjell. 2023. "Så formas motståndet mot omställning". *Sveriges natur*, nr 2.

Vowles, Kjell. 2023. "När svenska högerradikala medier blev en del av kontraklimatrörelsen. Motståndet mot klimatpolitik som ett försvar för status quo". *Fronesis*, nr 76-77.

Vowles, Kjell och Martin Hultman. 2021. "Så sprids klimatförnekelse i radikalhögerns mediala ekosystem". *Dagens Nyheter*, 27 december.

Vowles, Kjell. 2020. "Se upp med livbåtsetiken". *Grus & Guld*, nr 1.

Vowles, Kjell. 2019. "Hoppet för Demokratien". *Sveriges Natur*, nr 4.

Lindvall, Daniel, Kjell Vowles, and Martin Hultman. 2020. *Upphettnings: Demokratien i klimatkrisens tid*. Stockholm: Fri tanke.

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Gothenburg, April 2024

Preface

In the summer of 2018, my family and I rented a house in the old mining region of Bergslagen in Sweden. We would roam the spruce- and pine forests, foraging for mushrooms and bilberries. With a bit of luck, we would see an elk walk across one of the clear-cuttings, scars in the landscape left by big forest machinery. The summer was hot, swelteringly so. In early July the sparks from a passing train started a fire along the embankment and the surrounding woods. Joining hands with the fire service, villagers started bucket brigades to fight the fire, and after a few days the flames were put out, leaving a trace of dark, dead trees and ash laden ground. But the sun continued to burn through clear blue skies well into August. Our well ran dry and the water level in the nearby lake got lower and lower. The heat was not confined to Bergslagen, all across central and northern Europe people were trying to find relief from the high temperatures. A few weeks after the fire along the railway embankment, several large forest fires raged uncontrollably in many parts of Sweden, marking the 2018 fire season an anomaly. The total area burned was unprecedented during the modern fire defence era. More extreme heat waves have for a long time been predicted with rising temperatures, and research have confirmed that the 2018 summer heat had become more likely due to human induced climate change (Yiou et al. 2020). The fires and the drought had upped the stakes leading up to the national election in September. In August both Svenska Dagbladet and Dagens Nyheter, the two biggest Swedish morning newspapers, ran cover stories on climate change. When school started in late August, three weeks before the election, a then unknown, fifteen-year-old girl sat down outside of parliament with a sign saying: “School strike for the climate”. The rest, to use an old cliché, is history.

But, of course, it is not just one history, it is several. Greta Thunberg’s role as a catalyst for an already growing climate change movement is well documented. She became an inspiration for people to join the climate justice-struggle already fought by groups such as Earth Guardians, 350.org, and indigenous peoples all around the world. But during the years 2018-2019, when the Fridays for Future-movement gathered millions of climate strikers, and when groups such as Ende Gelände in Germany and Extinction Rebellion in the United Kingdom organised thousands of protesters in large civil disobedience campaigns, there were also signs of an impending backlash. The opposition to, and even hatred of, Greta Thunberg was vocal. In Europe, opposition to climate change policies was fierce among the far-right nationalist parties and politicians, such as Nigel Farage in the United Kingdom, the Alternative for Deutschland, and the Sweden Democrats.

Coming back to Bergslagen, there was a time when the train which started the fire would have stopped in the village, but for decades it has been running straight through leaving a trail of smoke in its wake. This time literally. Apart from clear-cuttings, other scars in the forests are small open pits left from centuries of iron mining. Bergslagen is mining country, where communities grew up around the deposits of ore or the charcoal-fired blast furnaces used to produce iron. Fossil fuelled capitalism upheld the mining communities, which grew in tandem with the wealth and welfare of citizens and companies. During the first half of the 20th century, the mines became large-scale industries. The iron mine in the neighbouring township to our village was the main employer in the area, with its predominantly male workforce earning a decent wage that could put food on the family table. Eventually the profits from the mines decreased. It closed in the late 1970s and since then the area has been in structural decline, marked by a decreasing and aging population and closing services. Our closest shop and school were more than 10 kilometres away. The decline has also provided a fertile ground for the far-right populist rhetoric of the Sweden Democrats, a party which has won votes both from a disillusioned working class and more affluent middle- and upper-classes (Jylhä, Rydgren, and Strimling 2018). In the election in the autumn of 2018, the Sweden Democrats gained nearly 40 per cent of the votes in the area. It became the largest party in a region where unionised mining labour for most part of the 20th century used to vote nearly unanimously for the Social Democrats.

This thesis is not about Bergslagen, nor about the Sweden Democrats, and only partly about Greta Thunberg. The reason that I mention Bergslagen and the summer of 2018 though, is because it was one of many times and places where two current phenomena became apparent. The first is climate change, where carbon emissions are pushing the planet further into the climate crisis with rising sea levels, unprecedented heatwaves, pelting rains, and deadly floods. The second is the increasingly influential far-right nationalist movement, which has made opposition to climate change politics a trademark alongside racism and anti-feminism. These two phenomena intersect in various ways in different political, geographical, and cultural arenas. What I hope that this doctoral thesis will do, is to shed light on how they have played out in one section of the cultural sphere, namely the Swedish far-right media ecosystem. It will also discuss the roots of far-right opposition to climate change politics, and how it interacts with the implicative denial of all of us who claim to take climate change seriously, but fail to act accordingly on a political and individual level.

1. Introduction

Aim and research questions

The broad aim of this thesis is to contribute to the knowledge of why, on a global, societal level, we are not acting sufficiently on climate change. Narrowing that down to the national level, the question is why climate change has become fiercely contested in Sweden, a country that historically has perceived itself as an environmental forerunner. Since 2010, a growing partisan divide has appeared among the electorate, with those sympathising with the political left generally being more concerned about global heating and more supportive of climate change policies, while those sympathising to the right are less concerned and more opposed to measures to mitigate emissions (S. Axelsson and Jönsson 2023). Survey results suggest that part of the reason for the divide might be the influence of far-right alternative media, which has grown during the last decade (Rönnerstrand, Oscarsson, and Axelsson 2023). Still, there has been little research on how far-right alternative media is reporting on climate change. With this thesis I start filling that research gap, and the research questions can be summarised as follows:

- (1) What climate change discourses occur on Swedish far-right digital media?
- (2) How have they been shaped?
- (3) What do the discourses reveal about the ideological drivers behind far-right opposition to climate change?

Knowing the answers to these questions, can provide an important chapter to the immense guidebook we need to resolve one of the greatest challenges of our time. Rising global temperatures are affecting weather-patterns and causing unprecedented heatwaves, downpours, floodings and droughts, and are changing living conditions on the planet. 2023 was the warmest year on record. On the 17th of November 2023, the global average temperature for the first time was above two degrees compared to pre-industrial times. Even if the threshold was breached temporarily for one day, it will be transcended more often the coming years. Record heat in January 2024, meant that for twelve months, from February 2023 to January 2024, the world was on average more than 1.5 degrees warmer than pre-industrial times (Copernicus Climate Change Service 2024). The heating trend is no surprise. It has long been anticipated by climate change science, which has been widely accepted for more than three decades (Stoddard et al. 2021).

Despite having the knowledge, humanity is on the brink of pushing the planet into a new state. “The world is on a disastrous trajectory” to cite the *Global Tipping Points Report 2023*. We are perilously close to crossing harmful tipping points, and if we cross one, it “could trigger others, causing a domino effect of accelerating and unmanageable change to our life-support systems” (Lenton et al. 2023, 10). One of the reasons for this failure is the workings of the climate change reactionary movement, which has been heavily funded by the fossil fuel industry and conservative foundations (Dunlap and McCright 2011; Brulle 2014). With oil, gas, and coal being paramount to their business model, several fossil fuel companies conducted research on climate change even in the 1960s and 1970s, as they needed to know what challenges lay ahead for their product (Franta 2018). The challenges turned out to be massive. However, when this knowledge had escaped the boardrooms and scientific laboratories in the early 1990s and had been recognised as a social and environmental threat that required a political response, the fossil fuel industry denied ever having recognised the problem. More than that, denying that the knowledge was true, they started a campaign spreading doubt about climate change science and obstructing mitigating policies (Oreskes and Conway 2011). The influence of the fossil fuel industry can be seen in that it took 31 years, and 27 UN Climate Summits (COPs) before the world leaders unanimously stated that fossil fuels was the main problem causing climate change. The text that came out from the COP 28 in Dubai 2023, was the first UN climate agreement that mentioned the need to transition away from fossil fuels.

In Sweden, a country where incremental – but too slow – territorial emission reductions have followed economic growth since the 1990s, there was for a long time a consensus among the parliamentary parties that climate change was a serious issue, and that Sweden should be a forerunner. The carbon tax, for example, introduced in 1991, was the result of a compromise that would lead to emission reductions without threatening industry (Hildingsson and Knaggård 2022). While there were neoliberal think-tanks pushing anti-environmentalism in the 1980s and 1990s, and in the late 00s a couple of climate denialist networks were formed, they did not get much traction among the established parties (Ekberg and Pressfeldt 2022; Anshelm and Hultman 2014a). The denialist network, the Climate Realists (formerly Stockholmsinitiativet), was provided access to media for a couple of years after it was formed in 2008, but together with other denialist voices it was soon pushed to the fringe in most established media, whose reporting was based on the scientific consensus of the reality and

seriousness of climate change.¹ This has led Sweden to be touted as a role model when it comes to environmental and climate change politics, even though there has been a big gap between the policies implemented and the ones needed to meet the Paris-agreement (Lidskog and Elander 2012).

But something changed with the new government after the election of 2022. No longer are the governing parties agreeing that Sweden should take the lead globally on climate. The government consists of the Conservatives (Moderaterna), the Christian Democrats, and the Liberal party, but is dependent on the support of the far-right party the Sweden Democrats. The four parties have together signed the so called Tidö-agreement² which states that all coalition parties – including the Sweden Democrats who does not hold any ministerial posts – should have equal influence over government policies, including climate and energy. With the Sweden Democrats being the second largest party in the Swedish parliament, and the largest in the Tidö-coalition, it is leading a pushback against climate legislation. For the first time, apart from financial rebound years, a Swedish government has adopted policies that will increase Sweden's territorial emissions (Klimatpolitiska rådet 2023). In its long-term climate roadmap, which the Swedish government by law is required to publish every four years, there is a near total absence of measures to mitigate emissions in the near term. Instead, the government is planning to buy emission allowances from other EU-states, to compensate for Sweden's increased emissions (Regeringen 2023a).

The Sweden Democrats has been influenced by Swedish climate denialist networks since it entered parliament in 2010 (Hultman, Björk, and Viinikka 2019). Leading party spokespersons have frequently pushed doubts about climate change science, by using arguments such as climate change being a hoax, or that climate change politics is populism, or that the warming trend has stopped (Habul and Forsberg 2018; Magnå 2019; 'Riksdagens protokoll 2012/13:59' 2013). The party also voted no to the Paris-agreement and has been the only parliamentary party opposing Sweden's climate law. In the run-up to the 2022 election, the debate about climate politics became a debate about energy and fuel prices, and the winning coalition had a programme focused on lowering fuel taxes, reducing the amount of biofuel in petrol- and diesel, and to build new nuclear reactors. The Sweden Democrats gained more than 20 per cent of the votes, and during the election campaign they had marked their opposition to climate policies on several occasions. Arguably, the most noticeable was by putting one of the leading voices

¹ See chapter 8 and 9 for a more detailed history of orchestrated denial in the Swedish media.

² It is named after Tidö Castle, where it was agreed.

from the Swedish climate change reactionary movement on the ballot. As part of the Tidö-coalition, the party in the autumn of 2023 paid lip-service to the Swedish climate goals, but with the explicit comment that they are not agreeing to any new measures to meet them.³

This thesis uncovers aspects of why Swedish climate politics have become contested, and how the far right has managed to win support for policies that aim to keep the country running on fossil fuels. Digital far-right alternative media have grown in influence in tandem with the Sweden Democrats. The party leader, Jimmie Åkesson, has publicly acknowledged the importance of these media in influencing the public debate (Leman and Vergara 2021). Both the climate change reactionary movement and the far right have argued that legacy media and public service is a lying propaganda apparatus, and by creating their own media ecosystem, they have managed to evade media gatekeepers.⁴ By analysing discourses on these media, I seek to understand the organisation and ideological underpinnings of Swedish far-right climate denialism, and why it is gaining support within the electorate.

The burgeoning research field on far-right political ecologies (e.g. Forchtner 2019a; Lubarda 2023; Allen et al. 2024) has shown how there are broadly two different strands within far-right thinking on the environment, and they both can be historically traced to 19th-century nation-building. One is connected to the homeland, and a connection between the soil and the ethnically homogenous people; the other is connected to industrial modernity, and using technology and engineering to fulfil the promise of a glorious nation. Both of these were present in the fascist ideologies of the 1930s, with the Third Reich containing blood and soil-doctrines and technocratic-industrialist projects such as the autobahn (Biehl and Staudenmaier 1995). In the present European far-right, we have seen, for example, how the French National Assembly has moved from a denialist position on climate change to pushing localism and nature conservation; while in Germany, there is a continuing tension between climate obstruction within in the major far-right party the Alternative for Germany, and ethnic exclusivist regional

³ See section 9, “Literal and implicative denial in the new Swedish government”, for a deeper analysis of the government’s new climate policies.

⁴ The term legacy media is used to define the major centre-left and centre-right media outlets or public service broadcasters, and it is against these that the far-right alternative media is positioning itself as a corrective. In paper IV, mainstream media is used as a synonym to legacy media. There is also left-wing alternative media in the Swedish media landscape positioning themselves against legacy media. This, however, does not imply that left- and right-wing media are in any ways equated concerning other practices.

environmental protection (Benoist 2023; Forchtner and Olsen 2023). The empirical material analysed in papers I-IV, however, shows that there is little concern for localism or nature conservation within the broader Swedish far-right, instead there is still a strong climate denialist tendency. Using sociological theories of modernity and history of ideas around nation-building, I argue in the kappa that this is because the post-war decades of the 1950s and 1960s, when a fossil fuelled economy was booming, constitute the golden past for the Swedish far-right (J. Håkansson 2023). This period of national-industrial modernity, is an era of ignorance regarding environmental pollution, and racial and gender-based injustices.

The idea of national-industrial modernity makes it necessary to further explore the links between climate denialism and gender. Concepts such as industrial/breadwinner masculinities (Hultman and Pulé 2018) and petro-masculinity (Daggett 2018) have helped explain some of the connections between extractivist ideological and patriarchal domination.⁵ The nostalgic gaze to national-industrial modernity, is an anachronistic longing to a time when life was perceived to be easier for the men who were in control, who would care for their families by earning a wage to cover bills and food and perhaps also bring in wood or coal to heat the homes. It was an era when men had near exclusive access to all influential private and public positions, and when increased industrialisation seemed to be promising expanded welfare for all people who were part of the nation. And, most importantly for the argument of this thesis, it is believed to be a time before environmental movements and complexity science started to show the negative side effects and pollution caused by industrial processes, before strong feminist movements demanded access to labour markets and equal wages, and gender studies started questioning claims of universal rationality, and before racialised minorities gained further recognition for their struggles. Through analysing the themes present in far-right media around climate change, I will highlight these connections.

The years 2018-2019 stood out in the Swedish climate debate. Starting in late summer 2018, reporting on climate change increased rapidly in Swedish media, and it has never been higher than it was in 2019 (Vi-skogen and Retriever 2021; Simonsen and Ytterstad 2024). The reasons are plenty. A slight upwards trend had been noticed since the Paris-agreement was signed in 2015 and then followed by the Swedish climate law a couple of years later. The record heat in the summer of

⁵ When referring to industrial/breadwinner- and petro-masculinities collectively, I will, for short, use the term industrial masculinities.

2018 gave further attention to the issue. When Greta Thunberg in late summer sat down outside parliament with her protest sign three weeks before the national election, claiming that Sweden's incremental emission reductions were not enough, the reporting of her and the movement she galvanised became extensive. But the mobilised climate movement also incited a reaction. These were the years when the far-right media ecosystem started reporting extensively on climate. Using denialist argumentation, news sites such as Fria tider and SwebbTV discredited Greta Thunberg and anyone else pushing for more radical action on climate change. In the papers in this thesis, I analyse the discourses on the three largest of these sites, which are Nyheter idag, Fria tider and Samnytt (Newman et al. 2020). I also analyse the reporting of Nya tider, which has had a print edition and therefore been eligible for state press subsidies. Finally, I analyse the online video channel SwebbTV, which has been the most prominent media connecting the far right with networks of orchestrated denial. Apart from the years 2018-2019, I, as part of a team doing an international comparison, analyse the media reception of the sixth IPCC report on legacy and far-right media. The empirical analyses of the papers allow me to answer research questions 1 and 2, and the theoretical concepts of the kappa will contribute to answering question 3. This will increase our knowledge of issues concerning climate change denialism, the far-right, national-industrial modernity, industrial masculinities, and changing media ecosystems.

Thesis outline

The thesis consists of four papers and a kappa. The papers contain the main empirical analysis, while the kappa provides a more in-depth background and an expanded theoretical contribution. The kappa is set up with an introductory chapter discussing terminology of the climate change reactionary movement and denialism, a note on positionality, and a reflection on why it is worthwhile to study the opposition to the transition.

The research background starts in chapter 2 with a longer historical view of the connections between fossil fuels and nationalism. Chapters 3–6 provide a review of the scholarly literature on orchestrated climate change denial and its connections to ideologies and identities, as well as the literature on changing media landscapes. The review is written mainly from an international perspective. As the thesis is interdisciplinary in scope, so is the research background, encompassing literature from environmental sociology, history of ideas and history of technology, media- and communications studies, science- and technology studies, and gender studies.

The Swedish background is explained in chapters 7 and 8, which offer a chronological overview of the climate change debate and climate change politics from 2006 up to 2023. These chapters provide context to the intensive climate debates of 2018-2019, as well as looking at how the debate shifted during the pandemic. The empirics, methods and articles are introduced in chapter 9–11, while chapter 12 offers a discussion on ethics and research practices. The empirical analysis is discussed in chapter 13, which mainly uses the work of Ulrich Beck to introduce the concept of the ignorance of national-industrial modernity. Chapter 14 summarises the contributions of the thesis, suggests ways forward to overcome the opposition to the low-carbon transition, and proposes future research.

A note on terminology: The climate change reactionary movement

The organised attempt by the fossil fuel industry, conservative foundations, and neoliberal think tanks to spread doubt about the science of climate change and to oppose any climate legislation has been well-researched, especially in the US. The seminal early work to describe this network, termed it “the climate change denial machine” (e.g. Dunlap and McCright 2011). It was often depicted as a machine where industry and foundations were providing the financing and pulling the strings of think tanks and front groups, who in turn controlled the levers that made sure that climate disinformation was amplified and circulated among media and politicians (see figure 1). To a large degree, this well-lubricated machine hid the oil-money behind the contrarian messages that came out, and in that way, it managed to effect political and public opinion about climate change in the US. The outline of the machine by Dunlap and McCright was vital for scholarly work on climate change denial as it brought attention to how certain actors were highly organised in their attempt to stop or delay climate action.

A machine, however, even if it is continuously greased, at some point becomes a relic. It is also, to a degree, inert. When societal or technological change makes the machine useless, it will probably be dismantled and perhaps recycled. This is probably one of the reasons why the metaphor of the climate change denial machine is seldom used in the academic literature today, instead it has been widely replaced by term “the climate change countermovement” (e.g. Brulle 2014; Dunlap and McCright 2015; McKie 2023). Shifting the terminology underscores agency in societal conflict. Rather than dealing with a machine, real political struggle can be discussed. Brulle (2014, 683) argues that when applying countermovement-theory to the dispute over climate change, it “enables us to view this contest as a political and cultural dispute”.

Key Components of the Climate Change Denial Machine

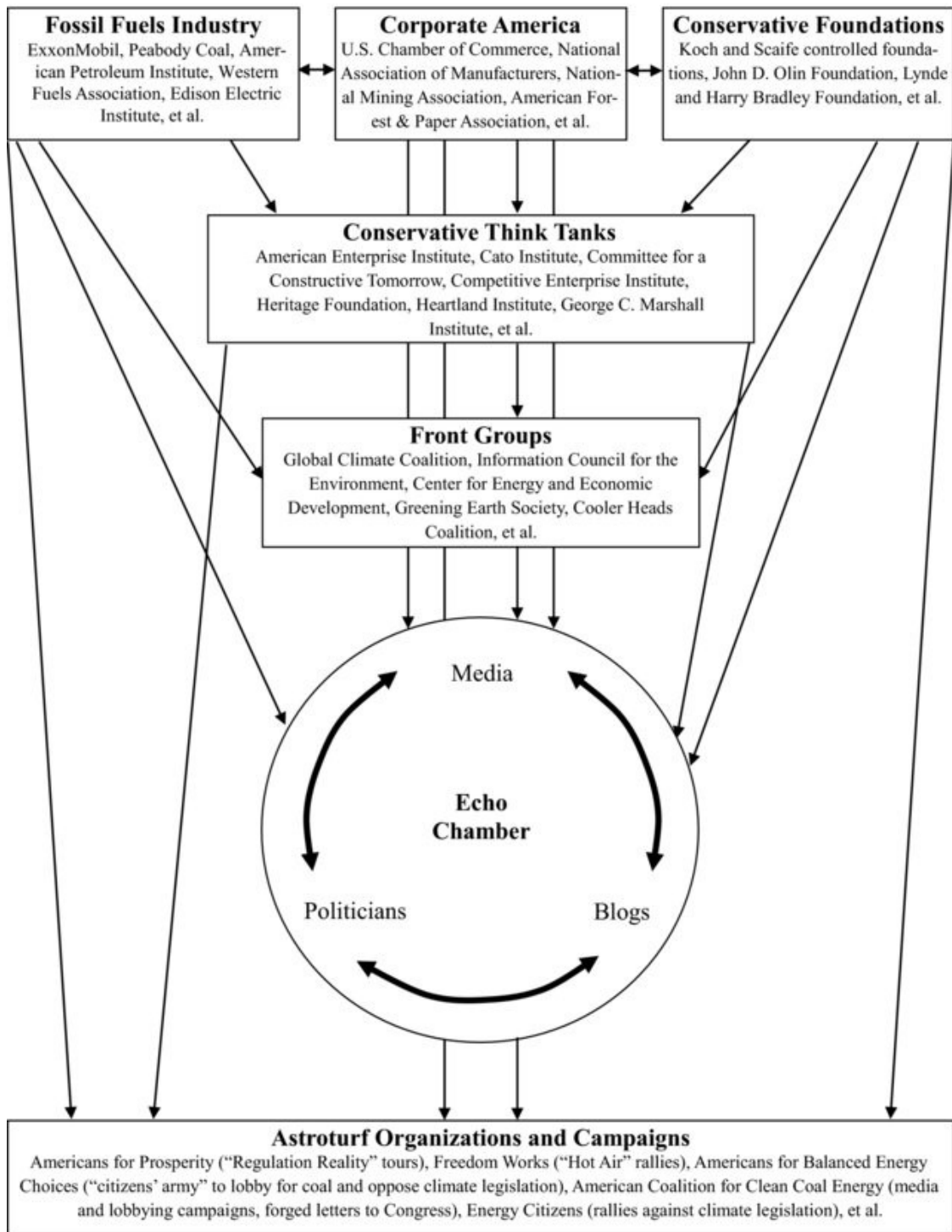


Figure 1: The Climate Change Denial Machine as outlined by Riley Dunlap and Aaron McCright in 'Organized Climate Change Denial'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, edited by John S Dryzek, Richard Norgaard, and David Schlossberg, 144–160. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2011). Republished with permission from Riley Dunlap.

The term comes from sociological literature on social movements, and the idea that: “Any social movement of potential political significance will generate opposition” (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996, 1630). Movement-counter-movement theory has been used when analysing opposing movements in a wide range of issues including anti-civil rights and anti-feminism (Andrews 2002; Corredor 2019). Counter-movements mobilise as a reaction to social movements, and often counter-movements represent the economic interests that are being threatened by emerging social movements. As defenders of the status quo, the counter-movement actors can often have ties to, and influence over, state agencies. This power is usually taken for granted until it is challenged by social movements, and this is when there is a need to form a counter-movement (Gale 1986).

Revisiting their own and other scholars’ work on counter-movements, and including the work on the climate change counter-movement, Staggenborg and Meyer (2022, 24) have identified five factors that help facilitate the formation of counter-movements. The first is that opponents will want to emulate successful movements, the second is that if established interests are threatened there will be a reaction, the third is that political allies will encourage the formation of counter-movements, the fourth is that social media and the internet allows for the rapid spread of ideas, and the fifth is that resources facilitate counter-movement activity. The last point highlights that the counter-movement theoretical perspective does not ascribe symmetry between the movement and counter-movement. There is no reason to believe that both sides will have equal access to resources. In the case of the climate change counter-movement, research has shown how the spending by industry dwarfs the financial resources available to environmental organisations (e.g. Brulle 2014; Brulle 2018). The third and fourth point above have, as we will see, been especially poignant in Sweden. It was from the late 00s, when the actors pushing climate change denial in Sweden could bypass legacy media’s gatekeepers through blogs and far-right alternative media, and when they found a political ally in the Sweden Democrats, that they gained significant political influence.

In her recent book, *The Climate Change Counter Movement: How the Fossil Fuel Industry Sought to Delay Climate Action*, Ruth E. McKie (2023) highlights the importance of elites in the counter-movement. The elite groups within the fossil fuel industry and conservative organisations, have often managed to exploit critical events or policy proposals in order to mobilise a public that otherwise has been disengaged on environmental issues. However, the mobilisation was carried out to support policies that are based on the elite group’s interests, and not that of the public.

While the countermovement term comes from the social movement literature, “the climate change countermovement” has in much of the literature become an entity in itself, with the term being used without further reference to its theoretical origins (e.g. L. D. Young and Fitz 2021). McKie (2023, 7) describes this entity holistically, as “a multitude of organizations and individuals that ... forge a diverse collective effort to obstruct policy efforts and undermine climate science.” This entity has been motivated by vested interests and neoliberal ideologies, and most research on it has focused on fossil fuel industry and think tanks. Studies have shown how this entity has influenced the Swedish far-right (Hultman, Björk, and Viinikka 2019; Ekberg and Pressfeldt 2022), but as we will see, it is a movement that is motivated not just by financial gain, but by ideologies connected to anti-gender and racist movements. These are reactionary movements, pushing back against the gains made by progressive environmental, feminist, and human rights movements. To move away from the fixed entity of the climate change countermovement, and to highlight how the orchestrated climate denial in Sweden is tied up with other pushbacks against gains won by social movements regarding equality and human rights, I will in this kappa use the term the climate change reactionary movement, and, for short, the climate reactionary movement or the reactionary movement.⁶

Stanley Cohen’s *States of Denial*

Núria Almiron and Jose Moreno (2022), two scholars who have done important work in analysing and tracing the activities of neoliberal think tanks in Europe, argue in their article “Beyond climate change denialism”, that there is a need to move towards a framework they call climate action obstruction. As I see it, they are raising some important issues regarding terminology and how we understand the subject of study. But I also believe that their arguments need deeper consideration, and I will use their text as a starting point for discussing what denial is and what terms might be useful in describing different aspects of the climate change reactionary movement. Almiron and Moreno’s main point is that denialism, which they define as an ideology, and denial, which they define as a mental state, are too crude and imprecise terms to be helpful. Specifically, they present three arguments for why denialism is of little analytical use in researching

⁶ The terminology is inspired by a special issue of the Swedish popular science magazine *Fronesis* which contained text regarding far-right, anti-gender and climate denial movements, and which was called “The Reactionaries” (*Fronesis* 2022). I had not developed this terminology when writing the papers, in which the term the climate change countermovement is used.

the climate change reactionary movement (Almiron and Moreno 2022, 12, the order of the arguments has been rearranged).

1. It is a term which increases polarisation and poisons the public debate.
2. Most people opposing climate policies do not actually deny climate science as such.
3. When the concept of denialism is used, the group in (2) becomes invisible along with the ideological structures which support them.

The first argument that denial and denialism can be seen as offensive and polarising terms, has often been discussed, especially in relation to the term scepticism (e.g. Jacques 2012; Van Rensburg 2015). People who dismiss the science of climate change have often called themselves sceptics, or climate threat sceptics, and there is a lot of scholarly literature using the term scepticism (e.g. R. A. Huber, Greussing, and Eberl 2021). This term is also used in paper IV, which is a collaborate paper where we needed a terminology that was acceptable for all nine authors. However, several scholars have commented that scepticism is a sound scientific attitude, which is not relevant to the practices of the climate change reactionary movement, and therefore denialism is a better word (e.g. Diethelm and McKee 2008; Dunlap and McCright 2011). Critics of the term denialism, however, argue that it has an unfortunate connection to holocaust denial, hence becoming derogatory and polarising. While this is true, I do not believe it can be solved by changing words. The two other terms recently suggested in the literature, delay and obstruction, are also pejorative. No one would title themselves an obstructionist. Almiron and Moreno (2022, 11) also argue that the literal meaning of “climate denial”, makes it a meaningless term, as it “would mean denying the climate, obviously something no one does.” This however, I would argue is an etymological fallacy. No one using the term climate denial would make such a claim, instead the term has acquired a meaning of its own which is to deny the science of climate change. If we kept to the literal meaning of the original words, we would neither be able to use the term “climate obstructionism”, used as shorthand for climate action obstruction (Almiron and Moreno 2022, 14), nor “climate delay”, meaning delaying meaningful action on climate change (Lamb et al. 2020).

Before moving on to the second and third of Almiron and Moreno’s arguments, we need to note the difference in the words: denial, denialism, and denier. The latter word, denier, is easiest to specify. It is a word which points to the individual doing the denial. It has been used frequently in the literature (e.g. Elsasser and Dunlap 2013; Bohr 2016; Hultman, Björk, and Viinikka 2019; Oscarsson, Strömbäck, and Jönsson 2021), and I have also used it myself (Lindvall, Vowles,

and Hultman 2020). Sceptic, its sibling in the terminology of scepticism, is also used in paper IV. Still, I am cautious of using either sceptic or denier as the words become essentialist and suggest engrained properties that an individual cannot escape. Hence, it focuses on character, not actions, and it becomes a discussion about who is a denier and who is not, rather than focusing on the acts of spreading disinformation or delaying action on climate change, and the structural and ideological reasons for these acts.

The difference between denial and denialism is more obscure. Defining denialism as an ideology is problematic as it does not signify a specific worldview. Denialism of a certain thing, such as climate change, is often ideological, in the way that neo-liberalism and far-right nationalism lend themselves easier to climate change denialism, but denialism as such does not come with a coherent worldview. There is a parallel discussion regarding populism, whether it should be considered a thick ideology with a coherent worldview, a thin ideology, consisting of pitching the people against a corrupted elite and that can be attached to a host ideology, or as a discursive style. The main advantage of seeing populism as a style, is that it becomes a variable where a political actor can be more or less populist, rather than a binary dichotomy between populist and non-populist ideologies (Rydgren 2017). Denialism should, I argue, also be seen as a style or a rhetorical device used to hide certain truths and contest scientific findings. By undermining our shared and common knowledge, denialism is “combative and extraordinary” and seeks to build “a new and better truth” in the words of the sociologist Keith Kahn-Harris (2018, 12). Just as populism, it can be used by actors across the political spectrum to achieve different political ends. Admittedly, this makes the distinction between denial and denialism less clear-cut, as denial also can be seen to be a style or an attitude. Kahn-Harris sees denialism as the expansion and intensification of denial, most notably when it is used to persuade others rather than kept personal. Denialism then becomes synonymous for what is sometimes called official, or orchestrated, denial, which takes us to the second and third argument of Almiron and Moreno.

When defining and discussing denial as a state of mind, Almiron and Moreno bring up the work of the late South African sociologist Stanley Cohen (2001). In his book *States of Denial*, Cohen traces denial of human suffering across the planet, from the bystander turning a blind eye to someone being harassed, to regime sanctioned cover-ups in South African Apartheid, Soviet Stalinism, Israeli occupation, and the military junta in Argentina. In the literature on climate change denial, Cohen has mainly been used through his typology concerning the question of what is being denied? (Björnberg et al. 2017) Cohen categorises three answers to the question, with the first being literal denial, to say that something simply is

not happening. In the case of climate change this would be to deny that the planet is heating up or that human emissions are the main cause; climate scientist Stefan Rahmsdorf (2004) defines this as denial of trend and attribution. The second category is interpretative denial, to redefine what is happening in such a way that it loses its significance. Regarding climate change this could be to say that climate change is happening, but that it is positive and making the planet greener; Rahmsdorf terms this denial of impact. The third category is implicatory denial, which is not to deny the knowledge as such, but to deny the moral, political, and psychological implications of it. In the case of climate change, this is to accept the basic science without acting to bring down carbon emissions. Implicatory denial has also been called response scepticism (Capstick and Pidgeon 2014; Van Rensburg 2015).⁷ Several of the discourses of delay identified by Lamb et al. (2020) can be categorised as implicatory denial; for example, to avert the blame to someone else or to solely believe in technological salvation out of the climate crisis.

This categorisation is also what is brought up by Almiron and Moreno (2022, 11) in saying that Cohen “identified three states of common denial among people who experience events that cause suffering; literal, interpretative and implicatory”. Here though, they miss a central point in Cohen’s classification as well as the multiple meaning of the title of the book, *States of Denial*. The three mentioned categories are answers to the *what* of denial, but Cohen’s classification of the elementary forms of denial is more intricate. He discusses the *how* of denial, in which ways it is organised, and suggests that denial can be conscious or unconscious, and it can be personal, official, or cultural. Personal denial is the state of mind of a certain individual, which is highly relevant in understanding individual responses to climate change, but out of scope for this thesis. Instead, it is the two latter which need careful consideration. Official denial is “public, collective and highly organised. In particular, there are denials that are initiated, structured and sustained by the massive resources of the modern state” (S. Cohen 2001, 10). Cohen is mainly concerned with human rights violations by government regimes, but similar practices are undertaken by the climate change reactionary movement, which has had massive resources, certainly more than some smaller states, to market doubt about climate change science.⁸ The core

⁷ See discussion above regarding the use of scepticism compared to denial.

⁸ A similar argument is made by Malm and the Zetkin Collective (2021, 14) who uses Louis Althusser’s term ideological state apparatus, ISA, to describe the climate change reactionary movement, arguing that “the S for ‘state’ [is] not a literal suggestion that a king or prime minister

feature is that it is an orchestrated attempt by a central actor or actors – whether it is the state, the fossil fuel industry, or far-right ideologues – who are trying to shape the discourses and opinions of a wider public, and I will therefore use the term orchestrated denial. Orchestrated denial is denialism at its core, the specific purpose is to persuade others; and using this conceptualisation it becomes clear that denialism can include claims of both implicatory and literal denial. This is also the multiple meaning of the word *states* in the title of Cohen’s book, in referring both to mental states as well as nation-states and organisational states.

Cultural denial is collective denial of events or atrocities, often in the form of knowing which things can be said and which things need to remain hidden: “unwritten agreements about what can be publicly remembered and acknowledged” (S. Cohen 2001, 11). The most intriguing work on the cultural denial of climate change is Kari Marie Norgaard’s study of the pseudonymised Norwegian village Bygdaby in the book *Living in Denial* (K. M. Norgaard 2011). Here Norgaard finds several cultural tools used to keep the topic of climate change away from everyday conversation. In that way a sense of order in day-to-day life is continued and the environmental privileges of being a white, male, citizen in an industrialised country in the Global North remain hidden. Cohen emphasises how official and cultural denial are often mutually dependant, official statements hiding or distorting the truth can serve a culture which is happy not to know. Young and Coutinho (2013) use a similar approach when discussing climate denial in Canada and Australia. Using concepts from the sociology of ignorance, they argue that the superficial acceptance of climate change science by the conservative governments, help maintain the ignorance, or not knowing, of citizens and institutions who believe that the government is taking action. Brulle and Norgaard (2019) have tried to conceptualise this when it comes to climate change, and argue that both the cultural denial seen in Bygdaby as well as the orchestrated promulgation of climate misinformation serve the purpose of trying to restore and maintain status quo and avoid cultural trauma. Apart from the *what* and *how*, Cohen discusses the *when* and *who* of denial; if it is present or past atrocities being denied, and whether it is the perpetrator, the victim, or a bystander who is doing the denying.

rules [the apparatus] like an embassy”, but that the apparatus “reproduce[s] the dominant ideology” of the state.

Lobbying as obstruction

While I do not agree that we should move away from discussing denial, as suggested by Almiron and Moreno, I do agree that obstruction is a useful and valuable term to highlight some actions of deliberately blocking climate change action. Take for example the lobbying done to prevent climate laws in the United States by the climate change reactionary movement (Brulle 2018). Even if the reactionary movement is using denialist argumentation, the term obstruction captures the action of lobbying better. In a similar manner, a group of researchers focusing on Canada reason about a “regime of obstruction” in an anthology with the same title (Carroll 2020). The book shows how corporate power blocks any transition from fossil capitalism to energy democracy, and describes the regime of obstruction as “a panoply of hegemonic practices that reach into civil and political society and into Indigenous communities” (Carroll 2020, 4). This is obstructionism according to the Oxford dictionary, which differentiates between obstruction and obstructionism in a similar way as I have tried to distinguish between denial and denialism. According to the dictionary, the difference comes down to intention: obstructionism is “the practice of *deliberately* impeding or delaying the course of legal, legislative or other procedures” (Stevenson and Waite 2011, 988 emphasis added).

In their recent book *Climate Obstruction: how denial, delay and inaction are heating the planet*, Ekberg et al. (2023) conceptualise three overlapping spheres of primary, secondary and tertiary obstruction. Primary obstruction is exemplified by the wilful activities of the climate change denial machine to spread doubt about climate change. Secondary obstruction includes arguments that tacitly accept climate change science, but which delay action due to ideological, economic or political reasons, while tertiary obstruction includes cultures, hierarchies and values, as well as, for example, infrastructures that stand in the way of necessary action. The book is a valuable and concise description of the historical foundations of the climate change reactionary movement, and how it stretches into the contemporary far right, and has implications in everyday life. However, I find that the schema of obstruction lacks precision, and becomes linguistically stretched. Regarding the former, Ekberg et al. argue that they highlight actors while not ignoring structures and power relations. This, I would argue, is the useful approach in Cohen’s framework, but in the three categories of obstruction they become conflated. The description of primary obstruction explicitly mentions actors (the denial machine), while the secondary form emphasises arguments (accepting but delaying climate change), and the tertiary form focuses on structures (cultures, hierarchies, values, and infrastructure). Taken at face value, this description means that several phenomena will fit all three, for example, the

fossil fuel company lobbying against fuel taxes by arguing that people need to drive to work. Others, however, will be squeezed to fit, such as Klimatsans (Climate Sense) in Sweden, where a lone elderly editor of a small, low-budget network has been sending letters-to-the-editors of local newspapers denying climate change. The denialist arguments might be primary obstruction, but the network seem to lack the heavy funding of the denial machine. When using the framework in practice, I believe it is likely that the first two forms of obstruction – primary and secondary – will be split according to arguments, while tertiary obstruction will come to include everything else.

The latter objection, that the framework becomes linguistically stretched, regards the cultures and values of tertiary obstruction. This comes back to one of the meanings of *States of Denial* as a state of mind, or similarly Norgaard's book *Living in Denial* as both a personal and collective denial of the climate crisis and what is needed to lessen its impact. It is far-fetched to replace the term denial with obstruction in these cases. What would it mean to be "living in obstruction"? Obstruction, I argue, can only be used to imply the intentful blocking of climate policies, but not to describe the – perhaps wilful – not-knowing of coming hardships connected to climate change. The connection between orchestrated and cultural denial, how the former influences and helps maintain the latter, is also why it can be useful to discuss denial in both cases, and not only obstruction.

Cultural denial as ignorance

While obstruction is a good word to describe several acts of deliberately trying to push back or delay climate policies, ignorance can be suitable for describing the act of not-knowing. Since the early 2000s, the sociology of ignorance has become a rich research field. Within this field, there has been plenty of studies concerning how and why people ignore knowledge, similar to Norgaard's work and also sometimes connected to evolutionary claims. Klintman (2019) argues that the evolutionary need of belonging to a group makes us resist knowledge which can threaten group dynamics. Ignorance studies have also pointed to the fact that in many cases ignorance is positive, in for example blind peer review for anonymous recruitment. Or as John Rawls argued through his concept of a veil of ignorance: that it would be a blessing if decision makers were ignorant of their own position in society, as they would then take the best decisions for all. Agnotology – a subfield to the sociology of ignorance – studies the production of ignorance, and has often examined the workings of the climate change reactionary movement, not least in comparison with the tobacco industry (e.g. Fernandez Pinto 2017). In their influential book *Merchants of Doubt* (2011), Naomi Oreskes and Eric Conway scrutinise the strategies used by the tobacco industry to discredit cancer

research, and how they have been used over and over again by anti-environmental think tanks to downplay a range of matters from the hole in the ozone layer to global warming. Similar to the literature on denial and obstruction, however, ignorance studies seem to grapple with its own complex terminology. The recent book *Ignorance – a global history* (Burke 2023) contains a glossary listing 56 types of ignorance, including strategic ignorance, moral ignorance, wilful ignorance, and opaque ignorance. These may all be useful terms, but they are not contributing to a uniform or concise terminology.

One reason for why the argument regarding denial and denialism is being raised, is because several papers highlight what, using Cohen’s terminology, could be called discourses of implicatory denial (e.g. Lamb et al. 2020; Coan et al. 2021). It is tempting to believe that this is due to a logical progression from literal to implicatory denial, and that once the consequences of climate change become more apparent, it will be impossible to deny the reality of them. This progression has often been suggested. Already in 2009, Hoggan and Littlemore (2009, 118) wrote that as “the evidence of climate change has become more compelling – as the science has grown more certain and as people have come to recognise the changes occurring before their very eyes – a new and more dangerous form of junk scientist has begun to emerge: the nondenier deniers.” While being logically appealing, this line of reasoning falls back on the information deficit model, which argues that if we get the right information, we will act in the right way. Most communication scholars have written off the information deficit model, since culture, identity and politics also hinder action. So, rather than being seen as a logical, progressive shift from denial to delay, any shift in communication, such as is seen in paper IV, needs to be contextualised.⁹

A summary of opposition to climate politics in Sweden can serve as an example. In the 1970s, climate change was used as an argument for expanding nuclear power (Ekberg and Hultman 2021). In the early 90s, arguments such as discourses of delay and blaming the consumer were used by neoliberal think tanks in order to push off governmental regulation (Ekberg and Pressfeldt 2022). In the late 00s, the Climate Realists was formed and literal denialist arguments were used at a time when climate was high on the media agenda. Further, in the late 10s, literal denialism became prominent on Swedish far-right digital media, connected to

⁹ The need for contextualisation probably helps explain the abundance of words to describe ignorance. Every new context creates the need for a new term.

discourses of anti-immigration and anti-feminism. This very short timeline shows how there is no inevitable progression when it comes to different types of denial. Rather, most argumentation is opportunistic; used to serve political ends in different societal and political contexts. This also implies that we often find discourses of literal and implicatory denial side by side, and they can in some cases feed off each other. Having actors pushing doubt about science, makes the voices who claim to care but not act seem reasonable – it is the former who are the deniers (Brooks and Wingard 2023; Holgersen 2024). In the words of Cohen (2001, 103): “The contradictory elements form a deep structure: their relationship to each other is ideological, rather than logical.”

In this thesis, I will be using the whole of Cohen’s framework regarding the different forms of denial, and not just the three categories regarding what is being denied. This way I hope to contribute to a detailed, nuanced, and multi-faceted map of denial and denialism, including the actors who do not literally deny climate change as well as the ideological and economical structures that uphold these actors. As this thesis is mostly concerned with non-state actors, I will use the term orchestrated rather than official denial, and to complement the terminology, I will use obstruction to describe activities that hinder climate legislation or climate action, and ignorance as a synonym for cultural denial. The reason for using obstruction and ignorance to complement the terminology is that sometimes the language of denialism becomes an obstacle, which takes us back to the first of Almiron and Moreno’s arguments. I do not think that reasoning about denialism poisons the debate, and in an academic setting I still believe that Cohen’s scheme is the most useful. However, I have noticed in certain other cases that use of the term denialism can hinder productive conversations about how to act on climate change. In such cases, it is better to be pragmatic and use other terms to focus on real world impacts to mitigate emissions, rather than be stuck in academic discussions on terminology.

A note on ontology and positionality

To make the study of climate change denialism a meaningful project, a note on ontology is needed. The critical discourse theory applied in this thesis, is grounded in the ontological view of Lillie Chouliarki and Norman Fairclough (which in turn is inspired by critical realism), which acknowledges that truth claims concerning both social and material practices are possible, but that these do not entitle privileged access or unwarranted universalist claims. This is a “‘modest’ yet non-relativistic understanding of scientific truth as epistemic gain, where what counts is relative explanatory power and contribution to meeting needs” (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 35).

Two further aspects need to be acknowledged in the spirit of critical social science. Firstly, that this research is normative in the sense of engaging with the contemporary world and wanting to contribute to new possibilities of a low-carbon society. Secondly, that the positionality of myself as a researcher is important, especially as I am in an environmentally privileged position with a – on the global level – high carbon footprint.

Donna Haraway has famously argued that natural and technological sciences were trying to perform the “god trick” of omnipotence. But in her first text on *Situated knowledges* (1988), she also resisted calls for radical deconstructivism which would lead to complete relativism. Putting the notion of vision in the centre, Haraway argued that scientific images, and the male scientific gaze, claimed – an impossible – neutral and universal objectivity, where the researcher had been removed from the studied object. Instead, she argued that the objectivity only could be achieved by recognising that it was partial, embodied and situated. This did not mean that all knowledge claims were equal or exempt from critical examination and inquiry. On the contrary, Haraway (1988, 584) argued that such relativism was the mirror twin of totalism: “Relativism and totalization are both ‘god tricks’ promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully, common myths in rhetorics surrounding Science.” In a similar way, David Bloor (1976), who argued for a symmetry principle in the Strong Programme of Social Science, did not claim that all knowledge claims were true. He was adamant that there is “nothing in the concept of truth that allows for belief making an idea true” (Bloor 1976, 38). At the same, knowledge claims and theories that are accepted by a group will affect social practices even if the claims are untrue. It will become “the basis for their understanding and their adaptation to the world” (Bloor 1976, 38). This latter point is key to the arguments in this thesis. The knowledge claims of the climate change reactionary movement and the far-right are, when picked up by wider communities, neither cynical lies of knowingly making claims that are untrue, nor simply a matter of information deficit. Instead, they are knowledge claims that are being internalised and accepted, to defend high-carbon lifestyles and environmental privileges in a highly unequal world.

The commonality between relativism and totalisation is mirrored in the commonality between extreme dualism and a complete collapse of the human/nature-binary, where both will allow continued human exploitation of natural resources. Jacques (2006) argues that the essence of the denialist argumentation is to reaffirm the nature-human duality, and to push back claims arguing that humanity has a moral duty to protect the environment or that more-than-human life can have intrinsic value. An interesting comparison to this argumentation is Aronowsky’s (2021) article about how scientist James Lovelock,

most famous for the Gaia-theory, conducted work paid by the fossil fuel company Shell. Aronowsky shows why the Gaia-theory, which states that the planet is a self-regulating organism evolving to create habitable living conditions for all species, lent itself to corporate PR-campaigns by both Shell and Exxon. The companies claimed that if humans are part of a self-regulatory planet, then any emissions from human sources should be taken care of by the planet's regulatory mechanisms. Aronowsky (2021, 327) argues that the Gaia-hypothesis "collapsed the human-nonhuman ontological divide to lend legibility to the notion of biological sources of pollution and ascribed a shared historicity to humans and algae to undermine efforts to link environmental problems with industrial operations."

At first sight this argument can seem contradictory to that of Jacques (2006, 85), in which denialist thinking about climate change is set in a worldview which "believes humanity is utterly independent of nonhuman nature." However, in their consequences, the theories that Jacques and Aronowsky criticise are remarkably similar, as both facilitate unfettered extraction of natural resources. It is perfectly possible to ascribe agency to both human and non-human actors independently, thus displacing the notion of a strong human-nature divide where humanity, as something essentially different, is bound to rule plants and animals alike. The Gaia theory, however, goes to the extreme of collapsing humans and non-humans to one single entity by ascribing these actors shared agency at the planetary level, where they both work for the best planetary living conditions. Therefore, all actions become good for the planet. Indeed, this argument is often employed by Patrick Moore, a former member of Greenpeace who switched sides and became a prominent figure within the reactionary movement. Showing a graph¹⁰ of how atmospheric carbon levels have decreased over millions of years, Moore argues that humans came along at the right time to start burning fossil fuels, thereby stabilising the climate and saving life on the planet (Anne Pasek 2021). Hence, both the human/non-human divide of modernity, and the shared planetary agency of Gaia, allows industrial capitalism to continue its exploitation.

Interestingly, versions of both these arguments have also been put forth by denialist Christian conservatives in the USA. In their analysis of Cornwallists' argumentation, Björnberg et. al. (2020) find both the enrichment argument, that man is God's image on earth and it is his duty to dominate nature, and the omnipotence argument, maintaining that as the earth is God's perfect creation, it can withstand any environmental pressure. The first argument holds on to

¹⁰ The graph is also used in SwebbTV, as we see in paper III.

modernity's human/non-human divide, while the second gives industry a green card to pollute, but by pointing to the divine powers of God rather than Gaia.¹¹

Nature-culture dualism is grounded in the scientific revolution. As Carolyn Merchant (1989) shows in her book *Death of Nature*, the scientific revolution was tied to the mechanical sciences which saw nature as a dead machine controlled by man. Merchant's historical account shows how discussions around mining in the 16th and 17th century often used metaphors to discuss how nature could be controlled and dominated. Francis Bacon, often mentioned as the father of modern science, referred to nature as a female who must be controlled by "the man of science" and her secrets discovered and controlled. She was to become a "slave" which was "bound into service" (Merchant 1989; as quoted in Warren 1998, 187). While we cannot analytically collapse human and nature into one entity,¹² since anthropogenic climate change would then become either a natural or mentally constructed phenomena, we cannot keep the complete separation. With the coming of the Anthropocene,¹³ it is clear that humanity and nature are interconnected. There is a distinction between them, but it is modest.

Why study the opposition to the transition?

"Are there still people denying climate change?" This has been one of the most common responses when I tell people what I have been doing during the last five years. I have also been queried about why we should be concerned with the people who do not want to act, and whether the saliency of climate change denialism is not increased by studying it. These questions have come from both within and outside academia and are worthy of consideration. Obviously, there is no point in writing a dissertation about climate change denialism or obstruction, if all people were prepared to act on the knowledge of climate change. It is also valuable, and probably more pleasant, to investigate initiatives trying to contribute to a low-carbon future, rather than focusing on the interests and ideologies that are most entrenched in burning fossil fuels. So why spend time and effort on

¹¹ A follow-up study on Swedish evangelical denominations did, contrary to the USA case, not find any denialism, instead there was a clear acceptance of climate science which was linked to human stewardship and an obligation to erasure poverty (Edvardsson Björnberg and Karlsson 2022). This shows how the broader socio-political context can influence climate change opinions even within similar faith-systems.

¹² See e.g. Malm (2018) for a strong critique against radical structuralism, new materialism and certain strands of STS.

¹³ See chapter 3 for a discussion about the Anthropocene.

researching the ideas of those who do not want to act? In this section I will try to explore these questions.

The quick reply to the first question above is: yes, there are still people denying climate change – but some nuance is needed. A survey-based study published in 2021 (Oscarsson, Strömbäck, and Jönsson 2021) stated that six per cent of the Swedish population literally deny anthropogenic climate change. The study asked the question “What is your view on the following statement? Changes in the climate are mainly caused by human activities”¹⁴, and respondents could answer on a scale from nought to ten, where nought meant “Completely wrong statement” and ten “Completely right statement”. The researchers then argued that all respondents answering between nought and three could be considered to be climate deniers, which resulted in six per cent.¹⁵ So what does six per cent of the population mean in context? One might say, as one of my recent reviewers did, that this is not such a high number. Six per cent represents slightly more than 1 in 20, and if the remaining 19 take the issue seriously, that might be good enough to make progress towards a low-carbon future. Indeed, a recent comment in *PNAS* argued that fewer and fewer people literally deny climate change, and to avoid increasing polarisation: “It’s time to give climate ‘deniers’ less attention in the media, in our own private conversations, and in academic discourse” (Bretter and Schulz 2023, 3).

Considering the overwhelming scientific evidence of anthropogenic global warming, the question must be asked, though, how six per cent of the population in a highly educated country, such as Sweden, can deny this fact? Already in its first assessment report in 1990 the IPCC (Houghton, Jenkins, and Ephraums 1990, XI) stated that it is “certain” that “emissions resulting from human activities are substantially increasing the atmospheric concentrations of the greenhouse gases ... resulting on average in an additional warming of the Earth’s surface. The main greenhouse gas, water vapour, will increase in response to global warming and further enhance it.” Since then, the science has become ever clearer making the question of why it is being denied intriguing for scientific exploration, but it is even more urgent considering the risks involved in inaction. Continued carbon

¹⁴ All Swedish quotes in the thesis are translated to English by the author.

¹⁵ The study was based on an annual Swedish survey, which in 2019 for the first time included questions related to beliefs in anthropogenic global warming. In later versions of the survey, the researchers have argued that everyone answering between 0-4 are denying anthropogenic climate change, which brings the number up to approximately 10 per cent. However, the 2019 study referenced here is still the most in-depth analysis of the results.

emissions risk tipping the planet into a new, inhospitable, state (Richardson et al. 2023).

But denial is more than literal denial. The six per cent measured by Oscarsson et al. (2021) does not tell the whole story. Denial or obstruction of climate change can take many different shapes, and quite a few respondents might accept the basic science but argue that the outcomes are positive (what Cohen would term interpretive denial). Or acknowledge the dire consequences of climate change but neglect its implications of needed action (implicatory denial). Neither of these groups are necessarily encompassed in the six per cent.

Knowing that there is a sizeable minority who in various ways denies climate change, the next question is whether this group will increase or decrease with heightened attention and scrutiny? Will the exposure of climate denialism lead to increased sympathy and support for it? This is a valid question, and it cannot be ruled out that there can be negative effects from studying climate change denialism. If the university is considered an elitist, liberal, politically correct bastion of wokeness (in the pejorative way these terms are used by the far right), as is often the case when the far right meets conspiracy thinking, it might be that any research coming out on climate change, and especially on climate change denialism, will be rejected out of hand by these actors. Indeed, an article studying party elite cues in the USA showed how out-party cues were more important than in-party cues (Merkley and Stecula 2021). This meant that climate denialist attitudes among republican sympathisers were often triggered by elites within the democratic party arguing for more climate policy. The same mechanisms might be applicable in the setting of the Swedish far-right, from which there are no shortage of accusations claiming that higher education is silencing the truth about certain subjects while promoting a leftist agenda (Önnerfors 2020). In that case, studying climate change denial and the far-right might trigger further accusations along the same line.¹⁶

The counterargument is tied to the need for urgent action on climate change, with the IPCC stating in the Summary for Policymakers in its latest assessment report that “There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all” (IPCC 2023, 24). Obviously, climate denialism, in all its forms, is an obstacle to the transition, and while there might be an argument that denialism could be augmented through the study of it, there is also empirical

¹⁶ It is an empirical question whether such reactions are a sign of *more* climate denialism, or if it is existing latent denialism becoming *visible*.

evidence of the opposite. Experiments have shown that if disinformation and sources of disinformation are highlighted, people can become less likely to fall prey to it. This is called inoculation-theory, and has been supported in studies where previous exposure to, and explanation of, false information, has helped people identify disinformation when they see it in a different setting (Farrell, McConnell, and Brulle 2019; Lewandowsky and Linden 2021).

Finally, there is a moral argument to why researching climate change denialism is important. We know that climate change will disproportionately affect the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities. These communities have done the least to contribute to the problem, while the fossil fuel companies and conservative organisations, which for decades have orchestrated the campaign to spread doubt about the science, are among the most powerful in the world. When this campaign is now being picked up and merged with the far right, it becomes an even more sincere threat to human worth. To argue that we should not conduct research on these actors, because it might increase the salience of their message, becomes, in the long run, a call for compliancy.

2. The long history

Setting the scene: Nationalism and the nation-state

This is stating the obvious, but nationalism matters in climate politics. Apart from how ubiquitous nationalism structure our lives, it also matters because it is the foundation of the international negotiations within the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), because emissions are usually calculated at the national level, and because nation-states are arguably the most viable and powerful entities to implement emission reduction policies. It also matters because the far right and the ideology of ethnic nationalism is gaining popular support in many parts of the world. Through its long connection with fossil fuels, we will see how certain types of nationalism are tied to climate change denialism. Therefore, we need to try to understand what the nation-state is, and how it came about.

“The basic characteristic of the modern nation and everything connected to it is its modernity”, Eric Hobsbawm declared in his book *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (1992, 14). While there has been an earlier scholarly debate whether nations and nationalism are historical, the statement is hardly controversial in current nationalist studies. Even scholars such as Anthony Smith, who highlighted ethnic continuity as the basis for nationalism, has conceded that nations are neither natural nor primordial (as discussed in Calhoun 2007, 42). But while the modernity of nations is established within the field of nationalism studies, the supposed naturalness of nations is often used as a political argument, not least by the far-right. In their party programme, for example, the Sweden Democrats try to claim an ancient past for the nation: “the nation is the most important, oldest, and most natural human community second to the family. Empires, political groupings, and other supranational communities have come and gone during the last millennium, but nations as a form for human community has remained” (Sverigedemokraterna 2019, 9).

There is plenty of literature on how nationalism in Europe from the French revolution and through the 20th century is tied to modernism, and “how industrialization, urbanization, and mass education both create and strengthen nationalism” (Mylonas and Tudor 2021, 113).¹⁷ Benedict Anderson (2016, 6)

¹⁷ Anne McClintock (1993) has succinctly shown that there is not just not one nationalism, and admittedly the description of nationalism and modernity here is, at least in parts, Eurocentric. The reason is that this is also the nationalism that the Swedish far-right is trying to defend.

defines the nation as an “imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”¹⁸ Nations are imagined as limited since no nation imagines itself as encompassing all of humanity, it always exists alongside other nations. It is imagined as sovereign in the sense that nations evolved when divine rule was being questioned by revolutions and the Enlightenment. It was a time when dynasties, who had been perceived to have inherited and given their powers through God or some other heavenly order, were being toppled from their thrones. Instead, it was the government of the nation-state that should rule over its territory. And it is imagined as a community, because despite existing inequalities, exploitations, and hierarchies within the nation it is “always conceived of as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (B. Anderson 2016, 7).

The fraternity that Andersson speaks of was created through the vernaculars, which were spread through print capitalism and modern administrative units (B. Anderson 2016, chap. 5; Hobsbawm 1992, 110–111). In the spirit of the enlightenment, the modern nation-states of the 18th century were supposedly rational and secular. It was the laws of science and objectivity that would guide them. In many cases, there was a certain degree of democracy in that it was the people of the nation that was going to rule the state. Even in authoritarian nation-states as they would later develop in the fascist regimes, the leaders would generally argue that they represented the people and not the heavens. The nation-state became the container for mass-education and increased welfare for the people of the nation. This also meant that within nationalism lay the idea of continuous, unlimited progress. Aligned with enlightenment thinking, the European nations were bound to be ever improving with more knowledge, technology, and wealth. Daniele Conversi has argued that nationalism is the dominant ideology of modernity, and that it is connected to both economic growth and the idea of “*development for development’s sake at whatever the costs*” (Conversi 2012, 22 emphasis added).

Ernest Gellner (2006) argued that nationalism was the result of industrialisation. Industrialisation required an educated and mobile work force, and it was the nation-state, born out nationalist sentiment, which could provide it. It was a

¹⁸ The term imagined here is not used to argue that nations are false or fabricated. Anderson argues, like Norman Fairclough’s ontological view (see note on ontology in introduction), that nations are real even though they are socially constructed.

centralised state that could provide mass-education in the vernaculars, having both the resources to administrate it as well as a loyal citizenship that was receptive to it. Gellner's model has rightly been criticised for lacking rigid empirical analysis, and there have for example been plenty of instances where nationalist movements have used the nationalist sentiment to push for industrialisation, rather than the latter causing the former. Still, however, it is clear that nationalism and nation-states in Europe are coupled with industrial modernity.¹⁹ The increased mobility of labour and the need for a cultural homogenic labour force in industry became either a breeding ground, or an aspiration, for nationalism. Gellner (2006, 22) acknowledged that "industrialized society is the only society ever to live by and rely on sustained and perpetual growth, or an expected and continuous improvement." Still, Gellner failed to recognise how this growth was dependent on the mining and burning of coal. Coal not only powered the factories, but it also ran the railways and modern communication infrastructure which tied the nation-states together.

Nationalism has a temporal dimension. The notion of progress requires a linear sense of time, as does the idea of an historical continuous, national community (B. Anderson 2016). Even though nations are created, they only make sense if they are considered as historical artefacts. Following Walter Benjamin, Anne McClintock (1993, 65) argues that "the mapping of 'Progress' depends on systematically inventing images of 'archaic' time to identify what is historically 'new' about enlightened, national progress." While several scholars have noticed this temporal aspect of nationalism, McClintock goes further in discussing its gendered dimensions. While the notion of progress is connected to modernity and industrialisation, the idea of nationalism requires a belief in the nation's deep roots, of age-old traditions and cultural continuity connecting generations. McClintock argues that women have been used to represent the traditionalism, authenticity, and naturalistic body of the nation, whereas men have represented the forward-thrusting and potent agent of progress. Women have often been articulated as reproducing the nation, both biologically and culturally (Yuval-Davis 1997). In the family sphere, women have been seen to bear the children of the nation, while culturally, they have raised the children to become part of the imagined community, with a shared and homogenised culture. The men, in turn, have often been portrayed as defending both the family and the nation by going to war (Nagel 1998; Lauenstein et al. 2015).

¹⁹ See Breuilly (2006) for a discussion of Gellner and criticisms of his theory.

Powering nationalism

If nationalism is tied to modernity and industrialisation, it is also tied to the fuels that powered the machines, trains, and ships that became part of the national infrastructure. Andreas Malm shows in *Fossil Capital* (2016) that it was coal, and later oil and gas, which for the first time in history created a society built on year-on-year economic growth and material output. The fossil economy, born out of the industrial revolution, was “an economy of self-sustaining growth predicated on the growing consumption of fossil fuels, and therefore generating a sustained growth in emission in carbon dioxide” (Malm 2016, 11). Thus, the modern nation-state was, at least in Europe connected to the burning of fossil fuel.²⁰ Malm (2016) argues that the switch from hydro to coal – from the flow to the stock – in England was originally effected by mill owners to gain increased control over workers. It enabled them to build factories in the cities where production was most profitable. As coal could be transported, stockpiled, and burned at the most convenient times, it became a power-source that was much more adaptable to the intention of the mill-owner, compared to localised hydro which demanded immediate use of the thrust created by the water wheel.

But coal also empowered the labour forces, especially at the end of the 19th century. The digging, loading, and transportation of coal needed workers, who could wield the concentrated power that lay in their hands. By organizing themselves around pits, railways, and ports, and going on strike to assert their demands, the power of coal-workers ushered an era of mass-politics and democratisation in the European states from the 1870s onwards (Mitchell 2013). This was also an era when education was rolled out, partly to meet the demands of workers, but also because the higher classes, who were the ones that up until then had been most occupied with nationalism, saw the need to include the working class as part of the nation. When England introduced “The Education Act” in 1870 as the first substantial policy to provide working-class education it was in order to secure England’s “industrial prosperity” (Middleton 1970, 167). Historian Cara Daggett (2019, 78) has argued that the control of energy sources was paramount to western newly industrialised states in the 19th century: “The relationship between supplies of energy and national prosperity was manifestly evident to the scientists of energy and their early followers, who saw in energy a knowledge that could govern imperial flows of goods and power.”

²⁰ European nationalism would become the copycat model to later spread around the world (B. Anderson 2016).

Increased democratisation and education in the 1870s intertwined with an increased national consciousness and nationalism of the flag. An example is how the number of self-proclaimed national newspapers in Britain rose from 1 in 1871 to 33 two decades later (Hobsbawm 1992, 105). It was a time of rapid social change, and Hobsbawm (1992, 109) lists three developments which gave impetus to the rising tide of nationalism: the first was the resistance of traditional groups which felt threatened by the onrush of modernity, the second was the rapid growth of urbanisation and novel classes in industrialised countries, and the third was the unprecedented migration across the globe. All of these were driven and powered mainly by fossil fuels.

Modernity, tightly tied to industrialisation, led to reactionary movements imagining a historic national past through linguistic and ethnic elements. These movements were creating the roots of the nation, whether in folklore, genes, nature, or modernity itself, which created a new sense of national consciousness among citizens at large. The new identities formed in this period, however, were not exclusive. In a sense, it would be easy to argue that the internationalism of socialism should be the anti-thesis to nationalism. But, while Marx and Engels wanted to awaken class consciousness and argued for proletarians of all countries to unite, this did not necessarily come at the expense of national consciousness. As Hobsbawm (1992, 123) writes: “a man might have no problem about feeling himself to be the son of an Irishman, the husband of a German woman, a member of the mining community, a worker, a supporter of Barnsley football club, a Liberal, a Primitive Methodist, a patriotic Englishman, possibly a republican, and a supporter of the British Empire.”

In Sweden, where industrialisation came relatively late at the end of the 19th century, nation-building was heavily tied to energy consumption even though the country lacked coal or other fossil fuel resources. To become less independent of coal imports, the Swedish government felt a need to expand hydropower, and three large hydropower plants were built in the early 20th century. These were hailed as engineering feats by brave engineers who worked for the good of the nation (Blomkvist, Kaijser, and Fridlund 1998). The second of this project, the Porjus-plant on the Luleå river in Sápmi, was created to both provide electricity to the Iron Ore Railway Line and to provide energy for the rapidly growing industries in northern Sweden. Through colonizing Sápmi, the north became paramount to the idea of Sweden as a modern, industrial nation. The forests and iron provided the natural resource base for export, and the rivers became the centre for power production (Sörlin 1988). The snow-capped peaks and the mountain marshes of The Scandes became the backdrop for the first national parks in Sweden. These were formed as a conservation project that would

showcase the national landscape to the world. In both Europe and the USA, Nature, with a capital N, “became the object of a national rhetoric and a sublime iconography” (Sörlin 1999, 105). These were sites of both wonder and natural resources, as exemplified by the national park, Stora Sjöfallet (which translates to the Great Sea fall). Soon after its inauguration in 1909, Stora Sjöfallet had its borders redrawn so that the waterfall, which was the centre of the park, could be damned for hydropower.

The Swedish colonisation of Sápmi came at a high cost. The expansion of hydro, the dammed rivers, and the increased mining forced the displacement of indigenous Sámi-communities and disrupted their possibilities of reindeer herding (Össbo 2014). Within national parks, Sámi communities were often first naturalised and regarded as being a part of the parks, and later saw their rights to the land restricted when their activities were deemed to cause too much damage (Andersson Hjulman 2017). The break between Sweden and Norway in 1905, became important to build the national identities of both countries. But the building of national identities was aided by the breaking down of Sámi-ones. The Sámi used to transgress the border every year when moving with their migrating deer, and a forced displacement was enacted by the Swedish government. Neither Sweden nor Norway recognised the traditional Sámi way of life as being compatible with Swedish or Norwegian nationalism (Labba 2020).

Within nationalist thinking of the time, there was a connection between protecting local nature and promoting a kind of pristine, patriotic, manliness. When people moved to the industrialised cities and the European nation-states were being consolidated, conservative movements portrayed nature as the soul of the nation. Connected to this nationalist framing of nature, were organisations such as the boy scouts which evolved from the military, aiming to turn boys into patriotic men through an outdoor, rural education. This would lead them away from working class militancy and the degeneration of inner city youth (Pryke 1998). One of the main scouting proponents in Sweden, Sven Hedin, wrote in 1912 that he wanted “to raise an army of scouts and drill them to become men among men, who in a moment of fear will gather from all around to defend the country” (as cited in Lundberg 2018, 62) Several other organisations, mainly consisting of men from the upper classes, also connected outdoor life with national identity (Sandell and Sörlin 2000). The slogan of one of the main associations – Friluftsrämjandet – was at the time “Manly sports – the forefathers’ legacy”.

In Germany, the conservative and romantic Heimat-movement turned, to a degree, against Enlightenment-thinking. In contrasting the German nation against the French, the movement emphasised rootedness and argued that while France was a

modern artifice of the revolution, Germany was authentic and natural (Olsen 1999). The German Heimat-movement could not however, hide the connection between nation-building and energy. The coal of Upper Silesia was essential to German industrialisation in the mid-19th century; it was the “route to modernity” (Allen 2021, 92). During the coming century there was a struggle between Germany and Poland to nationalise the region and invoke national consciousness among coalminers. The miners often felt more localised loyalty to the region than national loyalty to Berlin or Warsaw. A project of Polonization in the region was implemented in the inter-war years, as, in the words of anthropologist Irma Allen (2021, 96): “Silesian coal, a desirable, needed, and coveted raw material, was key to the nationalist-homemaking project”.

The great acceleration

Everything gathered speed after the Second World War. Fossil fuel use, population, GDP, paper production, international transportation, urbanisation – it all increased enormously from 1950 onwards. Similarly, the curves related to carbon emissions, methane production, ocean acidification, ozone depletion, and marine fish capture, among others, shot up. This is the period that has been called the great acceleration, when socio-economic and earth system trends increased so dramatically that they reshaped the planet (Steffen et al. 2015). The 1950s has been suggested as a starting point of the Anthropocene, the geological epoch that has been proposed to replace the Holocene.²¹ An epoch when humanity – or at least small parts of it – has become the prime mover for planetary changes. It is the epoch when the fossil fuel industry – as the prime example – went from believing that they could control the forces of nature through continued exploitation of oil, gas, and coal, to realising that they actually *did* control nature. But not just on a local level, the industry realised that their business was causing negative planetary change, a finding so disastrous to their business model that they chose to ignore, deny, and hide it as much as possible.

The economy grew rapidly in the Global North when the Second World War ended. Modern, individual lifestyles based on the car as the principal vehicle of transportation intensified the need for imported oil. In the USA, cities were built

²¹ In March 2024, the proposal to create a new Anthropocene epoch that would have succeeded the Holocene was rejected by the responsible subcommittee of the International Commission on Stratigraphy, ending a long formal process among geologists. The concept however is alive in both natural and social sciences as well as in culture, and the discussion about how it should be defined and acknowledged will continue (Witze 2024).

around the use of cars, which became symbols of autonomy and freedom, the very essence of American life.²² This was copied in Sweden, which was transformed to a car-society during the 50s and 60s (Lundin 2014). The reorientation to the car-society was fundamental during these decades, often referred to as the “record-years”; so much that in the 1970s the head of Sweden’s energy commission could proclaim that car ownership was “a human right. An absolute necessity for freedom” (as quoted in Millkrantz et al. 2022, 127). Oil was mainly used for transportation and heating, but in other forms it entered all spheres of industrialised society; in consumer products, such as clothes, toys, and cosmetics, as well as in industrial chemicals and in chemical fertilizers.

These years can also be seen as the culmination of the period that Ulrich Beck (1992) specified as first modernity. This was a period when society had been equated with the nation-state, and was built around stable class identities, gendered divisions of labour, and a linear understanding of science which would lead to increased knowledge, enhanced human control over nature, and technological improvements. First modernity was based on the nuclear family, with the father working in industry and the mother taking care of the family.²³ Industrial society demanded a separation between the spheres. It needed a mobile labour force which was regulated by contracts and governmental and market laws, but it also needed this labour force to be continuously reproduced. The rapidly growing industrial economy promised lifelong careers, together with stable, professional, class identities. As I will show in papers II and III, and expand in the kappa discussion, this period, which I call national-modernity, is the focus of Swedish far-right nostalgia, and part of the reason for far-right climate denialism.

The increased use of oil after the Second World War, lessened the influence of organised coal labour but increased European and USA dependence on the Middle East. It became more important to secure access to oil, which was part of the reasoning behind the USA- and UK-backed coup in Iran which displaced the parliamentary-based government with the authoritarian rule of the Shah (Mitchell 2013). Indeed, the speed of the great acceleration was highly unequal. Mainly Europe and the USA were stepping on the gas, and most of the earth-system impact from the great acceleration was caused by the OECD countries. Even

²² For a longer story about American lifestyles and the use of oil, see Matthew Huber’s *Lifeblood* (2013).

²³ Yvonne Hirdman shows how the division of labour was also key to the Swedish Social Democratic vision of a *People’s Home* (Folkhemmet) in the 1930s (as discussed in Nordvall 2023, 68). Indeed, the vision of the People’s Home is in many regards a near ideal type of Beck’s “first modernity”.

within these, it was the richest parts of the populations, mainly white and male, who were generating the largest ecological footprint.

This inequality has been claimed to be inherent to industrialised modernity itself. Alf Hornborg (2021) has argued that we need to recognise the role of unequal ecological exchange as part of technology, and that technological artefacts are never neutral. There are structural inequalities intrinsic to technological construction. The resources of land and labour needed to build and run machines must be acknowledged. According to such an analysis, the industrial revolution could never have taken off in Britain without the appropriation of slave labour and land in America for growing cotton. Continuing into the late 20th and early 21st century, empirical analysis has shown how unequal ecological exchange means that labour and raw materials are valued higher in richer countries, reinforcing inequalities between nations (Dorninger et al. 2021).

The dependency of unequal exchange means that industrial modernity never can be universal. This point is also underlined by considering the environmental resources underpinning a modern mode of living. Once Asia started to industrialise in the 1970s, carbon emissions rose even more rapidly, pushing the world ever closer to climate catastrophe. As Amtiav Ghosh succinctly points out: “what we have learned from this experiment [of industrialisation in Asia] is that the patterns of life that modernity engenders can only be practiced by a small minority of the world’s population” (Ghosh 2017, 92). In a similar fashion, Daggett argues that energy transitions, and especially the use of more energy, has been done for the privilege of the few rather than the many. Increased energy- and resource use is not a natural human evolution, but at strive after dominance and power (Daggett 2021).

The deep inequity of the Anthropocene, has led to repeated calls for naming the epoch for example the Capitalocene, the Econocene, or the (M)anthropocene (R. Norgaard 2013; J. W. Moore 2017; Di Chiro 2017). Changing the term from the Anthropocene would bring attention to the systems – such as capitalism, the economy, or the patriarchy – which are mainly responsible for the global environmental degradation, rather than laying the blame on humanity as a species. The main critique against the latter, is that the history of humanity shows that there is nothing inherent in the species of homo sapiens that has brought about multiple environmental crises, but that a small proportion of humans has been responsible for this during – in the historical record of humanity – a short period of time (Malm and Hornborg 2014). As will be discussed in chapter 13, this matters for notions about national-industrial modernity, and the far-right longing to its perceived innocent – but rather ignorant – past.

The ecological turn and the roots of neoliberal anti-environmentalism

Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, from 1962, has often been seen as the start of the modern environmental movement. In affecting prose Carson warned of the indiscriminate use of pesticides in the USA, primarily DDT, and the consequences to wildlife. Especially bird populations were declining. Silent spring was met with fierce opposition, mainly from industry, and the pushbacks often had gendered dimensions. Carson was claimed to be a hysterical woman who was stepping into male territory and using emotional language to question the rational male mind of the engineer. A rationality that was supposed to lead to technological and societal progress, and make sure that the USA was ahead of the Soviet Union in the Cold War. According to this logic, the sentimentality of Carson would lead to reduced harvests and Eastern European food-poverty in the USA (Smith 2001).

Towards the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s, the environmental issue had become pivotal on the political arena, both in Sweden and internationally (Heidenblad 2021). In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency was created and environmental legislation such as the Clean Air Act was passed in the early 1970s. Breakthroughs in both international corporation and data calculation also made it possible to compile measurements of pollution across the globe. The same technologies also made advanced computer modelling possible, showing possible future scenarios given certain trajectories. *Limits to Growth*, the report published in 1972 by the Club of Rome, pointed towards pending catastrophe if current industrial trends continued. Resource use and pollution discharge would sometime in the early 21st century result in population decline. For the first time, environmental issues were becoming global. It became increasingly obvious that industrialised nations were not just dependent on extracting resources from poorer parts of the world, but also needed the peripheral world regions to take care of its waste products. As Ekberg et al. (2023) points out, this was the time when a new conflict became apparent. The threats and disruptions to the Western capitalist system and industrial modernisation that became apparent during this period were both stated by, and helped to reinforce, a global environmental movement. At the same time, growing anti-environmentalism was seen within industries and conservative movements (Oreskes and Conway 2011; Layzer 2012).

Several of the big fossil fuel companies had even earlier taken an interest in the forming field of climate science and started to understand it as a potential threat to their business model. In 1959, leaders from the petroleum industry had been warned by physicist Edward Teller of global temperature and sea-level rise before

the year 2000. A few years later, in 1965, the president of the American Petroleum Institute, API, Frank Ikard, addressed industry leaders at their annual meeting. Commenting on the recent publication of an environmental report by the US Science Advisory Committee, Ikard said that “One of the most important predictions of the report is that carbon dioxide is being added to the Earth's atmosphere by the burning of coal, oil, and natural gas at such a rate that by the year 2000 the heat balance will be so modified as possibly to cause marked changes in climate beyond local or even national efforts.” His main message to the leaders of the petroleum industry, was “that there is still time to save the world's peoples from the catastrophic consequence of pollution, but time is running out” (as quoted in Franta 2018, 1025). Later, the fossil fuel industry would have its own research divisions producing climate models as good as any within academia, but despite having the knowledge of how they were now part of planetary change, companies such as Exxon, Shell, and Total chose a different strategy towards the public. With the help of PR-firms they continued to deny or downplay the knowledge they had (Franta 2018; Aronowsky 2021; Bonneuil, Choquet, and Franta 2021; Franta 2021a; Supran, Rahmsdorf, and Oreskes 2023).

The strategies used by the fossil fuel industry in relation to global warming, were also applied regarding other environmental regulations. Especially the Clean Air Act became anathema for the car- and oil-industry, who claimed it would have disastrous consequences for employment and the USA economy. The oil company Mobil, later part of ExxonMobil, ran an advertising campaign where they called the act “The \$66 Billion Mistake” (Layzer 2012, 51). This anti-regulatory stance within corporate and conservative sectors in the United States has remained (Dunlap 1987; Dunlap and McCright 2011). One consequence of the oil embargo in the 1970s was that the increased price of oil also increased the profit margins of fossil fuel companies. This allowed fossil fuel-dynasties such as the Koch- and Scaife-families to earn enormous wealth, which was used to build up organisations fighting environmental regulation (Mitchell 2013).

However, the anti-environmentalism that developed in the USA in the 1970s, was not just about profits for the fossil fuel-industry, it was also about a deep-seated belief in free market-capitalism. Oreskes and Conway (2011) argue that several of the scientists spreading doubt about global warming, did it as an ideological defence of capitalism. Several of the most prominent contrarian scientists had been involved in military research during the cold war and were staunchly anti-communist. At the end of the cold war the communist threat was replaced by environmentalism. Now it was the greens who were perceived to be opposing free-market values. These scientists, who had spent their careers close to the

industrial-military complex defending capitalism, were prepared to lend a hand to the fossil fuel industry.

The oil embargo in 1973 also had a profound effect on Sweden, which tried to reduce its dependence on imported oil. A long planned nuclear programme was realised with the opening of the first commercial reactor in 1972. This spurred an anti-nuclear sentiment within the expanding environmental movement, which was questioning industrial expansion and economic growth (Anshelm 2000). The climate scientist Bert Bolin, who later became the first chair of the IPCC, was an advisory to the Social Democratic government led by Olof Palme, and his early warnings came handy for the Social Democrats to stave off the anti-nuclear movement, pointing towards the environmental consequences of increased oil use. For the first time, warnings of global warming were used to promote nuclear expansion (Ekberg and Hultman 2021). Similarly, the oil embargo was used to defend nuclear power as a national source of energy. The Social Democrats adopted what we elsewhere have called the Swedish middle way of environmental politics, with the intention of combining economic growth, expanded welfare, and sustainability (Vowles, Ekberg, and Hultman 2024). But the references to climate change in national politics proved to be opportunistic. A few years later, when Social Democratic support for nuclear energy had waned, the party tried to downplay the connection between the Swedish energy system and emissions, and instead sought to displace the climate change issue to the international arena (Ekberg and Hultman 2021).

The growing environmental movement, and the warnings of Bert Bolin, also fostered an anti-environmental pushback in Sweden. It was spearheaded by affiliates connected to the Swedish Confederation of Enterprise (previously known as Sveriges Arbetsgivarförening, SAF), which organised larger industries and businesses in Sweden. In the 70s, it started engaging directly with public opinion, partly through the creation of free market think tanks such as Timbro in 1978. These industry-affiliated actors were pushing promethean arguments about there being no limits to neither growth nor industrial expansion. Especially vocal was the physicist Tor Ragnar Gerholm, who would continue throughout his career to challenge the views and findings of Bert Bolin. In the 1980s, Gerholm had contacts with prominent contrarian scientists in the US, and would frame ideas of uncertainty around climate change, arguing that there was no need for regulation before the science became more definitive (Ekberg and Pressfeldt 2022). The Swedish anti-environmentalism of the 1970s, came to be connected, through arguments, organisations, and people, with the climate change reactionary movement as it took shape in Sweden in the second half of the 00s (Vowles, Ekberg, and Hultman 2024).

3. The vested interests of the climate change reactionary movement

In 1988, on an exceptionally warm summer's day, NASA scientist James Hansen delivered his now legendary testimony to the USA senate about the signal of climate change. To the reporters in the corridor he said: "It is time to stop waffling so much and say that the evidence is pretty strong that the greenhouse effect is here" (as quoted in Rich 2018, chap. 6) The same year, the IPCC was formed, and climate change became widely recognised as an important issue. In the USA presidential election in November that year, both the democratic and republican candidate vowed to act on climate change. The latter, George Bush Sr. claimed that he would combat "the greenhouse effect" with "the Whitehouse effect" (as quoted in Rich 2018, chap. 7).

From the late 1980s, as the climate crisis has increased in urgency in multiple ways – with carbon dioxide levels increasing and temperatures rising but carbon budgets rapidly shrinking – there has been growing pressure on political leaders to act on climate. But while the warnings of climate scientists have been getting stronger, the concerted effort of the climate change denial machine or the climate change reactionary movement to oppose climate change legislation has intensified. As discussed above, industry-related anti-environmentalism can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s, but in response to James Hansen's testimony, the formation of the IPCC, and the start of high-level UN talks in 1992, the time and money spent on the orchestrated attempt to spread doubt about the science has increased.

Actors and networks

In 1989, the now defunct conservative think tank the George C. Marshall Institute published its first report on climate change, in which it asserted that the sun, and not carbon emissions, was to blame (Oreskes and Conway 2011, 186–190). During the same time, ExxonMobil, whose own research had earlier contributed to the science of climate change, decided to emphasise scientific uncertainty in its public communication (Supran and Oreskes 2021). In 1989, the Global Climate Coalition was formed with ExxonMobil and the American Petroleum Institute as two of its most influential members. The Global Climate Coalition included both major multinational companies such as Chevron and British Petroleum, and industry organisations such as the National Coal Association. It was utilised as a front group which could advocate inaction somewhat distanced from its funders. It became one of the most prevalent front groups fighting climate regulation and

was successful in stopping the United States ratifying the Kyoto Protocol. The coalition was dominated by fossil fuel industry and businesses in closely associated sectors, such as energy utilities, along with steel and rail (McCright and Dunlap 2003; Dunlap and Brulle 2020; Brulle 2022).

During the last decade, the actors of the reactionary movement, especially in the United States, have been thoroughly studied. While it has been proven that fossil fuel companies such as ExxonMobil, Total, and Shell have been paramount in efforts to obstruct climate change policies, the climate change reactionary movement extends beyond the fossil fuel industries (Hope 2018; Bonneuil, Choquet, and Franta 2021; Supran, Rahmsdorf, and Oreskes 2023). With cheap energy as a cornerstone of industrial capitalist society, several conservative and neo-liberal, free-market advocates have taken part. McKie (2017) identified 465 counter movement organisations, as she names them, in 53 countries. Most of them are conservative or neo-liberal think tanks and some of them appeared as early as in the 1950s.

The importance of this network of think tanks has been highlighted in research by Dieter Plehwe (2019). Plehwe argues that think tanks are relevant because of their multi-faceted nature, working in several different areas, such as academic research, public relation, journalism, policy consulting, and campaign management. This makes it possible for them to set media agendas and create thought collectives questioning the science of climate change. If enough people doubt climate change, it can become a politically influential thought collective, even though there is no scientific rationale for it. The network of think tanks, also makes it possible to copy strategies to counter climate legislation between countries, but to adjust them to local contexts (Plehwe 2023). The contrarian output of conservative think tanks in the reactionary movement has been analysed in several studies. One important finding is that the publications of these think tanks does not undergo peer-review, which is also the case with the literal denial arguments in SwebbTV in paper III (Dunlap and Jacques 2013; Cann and Raymond 2018). On the other hand, since the aim is to create a contrarian thought collective and not to be involved in the academic debate, this is not a problem for the reactionary movement. It is not a question of science; it is a struggle for people's minds and perceptions.

Several studies have shown that there is no scientific discussion about whether anthropogenic climate change is happening or not (e.g. Anderegg et al. 2010; Cook et al. 2013; Cook et al. 2016), and the consensus is often stated to be around 97 per cent. Taking this figure, Young and Fitz (2021) analysed who the remaining three per cent of scientists are. Compiling a list of signatories to any of

the several petitions arguing that climate change is not happening, they gathered 427 names who could be seen as the main contrarian experts. Not surprisingly, considering previous research, they found that 82 per cent of the individuals had ties to organisations within the climate change reactionary movement. They also found that just like the Climate Realists in Sweden (Anshelm and Hultman 2014b), most of them were elderly males. These results also compare to survey studies in the United States and Norway, showing that elderly, conservative white males are more likely to hold denialist views (McCright and Dunlap 2011a; Krange, Kaltenborn, and Hultman 2018). Other survey studies have shown how rejection of climate science is also connected to social dominance orientation and anti-egalitarian attitudes. This suggests that these actors are most interested in defending the status quo, thereby rejecting all science that points to the need for societal transformation (Jylhä and Akrami 2015; Jylhä and Hellmer 2020).

Any network will have its central nodes, and certain organisations and individuals have more influential roles in the climate change reactionary movement. Analysing large data sets through computational methods, Farrell (2016a; 2018) showed how corporate funding was essential for the influence of an organisation, both for getting its message across in the media and within politically influential, private philanthropy organisations in the United States. Organisations connected to the Koch brothers or to ExxonMobil were the most influential when it came to agenda-setting in the media (Farrell 2016b).

When Donald Trump came to power in the United States in 2016, several prominent individuals of the climate change reactionary movement, such as Rex Tillerson, former CEO of Exxon, and Scott Pruitt, the Republican politician known for suing the Environmental Protection Agency, took up central positions within the United States government. Pruitt even became head of the organisation he used to sue (De Pryck and Gemenne 2017). At the same time as Trump came into office, corporate membership in reactionary movement organisations dropped (Brulle 2019). The most likely reason is that when the White House became a house of denial, there was less need of obstruct action on climate change in other ways. Denial had, through the Trump-administration, become official in the way Stanley Cohen discusses state orchestrated denial. One sphere where this was seen was on Twitter (now X), where Donald Trump was the biggest influencer in the USA denier community during the years 2017-2019 (Gounaridis and Newell 2024).

Global influence

Arguably, the most visible reactionary movement organisation during the last decade in the USA has been the conservative Heartland institute, infamous for its advertising campaign comparing anyone believing in climate change with the UNA-bomber Ted Kaczynski. Heartland has produced the Non-Governmental International Panel on Climate Change-, NIPCC-reports. The NIPCC-reports are near replicas of the IPCC-reports when it comes to style, editing and outline, but instead of synthesising the latest science on climate change, it claims that there is no anthropogenic global warming. The NIPCC-website is identified as one of the central nodes in the international hyperlink-network analysed by McKie (2021), together with blogs such as Climate Audit and Watts Up With That, and think tanks such as Friends of Science and the Science Public Policy Network. Similarly, a hyper-link analysis of German sceptical websites shows that they often link to USA counterparts (Kaiser 2019).

The hyperlink-network analyses highlights the importance of United States based think tanks and show how their influence has spread across the world. Scholars in Europe have during the 2020s been catching up when analysing the output from think tanks. Almiron et al. (2020) show how contrarian framings of climate change has been used by European neoliberal think tanks since the 1980s, and that the output has increased in recent years. Of central importance in Europe are institutions founded by the British businessman Anthony Fisher. These include the think tank the Institute for Economic Affairs, IEA, which was founded in 1955 and which in the 1970s had a significant role in bringing Margaret Thatcher to power, and the Atlas. Both institutions have received fossil fuel funding, and the latter has been instrumental in creating a network of international think tanks (McKie 2023). One of them is Timbro in Sweden, who was part of the anti-environmentalist push-back in the 1970s and would later promote both literal and implicatory denial (Ekberg and Pressfeldt 2022).

One of the most prominent denialist think tanks in Europe is the German EIKE-institute, which has ties to the far-right party Alternative for Deutschland. EIKE has consistently been pushing contrarian argumentation, and attacking Greta Thunberg, but compared to its United States counterparts it has not been as successful in getting favourable media attention (Busch and Judick 2021; Moreno and Narberhaus 2022). In Holland, the newly formed CLINTEL-organisation has been prevalent in spreading doubt about the science and has provided the European Union with a declaration claiming that there is no climate emergency. Similar to previous research from the United States, Moreno-Soldevilla (2022) finds that an overwhelming majority, 88 per cent, of the names on the declaration

are traditionally male names. Furthermore, CLINTEL uses misogynist argumentation, claiming that there is a male rationality versus female emotions. A related finding is that denialist internet forums in Germany are part of a hyperlink-network together with conspiracy sites, far-right blogs, and men's groups, forming what Kaiser and Puschmann (2017) term an "alliance of antagonisms". The media influence of people within the Global Warming Policy Foundation, GWPF, in the UK has also been studied (Black 2018), as has the influence of the neoliberal Mises-institute (Plehwe et al. 2021).

Apart from the private fossil fuel companies in the USA and Europe, petro-states such as Saudi Arabia have also been involved in blocking progress within the UNFCCC negotiations and downplaying the science within the IPCC. At the negotiations, Saudi Arabia has since the early 1990s advocated for decisions to be taken in consensus, meaning that Saudi Arabia can veto any action. Continuously throughout the high-level negotiations, Saudi Arabia has often raised procedural objections to slow down progress, such as refusing online talks during the Covid-pandemic. Saudi Arabia has also tried to downplay the impact of the IPCC and has influenced the Summary for Policymakers which must be accepted by all IPCC member states. For example, Saudi Arabia made sure that there was no mention of fossil fuels in the Summary for Policymakers in the Sixth Assessment Report published by the IPCC's Working Group I in 2021 (Depledge, De Pryck, and Roberts 2023).

Funding

In their seminal work on the climate change denial machine (see figure 1, page 22) Riley Dunlap and Aaron McCright (Dunlap and McCright 2011; McCright and Dunlap 2011b) described it as a complex, coordinated and well-funded machine that was trying to discredit the science of climate change. Being funded by fossil fuel industries, corporate associations, and conservative foundations, the aim was to stop any political regulation on fossil fuels. To hide the money sources, the machine consisted of: think tanks such as the George C Marshall Institute, who employed contrarian scientists and published reports that contradicted the scientific consensus; front groups such as The Global Climate Coalition, who pushed contrarian claims into the public sphere; and astroturf organisations which were made to look like citizen groups but actually were financed through the climate change denial machine. To amplify their message, these organisations strived to circulate their arguments in what Dunlap and McCright called the echo-chamber of blogs, conservative media, and conservative politicians.

The climate change reactionary movement has been heavily funded. One study analysed grants received by organisations within the movement in the USA, revealing that they had earned more than \$900 million dollars annually during the years 2003-2010 (Brulle 2014). Most of the identified money came from conservative foundations and was granted to think tanks. But not all the money could be traced to the original sources, as it had been channelled through special donor funds that hid the identity of the funder. Robert Brulle found that around 2006, the direct funding to think tanks from the ExxonMobil-foundation decreased to almost zero, but the amount of money channelled through anonymous donor funds increased rapidly. Other significant funders of the reactionary movement have been foundations connected to the Koch brothers – owners of the Koch-industries conglomerate – and foundations connected to the Scaife-family who founded Gulf oil (which later became part of Chevron). Among the think tanks that received the most money were the Cato institute (which was founded by the Koch brothers), the American Enterprise Institute, and the Hoover Institute on War, Revolution, and Peace (Brulle 2014). A follow-up to the study was conducted in 2021, which extended the analysed time-period to 2018. During the 2010s, both funding to organisations orchestrating climate change denial, and money spent by these organisations on issues related to climate and energy, were higher than during the previous decade (Brulle et al. 2021).

The climate change reactionary movement has also engaged in lobbying against politicians. One study regarding money spent on lobbying to obstruct climate change legislation in the United States congress, showed that a total of \$2 billion dollars were spent during the years 2000-2016, and that the fossil fuel, transportation, and utilities sectors dwarfed the spending by environmental organisations 10 to 1 (Brulle 2018). The amount spent on lobbying peaked during the years around the Copenhagen climate summit in 2009.

Tobacco tactics

The tactics of the climate change reactionary movement have been exposed by Naomi Oreskes and Eric M. Conway in their book *Merchants of Doubt* (2011), where they document how the fossil fuel industry has taken many leaves out of the tobacco handbook of how to cloud research in smoke, whether from the smoking of cigarettes or the exhaust pipe of a car. In 1953, at a time when the science regarding smoking and cancer became more settled, tobacco executives met in New York to orchestrate an extensive PR-campaign, with the stated goal that “scientific doubts must remain” (Oreskes and Conway 2011, 16). The end goal for the tobacco companies was to defend their product, to secure the profits from cigarette sales, and to do this, the industry needed to hinder regulation.

Believing that it would be difficult to stop laws if the public was convinced that smoking caused cancer, the industry spread doubt about the science. Hence, the industry started producing their own supposedly scientific counterclaims about there being no causal link between cigarettes and cancer.

To do this the tobacco industry developed several different tactics. One was to create and finance seemingly independent research institutes and enlist the few contrarian scientists, Oreskes and Conway describe them as a “handful”, who opposed the scientific consensus. These could then produce reports and arguments supporting the tobacco industry’s position. One was to misrepresent what was considered evidence. Even though a statistically significant correlation existed between smoking and cancer, it did not mean that anyone who smoked definitely would get cancer, or that it was 100 per cent certain that anyone with cancer, even if the person was a smoker, developed it from tobacco. Another way was to carefully cherry-pick data, and to continue to pose questions about them even though the answers were scientifically known. For example, to ask why cancer cases were higher in one country compared to another, even though the smoking rates were the same. It was well-known that tobacco smoking was not the only cause of cancer and that cancer rates could vary due to other causes, but by repeatedly asking the question, doubt was sown among the public. By overemphasizing uncertainties, cherry-picking data, and repeatedly asking already known questions, institutions and scientists affiliated to the tobacco industry claimed that the science was unsettled and there was no proof regarding smoking and cancer.

To be able to get their message across, the tobacco industry needed space in the media. This was achieved by appealing to the fair reporting doctrine, which stated that the media should always give two sides to a story, and that anyone accused of misconduct should be given space to answer. The doctrine made sense in a political debate, or if accusations were made against an individual person or an organisation. It did not, however, make sense in a scientific question. The relation between smoking and cancer was no longer questioned within the scientific community, but by demanding space in media to question the science, the tobacco industry and affiliated organisations made it seem that way to the public (Oreskes and Conway 2011, 16–20).

All of these tactics have been used to orchestrate denial about climate change (Oreskes and Conway 2011; Supran and Oreskes 2021). As Oreskes and Conway (2011) show, several contrarian scientists who helped the tobacco industry later lent their services to the fossil fuel industry, and in some cases, such as the Cato-institute, through the same think tanks and organisations. Similar arguments have

also been used. The known uncertainty around whether a certain weather event is caused by climate change has often been used to exaggerate uncertainty, casting unreasonable and false claims about anthropogenic climate change. Also, as discussed in paper III, cherry-picked data is often used to discredit the science. As with the tobacco industry, PR-firms have played an important role, especially at times when climate has been high on the political or media agenda. A study regarding oil company spending on advertising in the USA, during the years 1985-2015, showed that spending increased whenever climate change became a salient political issue, though not necessarily connected to the release of climate change reports (Brulle, Aronczyk, and Carmichael 2020).

Denialist arguments

The arguments used by the climate change reactionary movement have been comprehensively studied, with the most extensive taxonomy to date being presented by Coan et. al. (2021) who used machine learning techniques to identify five broad super-claims, which included in total 27 sub-claims and 49-sub-sub-claims. The five broad super-claims were that global warming is not happening, that human released greenhouse gases are not the cause, that climate impacts are not harmful, that climate solutions will not work, and that the climate movement or climate science is unreliable. Using Cohen's scheme, the first two super-claims are literal denial, the third interpretative, and the last two implicatory. While several of these arguments have been identified and classified previously through non-digital textual analysis, by for example Rahmsdorf (2004), Dunlap and McCright (2000) and Mann (Mann and Toles 2018), the computer-assisted classification by Coan et al. is more detailed. The research also suggests a double shift in argumentation. The first is from the super-claim that climate scientists and the climate movement is not reliable, to claims about the infeasibility of climate solutions; the second is a shift in emphasis within the former super-claim, from climate science being unreliable to the climate change movement or climate activists being unreliable. These shifts contrast with the findings from the same authors a few years earlier, when they text-mined the arguments of conservative think tanks and reached the conclusion that the era of science denial is not over (Boussalis and Coan 2016).

Changes in argumentation are also suggested by William Lamb et al. (2020) in what they term discourses of delay (implicatory denial). They identify twelve discourses divided into four sections (redirecting responsibility, pushing non-transformative solutions, emphasizing the downsides, and surrender) which all delay action on climate change while not literally denying the science. Among the twelve discourses are whataboutism, which directs the blame to someone else,

stating that there is no point in acting if China does not stop burning coal,²⁴ and ungrounded technological optimism, arguing that we do not need rapid emission reductions now since future technologies will save us.

Nevertheless, any shifts in argumentation should not be seen as a linear progression from denial to delay because of increased scientific certainty. Rather, they should be seen as contextual reactions to changes in political landscapes. For example, in their study of climate change discourses in Sweden in 2006-2009, Anshelm and Hultman (2014a) found both denialist argumentation and what they named an industrialist fatalist argumentation appearing simultaneously, with the latter including several of the discourses of delay. Similarly, in their study of Canada and Australia, Nathan Young and Aline Coutinho (2013) found how acceptance of the science together with meaningless political targets, could help governments delay any action on climate change, without questioning the science in the way that was prevalent in the United States. Using the language of Stanley Cohen, this is literal and implicatory denial being promoted simultaneously, but in different contexts, by industry actors who are orchestrating denial.

The argumentation of the climate change denial machine has also been analysed by Ruth McKie (2019) in regard to neutralisation techniques, bringing a criminological lens to the literature. Neutralisation techniques are used to legitimate actions that oppose social norms and values. In terms of climate change, this means that instead of saying that we will continue to burn fossil fuels even though we know that the consequences will be disastrous, the climate change reactionary movement denies responsibility. It does this by for example declaring that climate change is not happening, or by maintaining that the effects of rising temperatures will be beneficial. Neutralisation techniques can be seen as a way to avoid moral implicatory denial by using literal and interpretative denialist arguments.

Attacking scientists and co-opting protesters

Climategate can be taken as an example of another tactic used by the climate change reactionary movement, namely attacking individual scientists. In the lead up to the Copenhagen climate summit, e-mails were stolen from a server belonging to the climate research unit at the University of East Anglia. The e-mails were uploaded to various climate denialist blogs on the internet. By cherry-

²⁴ It could be any high-emitting country, but in the Swedish far-right discourse it is usually China, as seen in papers I and II.

picking words and taking quotes out of contexts, the reactionary movement attacked scientists who were part of the e-mail conversation, especially the head of unit Phil Jones, and Michael Mann, professor of atmospheric science at Penn State University. The claims were that the scientists were corrupted, and that the e-mails proved how they had manipulated and hid data, most notably regarding Michael Mann's so called hockey stick graph, which showed how temperatures had risen sharply the last 100 years. Despite several investigations clearing the scientists of all wrongdoing, the conspiracy accusations have persisted. The latest turn was in 2019 when a court dismissed a libel lawsuit that Michael Mann had brought against Tim Ball, after Ball had claimed that Mann was fraudulent and should be in prison. The court dismissed the case, judging that Mann and his counsel had let the case linger too long. However, contrarian media reports claimed that the court case was proof that the hockey stick-graph lacked scientific merit, even though the court had not given the graph any consideration (for a detailed analysis of climategate, see e.g. Ryghaug and Skjølsvold 2010; Bricker 2013; Mann 2014).

Another example is how the Global Climate Coalition spearheaded an attack on Ben Santer who was lead author of chapter 8 in the 1995 IPCC-report. The chapter, on the "Detection of Climate Change and Attribution of Causes", stated that the balance of evidence suggested a discernible human influence on climate. This statement was not well-received by organisations within the reactionary movement. By writing op-eds and using paid advertising space in major newspapers in the USA, and in a public confrontation of Santer at an IPCC presentation, the Global Climate Coalition tried to argue that the IPCC was corrupt. The IPCC chair Bert Bolin, however, defended the organisation and Ben Santer, and all the allegations were found baseless when independently scrutinised (Oreskes and Conway 2011; Brulle 2022).

The purpose of the climate change reactionary movement has been to obstruct action on climate change and hinder regulation on fossil fuels. Two other strategies that have received scholarly attention is partisan economic research and co-optation of the identity of protesters. Regarding the former, research by Benjamin Franta (2021b) reveals that a group of economists was hired by the fossil fuel industry for three decades starting in the 1990s. The economists produced cost-benefit reports which inflated the cost of transitioning away from fossil fuel, and downplayed the benefits. Even though it was sponsored by the industry, the research was often presented as independent. Similarly, historical research in Sweden has shown how a few select neo-liberal economists with connection to Swedish enterprise have promoted promethean anti-environmentalism, claiming that there are no limits to resources that could hinder

industrial expansion and no pollution that would be too difficult to fix (Ekberg and Pressfeldt 2022).

Regarding the co-optation of the identity of protesters, a study by Shannon Bell et al. (2019) showed how the fossil fuel industry in the United States identified women and mothers as most likely to protest fossil fuels, and therefore mobilised members of the same groups to defend their products. By appropriating the identity of the protesters, the fossil fuel industry tried to neutralise their critique. A similar tactic was used by Shell in response to the growing opposition to company activities in Nigeria in the 1990s. Shell tried to limit protests in several different ways, and one was to try to align the goals of social environmental movements with the goals of the company. This was done both openly, by interacting with major actors such as Greenpeace, but also through covert operations, when they sent “moles” to social movement events (Ekberg and Brink Pinto 2023). These tactics can be seen as attempts to maintain a cultural denial regarding climate change and company activities. The goal has been to disarm the movements that might push for legislative action.

4. Ideologies: Neo-liberalism and the far right

Broadly speaking, two ideological currents are connected to climate change denialism. As discussed above, neo-liberal anti-environmentalism goes back to the 1970s. In the USA, the reactionary movement has mainly been based on free-market capitalism and conservatism, with historical roots back to the the cold war. It was an ideological fight to protect fossil capital from governmental regulation. Indeed, in the voice of some of its most ferocious proponents, it was a fight for defending democracy against totalitarian communism (Oreskes and Conway 2011). These ideas also appeared and spread across the Global North, and to a certain degree even the Global South, through influential networks of think tanks and free-market advocates (McKie 2023). In Sweden, industry-affiliated actors have been motivated by neo-liberal ideas in their opposition to environmental movements (Ekberg and Pressfeldt 2022).

But with the resurgence of far-right nationalism across Europe and beyond, the arguments of the climate change reactionary movement have found a second ideological home. Here the defence of fossil fuels has often become a defence of privileged identities, and national-industrial modernity. There is a long scholarly tradition of researching the far right (e.g. Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2018a), but apart from a few noticeable exceptions (e.g. Biehl and Staudenmaier 1995; Olsen 1999), it is only during the last decade that scholars have paid attention to far-right ecologies. Due to the rising influence of far-right parties and networks, and the growing predicament of multiple environmental crises, this literature is rapidly expanding.

The contemporary European far right includes a wide range of parties, stretching from anti-liberal radical-right, to anti-democratic extreme right (Rydgren 2018a). These parties are often described as populist, but Jens Rydgren (2017) argues that the core feature of their ideology is not populism but ethnic nationalism. Bar-On (2018, 26) agrees that ethnic nationalism is the master frame of the far right, and that for the “nation to be free, sovereign, and whole, the state must be cleansed of non-nativist influences and cultures. Remember that immigrants, asylum seekers, and Muslims (and at times Jews or Rom) are viewed by the radical right as mortal dangers to the nation, more lethal than guns.” Also feminism has been seen as a non-nativist culture threatening the patriarchal state (Wodak 2019), and as we will see in paper II, climate activists such as Greta Thunberg have also become targets. The populism of these parties, in pitting the true people against a corrupted elite, is according to Rydgren (2017), an important part of their political performance, rather than a core ideological belief. While the prevalence of climate obstruction might suggest that the far-right as a whole is anti-environmentalist, the global

empirics reveal a different picture. Before returning to the climate denialism of the far right, I will therefore discuss the environmental strands that are seen in parts of the far-right.

Far-right ecologism

Two book-length contributions (Olsen 1999; Lubarda 2023) have tried to outline the ideological components of far-right environmental thinking. Naming it right-wing ecology, Olsen (1999) argues that the ideological pillars are eco-naturalism, eco-organicism, and eco-authoritarianism. Eco-naturalism is the idea that the nation (including its culture and people) is age-old and natural, and that nature provides a blueprint for how society should function. Eco-organicism is the idea that the nation is a living organism, a closed eco-system and a given home for the nation's people. There is diversity between (and to a degree within) ecosystems and nations, but if the ecosystems become contaminated, they can cease to function. Connected to eco-naturalism, the organic nation will be polluted by immigrants in the same way as ecosystems can be harmed by what is often referred to as invasive species.²⁵ Eco-authoritarianism is connected to far-right ideals of a strong, usually masculine, leader, who can take charge in times of environmental crises.

Olsen focuses on Germany, where there, as mentioned earlier, has been a long nationalist tradition of connecting the people with the homeland, the *Heimat*. The idea in the late 19th century was to portray the recently unified Germany as a natural entity, with an inherent connection between the Germans and the geographical space contained in the nation-state. The idea of a homeland was influenced by romanticism in literature and music, and it portrayed a natural, rural life in connection with the local community and nature. The *Heimat* was in part a reaction to modernity and the enlightenment, and Olsen argues that the three pillars of right-wing ecology are connected to each other through their opposition to Enlightenment universalism. While enlightenment universalism suggests individual rationality on a global scale, right-wing ecology celebrates particularistic national communities functioning as an organic whole.

Using the morphological approach, which regards ideologies as plural and conceptual, Lubarda (2023) seeks to outline the core and peripheral concepts of what he names far-right ecologism. The core concepts of an ideology will be

²⁵ For a discussion on what is considered “invasive” and how it has shifted over time, see Frihammar et al. (2018).

stable and present in all guises of the ideology, whereas the peripheral ones can be reordered, and vary in salience. The variation in peripheral concepts allows for the plurality of an ideology such as far-right ecologism, as the peripheral concepts can change in different contextual settings. The core concepts in Lubarda's scheme are similar to those suggested by Olsen, although instead of eco-authoritarianism Lubarda suggests the term Manicheanism. Manicheanism divides the world into binaries of "us" and "them", "good" and "evil", and relates to the far-rights' usual populist discourse, as well as its racism and otherising of minorities. As the adjacent concepts to far-right ecologism, Lubarda names nostalgia, autarky, spirituality, and authority. Similarly to Olsen, Lubarda argues that far-right ecologism is in opposition to modernity; it is seeking an authentic home, not corrupted by global capitalism or superficial consumer culture. Focusing on far-right actors in Hungary and Poland, Lubarda argues that the nostalgic appeal in far-right ecologism is traditional farming in a pure and unpolluted rural landscape.

The reason for discussing far-right ecologism is that there are plenty of far-right actors engaging with at least some environmental issues. Apart from the actors and groups in Germany, Poland and Hungary covered in the books above, both the Danish People's Party and the British Nationalist Party have, for example, engaged in protection of local environments and the national countryside but cast doubt on transnational environmental threats such as climate change (Forchtner and Kølvråa 2015). White supremacists in New Zealand and Australia are connected to deep ecology, pristine landscapes, and pride in colonisation (Campion and Phillips 2023; Machin 2024). And there are strands of ecologism within the neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement and a recent arson attack on a mink farm had links to far-right extremism (Darwish 2018; Darwish 2024). These are a few of the examples that have been covered in the scholarly literature (see e.g. Forchtner 2023; Allen et al. 2024).

Far-right ecologism, Lubarda argues, is a spectrum, and the last two examples would be part of the eco-fascist extreme right. The blood and soil-mysticism of German Nazism portrayed a relationship between the people and the homeland, and argued for organic farming and environmental conservatism (Biehl and Staudenmaier 1995). The eco-fascist wing of the national-socialist party, however, was overruled by the industrialisation and militarisation project which caused enormous environmental damage before and during the Second World War. Similar to Germany, Italian fascism has been described as being "imbued with an extreme modernist ethos" undermining any potential ecological traits (Conversi 2024, 3). Still, certain eco-fascist ideals have lived on. In the late 10s, it became most visible in the two terror-attacks in Christchurch and El Paso. The perpetrators published manifestos, the Christchurch one being self-proclaimed

eco-fascist, trying to legitimate their mass-murders as a form of population control, arguing that the western world and its natural landscapes were being destroyed by Muslim and Latino immigration (Forchtner 2019d). The book *White Skin, Black Fuel* (Malm and The Zetkin Collective 2021), provides an in-depth discussion on eco-fascism, and the dangers of it returning not just as a set of ideas, but as a real historical force. Naming it fossil-fascism, Malm and The Zetkin Collective argue that there is a deep historical and mythical connection between fossil fuel and fascism. This is tied to the stock of fossil fuels, and the notion that that these can be burned when and whenever you want, compared to the flow of renewables: “Nations blessed with fossil fuels have felt the stock within them, as an ultra-deep material inheritance to which the mystique of nationalism easily sticks. The stock will always be found under the land within our borders, the flow may be for a passing moment but not the next. The flow has a weak bond to the homeland; it is both nowhere and everywhere; it does not reside under any particular soil” (Malm and The Zetkin Collective 2021, 275). This relationship between fossil fuels and the soil is compared to the idea of blood and soil, implying that an ethnically homogenous community has an exclusive right and a sacred bond to its homeland. Outsiders, people belonging to other ethnic communities are excluded, they can never be part of the imagined national community. Following this line of thought to its extreme endpoint, Andreas Malm and The Zetkin Collective (2021) argue that, in fossil fascist thinking, “[s]olar and wind are the Jew and the Muslim of energy.”

White Skin, Black Fuel makes an important contribution in unmasking how the energy wealth and extractivism of ethnic nationalism and nations in the Global North are tied to domination over both nature and otherised people.²⁶ However, the argument that ethnic nationalism is tied specifically to fossil fuels is still open to empirical investigation. Large hydropower plants have often been linked to both racism and national pride, not the least in Sweden. Here the construction of dams and power plants to harness the flow was part of the nation building project in of the early 20th century (see e.g. Blomkvist, Kaijser, and Fridlund 1998; Össbo 2014). Åsa Össbo (2023) has argued that the Swedish industrial expansion was an act of settler colonialism, where the hydropower infrastructure and the immigration of construction workers dispossessed Sámi communities of their land while threatening their culture and livelihood. Neither is it a given that other renewables, such as solar and wind, could not become part of ethno-nationalist imaginaries. While there has been far-right opposition to wind power in Europe

²⁶ Just as it is linked to patriarchal dominance of women (Merchant 1989).

and the US (see e.g. Haider et al. 2023), we can find cases of the opposite in a global perspective. In India, solar power has been used to promote Hindu nationalism (Stock and Sovacool 2023), and in the occupied territories of Western Sahara and the Syrian Golan Heights, wind power and ecological modernisation discourses have been used to exert Moroccan and Israeli colonial rule (Alkhalili, Dajani, and Mahmoud 2023).

A central tenet in Global North far-right ecologism, which is connected to authoritarianism and Manicheanism, is a focus on overpopulation in the Global South rather than overconsumption. Here far-right actors often recall the writings of biologist Garret Hardin (Taylor 2019). After conceptualising the tragedy of the commons, arguing that human societies were incapable of managing common resources, Hardin suggested that lifeboat ethics was the best way to handle scarce resources in the international system. Malthusian thinking on population led Hardin (1974, 37) to argue that every country is a lifeboat, which can sink if too many are taken onboard: “Metaphorically, each rich nation amounts to a lifeboat full of comparatively rich people. The poor of the world are in other, much more crowded, lifeboats. Continuously, so to speak, the poor fall out of their lifeboats and swim for a while in the water outside, hoping to be admitted to a rich lifeboat, or in some other way to benefit from the “goodies” on board. What should the passengers on a rich lifeboat do?” Hardin’s answer was to make sure no one was admitted onboard, to close borders and stop immigration.

As seen above, there are reasons to discuss far-right ecologism. Not least because it can overlap with other types of ecologism, and any egalitarian climate- and environmental movement should be advised to be aware of these potential intersections.²⁷ At the same time, we should recognise that environmentalism – and especially climate change – for most far-right actors is still a peripheral issue. While it has been suggested that eco-fascism can replace denialism as the effects of the climate crisis are increasingly felt (S. Moore and Roberts 2022, 5), there is so far, in the mid-2020s, little sign of this happening on a broader scale. Instead, for many of the large populist far-right political parties and actors in Europe and

²⁷ One example is the anthroposophical movement. It is today often seen as progressive, and indeed, several – perhaps most – current practitioners of biodynamic farming and teachers at Waldorf-schools are committed anti-racists and no longer follow all the teachings of the movement’s founder Rudolf Steiner. But critical historical research of Steiner’s teachings in the early 20th century has uncovered ecofascist and racist legacies which remain in parts of the movement today (Staudenmaier 2009). There is also a prevalence of climate change denialism within the movement’s present ideologues, a prevalence that the philosopher Sven Ove Hansson (2022) ascribes to the movement’s spirituality and cosmology.

globally, the defence of continued extraction and burning of fossil fuels is central to their political programme. On the far-right media outlets studied in articles I-IV, far-right ecologism is virtually absent.

Far-right denialism

The continued parliamentary success of far-right parties in Europe has led to a marked upturn in research on their environmental policies (Jeffries 2017). The empirically grounded anthology *The Far Right and the Environment*, edited by Bernhard Forchtner (2019b), provides case studies from all over Europe. Exploring both extreme-right and radical-right actors, the book provides support for two ideological tenets of far-right thinking on the environment. The first is that eco-organicism is stronger among actors further to the anti-democratic extreme right. The second is that climate change denialism is, to various degrees, present across the far-right political spectrum. Even though not all far-right actors examined in the book deny climate change, there is no clear link between denialism and other ideological positions (Forchtner 2019c). Providing further nuance to this picture is a report on far-right voting patterns and rhetoric in the European Union. With the Hungarian Fidesz and Lithuanian Law and Order party as two exceptions, the study finds that far-right parties overwhelmingly vote against climate change policies, suggesting that even if some parties might not officially be denying the science, they are still using obstructionist tactics to delay action on climate change (Schaller and Carius 2019). Likewise, a study of the environmental rhetoric of the three largest far-right parties in Sweden, Denmark and Finland showed how they all renounced “climate hysteria” and “alarmism”, while superficially accepting the science (Vihma, Reischl, and Nonbo Andersen 2021). A similar finding is seen in a study of speeches in the European parliament, where literal denialist argumentation has diminished over time, to be replaced by various arguments of implicatory denial, or discourses of delay (Forchtner and Lubarda 2022). But while the style of argumentation may have changed, the argumentation in itself has become more prevalent. The opposition to climate change policies has become more salient for far-right parties, who, especially since 2019, have talked much more about the issue (Schwörer and Fernández-García 2023). The biggest far-right party in Germany, the AfD, is also continuing to use both literal and implicatory denial (Küppers 2024). Outside of the European Union, far-right climate obstruction has also been seen in for example Canada, where it has joined hands with fossil capital to prevent action on climate change, and in Norway where far-right literal denialism has gone hand-in-hand with the implicatory denial orchestrated by the state (McLean 2024; Holgersen 2024).

In a hypothesising piece, Lockwood (2018) argues that there might be two broad explanatory categories to why far-right parties tend to dismiss or deny climate change. One is termed structural, taking the idea that core voters of the far right are industrial, male workers who have seen jobs disappear and wages stagnate during the last decades. While there is empirical evidence that climate denialism is more prominent among elderly men, Lockwood argues that this structural explanation leaves several questions unanswered. Especially that far-right voters are not a homogenous group, and far-right parties enjoy support both in areas of structural decline, but also in more affluent communities. Instead, Lockwood argues that the ideological dimension is more important. Opposition to climate change is an issue which sits well with the nationalist and authoritarian populist politics of the far right, which pits the ethnically, homogenous people against the corrupted, cosmopolitan elite. Often being framed as a technical, scientific, and global question, “climate change is the cosmopolitan issue par excellence”, and a good target for nationalist, populist rhetoric (Lockwood 2018, 723).

As Lockwood points out, the ideological explanation is not inconsistent with the structural one, and in many cases, they can reinforce each other. This is the case of coal nationalism in Poland, which is tightly connected to the situation of coal workers in Upper Silesia. Irma Allen’s (2021) ethnographic study showed how the support for the far right Law and Justice-party, PiS, was tied to claims for dignity among coal workers. The dirty coal mining was no longer seen as the emblem of modernity, and being Polish was often stigmatised within the EU. There was a sense of post-socialist Poland still failing to catch up, because of communist legacies of greed and corruption, as well as greedy EU elites who wanted to exploit Poland for their own benefit. Through what Allen terms industrial populism, PiS managed to win miners’ support for a “Polish ‘people’s’ economy, one that respected and valued them for their worth and purged them of their shame too by simultaneously elevating them as truer, purer, realer, hard-working ‘Poles’” (Allen 2021, 308). Here, PiS created a nationalist ideology appealing to the coal workers who felt that Europe was sacrificing them in the carbon transition.

Industrial versus rural nostalgia

Nostalgia has always been part of far-right and fascist thinking, the idea of recovering a glorious national past (Griffin 1996; Wodak 2019). Lubarda argues that it is one of the adjacent concepts of far-right ecologism, and that it is aimed at restoring a pure, natural, and rural nation where the ethnically homogenous people is connected to the land. As we have seen, this is a continuation of 19th century nationalist projects that tried to find the soul and culture of a nation, and which

also aimed to showcase its pristine beauty in national parks. But 19th century nation-building often consisted of two discourses, one inventing the past of the nation, while the other was looking towards its industrial future. The relative strength of these discourses varied. In Britain, although it was the home of the industrial revolution, the so-called southern metaphor of romantic, aristocratic, and pastoral ideals won prominence over the northern metaphor of rationality and industrial prominence. In Sweden, on the other hand, it was the idea of an industrially prosperous and modern nation that became the most salient. Here it was the narrative of Sweden's evolution from a poor, agrarian, European periphery to an industrial welfare state that became part of national history (Sörlin 1988, 95). Both these ideas of the nation are part of far-right nationalism today, but just as in the 19th century, the prominence of them varies. And this reflects the focus of far-right nostalgia.

Within the Sweden Democrats, there has been examples of looking back towards a pre-industrial past and in early party programmes, there were occasional references opposing modernity (Aspberg 2023). In general, though, the nostalgic gaze has been towards the post-Second World War society. Several studies have illuminated how the Sweden Democrats conceptualise the idea of the People's Home from the 1950s and 1960s, as a democratic, ethnically homogenic welfare state, and the party has often claimed itself to be the true steward of a Social Democratic legacy (Hellström 2016; Elgenius and Rydgren 2019; J. Håkansson 2023).²⁸ A similar sentiment is also seen in an analysis of the nationalistic framings in the Sweden Democratic newspaper *Samtiden* (Hellström 2023). The role of nostalgia towards a fossil fuelled national past has also been seen in for example the USA and Canada (Travis 2023; Letourneau et al. 2023), while in Russian far-right nationalist discourse, the Arctic is portrayed as a wild frontier, which is there to be tamed and conquered in order to extract the fossil fuels that will make the white Russian nation great again (Pietiläinen 2023). As I will discuss further in chapter 13, I argue that this can influence the environmental politics of different far-right groups. When the imagined national past glorifies national modernity rather than agrarian communities, it becomes more difficult to

²⁸ However, during the last five years, the Sweden Democrats have changed their argumentation concerning the Social Democrats. Trying to divert attention from its own extreme-right neo-Nazi roots, it has claimed that it is the Social Democratic party who has a shameful and antisemitic history (see J. Håkansson 2023).

accept the fact that fossil fuels, which have powered this modernity, can also cause its demise.²⁹

Individual climate change attitudes

In this chapter we have so far examined the ideological underpinnings of climate change denial, but there is also a body of work on the public perception of climate change, asking which groups are most inclined to mistrust the science or oppose climate change mitigating action. In the USA, the success of the reactionary movement has been seen in that the political divide regarding views on climate change has increased since the 1990s. McCright and Dunlap (2011a) have demonstrated that conservative white males are more likely to hold denialist views, arguing that they are protecting their privileged group identity within industrial, capitalist society by denying the risk of climate change. This so called white male effect is especially strong in the United States, but cross-country comparisons have proven its existence in other countries (Tranter and Booth 2015; Hornsey, Harris, and Fielding 2018). Survey studies in Norway have expanded McCright and Dunlap's study by also investigating xenophobia and distrust of institutions, and finding that both were linked to climate change denialism (Kränge, Kaltenborn, and Hultman 2018; 2021). Several other studies have shown that anti-egalitarian attitudes, anti-feminism, right-wing ideology, nationalism and social dominance orientation correlate with climate change denial (Jylhä and Akrami 2015; Jylhä and Hellmer 2020; Kulin, Johansson Sevä, and Dunlap 2021). In Sweden, climate denialism has been most prevalent among elderly, male sympathisers of the Sweden Democrats who live far from the big cities and who are discontent with democracy (Jylhä, Strimling, and Rydgren 2020; Rönnerstrand, Oscarsson, and Axelsson 2023). Supporters of the Sweden Democrats also mistrust public service and legacy media more than sympathisers of other parties (Oscarsson, Strömbäck, and Jönsson 2021).

Within this work there is also a discussion about how much populist, anti-establishment attitudes matter. Some results (R. A. Huber, Greussing, and Eberl 2021) indicate that such attitudes might be at the core of denialist views on global

²⁹ Nostalgia is a fitting concept for the Swedish context, where the far-right is often explicitly looking back towards a perceived glorious past. As Allen (2021, 132) discusses, however, it become more problematic in the post-socialist Polish context, where the gaze is as much turned sideways, towards a perceived state of modernity and industrial welfare in capitalist Europe, as it is towards the past. This does not change the basic premise of the argument though; that the perceived true state of the nation – whether this is mainly seen as industrially modern or agrarian and rural – influences far-right climate politics.

warming, while other results indicate that it is right-wing ideology, rather than populism per se, which can explain denial (Jylhä and Hellmer 2020). A survey study that encompassed both left-wing and right-wing populism, however, only found a correlation between the former and climate denialism, suggesting that it is predominantly ideology that matters (Yan, Schroeder, and Stier 2021). This finding was also reiterated in a narrative review of the literature (Jylhä et al. 2023). Similarly, a study on right- and left-wing populist parties, only found climate obstruction within right-wing parties (R. A. Huber et al. 2021).³⁰

³⁰ The only potential prominent exception in Europe, is the emergence of the Sarha Wagenknecht Alliance in Germany, founded in January 2024 and branded as left conservative. Wagenknecht has repeatedly attacked German and European energy transition policies, claiming it is “blind eco-activism” doing nothing for the climate (Meza 2024).

5. Identities: The threat to industrial masculinities

To exemplify how misogyny and climate change denial connect, we need to look no further than Donald Trump. When he became president of the USA in 2016, it did not only crown the work of the climate change reactionary movement, but it was also a highpoint for the country's anti-feminist movement. The misogyny during the election campaign had been prevalent, from Trump attacking a female news-anchor saying that she had "blood coming out of her wherever", to being caught on tape bragging about how he could sexually assault women and get away with it. Speaking a few years after the election, climate scientist Kathryn Hayhoe said that it had become more difficult to do climate research since Trump's inauguration. Not only due to the federal cuts to scientific institutions, but also because attacks against climate scientists and women had become more prevalent: "What Trump did was: He normalized harassment. It is like he just handed out a get-out-of-jail-free-card to everybody who wanted to harass women online or even in person" (as quoted in Bjork-James and Barla 2021, 392).

Reactionary petro-nostalgia

The overlap of climate denialism and misogyny is not coincidental, rather they are part of a broader reactionary movement defending national-industrial modernity. These overlaps have been conceptualised by Cara Daggett (2018) in the term petro-masculinity, and by Martin Hultman and Paul Pulé (Hultman and Pulé 2018; Pulé and Hultman 2019) with the term industrial/breadwinner masculinities. Daggett does a historic and psycho-political reading of petro-masculinity, arguing that fossil fuel extraction both materialistically and ideationally helped create and uphold white patriarchy. When Donald Trump argued for making America great again, Daggett writes, it is petro-nostalgia, it is "an *homage* to a mid 20th century fantasy of American life, when white men ruled their households uncontested, a formula that relied upon widespread full-time employment for white men with wages that could support housewives and children" (Daggett 2018, 31, emphasis in original). Trump's politics have also been analysed as a form of energy dominance, which "invites those who feel aggrieved under Obama administration regulatory policy and the multicultural identity politics of the left to renew their commitment to fossil fuels, American exceptionalism, and a restored social order and privilege" (J. Schneider and Peebles 2018, 1).

Building on the works of Matthew Huber and Timothy Mitchell (*Lifeblood* and *Carbon Democracy* respectively), Daggett describes how the post-war USA was built on cheap fossil fuels, where cars, a house, and a nuclear family in middle-class suburbia became part of the American dream. It was an industrial society

divided by gender, where it was the male breadwinner who could earn a wage and build a career which could support the family at home. It was also a society where paid employment and associated welfare benefits were stratified by race. Behind it all was the burning of fossil fuels, which ran the cars, heated the houses, and created work either in the fossil-fuel industry itself, or in the industrial economy dependent on it. This gave oil, coal, and gas a unique role in the society. For many, Daggett (2018, 32) writes “extracting and burning fuel was a practice of white masculinity, and of American sovereignty, such that the explosive power of combustion could be crudely equated with virility”.

The endless supply of fossil fuels required authoritarian politics. While western regimes were promoting liberal democracy at home, they were often supporting authoritarian regimes in the Middle East to access cheap oil. Also, extractivist politics are racist politics, both regarding hierarchies at the workplace and suffering from the environmental damage caused by the exploitation. Through a psycho-political reading of fossil fuels inspired by the Frankfurt-school, Daggett connects authoritarianism with patriarchy, and this is where the virility comes in. According to Daggett, Western, authoritarian politics, have been associated with gender anxiety throughout the 20th century, which has been spurred by a sense of weakness in the authoritarian personality. While hypermasculinity and traits such as strength and independence are hailed, there is also a sense of social fragility and anxiety of not being able to live up to the ideals. This becomes even more pronounced in times of capitalist crisis such as the 2008 recession, when lay-offs and unemployment makes it more difficult to keep the breadwinner job – the basis for the patriarchal, nuclear family.

Petro-masculinity, Daggett argues, is often performed as a reactionary masculinity. While it used to be hegemonic, to use Connell’s term (1995), it has since the 1990s been gradually undermined. This is part of the shift proposed by Ulrich Beck (1992) to reflexive modernity, but this shift is – if it is taking place at all – a political struggle, and petro-masculinity is in this way a reactionary movement against feminism. Daggett exemplifies this reactionary tendency with the extreme-right group Proud boys, and through the practice of “rollin’ coal”. Proud boys came into the media spotlight during the presidential election in 2020 when Donald Trump famously asked them to “stand back and stand by” and when several members of the group joined the storming of Capitol Hill in 2021. To become a member of the group, one needs to declare that “I am a western chauvinist, and I refuse to apologise for creating the modern world” (Daggett 2018, 39), and thereby commit to defending the patriarchal values of national-industrial modernity. Rollin’ coal is the phenomenon of retro-fitting a diesel-engine to make it exhaust large plumes of smoke, something which has been used

to spew black smoke over environmental activists, cyclists, electric vehicles, and others. These can be seen as examples of petro-masculinity fighting back when it has lost its hegemonic position. “Rollin’ coal and other methods of fossil fuel burning become tempting weapons for seeking vengeance against the forces that threaten petro-patriarchal orders” (Daggett 2018, 43). In this case, the forces are climate change, environmentalism, and feminism. The hatred shown against Greta Thunberg when she travelled to Alberta, Canada, in 2019 can also be taken as a case of aggressive, and reactionary petro-masculinity (Keller 2021). Perhaps the most graphic example was when an oil company printed a sticker with its logo and a drawing of Thunberg being raped (Barla and Bjork-James 2021). The misogyny against Greta Thunberg in Sweden is analysed in paper II.

Industrial/breadwinner masculinities

Daggett emphasises that masculinity is always enacted in multiple contextual ways, and this point is made more explicit in Hultman and Pulé’s (2018) conceptualisation of industrial/breadwinner masculinities. Hultman and Pulé discuss how men and masculinities have historically profited from the human-nature divide, which Carolyn Merchant (1989) traced back to the scientific revolution in the 17th century. This has created a typology of men who have gained both wealth and power through the extraction of natural resources and domination over otherised people. The slash in industrial/breadwinner masculinities marks a broad difference in class and reveals that these different typologies are conceptualised as one through certain traits; but in some cases, these also need to be distinguished and separated. The industrial masculinities can, according to Hultman and Pulé, be represented by mining- and fossil fuel-executives, bankers, and corporate managers. It is masculinities performed by those who have earned the most from resource extraction and the burning of fossil fuels: “they are typically not only Western and white but tend to be owning- and middle-class individuals who have welded their identities to the dominant social, economic and political systems that operate throughout the Global North” (Hultman and Pulé 2018, 41). The breadwinner masculinities have also benefitted from fossil fuel extraction, but on another level of the social hierarchy. The breadwinner masculinities are represented by the workers at the coal face or on the assembly line; people who have spent their working life employed directly by fossil fuel or extractivist industries or in industrial sectors dependent on cheap fossil energy. This work has defined them as breadwinners – as the men putting food on family tables.

The industrial masculinities are exemplified by the elderly men in the Swedish climate change reactionary movement.³¹ These are men whose work has been tightly connected to industrial modernity; and climate science “affronts these individuals at the level of their personal and professional identities” (Hultman and Pulé 2018, 44). The breadwinning masculinities are exemplified by Australian copper miners. Australia has the third highest reserve of copper ore in the world, after the United States and Chile, and 92 per cent of those employed by the industry are male. Of those employed, a minority have a university education, with the majority being either high school graduates or school dropouts. These breadwinning masculinities earn a living extracting an industrially important resource. While the wage can provide food, shelter and a sense of identity, the major profits go to senior managers and shareholders – to the industrial breadwinners (Hultman and Pulé 2018, 41).

In line with Daggett, Hultman and Pulé also note that industrial/breadwinner masculinities arguably have lost, or is losing, its hegemonic status. Furthermore, they conceptualise the ecomodern masculinities which are now becoming hegemonic. Building on the empirical work of Hultman (2013), they outline the typology of masculinities who have an accepting attitude to the basic science around climate change and other environmental damages caused by industrial production, but who mainly turn to technological fixes as a solution. Economic and materialistic growth, built on the idea of nature as a ripe resource for exploitation, is at the core of industrial capitalism. During the 70s and 80s, this was challenged by environmental and progressive movements, and seeing this as a threat to industry, a shift towards ecological modernisation took place among some policy makers and corporate leaders. A reorganisation of business models and political policies was proposed, where environmental damage would be considered, and care should be taken to protect the planet. One example of where ecomodern masculinities has come into play is in the gendered aspect of sustainable aviation, and the idea that future technological change will secure hyper-mobility, therefore closing the path for other alternatives (Hopkins et al. 2023). Another example are the voices proposing Sweden to be an environmental forerunner through industrial growth and green industry jobs, without questioning consumption patterns or lifestyle changes (Hultman and Anshelm 2017).

While this turn has achieved some success in raising ecological awareness, Hultman and Pulé argue that in total it has failed because it has prioritised economic interests, and human needs and aspirations, rather than protecting all

³¹ These are discussed further in chapters 7 and 8.

life on earth. Regarding ecomodernism as a reformist agenda for industrial modernity, ecomodern masculinities can be seen as the masculine identities pushing and promoting this agenda. “While distinct from industrial/breadwinner masculinities in their willingness to recognise global challenges, ecomodern masculinities have emerged paradoxically; aligning global responsibility and determination with increased care for the global commons, but held strictly within the market forces of industrial and corporate capitalism” (Hultman and Pulé 2018, 47). And it is a shift which arguably has led to some of the reactionary politics we see today. Ecomodernism, Hultman and Pulé (2018, 47) write, “has levelled too much attention at the machinations of production and trade while offering minimal or non-existent responses to the discontents of working families. This is one core reason for the populist, nationalist, white supremacist uprisings that we are now experiencing throughout the West.” The petro-masculinity of Daggett can therefore be understood as a reaction against ecomodernism.

As we have seen, industrial/breadwinning masculinities and petro-masculinity have been formed in connection with industrial modernity. This was, as mentioned earlier, also connected to the modern nation-state. These connections are spelled out by Joanne Nagel, who has described how “the culture and ideology of hegemonic masculinity go hand in hand with the culture and ideology of hegemonic nationalism” (Nagel 1998, 249). Nagel argues that modern masculinity arose simultaneously with modern nationalism in the late 19th century. There is a masculine nationalist culture that empathises themes such as honour, patriotism, adventure, and bravery. The military has in this way been a bastion of both hegemonic masculinity and nationalist pride, sending men to war to defend both the nation and its women and children, and at the same time to defend their manhood.³² Industrial/breadwinner- and petro-masculinities are related to domination, extraction, and violence, which are all aspects of the modern, energy-intensive, nation-state. But the two-faced nation-state has also expanded care and welfare to those deemed to be belonging to the nation. Masculinities can come into play here as well, and these typologies often require more careful categorisation than perhaps the industrial/breadwinner typology allows for.³³ An example of this is the element of care in breadwinning masculinities, as seen in Allen’s (2022) ethnographic work in the mining region of Upper Silesia in Poland. Coal is here used as the main source of heat in the winter months, and

³² Though the emergence of nationalism is contextual and historically contingent, and several scholars have highlighted the different roles played and contributions done by women in nationalist struggles (McClintock 1993; Yuval-Davis 1997).

³³ As communicated by Paul Pulé in personal communication with the author.

according to the gendered labour it is the male in the household who should bring home the coal and keep it burning. Thus, the male breadwinner, working in the coal mine, should both bring home a wage to feed the family, and coal to heat the house. Allen (2022, 199) notes how coal in this way becomes part of paternal, affectionate care, taking care of the coal stove in the basement to make sure that your loved ones are warm, “*Breadwinning care* puts practical tasks and accomplishments associated with the values of protecting, providing, and securing at the heart of masculine-centred domestic labours of ‘caring’”. A similar caring sentiment has been seen among workers in the Alberta tar sands, who on Twitter take pride in their work as a way of looking after both their families and Canadian welfare (Letourneau et al. 2023). When fossil fuels are structuring society, including both care work and hegemonic masculinities, these inexorably become entangled.

Altogether, these examples of how fossil-based masculinities can be articulated in performances of care as well as dominance show how identities are interconnected to ideologies and go beyond profit-seeking motives. There is no doubt that fossil fuel industry has spread denial to hinder any regulation on oil, coal, and gas, and that this is tied to ideologies of neoliberalism and far-right nationalism. Furthermore, the historical and emotional ties between mainly fossil-fuelled energy and nationalist and masculine identities indicate the deep-lying values that can become unintentional – but nonetheless created – obstacles in the energy transition.

6. Changing media landscapes

Media is an important arena for anyone trying to convey a message, and the climate change reactionary movement has been successful in leveraging media over the years. Picking another leaf out of the tobacco industry handbook, the reactionary movement appealed to the fairness doctrine of media reporting, suggesting that both sides of a story should always be told (Oreskes and Conway 2011). This often makes sense, especially when it comes to political debates departing from a common point of view. If everyone would agree that it is important to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we could have a legitimate discussion about how this should be done. And if everyone also accepted the science saying that we need to, at least, halve emissions in ten years, we can also have a reasonable discussion about policies, excluding technically infeasible options such as, for example, electricity-based mass-aviation (for a discussion about the need to limit aviation demand to meet the Paris-targets, see Bows-Larkin et al. 2016). If we share a common understanding of the problem, it makes sense for media to report different political opinions for how to solve that problem. What the climate reactionary movement has done, however, is to undermine the common understanding. While the science on climate change has, to a large degree, been agreed on since the early 1990s, the reactionary movement has often been successful in portraying it as a debate and claiming space in media. This fake balance has been seen especially in the United States and in the United Kingdom (Boykoff and Boykoff 2004; Painter and Ashe 2012; Petersen, Vincent, and Westerling 2019).

Some studies suggest that fake balance is a thing of the past. One study illustrated that less than 10 per cent of newspaper articles in the USA during the autumn of 2012 and spring of 2013 showed signs of balance, compared to more than 50 per cent a decade earlier (Schmid-Petri et al. 2017). Another study, focusing on newspaper in USA, UK, India, Switzerland, and Germany, during the years 2011-2012, found that while contrarian perspectives were cited, their views were often contextualised as marginalised and unscientific (Brueggemann and Engesser 2017).

However, other studies show that the balance norm still misrepresents the science when it comes to implicatory denial. Using computational methods and analysing press coverage in the USA between 1985-2014, Rachel Wetts (2020) shows that press releases from large businesses or business coalitions arguing against taking action on climate change were more likely to receive press coverage than press releases demanding rapid emission reductions in line with the science. Similarly, climate change messages from structurally powerful interest groups in the USA,

who leverage cultural ideals of identity, national security, and rational individualism, are given disproportionate media attention (Wetts 2023). A related finding comes from a longitudinal, qualitative study in Canada showing how, even if the denialist voices did not increase during the 1990s and 2000s, there was a marked increase in business-friendly articles. Examining a sample of Canadian print reporting on climate change from 1988 to 2008, Nathan Young and Eric Dugas (2011, 17) argue “that climate change talk has been increasingly banalized rather than radicalised over time. In other words, climate change has been incorporated into the status quo rather than acting as a subversive or transformative agent.”

The propaganda feedback-loop and filter-bubbles

Dunlap and McCright (2011) argue that an important part of the denial machine is the echo-chamber of conservative media, blogs and politicians where contrarian argumentation bounces around. There has been a fear that social media and digital algorithms will create and uphold online filter-bubbles or echo-chambers where audiences only receive news from a few select partisan media. Empirical research, however, has shown this fear to be unfounded, both regarding political news in general (Dahlgren 2021), and regarding climate change in particular (Kaiser 2019). One study demonstrated that sympathisers of far-right populism, who were more liable to question the science of climate change, visited both hyper-partisan and climate science websites more often than other groups (Yan, Schroeder, and Stier 2021). But even if the algorithms do not determine the news intake of the public, there is still a system of circulating and amplifying disinformation. Yochai Benkler, Robert Farris and Hal Roberts (2018) have identified it as a propaganda feedback-loop which contrasts with the reality-check feedback-loop in traditional media. In the reality-check feedback-loop, actors – including media, citizens, and politicians – police each other regarding the truthfulness of each other’s statements. While a good story will sell newspapers, any medium simply making a story up will be exposed by competing outlets. Similarly, if a politician tells a lie, reality-check media will, as the Fourth Estate, hold them accountable. In the propaganda feedback-loop, however, the dynamic is different. Here the actors carefully watch each other for ideological leanings. What is important is that the newspaper or politician acts or talks in a way that is ideologically aligned with the highly partisan audience. In this feedback-loop, you can get away with a lie if it follows the ideological line. Compared to the echo-chamber, it is not that audiences in the propaganda feedback loop do not get news from other outlets, but that they simply disregard it, since anyone from outside the feedback-loop is seen as untrustworthy. The propaganda feedback-loop, with Fox News as a central

node, has played a key part in the increasingly asymmetrical United States media system (Benkler, Farris, and Roberts 2018). In paper I, we see how the propaganda feedback-loop has helped spread climate misinformation in the Swedish far-right media ecosystem.

Turning the idea of filter bubbles on its head, recent research has suggested the somewhat paradoxical effect that listening to the other side will lead to strengthening convictions, rather than deliberative reflection. This has been theorised as an effect of sorting on a national or global level. The idea is that cross-alliances reduce social conflict at a local level: taking Hobsbawm's Barnsley-supporting, primitive methodist, patriotic imperialist coalminer as an example, the class-conflict might not be seen on the terraces of the football stadium, the football-rivalry with Rotherham might be invisible in Church, and the Church might have allegiances other than the British Empire. But the move to digital media, which allows social interaction away from the local setting, can result in a sorting process where personal allegiances align, creating a more homogenous ingroup. And without the mediating effect of not wanting to punch your fellow football-fan, colleague, or parish member in the face when you meet them in a different setting with other conflicts and loyalties, this can lead to increased tensions and social conflict (Törnberg 2022).

The creation of their own media ecosystems allows far-right actors to bypass the legacy media's gatekeepers, which can provide an easier route to spreading disinformation; especially in countries such as Germany, where there has been little resonance for climate denial within legacy media (Adam et al. 2020). Other arenas where the gatekeepers are less active are comments sections, social media, and internet forums, and there has been an increasing number of studies investigating these. Two studies examining users' posts on denialist and far-right forums reveal that the users do not reject science per se, but instead regard themselves as rational positivists who can see the truth. "Hyperrational" commentators on the blog *Watts Up With That* can see through the corrupted climate science (Tillery and Bloomfield 2022), while posts on far-right anti-immigration forums "advocate a type of counterknowledge – a kind of 'objectivist' technocracy based on alternative knowledge authorities" (Ylä-Anttila 2018, 378). This is similar to the extreme trust in numbers, identified in paper III, and the sense that you yourself can find out the uncorrupted truth. Likewise, in all these examples, rational thinking is often seen as masculine and emotions as feminine. Another study, scrutinising Youtube-comments about Greta Thunberg, has found that these often contain sexism, ageism and ableism (Park, Liu, and Kaye 2021). This can be compared to the far-right attacks on Thunberg which we find in paper II and together they contribute to our understanding of opposition to

climate activism. Finally, another, non-digital way to bypass media gatekeepers is through letters to the editors. These can often represent fringe views, and a Canadian study shows that they have been especially important for disseminating conservative, denialist views (N. Young 2013).

7. From consensus to contention: The Swedish climate debate since 2006

The three years leading up to the Copenhagen climate summit, COP 15, in December 2009 became a turning point in the Swedish climate change debate. Sweden held the presidency of the Council of EU during the autumn of 2009, and held that role at the meeting where a continuation of the Kyoto-protocol was to be agreed. At the time, climate change had been brought to the top of the political and media agenda through several influential publications and an incentivised climate change movement. In the autumn of 2006, Al Gore premiered his unlikely cinema-hit *An Inconvenient Truth*, where he managed to draw full houses to the cinema through a film that was basically a PowerPoint-presentation. In the same year, the *Stern-review* on the economics of climate change was published, and the following year, the fourth assessment report of the IPCC was published. The latter led to the IPCC and Al Gore jointly being awarded the Nobel peace prize in 2007.

The upturn on climate reporting in media in 2006 can be seen in figure 2, which shows reporting in three of the main Swedish dailies since the turn of the millennium. The following two chapters (8 and 9) chronicles the climate change debate in Sweden since 2006. It was in the run-up to the Copenhagen-summit, when a more voiceful climate movement demanded more rapid emissions reductions, that a Swedish reactionary movement was formed, which instead claimed that climate policies were costly mistakes, as there was no climate crisis. Chapters 8 and 9 contextualise papers I-IV by focusing on the time periods and events that have received increased media attention. The chapters also discuss why media attention has dropped at certain points.

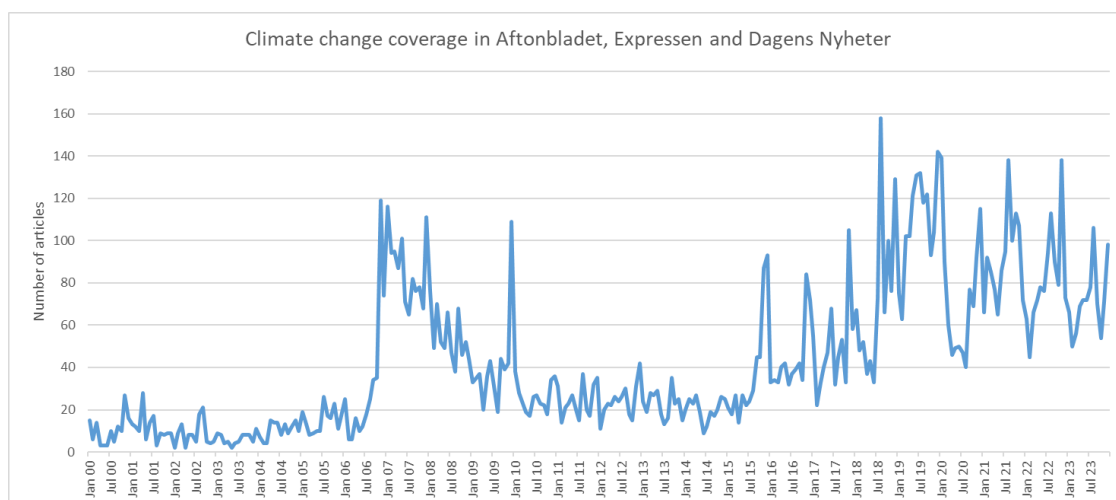


Figure 2: Total number of articles per month in the three major Swedish dailies. Created from dataset by Simonsen and Ytterstad (2024).

The environmental middle-way

Sweden held an election in September 2006, which led to an alliance of the Conservatives, the Liberals (then called *Folkpartiet*), the Christian Democrats, and the Centre party (liberal/centre-right), forming government. The coalition was led by the conservative party-leader Fredrik Reinfeldt who became prime minister. Though Reinfeldt hardly mentioned climate change during the election campaign, in office, and as a reaction to the heightened media attention to climate, he soon articulated the need for Sweden to be an environmental forerunner. Arguing for nuclear power, consumer choice and technological innovation, Reinfeldt maintained that it was possible to take climate change seriously while still pursuing economic growth. The argumentation continued the ideas of sustainable development and ecological modernisation that had dominated the Swedish environmental debate during the 1990s and the early years of the new millennium. The future would be bright and green, with technocratic solutions to environmental problems (Friberg 2023). Even in news reporting, “glorification of Swedish climate action” was present (Berglez, Höijer, and Olausson 2009, 222).

In their book on climate change discourses during the years 2006–2009, Jonas Anshelm and Martin Hultman (2014a), argue that the *industrial fatalist* and the *green Keynesianist*-discourse dominated the Swedish climate debate at the time. The former, to which Fredrik Reinfeldt belonged, argued that climate change could be handled through business-as-usual and market mechanism, with no need to rethink the relationship between industry and environment. Indeed, it was argued industry is needed to create the required economic means to protect the environment. Accordingly, environmental issues and climate change posed no threat to lifestyles or neoliberal ideology, and resource exploitation and material flows could continue unaltered. If the producers and consumers were allowed to choose freely on an unregulated market, the invisible hand would prove to be the benefactor of both Swedish industry and environmental protection. Central to the industrial fatalist discourse was the need for more energy, and a technocratic view on nuclear energy. The politicians’ jobs were to set the stage for nuclear expansion through suitable laws.

The industrialist fatalist discourse also rested on the image of Sweden as an eco-modern utopia and environmental forerunner. It was argued that Sweden had already fulfilled its fair share of emissions reductions. In the restructuring of the electricity system in the 1970s, nuclear expansion pushed fossil fuels out of the electricity mix to a large degree, and during the 1990s and 2000s district heating and different kinds of heat pumps replaced oil boilers. Highlighting these territorial emission reductions, the argument became one of cost-efficiency.

Sweden had taken the lead and picked the low-hanging fruits, now it was economically wise to spend money on emission reductions abroad and help other countries lower their carbon emissions, rather than to risk Swedish industry by promoting more ambitious climate policies. At this point, it was the USA (rather than China) that was blamed for being a climate gangster, and while the EU was said to be acting responsibly in order to lower emissions, this was of no consequence unless the USA was onboard.

The other dominant discourse, as indicated by Anshelm and Hultman, was the green Keynesianist discourse. The green Keynesians also pointed towards Sweden's low-carbon electricity mix, but rather than arguing that it was a sign of Sweden already having done enough, it was seen as a case of Sweden being exceptionally well-placed to lead the transition. With a low-carbon electricity system already in place, Sweden could – through state regulated policies regarding for example biofuels, renewable electricity production, and energy efficiency standards – show the way towards a fossil-free welfare state. The proponents of the discourse were mainly the major environmental NGOs and the parties in parliamentary opposition, the Social Democrats, the Left and the Green party. Within the discourse the need for environmental justice was raised, and that Sweden, as a rich industrialised country, had a moral obligation to rapidly reduce emissions. The idea of environmental justice also implied an ecological debt to be paid to developing countries, for the damage caused by historical carbon emissions. The money could be used by poorer countries to leapfrog the fossil fuel-age when expanding energy systems, and for adapting to the warming already locked into the system.

The green Keynesianist discourse was critical to a perceived lack of ambition within the then Conservative-Liberal government, and the reliance on market mechanisms and technological innovation to instigate the transition. It argued that the rapid emission reductions demanded lifestyle changes and government regulation. But while arguing that we need to rethink the idea of economic growth, it did not question the principles of the capitalist market economy. It was a matter of working with the system, rather than transforming it; state-led intervention along the lines of a Green New Deal that would create a unique market opportunity for Sweden to lead the way. Through government investments, old dirty jobs could be replaced by new ones in upcoming clean, technology sectors. Especially in light of the financial crisis in 2008-2009, a public investment programme was seen as a golden opportunity for a green transition out of the recession.

In our chapter in the book *Climate Obstruction in Europe* (Vowles, Ekberg, and Hultman 2024) we argue that both the industrial fatalist and the green Keynesianist discourses are – to a large degree – part of the Swedish environmental middle-way. Through the idea of Sweden as an environmental forerunner, which managed to combine incremental – but too slow – territorial carbon emission reductions with economic growth, there was a political consensus among the main parties, labour unions, and industrial representatives that climate change was a serious issue, but that this could mainly be solved through new technology and industrial innovation. This limited the space available for vigorous anti-environmentalism, but also for more radical green movements urging a transformative agenda (Hultman 2015). The carbon tax implemented in 1991, which was seen as a compromise between keeping nuclear power and limiting fossil fuels, was also seen as a policy success that showed how the market could be used to implement reform while not putting a too heavy burden on industry (Hildingsson and Knaggård 2022).

The environmental middle-way is closely related to and overlapping ecomodernism, but what we argue in the chapter, is that the middle-way gained special recognition in Sweden, as it was also related to the Social Democratic welfare model of compromise between unions and industry. Inherent in this line of thinking was the idea of continuous progress and material welfare as the only way forward. This was an idea that was often only tacitly recognised, but which was so persistent that it marked a type of common-sense position in the debate; anyone questioning it was often perceived of as either ridiculously idealist or radically dangerous. But in the lead up to the Copenhagen summit, when climate change was top of the political and media agenda both in Sweden and internationally, a Swedish climate justice movement mobilised while a reactionary movement formed within parts of the industry affiliated networks. Moreover, this is where we can find the roots of Swedish far-right climate denialism.

Movement and reactionary movement activity

In the years leading up to the Copenhagen summit, new organisations and networks formed a climate justice movement. Influenced by popular science books by British activist-journalists such as George Monbiot and Mark Lynas and the Swedish Andreas Malm, networks such as “Klimax” and “Klimataktion” were formed in Sweden (Anshelm and Hultman 2014a; Thörn and Svenberg 2017) and took to the streets. In his book *Heat* (2006), Monbiot started uncovering the orchestrated denial in the USA and the ties between the fossil fuel industry and campaigns to discredit the science of climate. He also argued the case for a mass-

movement to initiate ambitious climate change action, in aid of transforming society to reach emission reductions of 90 per cent prior to 2030. The journalist Mark Lynas, in his book *Six degrees* (in Swedish in 2008) portrayed the added dangers and tipping points that came with every extra degree of global warming. The book read like a modern version of Dante, and Lynas' background in the British environmental movement led to the book becoming a mobilising call for climate activists. A Swedish popular science book by Andreas Malm (2007), at that time a journalist but who has since become most well-known for his scholarly work on Fossil Capitalism (Malm 2016), played a similar role, where Malm portrayed the late industrial, capitalist society as a speeding bus heading towards a cliff. We needed, according to Malm, to get off the bus, and leave the capitalist system, to be able to avert catastrophic climate change.

These books aided a flourishing Swedish climate justice movement, which stood apart from the traditional, large NGOs. The latter had become more and more institutionalised since the 1990s, tied to the Agenda-21 protocol that came out of the Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and which promoted cooperation rather than conflict (Thörn and Svenberg 2017). The upcoming climate justice movement involved both street protests from Klimataktion, and civil disobedience actions from Klimax (Cassegård and Thörn 2023). It was urging Sweden to adopt ambitious climate targets, as well as calling for an international agreement with binding and forceful emission targets at the Copenhagen summit. Apart from the books above, the ideological spine of the movement was independent magazines and newspapers which promoted radical thinking around climate change and questioned the economic fundamentals of a growth-addicted industrial society (Anshelm and Hultman 2014a).

On the opposite side of the environmental middle-way, another set of actors started to group. During these years, literal climate change denial was being spread by think tanks such as Captus and Timbro, which were funded through *Stiftelsen Fritt Näringsliv* (The Foundation Free Enterprise), a foundation created by the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (Lindström 2010; Anshelm and Hultman 2014a; Allern and Pollack 2020). Timbro is the most significant think tank affiliated to the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise and also connected to international neoliberal associations such as the Atlas Network and the London based International Policy Network. The latter two networks have played a leading role in disseminating a contrarian climate change message of literal and interpretative denial in Europe and elsewhere (Plehwe 2022; McKie 2023). With a history of promoting arguments and spreading publications which denounce the need for environmental regulation, and opposing ideas such as limits to growth, Timbro started spreading literal denialist messages (Ekberg and Pressfeldt

2022). In 2006, they organised a seminar with the well-known USA contrarian Richard Lindzen, meteorology professor at MIT. In an interview with the Swedish magazine *Veckans affärer*, the then CEO of Timbro, Maria Rankka, was described as holding a rather typical opinion within the market-liberal world when she said that the climate is changing: “But more research is needed to be able to say exactly what are the causes. The natural science is not agreed, and anyone who politically has a ready answer is taking an ungrounded position” (Carlbom 2006; for more information on Lindzen, see Dunlap and McCright 2010; McKie 2017; and DeSmogBlog 2023a).

Several articles promoting literal or implicatory denial appeared in an online magazine published by the think tank Captus; these were written by among others an engineer named Tomas Brandberg. Brandberg would later become a Member of Parliament for the Sweden Democrats and a vocal contrarian voice in the party magazine *Samtiden* (Hultman, Björk, and Viinikka 2019).³⁴ In Captus magazine, he claimed that: “I don’t believe that increasingly warm climate will result in any tsunami-like raising of the world seas and I don’t believe in any dramatical increases of the earth’s average temperature the coming decades” (Brandberg 2007). He argued that models predicting the trends up until 2100 were worthless, since the “[t]hought is absurd” that anyone in the year 1900 could have said anything about the society at the turn of the millennium. He considered that it was more realistic to focus on the year 2050 and that most of the IPCC:s predictions narrow down the increased temperatures to roughly one degree, which is “difficult to accept as humanities biggest problem right now (Brandberg 2007).” This claim was factually wrong, as most IPCC-projections in the fourth assessment report released that year showed increased temperatures of nearly two degrees compared to pre-industrial levels, and it also ignored the cumulative aspect of climate change, and that current emissions will impact climate change for centuries to come (IPCC 2007).

A third Swedish think tank involved in the climate debate at the time was Eudoxa, who had connections with the USA climate change reactionary movement. Eudoxa translated and published a report by the Competitive Enterprise Institute titled “Vad varje europé bör veta om global uppvärmning” (What Every European Should Know about Global Warming), in which the author argued that there was no scientific consensus regarding global warming, and that there was no present

³⁴ Another writer at Captus spreading literal denialist argumentation would later go on to become the press secretary of the then Minister of Enterprise Annie Lööf in the Centre Party. But there has been no sign of literal denialism being picked up by the Centre Party (Nilsson 2021, 104).

justification for policies aimed to reduce energy use. It also cited research by Nils-Axel Mörner, a former head of the paleogeophysics and geodynamics department at Stockholm University and well-known for his contrarian views on rising sea levels. Mörner later conducted research paid for by the CO2-coalition – a USA reactionary movement-organisation sprung out of the George C. Marshall-institute and led by physicist and former Trump-advisor William Happer. This research was published in journals with no or little peer review. He was also a speaker at events organised by reactionary movement organisations such as the Cooler Heads Coalition and the Heartland Institute (for more on Mörner, see Readfearn 2018; Vowles 2018; DeSmogBlog 2023b).

Denialist networks

In 2008, the Climate Realists was formed, Sweden's foremost network spreading literal climate change denial. Then known as the Stockholm Initiative, it held its first public seminar titled "Tid för förnuft i klimatfrågan" (Time for reason/common sense regarding the climate issue) together with the PR-firm Kreab (Stockholmsinitiativet 2013).³⁵ According to its own history writing, the network started in March 2008, and consisted of several prominent members from Swedish industry, media and academia (Peter Stilbs 2018). One of the founders was the well-known journalist and tv-presenter Åke Ortmark and another prominent member was the former CEO of the engineering conglomerate Sandvik, Per-Olof Eriksson. At this time, Lars Bern, a former industrial leader and academic, who in the 1980s had headed the research institute IVL – jointly run by the government and private industry – was also listed as a member of the group. Bern was well connected within the upper strata of Swedish industry (Stockholmsinitiativet 2013; Ekberg and Pressfeldt 2022). The group was formed "to critically examine the issue of climate change and highlight its political and economic consequences" (as cited in Anshelm and Hultman 2014b, 87). The high profile of several members gave them access to space in major media outlets, hence expanding literal denialism from think tank publications to established media. Soon after the first public seminar, the group published an opinion piece in Expressen in June 2008 titled "Kasta inte pengar på klimatbluffen" (Don't throw money at the Climate scam) followed by one in October in Svenska Dagbladet titled "Tro inte på klimatprofeten Gore" (Do not believe in the climate prophet Gore). The latter was signed by seven representatives of the Stockholm initiative,

³⁵ Kreab also played a prominent role in connecting the Sweden Democrats and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise in the mid 2010s (Nordenskiöld 2015).

including all those mentioned above (Ahlgren, Ortmark, and Stilbs 2008; Ahlgren et al. 2008). In October 2008, the shock waves from the Lehman Brothers crash were felt across the world economy, and in Sweden it was the economy, not climate, that was the main talking point. Against the background of the financial crisis, the Stockholm initiative in their October-article argued that the IPCC was a political body, and that climate had become a matter of faith: “Swedish welfare and industry has already been harmed by the climate propaganda. Several electricity-intensive industries are on the ropes, plenty have already fallen.” In the article they also lamented a perceived lack of debate in Swedish media, claiming that theories around anthropogenic global warming were much more questioned internationally (Ahlgren et al. 2008). For a short time, the group managed to change this. In the autumn of 2008 the science programme on Swedish public service radio ran a series in which contrarian scientists who were sceptical of the IPCC report were interviewed (Sveriges Radio 2008). The group was also provided space within local news media, especially in connection to Climategate, when they were asked to comment on the stolen and leaked e-mails from climate scientists just before the Copenhagen summit (e.g. Carlqvist Warnborg 2009; Sievers 2009).

The Climate Realists became the core of a Swedish climate change reactionary movement, which included neoliberal think tanks, a few independent opinion makers, the editorial of the newspaper Svenska Dagbladet, and the smaller network Klimatsans (Anshelm and Hultman 2014a). The Swedish climate reactionary movement was not supported by any of the main political parties during the years leading up to the Copenhagen summit. In their analysis of actors that were promoting climate denialist argumentation, Anshelm and Hultman (2014a; 2014b), argued that these actors were defending industrial modern masculinities. This group had recirculated several of the reoccurring tropes that had been used in the USA climate reactionary movement, of climate change being a religion, that the denialist voices were being ostracised, and that climate change advocacy was a threat to free market values. But compared to previous analyses of the climate reactionary movement, Anshelm and Hultman argued that it was not only about defending vested interests, but that it was about defending industrial values and identities. Claiming that their reasoning was grounded in rational and positivist science, these actors denounced any idea that nature could act in surprising or unpredictable ways; instead, humanity could control nature locally without restraint. Similarly to the industrial fatalist proponents, mentioned above, this group regarded industry and economic growth as the only way forward. However, in order to avoid becoming stuck in the cognitive dissonance

of implicative denial – which included accepting the science but refusing to act – the group needed to denounce the science itself.

“Climate sceptics understood that taking climate change seriously would mean an overhaul of modern industrial society, thereby laying bare an historical antagonism between industrial modern and ecological discourses. They assumed that liberals and social democrats did not understand the consequences of climate scientific findings. The consequence of climate change science results was that industrialists and engineers shaping the modern Swedish society needed to change. Since the climate sceptics in Sweden were part of the industrialist core and were intertwined with its values and practises, their rhetoric therefore evoked dystopia and catastrophe. They foresaw a society without welfare, without economic growth and on the road to stagnation. Climate sceptics in Sweden were defending an industrial society in which they had invested their whole lives” (Anshelm and Hultman 2014b, 92).

As we will see in papers I-III, similar views were later spread in far-right media, where the emphasis was on the industrial nation-state. One of the main figures was Lars Bern, who would become scientific commentator on the far-right channel SwebbTV.

Push-back against legacy media

In 2009, Lars Bern co-authored the book *Chill out – sanningen om klimatbubblan* (Chill out – the truth about the climate bubble) with a then prominent contrarian blogger and member of the Climate Realists-network. The book opened with the statement: “This book should not really be needed. If Swedish journalism had worked as it is taught at journalist school, we would not have had any reason to write it. Unfortunately, our old established media does not function in a satisfying manner any longer. The reporting is often too affect-seekingly biased and unfortunately that leads to the spreading of distorted information – sometimes pure disinformation” (Bern and Thauersköld 2009, 6). The book’s 15 chapters argued that the IPCC was a corrupt organisation and that it, together with Al Gore and undemocratic environmental NGOs, had caused a mass-psychosis in line with the Chinese cultural revolution. The main argument against climate science was that it was too complex and immature to make reliable model simulations about future trends. Instead, the hypothesis of global warming had become a piggybank for the “environmental lobby”, and “it was a gift from heaven for everyone who hates individual freedom and capitalism. Suddenly they got a chance to attack the

global industry upfront by focusing on the elementary basis of our modern lives: energy consumption” (Bern and Thauersköld 2009, 115).

One main point of the authors was that legacy media was corrupted and had failed its mission. They claimed that journalism had reached a new low by retorting to spreading climate alarmist propaganda. Instead, they pinned their hope on the internet, claiming that blogs were exposing legacy media’s lies and making the traditional outlets obsolete. A main reason that several legacy media outlets were facing financial difficulties in competition with new digital sources of information, was accordingly that the former were censoring the climate debate. Aligned with most media commentators at the time, the authors predicted a structural change in the media landscape. But rather than ascribing it to the convenience, cost, or speed of digital media compared to legacy media, they claimed the change was happening because when it came to climate change, the “journalist corps and old media [were] rapidly pulling the rug out from under their feet” (Bern and Thauersköld 2009, 157). Hence, they concluded, the structural change would be a positive development, as real news could then be published on the internet, bypassing media’s gatekeepers.

Åke Ortmark, one of the founders of the Climate Realists-network, was a well-known journalist and publisher. A successful career in Swedish public service television started in the late 1950s and included a period as host for the main news programme *Aktuellt*. After that he moved to commercial media, working as an editor-in-chief of *Veckans Affärer* and later having his own show on TV 8. Ortmark was well-known in Sweden, and the Climate Realist-network has written about how his media connections helped to publish opinion pieces in major newspapers (Peter Stilbs 2018). In 2013, he published his biography titled *Makten och lögnen – ett liv i televisionens Sverige* (The power and the lie – a life in the Sweden of television). The book covered his whole career. In one section, which was written in the winter of 2011-2012, he discussed climate reporting and especially one segment about the Maldives, shown on a culture programme on Swedish public service television. The programme claimed that the Maldives was about to disappear because of rising sea levels, but Ortmark wrote that the reporting was biased as it did not interview the previously mentioned Nils-Axel Mörner, who was claimed to be a “leading scientific authority” on the subject and who had strongly refuted the idea that the Maldives was sinking (Ortmark 2013, 620). Mörner had in December 2011 fronted the British magazine *The Spectator* with a story about: “The Sea Level Scam – The Rise and Rise of a Global Scare Story”. In the article he suggested that the president of the Maldives himself did not believe that sea levels were rising: “If this is what President Nasheed believes, it seems strange that he has authorised the building of many large waterside hotels

and 11 new airports. Or could it perhaps be that he wants to take a cut of the \$30 billion fund agreed at an accord in Copenhagen for the poorest nations hit by ‘global warming’?” (Mörner 2011).³⁶

Claiming that the show was one-sided propaganda in a politically controversial field, Ortmark drew the conclusion that Swedish public service television should be considered to be “a propaganda-centre for climate-hysterical alarmism” (2013, 621–622). In a similar vein, he claimed that the British BBC’s stated policy that its reporting should be grounded in the scientific consensus about anthropogenic climate change was dictatorial. Indeed, Ortmark was especially concerned about the BBC, an organisation that he had held as a guiding star throughout his career: “You would believe that this admired, public service company, this role model for serious journalism, would have approached the problem in an analytical and unpartisan spirit. I don’t get that impression. Instead, the company has transformed to a propaganda centre for the opinion which dominates the establishment. The Maldives are sinking below the surface of the sea, if not in reality, at least in the British broadcast media world” (Ortmark 2013, 623). Interestingly, Ortmark also claimed to be fair to all sides, and said that as well as asking the tough questions about climate science, the media should investigate claims of fossil fuel funded disinformation. But considering that he wrote this after the publication of, for instance, *Merchants of Doubt* (Oreskes and Conway 2011), *Heat* (Monbiot 2006) and Riley Dunlap’s first works on the denial machine, it is difficult to believe that he himself was too concerned about industry propaganda.

The attacks on media from Ortmark and Bern were echoed in several articles published by other actors within the Swedish climate change reactionary movement (Anshelm and Hultman 2014b). Another profiled journalist who spread literal climate change denial was Hans Bergström, then writing as an independent columnist for Sweden’s main morning newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, which he previously had been editor-in-chief for. After the Copenhagen-summit, and spinning a tale on the stolen e-mails from Climategate, he claimed that: “The gang who has made up the core of the UN panel on climate change” has “manipulated data to get it to fit their activist conviction” (Bergström 2009b). This statement was wrong in that no manipulation had taken place, as proven by independent reviews of Climategate (see e.g. Bricker 2013), nor could the scientists whose e-mails had been stolen be described as a core gang of the IPCC. Such a description

³⁶ It is worth noting Mörner’s use of ironic quotation marks, or scare quotes, around global warming. This would later become standard in Swedish far-right media, as seen in paper I.

gave the false impression that the IPCC was run by a small group of researchers who decided what was written in the reports. Bergström's view of the IPCC as fraudulent also meant that he thought that several of the outlets in his own media profession were silencing the "serious" scientists criticizing the IPCC: "Is, for example, climate change dominated by reinforcing feed-backs (as increased warming when icesheets melt) or of stabilising feed-backs (such as "dimming" through cloud cover)? Serious scientists claim the latter, while media only mirror the former opinion" (Bergström 2009a).

The portrayal of legacy media outlets as propaganda organs ostracizing voices that spoke against the IPCC, would become important during the coming decade. Compared to the USA climate change reactionary movement, the Swedish voices spreading doubt about climate science were not as successful in making their voices heard in legacy media. During the early 00s, the media reporting was characterised by scientific authority (Berglez, Höijer, and Olausson 2009), and after the initial flurry of interest in the Climate Realists-network in the years 2008-2009, members of the group were seldom interviewed. No systematic peer-review study has to my knowledge checked the prevalence of contrarian argumentation in Swedish legacy media during the 2010s. However, having worked as a climate journalist during this decade, I have seen little evidence that denialist argumentation was widespread in legacy media. Most of the reporting was grounded in the scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change, but occasionally an opinion piece from the reactionary movement would be published, mainly in the local press.³⁷ Thus, there was little of what is usually referred to as false balance (Boykoff and Boykoff 2004) in Swedish legacy media's reporting on climate change. The difficulty of contrarian groups to get past legacy media's gatekeepers in Sweden, would lead them to a completely different media ecosystem. During the 2010s, a far-right media ecosystem was forming online, and as we can see in paper I-IV, it was here that doubts over the science of climate change would spread towards the end of the decade.

From Copenhagen to Paris

After the Copenhagen-summit, there was a drop in media reporting on climate change, both in Sweden and internationally (Boykoff 2011; Kunelius and Roosvall 2021). The build-up to the summit had been huge, but the outcome was

³⁷ This impression is also supported by several articles examining specific aspects of climate reporting and news consumption (e.g. Lakew and Olausson 2019; Egan Sjölander 2021).

disappointing. No follow-up to the Kyoto-protocol had been agreed, and following conventional news-logic, global media attention was soon elsewhere. The fallout from the financial crisis was making an impact around the world. Nearly to the day one year after the summit ended, Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid, igniting the Tunisian revolution that would lead to the Arab spring, and the overthrow of several Arab dictatorships. In Syria the protesters were met with violence from the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad, resulting in a bloody civil war. The unrest in Syria and Iraq also led to the establishment of ISIS and increased attention to terrorist threats in Europe. There have been discussions about the role that climate change might have played in the uprisings and conflicts, with poor global grain yields pushing up food prices in 2010. Droughts in Russia and in Ukraine, floods in Pakistan and torrential rain in Canada, Australia and Europe diminished harvests and destroyed grain reserves (Soffiantini 2020). In Syria, a drought exacerbated the problems caused by the regime's poor water management (Daoudy 2020). The level to which climate change contributed to these conditions is in 2024 an ongoing scholarly debate, though there is little disagreement that the climate crisis can become a threat multiplier adding extra pressure on political and social structures.

There are two reasons to mention the Syrian war in this kappa. The first is that it serves as an example of how news logic can push climate change mitigation off the media and political agenda. Whenever the threat erupts into a real event, the background factors tend to be forgotten compared to the urgency of the present. This is, to a degree, even true in cases of extreme weather events where the link to climate change is well established. During, and in the immediate aftermath, of a climate change induced heatwave or downpour, the focus will mainly – and probably rightly – be on how to deal with the event. But after the event, when it would be beneficial to investigate its causes, the reporters are already covering the next story. After Copenhagen most media outlets moved forward to other news items such as the Syrian war, and the global coverage of climate change dropped considerably. The second reason is that the war caused massive displacement, and the high numbers of asylum seekers that came to Sweden in 2015, were utilised by Swedish far-right media to spread an anti-establishment discourse.

Nonetheless, in international climate politics, the Copenhagen accord was intensely lobbied by the proposing countries (Ciplet, Roberts, and Khan 2015). The accord had been drafted in the final hours of the summit by the USA, Brazil, China, India, and South Africa. Ciplet, Roberts and Khan describe how several of the delegates received the draft at 3.00 am in the morning of the final plenary session on the 20th of December 2009. In the end, the summit agreed to “take note” of it. It proposed a radical shift in the international climate regime: from the

binding collective targets of the Kyoto protocol to voluntary contributions by each nation-state. This would later become the NDCs, National Determined Contributions, in the Paris-agreement in 2015. The move changed the decision-making process within the UNFCCC-regime and shifted power from the multilateral arena and the UN, to single nation-states who could unilaterally decide their NDCs and enter bi- and mini-lateral agreements. Cipler and Roberts argue that it was a move away from the common but differentiated responsibilities of the Kyoto protocol, to a system of “shared unaccountability. The agreement required that no one was required to act at any certain level” (Cipler and Roberts 2017, 152). At the end of 2023, there is still a significant climate action gap. The long term pledges in the NDCs will, if they are held, lead to a likely warming of 2.1 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial limits, but the current policies actually implemented will push warming to a likely 2.7 degrees (Climate Action Tracker 2023).³⁸

For a large part of the global climate justice movement the Copenhagen accord was a failure, which led them to rethink climate politics from the international to the national level (Cassegård and Thörn 2023). Several of the institutionalised NGOs in Sweden, who were connected to the international Climate Action Network, CAN, started focusing on national politics, arguing that Sweden should wear the mantle of a climate leader. The newer climate justice networks that had taken to the streets in the run up to the Copenhagen summit either ceased to exist or lost momentum. Parts of the movement re-strategised to focus on creating sustainable local communities rather than pressuring international and national politics to change. Networks such Transition Towns and Dark Mountain, with the latter being more anti-institutional, were trying to engender low-carbon, resilient communities that would both decrease their ecological footprint but also withstand the shocks of future climate change and financial turmoil (Thörn and Svenberg 2017).

Enter the Sweden Democrats

The big shift in the Swedish political landscape after the Copenhagen summit was the national election of 2010, when the radical-right party the Sweden Democrats entered parliament.³⁹ The party was founded in 1988 as a political successor to the

³⁸ For long term pledges, the temperature range is 1.7–2.6 degrees Celsius, for implemented policies, the range is 2.2–3.4 degrees Celsius.

³⁹ While there is a significant amount of literature on the definition of radical right-parties, I adhere to the view of Rydgren (2017) that the main ideological feature is ethnic nationalism and that

nationalistic and racist campaign organisation Bevara Sverige Svenskt, BSS (Keep Sweden Swedish). Several of the leading figures within BSS had been active in openly nazi- and fascist- movements and parties, and many of them continued into the Sweden Democrats (Mikael Ekman 2014).⁴⁰ The connections and the overlaps between the extreme right milieu and the Sweden Democrats were considerable during the 1990s, with several high-profile members having current or former ties to neo-Nazi groups. During the 2000s, the party was trying to create a more acceptable façade and distance itself from its extreme right roots, an effort that intensified when Jimmie Åkesson became party leader in 2005. In the election of 2006, the party gained nearly 3 per cent of the votes, a considerable success compared to the election four years earlier, and gained several municipal seats (Rydgren and van der Meiden 2019). In the national election in 2010, the party gained 5.7 per cent of the votes, thus exceeding the 4 per cent threshold for entering the Swedish parliament. Since 2012, the party has claimed to have a “zero-tolerance” against racism, even though the party leader Jimmie Åkesson (2009) three years earlier had written an opinion piece where he described Muslims in general as Sweden’s “greatest foreign security threat since the Second World War.” Media has recurrently exposed party members who have written nazi- and racist comments or shared such content on social media. Sometimes it has led to expulsions from the party, other times the party establishment has let it pass unnoticed (Vergara and Leman 2023). In their current party programme, published in 2019, the Sweden Democrats describe themselves as being “a social-conservative party based on a nationalistic premise” (Sverigedemokraterna 2019).⁴¹

Anti-immigration was, and is, the main issue defining the Sweden Democrats. Using an anti-establishment rhetoric, the party claimed to be the only opposition party, stating that the other seven parliamentary parties had transformed Sweden

populism is a political style or discourse that is used by several of these parties. The parties are radical in their desire to radically change our present society, but they are distinguished from the extreme right in that they are aiming to do so through parliamentary means. Apart from Rydgren’s definition, the arguably most influential one is Cas Mudde’s concerning “populist radical right parties, i.e. political parties with a core ideology that is a combination of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism” (Mudde 2007, 26).

⁴⁰ Since entering parliament the party has tried to downplay these roots, but even the white paper commissioned by the party itself concludes that : “a substantial part of the founding generation had its background within nazi-, racist or undemocratic communities” (T. Gustafsson 2022, 60).

⁴¹ In the party programme, climate change is not mentioned once, and the only mention of fossil fuels states that these need to be used continuously while nuclear power is being expanded, and that this should be done in such an environmentally friendly way as possible (Sverigedemokraterna 2019, 25).

through immigration.⁴² Similarly, the other parliamentary parties considered the Sweden Democrats an extremist force and constructed a cordon sanitaire against the party. This reputation, however, did not stop contacts between the Sweden Democrats and prominent members of the climate change reactionary movement. The newspaper *Expressen* (Baas 2016a; 2016b) revealed that Lars Bern was invited in April 2012 to hold a lecture to party MPs at the parliamentary office of the Sweden Democrats. Bern had been invited by Josef Fransson, who was then the party's environmental spokesperson. Fransson had regular contact with Bern to receive feedback on parliamentary proposals and talks. He also had contact with other members of the Climate Realists-network, such as the then chairman who invited Fransson for lunch at a luxury hotel, as well as Peter Stilbs, a professor emeritus in physical chemistry and one of the founders of the network. Stilbs gave Fransson advice about climate politics and said to *Expressen* that the Sweden Democrats had the most sensible climate politics, because the other parties "seem to be completely brain washed. They don't even know what they are talking about" (Baas 2016b). Fransson also had contacts with the free market think tank Timbro, who previously had circulated literal climate denial.

An analysis Fransson's argumentation in the Swedish parliament, can shed light on how these connections influenced his argumentation at the time. In the summer of 2012, he argued that Swedish carbon emissions are "negligible in a global context", but still said that the Sweden Democrats "does not question whether human activity influences the climate" and that Sweden should "honour international climate agreements that we join and should take our fair share of mitigating global emissions of greenhouse gases" ('*Riksdagens protokoll 2011/12:125*' 2012). Half a year later, however, in January 2013, while reiterating Sweden's smallness, he started his speech by saying that he had some encouraging news:

"Only over the latest days and the latest weeks have we seen several indications that the apocalyptic future scenario portrayed by many in the climate debate probably won't strike with the force which many times has been asserted. This is obviously good news unless you are one of those who have built a lucrative career in warning humanity about the earth's doom, in which case you will obviously choose to ignore positive signals.

⁴² The other seven parties in the Swedish parliament are: the Left Party, the Social Democrats, the Green Party, the Centre Party, the Liberals (formerly *Folkpartiet*), the Christian Democrats, and the Conservatives.

It has, among other things, been noticed that any global warming has not been possible to detect during the last 15 years. Rather, the 20th century warming of roughly 0,75 degrees seems to have paused, at least for now. That the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased since the 19th century with 0,01 per cent or 0,1 per mille has, at least over the latest years, proven to be less ominous than various climate models have predicted. That is naturally very encouraging news” (‘Riksdagens protokoll 2012/13:59’ 2013).

With these words, Fransson spread literal climate denial in the Swedish parliament. He picked up on what is known as the hiatus-argument, which is commonly circulated by contrarian actors. It is a case of cherry-picking, which usually starts by selecting a strong El Niño-year, when the reoccurring weather phenomena in the Pacific raises global temperatures. As the climate crisis elevates average temperatures to new heights, the warm El Niño-years are likely to produce record temperatures. That was the case in 1998, a year often used as the starting point for the hiatus-argument until records were broken again in 2016 with a new El Niño-year. In the early 2020s, the hiatus-argument resurfaced again, but with 2016 as the starting year (Hausfather 2022). Considering the strong current El Niño, we might well see the same argument being enlarged upon again in a few years with 2023 or 2024 as a starting year. Fransson also discredited climate models, and thus climate science, insinuating that they were alarmist and unreliable. By claiming that there was a professional class of doomsayers, who chose to disregard opposing evidence to make a living of warning humanity about catastrophic climate change, Fransson tied the literal climate denial with the populist, anti-establishment rhetoric of the Sweden Democrats. This was underlined in a later statement during the same parliamentary debate. Referring to a discussion about a potential tax on meat which had been raised by the Swedish Board of Agriculture, Fransson claimed that this was the latest example of using climate politics to further other political means: “where it seems like the Swedish Board of Agriculture itself has been taken over by the vegan movement”. He also included legacy media and public service as part of the establishment, when saying: “As is known by most, The Green Party is the media’s pet. They can say anything without expecting either scrutiny or opposition from the country’s bigger media, including the state financed SVT [public service television]” (‘Riksdagens protokoll 2012/13:59’ 2013). The populist discourse of the radical right portrays what is considered as the true ethnic people being betrayed by a globalist elite. In the rhetoric of

Fransson, public agencies, climate scientists, legacy media, and the vegan movement are all part of this elite.

In a subsequent analysis of the rhetoric of the Sweden Democrats and the climate change reactionary movement during the years 2013-2017, Hultman et al. (2019) observed that arguments of the two groups merged. In parliament, debate articles, and in their own party magazines, Josef Fransson and other leading members of the Sweden Democrats raised doubts about climate science, argued that Sweden had already done enough, and used anti-establishment rhetoric to denounce the corrupted elite. In their proposed national budget for 2016, the party scare-quoted the word climate, and in their specified budget for the environment that year, the party proposed a reduction of the funding for the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute, which was claimed to be involved in “tendentious opinion-making” rather than research. Hultman et al. also connect the rhetoric of the Sweden Democrats to the concept of industrial/breadwinner masculinities, arguing that the party, like the reactionary movement, was defending the lives and lifestyles of industrial modernity. Similar to how the men in the climate change reactionary movement would need to question their life project in the service of the industrial nation if they took climate change seriously, the Sweden Democrats would need to question Swedish carbon intensive lifestyles if admitting the need for a rapid, low-carbon transition.

The fourth IPCC-report

When the IPCC Working Group I convened in Münchenbryggeriet, an old brewery in Stockholm, in September 2013, to approve and publish the first part of the IPCC's fifth assessment reports, the physical science basis, the environmental minister Lena Ek from the Centre Party opened the session. Ek said that: “To tackle climate change is an economic concern and a possibility.” In her speech, Lena Ek also argued that Sweden's territorial emission reductions showed how carbon emissions could be decoupled from economic growth, a claim that neglected the fact that consumption based emissions had decreased at a much lower rate (Vowles 2013). Ek and the Centre Party were part of the liberal-conservative coalition that had been re-elected in 2010. The coalition continued to portray Sweden as a guiding ecomodern light that could combine economic growth with reduced carbon emissions (Friberg 2023).

When the IPCC working group opened the doors to journalists on Friday the 27th, the message was stark. The working group confirmed that human induced climate change was unequivocal and would continue, causing severe risks of rising sea levels, melting ice sheets, more frequent heatwaves, and more intense downpours.

Not everyone was convinced, however. You could see the disheartened look of the IPCC delegates when a well-known contrarian Daily Mail-journalist asked how long the hiatus that had started in 1998 needed to continue before the IPCC admitted its models were faulty.⁴³ It was a case of classic cherry-picking, and the response from Michel Jarraud, Secretary General of The World Meteorological Organisation, was that the question was “ill-posed from a scientific point of view” (Rose 2013).

The publication of the report contributed to increased attention to climate change. Trying to reorganise after Copenhagen, new climate justice groups gained salience. In Sweden, the youth organisation PUSH, founded in 2013, became the most rapidly growing environmental organisation since the 1980s, gaining 10 000 members in its first year. PUSH was the Swedish arm of the international Power Shift network, with strong connections to the USA climate organisation 350.org. On the day of the report, the 27th of September, PUSH, who only allowed members under 30, arranged a “climate scream” which it hoped would echo over Stockholm. The spokesperson of PUSH made it clear that they wanted to show a different Sweden compared to the one Lena Ek was trying to portray: “We want media all over the world to pick up our message. We want to deliver another image of Sweden. We want to show that we are angry, frustrated and discontent that Sweden’s, and the rest of the world’s, politicians do not act on the climate issue” (McDowell 2013).

All the main Swedish media covered the IPCC-report, and true to standard media logic, the newsworthiness increased since it took place in Stockholm. While the youth activists screamed on the streets to make their angst heard above the alarming, but emotionally removed, language of the IPCC, the Climate Realists-network took a different approach. Paying for advertising space on the digital sites of three of Sweden’s main morning newspapers (Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet and Göteborgs-Posten), the group ran a top-banner on each of the three news sites saying: “The Climate Threat – A misunderstanding?” (Krantz 2013).

Another, and cheaper, tactic to spread denialist argumentation in newspapers was used by the other contrarian network in Sweden, Klimatsans. A search in the media database Retriever, reveals that in one month, from the 1st of September to the 1st of October 2013, the secretary of the network published eight different letters-to-the-editor and opinion articles in different local newspapers. As a couple of the pieces were published in several different newspapers, the secretary had

⁴³ The author attended the press conference as a journalist for the magazine Klimatmagasinet Effekt.

ensured that the articles were published in total 17 times during the month. Both the advertising campaign and the letters to local newspapers point towards the difficulty the Swedish reactionary movement had to get past media gatekeepers, while UK-tabloids, such as the Daily Mail, sent contrarian journalists to cover the report. Several of the major Swedish newspapers refused any kind of editorial space to the contrarian groups, which meant they had to pay for advertising spots to get their message across. The lesser resources at smaller, local newspapers made it easier to be able to publish contrarian opinion pieces and letters, but even there, climate change reactionary voices were seldom interviewed.

The Sweden Democrats saying no to the climate framework

In the 2014 national election, the liberal-conservative alliance was voted out of power, while the Sweden Democrats nearly doubled its share of the votes and became kingmaker in parliament. This created a deadlock in parliament until an agreement was reached in December 2014 between the other seven parties, which was designed to keep the Sweden Democrats out of power by letting the largest minority coalition form government. The agreement, however, only lasted a year. Since then, all the centre-right and conservative parties – apart from the Centre Party – have started negotiating and cooperating with the Sweden Democrats.

In December 2014, the government appointed a commission consisting of all the parliamentary parties apart from the Sweden Democrats, to propose a Swedish climate law that would govern Swedish climate politics in the long term. In September 2015, and following a suggestion by climate scientist Johan Rockström in a popular radio show during the summer, the Social Democratic prime minister Stefan Löfven declared that Sweden would become one of the world's first fossil free welfare states (Hellberg 2015). Around the time of the COP 21 in Paris in December 2015, all seven parties in the Swedish climate commission endorsed the 1.5 degree target. Just a couple of months later, however, when presenting their report, the commission had agreed on national targets incompatible with 1.5 degrees, and instead aimed at limiting warming to two degrees warming above pre-industrial levels. The chairman of the commission, Anders Wijkman, said that “politics is the art of the possible” and that it would have been impossible to convince all seven parties to agree to more ambitious emission reductions (Rosén 2016). While it is reasonable to assume that Wijkman was right, the targets themselves are a case of orchestrated implicatory denial. The seven parties continued to endorse the Paris-agreement, despite knowing that their own targets were not good enough to live up to the commitment. A later scientific assessment has suggested that Sweden needs to at least double the ambition of the climate law if it is to be compatible with the Paris-agreement (K. Anderson, Broderick, and

Stoddard 2020) .⁴⁴ When the agreement was ratified in October 2016, the only party that voted against it was the Sweden Democrats, on the basis that the party did not want to commit to the national determined contribution, NDC, which would be negotiated at the EU-level.

The proposals of the commission were adopted by parliament in 2017 through the climate political framework, which consists of three pillars. The first is the climate law, which stipulates that the government each year must present a report on its climate policies, and every four years needs to publish a roadmap for how it plans to reach the climate goals. The second pillar is the climate goals themselves, which is net-zero by 2045, and 15 per cent of Sweden's emissions can be compensated through emissions reductions abroad or through negative emissions. By 2030, the emissions from domestic transportation (excluding aviation) should decrease by 70 per cent. The third pillar is the establishment of the scientific climate council, which is an independent watchdog that each year should publish a report on whether current government policies are aligned with the climate goals. When the climate framework was passed in parliament in 2017, it was supported by all parties except the Sweden Democrats.

Aviation: A case of implicatory denial

In 2017, the government proposed an extra tax on aviation, to lower emissions. The tax was heavily debated, and became focal in Swedish media coverage that year (Vi-skogen and Retriever 2018). The science on aviation was clear that no near-term technical solutions existed that could make the sector compliant with the Paris agreement (Bows-Larkin et al. 2016; J. Larsson et al. 2019).

⁴⁴ Morfeldt et al. (2022) argue that the Swedish climate law is compatible with Paris, as long as emissions from before 1990 are excluded. The main difference between this calculation and the one by Anderson et al. (2020), is that the main principle for Morfeldt et al in estimating a fair share of carbon emissions is historical emissions per capita, whereas Anderson et al. use a grandfathering approach, i.e. allocating carbon budgets based on current emission, for developed countries while allowing developing countries a larger share. The approach by Morfeldt et al. can be argued to be fairer due to a more equal per capita distribution, whereas the approach by Anderson et al. can be argued to be more realistic in acknowledging carbon lock-ins from current infrastructure so that no country is given implausible mitigation rates. Anderson et al. attempt to incorporate fairness by giving poorer countries a larger carbon budget.

If the carbon budget is calculated at the per capita level from 2020 – which is argued for in the climate report that the current Swedish government ordered from the professor in economics John Hassler (2023) – and therefore not accounting for historical emissions, Sweden will still grossly transgress its carbon budget if emissions are reduced at the same rate as they have been since 1990. In that case, Sweden will emit more than 100 tonnes carbon per capita, but a rough estimate of the global per capita budget is 62 tonnes from the year 2020 (calculated by author using data from Friedlingstein et al. 2023).

Nevertheless, the attempt to reduce demand was politically controversial. Even the Social Democratic-Green government, who implemented the aviation tax, simultaneously subsidised an airport – and associated carbon emissions – in Sälen. The contradictory signals of trying to curb aviation through a special tax, while at the same time endeavouring to increase aviation to one of Sweden’s main ski resorts (which of course will suffer from warmer winters in the future), were shrugged off by Mikael Damberg, the Social Democratic Minister for Enterprise. He said that: “Politics is about doing several things at the same time. You must be able to chew gum and walk at the same time” (Alskog 2017). In a similar vein, Annie Lööf, the party leader of the Centre Party, who was in opposition, claimed in an interview that it was necessary “to think about the way we travel” and that in the future “we can fly more” with the help of biofuels, even though the latter is not a viable solution without also curbing demand (Stiernstedt 2018). The Swedish debate on air-travel is a good example of political actors furthering implicatory denial through relying solely on technological innovation, one of the common discourses of delay (S. Cohen 2001; Lamb et al. 2020).

At the same time as political leaders were continuing business as usual, there was, from 2016, a growing discourse taking place in media about staying on the ground, with several influential scientists and artists affirming that they did not fly (Ullström, Stripple, and Nicholas 2023). The discourse became more prevalent in 2018 when the Stay on the Ground-movement was founded in Gothenburg and a few influential journalists published opinion pieces about the need to stop flying. The debate had a marked effect on aviation, with Swedish air-travel decreasing for the first time ever in 2019 (Jacobson et al. 2020). Interview studies in Sweden have shown how those who stopped or decreased flying experienced a process of internalizing knowledge about the climate crisis which led them to change their behaviour. At the same time, they felt that the failure of politicians to act and the lack of political incentives to limit flying could hinder their actions (Jacobson et al. 2020; Wormbs and Wolrath Söderberg 2021). Here we can see how the implicatory denial orchestrated at the political and institutional level – where leaders refuse coherent policies to reduce aviation – obstructs actions by citizens, who have accepted the moral and political implication of the climate crisis and want to reduce air travel.

8. Swedish far-right alternative media

When the Sweden Democrats entered parliament in 2010, the party had, to a degree, moved away from the anti-democratic extreme-right to become a radical right party with the aim of transforming society through institutional and parliamentary means (Rydgren and van der Meiden 2019). However, the party still displayed an intense distrust of legacy media, and at a time when social media had become popular, the Sweden Democrats quickly picked up digital means. In her analysis of the 2010 election, media scholar Anne Kaun (2017) shows how the rhetoric of the Sweden Democrats towards legacy and newer digital media focused on three arguments. The first was accusations against legacy media of being biased against the Sweden Democrats by portraying them in a negative light. Thus, the legacy media was undemocratic by silencing the Sweden Democrats who was telling the truth about society. This is a common discursive framing for the far-right, to argue that they are the truth-tellers in a world of lies (Wodak 2019). The second argument from the Sweden Democrats was that legacy media had become commercialised and was more attached to profit than to justice, which made them favour the establishment parties. Instead of being a watchdog, legacy media had become complicit in defending the interests of the powerful. The third argument was that the journalists of legacy media were lying hypocrites when they endorsed multicultural ideals that they did not live up to, while discrediting alternative digital channels.

One article in the Sweden Democratic magazine *SD-kuriren* stated that legacy media “is doing its best to consolidate its news- and opinion monopoly by casting suspicion over, and belittling the blogosphere, citizen journalism and samizdat journalistic initiatives such as *Politiskt Inkorrekt* [politically incorrect] and *Avpixlat* [un-pixelated]. The achievements of the IT-society have made such alternative information- and opinion-carriers possible, but their attraction and ever increasing readership is due to something completely different – that mass media’s merchants of diversity “are not doing their job” (as cited in Kaun 2017, 176). This is comparable to the argumentation of the climate change reactionary movement when describing legacy media as a propaganda tool for climate alarmism. In this discourse, the increased pull of digital media has nothing to do with technology, instead it is due to the supposedly corrupt legacy media not doing its job. As we will see in papers I-IV, several of the digital alternative media that were established by the Swedish far-right, from the second half of the 00s, would later become vocal in obstructing climate change politics and spreading literal denial arguments. Thus, they became political organs that could bring the far right and the climate change reactionary movement together. The

two far-right sites, Politiskt Inkorrekt and Avpixlat, which in the quote above are compared to dissident journalism in the old Soviet bloc, are the forerunners to the site Samnytt, which in 2019 made opposition to Greta Thunberg one of its main features.

It was not only the Sweden Democrats that was trying to create its own news media to bypass legacy media gatekeepers. Extreme right actors and neo-Nazi movements were also making use of this new space (Mattias Ekman 2014). In her dissertation, Mathilda Åkerlund (2022) has mapped far-right organisations and groups, showing the number of webpages and digital media that have appeared from the second half of the 2000s onwards (see figure 3). These news sites range from anti-democratic extreme right to anti-liberal radical right, or, similarly, from “anti-system” to “polarising” in Kristoffer Holt’s (2018) framework of alternative media.⁴⁵ Up until 2018, these news sites were mainly concerned with immigration (Nygaard 2019), and several of them were successful in creating attention and extending their reach on social media in the run-up to the 2018 national election, and especially Twitter bots were spreading their message (A. O. Larsson 2019; Schroeder 2020). Recent studies have confirmed how Swedish far-right media have continued to spread Islamophobic material, and that their readership has been more likely to mistrust the Swedish electoral system (Theorin et al. 2023; Palmgren, Åkerlund, and Viklund 2023).

As the far-right alternative media considered itself as being in opposition to legacy media, very few of the new digital sites joined the voluntary code of ethics which regulated Swedish media. Following a change in the state press-subsidy system, which made digital media eligible for state subsidies if they followed “good media-ethical practice”, several of the news sites, such as Samnytt and SwebbTV, signed up to the ethical code (Myndigheten för Press Radio och TV 2021, 7). After repeatedly being criticised for breaching the code however, Samnytt left, and stated that the only reason it joined was to get state subsidies (Samnytt 2023). The reach of the far-right media sites is measured by the annual Reuters Digital News Report, and during the years 2018–2019, several of the news sites reached about 10 per cent of the Swedish online population.

⁴⁵ While far-right alternative media is obviously ideologically distinct from left-wing alternative media, Holt et al. (2019) argue that alternative is a useful umbrella term as media to both the left and right see themselves as corrective of legacy media, this is elaborated upon in article I and II, note 1. Strömbäck (2023) argue that several alternative media should not be called *news* media, as this makes them resemble traditional news media.

The far-right media was mainly discredited by legacy media, but still received attention. Intermedia agenda-setting is when a media outlet rewrites or expands upon a story originally reported by another outlet, and thereby recognises the story as newsworthy. In regard to Swedish far-right alternative media, this rarely happened, apart from a few stories from Nyheter idag that were later picked up by legacy news (Nygaard 2023). But even without intermedia agenda-setting, the far-right alternative media could influence the debate, when legacy media needed to formulate some kind of response to their presence. If legacy media reported negatively about them, it could amplify the feeling among the far-right readership that they were being ostracised and lied to by legacy media. If the alternative media expanded far enough, they would have a polarizing influence on the media system as a whole, and become competitors to legacy media (Holt 2018). In Sweden, two well-funded media initiatives, Kvartal and Bulletin, which started in 2016 and 2020 respectively, were both created to fill a space between the far-right alternative media and legacy media, where issues such as immigration could be discussed (E. Andersson 2020). Both sites have also repeatedly disseminated contrarian climate messages (e.g. Kvartal 2020; Törnvall 2023).

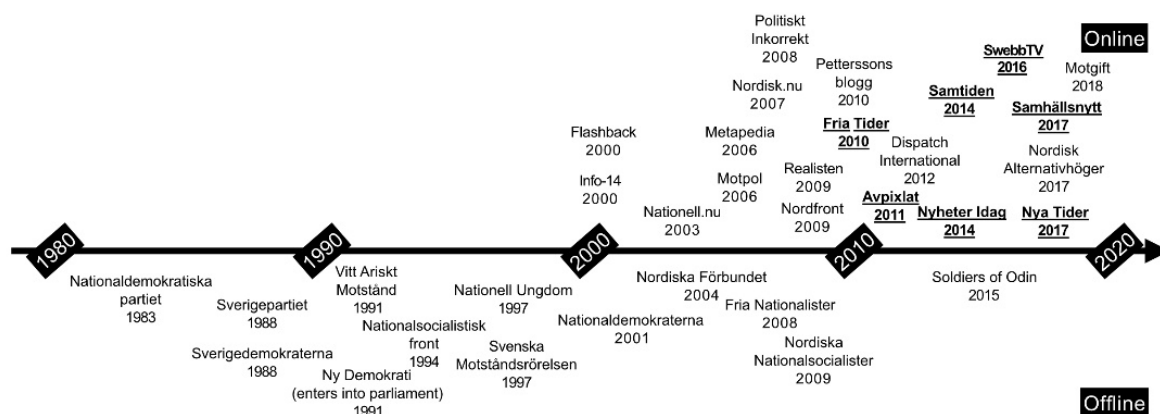


Figure 3: A timeline of far-right organisations and media in Sweden. Digital media studied in papers I-IV in bold and underlined. Politiskt inkorrekt and Avpixlat are previous incarnations of Samhällsnytt or Samnytt, and Nya tider existed as a print edition from 2012, before going online in 2017. Reused and adopted with permission from Mathilda Åkerlund (2022, 31).

A new media ecosystem to bypass media gatekeepers

The Swedish far-right media are considerably larger than several of their European counterparts (Schulze 2020). There can be various explanations for this. Schultze (2020) suggests that part of the appeal of far-right media can be connected to the high number of refugees that came to Sweden in the autumn of 2015, fleeing from the wars in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The event led to the

then Social Democratic-Green government making a U-turn on Sweden's relatively generous asylum policies, by implementing border controls and adopting a much more restrictive approach to immigration. The far-right alternative media had been pronounced in arguing that legacy media, together with the political establishment, were lying about the negative consequences of immigration. The difficulties faced by authorities and civil society in providing basic facilities such as beds and schooling, and the government's rapid policy change, were used as arguments by far-right media that they had been right all along.

The premise of this argument is that the far-right alternative media offers something completely different compared to legacy media. This can be partially understood in relation to the Swedish media system, which has been characterised as politically plural as well as having a high degree of professionalism (Strömbäck and Nord 2008). The newspaper market in Sweden was highly developed during the 20th century, with a state subsidy system set in place to support a pluralistic system where several, even smaller towns, had two daily newspapers. Up until the 1970s, the press was highly aligned with the political parties. Both the Centre Party, which used to be called the Farmer Party and enjoyed strong support outside the cities, and the Social Democrats owned several newspapers. After these were sold, the Swedish press has been characterised by norms of political impartiality in the news reporting, including a clear divide between the opinions on the editorial page and the news coverage. During the 1990s and early 2000s, when television in Sweden had been de-regulated and media in many countries became highly commercialised, the Swedish press became an exception. "The relative strength of newspapers as opposed to TV, the institutionalized systems for regulation of the media and the strong position of the public service media make Sweden stand out even in times of globalization, modernization and homogenization processes" (Strömbäck and Nord 2008, 116).

Political advertising on television was banned until the late 2000s and the political parties were given no free time to communicate directly to the viewers. This made Sweden an exception in an European perspective, and Swedish parties had to attract the attention of news editors and reporters to be provided space in media (Johansson 2017).⁴⁶ Thus, the newsroom was seen as the most important channel for political communication. As we have seen, both the climate change

⁴⁶ In the UK for example, paid political advertisement was also banned, but the BBC allotted free and equal airtime for the political parties to convey their message.

reactionary movement and the far right argued that they did not have media access. Part of this can be ascribed to professional journalists being independent from media owners, as well as journalistic ethical norms of political impartiality while still supporting democratic principles. Hence, unscientific, and racist views were deemed not credible and unworthy of serious discussion.

Regarding climate change, the reporting in general was focused on the scientific consensus of anthropogenic global warming, and there has been limited room for fake balance.⁴⁷ Journalist and scholar Björn Häger (2016) has argued that, for a long time, the same argument applied to the Sweden Democrats. The party's roots and its anti-immigration, racist sentiment was deemed incompatible with a democratic society, therefore it was shunned by legacy media. “[Public Service television] would not have a debate between two equal parties where one claims that the earth is flat and the other that it is round. We can discuss whether we are pro- or against nuclear, but not pro- or against all races' equal worth. If a Swedish politician argued for the death penalty, it would be considered as an oddity and be put in the not credible camp” (Häger 2016, 35). An example of how the Sweden Democrats was deemed illegitimate occurred when the commercial tv channel TV 4 refused to broadcast their advertising film in 2010. It was the first national election in which political advertising was permitted on TV, and the Sweden Democrats had paid for airtime. But TV 4 refused to show the film in unedited form, stating that it was discriminatory against minorities. Instead the Sweden Democrats made it available on the internet, and it became one of the most viewed films of the election campaign (Johansson 2017).

This background can help explain the effort the far-right has put into creating an alternative digital media ecosystem in Sweden, and why it has been appealing to merge with the climate change reactionary movement. Especially in anglophone countries, right-leaning media outlets have given regular voice to contrarian claims about climate science (Painter 2011; Painter and Ashe 2012; Elsasser and Dunlap 2013; Black 2018; Boykoff and Farrell 2019). In these countries the ownership of the outlet has often determined its stance on climate science, with for example Rupert Murdoch-owned media supporting literal denial, and with Fox news playing a central role in the USA propaganda feedback-loop (McKnight 2010; Benkler, Farris, and Roberts 2018).

⁴⁷ The reporting though, has generally been aligned with the ecomodern discourse and the environmental middle-way, hence leaving limited room to question the imperative of economic growth.

In Sweden, the only legacy newspaper that has regularly published contrarian views has been Svenska Dagbladet on its editorial page. The newspaper, however, is a clear example of the division between the editorial and news sections in the Swedish media system. For several years, while publishing contrarian editorials, Svenska Dagbladet was also the newspaper that had the most comprehensive news coverage of climate change and one of the few that had a designated climate reporter (Vi-skogen and Retriever 2018). When legacy media gatekeepers were keeping racist and climate contrarian views out, the only way to succeed for these actors was to create a new media ecosystem.

2018-2019: Turning up the heat

The debate around flying which took off in early 2018 was the start of two years that would firmly put climate change at the top of the political and media agenda. The weather conditions in Sweden in late spring and summer, when I was living with my family in Bergslagen, were extreme. Heat waves in May were followed by extraordinary dry and warm summer months through July to mid-August (SMHI 2018). The lack of rain turned the grass yellow while other crops stopped growing. Grain yields were measured at a record low and the lack of food for grazing animals led to emergency slaughters (Triches 2018; H. Svensson 2018). Care workers faced challenges looking after elderly and vulnerable people, and in preschools staff and kids were struggling to keep cool. People involved in different kinds of care work have stated that they were unprepared to deal with such heat. Between 600 and 750 extra death have been ascribed to the heatwave in Sweden (Åström, Bjelkmar, and Forsberg 2019; Malmquist et al. 2021; M. Håkansson, Durgun, and Eriksson 2023).

During the drought, the forest litter became kindling. Several smaller forest fires started due to passing trains and forest machinery in early summer, but for three days, the 12-15 of July, thunderstorms in middle and northern Sweden set the forests ablaze. Most of the fires were quickly controlled, but several of them lit up again and became uncontrollable the coming days when the fire-favourable weather conditions continued. A dozen fires grew above 200 hectares, with four of them burning areas above 3000 hectares. Never during the era of the modern fire defence had so much forest in Sweden been turned to ash during a single season. Nearly 25 000 hectares were burnt in 2018 (Granström 2020).

Several attribution studies have confirmed that the heat and drought in Sweden in 2018 had become more likely due to human induced climate change (Wilcke et al. 2020; Yiou et al. 2020). While the conditions might have happened even in pre-

industrial times, they would have been highly unlikely, whereas in the present climate they will soon be commonplace.

The fires, drought, and heat made their way into the Swedish news, and the connections to climate change were drawn. In August, the two major national morning newspapers, Dagens Nyheter and Svenska Dagbladet, ran cover stories about the climate crisis. But the opposition was seen from the start. Sweden was due to hold a national election in September. According to the Swedish climate change reactionary movement the only reason why legacy media was connecting the summer heat with climate change was to increase the support for the Green Party, who in the opinion polls were balancing on the 4 per cent electoral threshold. The blog of the Climate Realists published an article titled “Swedish television and operation ‘Save the Green-party’” which stated: “Media does not tell people explicitly to vote for the Green Party but they know that the issue favours the Green Party if people can be frightened with the ‘climate threat’. We have had a very warm summer so far, but there is no scientific fact that connects this with any carbon emissions. It is pure disinformation from mainstream media” (Welander 2018). The sentiment was echoed by parliamentary members from the conservative party, with for example Edward Riedl tweeting that legacy media’s reporting on climate change was in the long run a threat against Swedish democracy: “Agenda setting journalism diminishes the trustworthiness of legacy media. The shortsighted win for these journalists who save the Greens has in the long term a high cost for Swedish democracy” (O. Svensson 2018). And Jimmie Åkesson, the party leader of the Sweden Democrats, claimed that any politician who was trying to connect the summer heat to climate change was acting in desperation: “To turn the weather of one single summer into politics is simply not serious. It is the worst kind of populism” (Habul and Forsberg 2018).

This was the scene when Greta Thunberg, then a 15-year-old unknown schoolgirl, sat down in front of the Swedish parliament on Monday the 20th of August with a sign saying School Strike for Climate. Her protest was reported by major media outlets the following day, and she was quickly joined by fellow strikers in Stockholm as well as in Gothenburg and Malmö. At the time though, the numbers were limited, and it was not until the global Fridays For Future marches organised in 2019 that the movement gathered large crowds in Sweden (Wennerhag et al. 2020). By that time, large school strikes inspired by Thunberg had already taken place in Australia and Belgium.

Media interest in Sweden increased in conjunction with the climate talks in Katowice in December 2018, where Greta Thunberg was asked to sit next to the UN general secretary Antonio Guterres. Throughout 2019, she was invited to

speak in several parliaments (although not the Swedish) and travelled to the USA; with the increased visibility abroad, media interest in Sweden peaked. Reporting on climate was more extensive than ever before, and Thunberg was by far the most mentioned person in climate change coverage. She was mentioned nearly three times as often as the Swedish prime minister, Stefan Löfvén, who was the second most visible person in media reporting on climate (Vi-skogen and Retriever 2020; Kunelius and Roosvall 2021). Greta Thunberg and Fridays for Future were not the only activists being seen. Extinction Rebellion was formed in the UK in 2018 and the large turnouts for peaceful, civil disobedient actions in especially London, but with smaller protests happening in cities all across the world, were covered extensively (Nacu-Schmidt, Boykoff, and Katzung 2020). Other prominent international activist campaigns included the Ende Gelände-movement in Germany which arranged large-scale occupations of coalmines, and the Sunrise-movement in the USA. The momentum and demands of the climate justice movement – which was beyond eco-modern policies – managed to stir the status quo during these years.⁴⁸ In Sweden, for example, the debate about aviation has led to lasting decrease of flying, with 23.5 per cent less passengers in 2023 compared to 2017 (Urisman Otto 2024) and several municipalities and regions have adopted ambitious carbon budgets (K. Anderson et al. 2018). Internationally, several parliaments, and the pope, declared climate emergencies during 2019.

The opposition that had occurred against the media in reporting about the fires earlier in 2018, was soon seen in opposition to Greta Thunberg. Johan Hakelius (2018), a columnist in *Expressen*, lamented that a “regiment of journalists and columnists” wanted to use a child to promote their activism, and a local politician for the conservative party said on Twitter that Thunberg had “gone all out fascist” and wanted an armed rebellion (Bessou 2019). As seen in papers I – III, this was also the period when climate change became a prominent issue in far-right alternative media. From the issue being virtually non-existent a few years previously (Holt 2016a), it became one of their most covered topics. In *Samnytt*, four of ten most read articles in 2019 were about Greta Thunberg. As argued in the thesis’ papers, this points to the reactionary nature of the far-right alternative media when it comes to climate change. When the issue received widespread attention in legacy media, and when the climate justice movement started to earn recognition for transformative demands, the far-right media needed to react. It did

⁴⁸ Greta Thunberg started her school strike when the climate law was in place and when the government consisted of the Social Democrats and the Greens. But she, and her followers, demanded climate politics beyond the incremental emission reductions of ecomodernism and the Swedish middle-way.

this by creating a discourse where climate change was taken for granted as a hoax. A similar reactionary pattern was seen in a study analysing party manifestos of ten populist radical right parties in Europe. The parties became more deviant against mitigation measures and spoke about climate change more often in the years 2019-2022, as a reaction to the Fridays for Future movement (Schwörer and Fernández-García 2023). The online far-right video-channel SwebbTV started focusing on climate change in 2018 and invited several prominent members of the climate change reactionary movement as experts, including Peter Stilbs, Per-Olof Eriksson, and Nils-Axel Mörner. Lars Bern became the channel's political and scientific commentator, while Elsa Widding, a former employee at the ministry for enterprise and who recently had become a contributor to the blog of the Climate Realists, became a frequent guest. As seen in paper III, SwebbTV took help of these people to spread contrarian messages and doubt about the science. Often these shows were referenced to by other far-right alternative media, as proof of climate change being an irrelevant subject.

Effect of far-right digital media

The climate discourses of far-right media might well have impacted climate change opinions among the Swedish population. Studies have shown that the use of far-right media influences views on immigration (Theorin and Strömbäck 2020), and several studies have consistently shown that people who sympathise with the Sweden Democrats are more distrustful of both legacy media and climate science than the population in general (e.g. Jylhä, Rydgren, and Strimling 2018; Jylhä, Strimling, and Rydgren 2020; U. Andersson 2020; Oscarsson, Strömbäck, and Jönsson 2021). The SOM-institute in Gothenburg has since 2019 included questions about belief in anthropogenic climate change in its yearly poll, and every year roughly ten per cent of the respondents have disagreed with the statement that climate change is primarily caused by anthropogenic emissions.⁴⁹ In a recent study from the institute, it was also shown that media usage among those ten per cent, was an important factor in determining climate denialism. People who read, listened, or watched less legacy media, were more prone to deny climate change. While usage of alternative media was not included in the study, this was highlighted as important future research (Rönnerstrand, Oscarsson, and Axelsson 2023).

⁴⁹ The amount who has disagreed is the sum of those who have answered between 0-4 on an 0-10 scale, where 0 is completely disagree and 10 is completely agree.

Another indication of how far-right alternative media might have influenced opinions on climate change in Sweden is found in the Reuters Digital News Report from 2020 (Newman et al. 2020). The report showed that the three largest Swedish far-right alternative media (Nyheter idag, Fria tider and Samhällsnytt) reached between 9 and 12 per cent of the Swedish online population. The survey also measured views and media consumption related to climate change. It showed that views on climate change in Sweden were becoming nearly as politically polarised as in the United States. People leaning towards the political right were much less concerned about climate change than people leaning to the political left, a finding that is also supported by the SOM-institute surveys (Newman et al. 2020; Rönnerstrand 2022). It also showed that news consumption about climate change was considerably lower among those not concerned about climate change compared to the most concerned group in regard to legacy media, but when it came to social media and blogs, the two groups were nearly equal. The group that did not think climate change was serious at all was also most active in sharing news stories about climate. This suggests that the media studied in this thesis, are important information channels for those wanting to spread doubt about climate science, and for the audiences receptive of such messaging.

A temporary halt to fossil capitalism

The momentum that the climate justice-movement had in 2019, died with the covid-pandemic. With large parts of the world entering various stages of lockdown during late winter and early spring 2020, there was a sudden stop to the global climate strikes that a few months before had gathered millions of protesters. Fridays for Future moved their Friday strikes online, in solidarity with those most affected by covid. The media attention to the issue also diminished, with Swedish media writing 30 per cent less about climate change in 2020 than in 2019, thereby following the international pattern (Vi-skogen and Retriever 2021; Nacu-Schmidt et al. 2023). This was also seen in Swedish far-right media, who wrote considerably less about climate change in 2020 compared to 2019 (Arnell and Blomberg 2021). In far-right media, again, the opposition to legacy media could be seen. Early in the pandemic, when Sweden had taken a different path than many other countries with less severe restrictions, far-right media were critical of the Swedish strategy. Samnytt, for example, accused prime minister Stefan Löfven of finding it “exciting” that 4 000 Swedes had died (Kristoffersson 2020). Nevertheless, later Swedish far-right media became more aligned with their international counterparts promoting conspiracies regarding vaccines and covid-restrictions, and it created a discourse which purposefully targeted

immigrants as carriers of the disease (Dyrendal 2023; Strange and Askanius 2023).

At the same time as the momentum of the climate movement died, emissions dropped due to world leaders pulling the brakes on global fossil fuelled capitalism with strict lockdowns. Planes were grounded, factory workers stayed at home, machines stood still. Over the year emissions dropped with 5.4 per cent, but in March, the month of the strictest lockdowns, emission reduction rates were considerably higher (Friedlingstein et al. 2022). This was unprecedented and the first time that global emissions had been reduced on a scale comparable to what is needed to limit warming to 1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius. This situation also followed the familiar pattern of global emissions being reduced only in the event of an economic downturn, which begs serious questions of whether optimistic claims regarding absolute and necessary decoupling between carbon emissions and economic growth is best considered as implicative denial.⁵⁰ In Sweden the territorial emissions dropped 9 per cent in 2020 (Naturvårdsverket 2023). Emissions rebounded in 2021 but decreased again approximately 5 per cent in 2022. This was enough to be roughly compliant with the Swedish climate law, but a long way off from the Paris agreement (K. Anderson, Broderick, and Stoddard 2020). Recent estimates regarding Sweden's carbon budget, using the methods of Anderson and Stoddard (2022), show that emission reductions need to be nearly 20 per cent per year (from 1st of January, 2022) to be in line with the 1.5-degree threshold of the Paris agreement, or 12 per cent per year to limit warming to 2 degrees.⁵¹

The pandemic also meant that the climate summit of 2020, COP 26, was postponed for a year. When it took place in Glasgow in November 2021, it received a lot of attention, and global media reporting was up from 2019 levels (Nacu-Schmidt et al. 2023). Also, the first part of the 6th IPCC-report, which was released in August 2021, was covered extensively. As seen in paper IV, the report was contested in right-wing media. In Sweden, the coverage was markedly different between legacy media, which was claiming the report was too cautious, and far-right media who continued to spread literal denial. The second and third parts of the report, published in March and April 2022, were not covered as much

⁵⁰ A recent analysis found that no country has managed to decouple carbon emissions from economic growth at necessary rates to be compliant with the Paris agreement (Vogel and Hinkel 2023).

⁵¹ See footnote 44 for a discussion on the premise of these estimates, and how the carbon budget is divided regarding equity.

(Painter, Marshall, and Leitzell forthcoming). This might partly be due to the attention paid to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February the same year.

Fossil fuelled war machines

Since the end of the pandemic, the international world order has been destabilizing, with fraught relations between the USA and China, the full-scale Russian invasion, and the Israeli war on Gaza following the terror attacks by Hamas on the 7th of October 2023. Apart from causing immense human suffering, these conflicts have a direct impact on global efforts to mitigate climate change in at least three ways. Firstly, war itself causes not only environmental damage but releases huge amounts of carbon into the atmosphere. Fossil fuelled tanks, ships and planes are used to bomb and shell infrastructure (apart from human life), which at some time will need to be built up causing further carbon emissions. Also, the fighting often causes fires, which releases even more carbon into the atmosphere. Preliminary estimates suggest that in the first seven months of the war in Ukraine, the current and future emissions caused by the war – both from fighting and future rebuilding – is estimated to be roughly 100 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents, more than twice Sweden's annual territorial emissions (de Klerk et al. 2022). Similar calculations regarding the first 60 days of the Gaza war suggest emissions of 30 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents (Neimark et al. 2024). Secondly, the armed conflicts showcase the world economy's dependence on fossil fuels. The Russian invasion had serious implications for Europe's imports of Russian oil and gas, but Russian fossil fuels have only been price capped through international sanctions, not banned, as they are considered necessary to the world market. There are signs that the high energy prices caused by the invasion intensified efforts in Europe to switch to renewables, but countries such as the UK and Germany also postponed planned closures of coal mines due to energy security. The conflict in the Middle East, especially if it spreads further outside of Gaza, can affect the oil market, and hence carbon emissions, in unpredictable ways. It is worth remembering that higher oil prices are only good for climate change mitigation if consumption decreases. The high oil prices in the 1970s meant record profits for Western oil companies, money that later went to setting up think tanks and funding the USA climate change reactionary movement (Dunlap and McCright 2011; Mitchell 2013). Thirdly, these armed, and inherently nationalist, conflicts can impact international cooperation and national security in several different ways. Unpredictable economic downturns can lessen the inclination of richer countries to finance mitigation and adaptation in poorer countries, with climate debt often being a fraught issue at international negotiations. Increased geopolitical

instability, has also increased spending on fossil fuelled militaries (Tian et al. 2023).

The Sweden Democrats as part of the government-coalition

The parliamentary isolation towards the far-right was gradually diminished with a new national-conservative bloc forming in Swedish politics with the Sweden Democrats, the Conservative party, and the Christian Democrats. With the support of the Liberal party, the bloc won the 2022 national election, and the Sweden Democrats became the largest party of the four. The Liberal party, however, refused to enter government with the Sweden Democrats, and after prolonged negotiations, the arrangement resulted in the Tidö-agreement. Through the agreement, a government was formed consisting of the Liberal party, The Conservative party, and the Christian Democrats, but it was to negotiate all proposals with the Sweden Democrats, who should hold equal influence over government policies despite not officially being part of the government.

The 2022 election was marked with debates about gang-related crime and high energy prices. The issues were the first and third most important for the voters (with healthcare taking second place), raising the profile of these questions considerably compared to the last three national elections (J. Martinsson 2023).⁵² Elsa Widding, who was a frequent writer on the blog of the Climate Realists-network, had her own climate contrarian Youtube-channel, and was a regular guest on SwebbTV, stood for election for the Sweden Democrats. She became one of the party's high profile voices regarding energy and climate and was given the task of being the party's principal investigator regarding its future energy policies. Widding was also listed as a member of the scientific board of the Norwegian climate realists, an organisation that on its website stated "We are not in agreement with the UN:s climate panel, when they claim that CO2 drastically alters climate" ('Klimarealistenes Vitenskapelige Råd - Klimarealistene' 2023; for more information about Widding's contrarian arguments, see Nilsson 2023). When Widding was elected, it was the first time a prominent voice of the climate change reactionary movement won a seat in the Swedish parliament. It did not take long before she was ventilating her contrarian views in parliament, asserting that there was no scientific evidence of a climate crisis. She also used the same

⁵² In the questionnaire measuring issue salience, energy was combined with environment and climate, but the debate was completely dominated by the former at the expense of the other two. Ulf Kristersson, who after the election became prime minister, even said in a speech that "the climate issue starts and stops with energy politics" (Kristersson 2022).

signalling as far-right media (see paper I) when talking about the “so called climate crisis” (‘Riksdagens protokoll 2022/23:11’ 2022). Elsa Widding left the Sweden Democrats in the aftermath of her holding a public talk at a conspiratorial conference in Norway, which included both climate change denialism and opposition to vaccines (Glaad 2022). She remains as a party-less member of parliament.

The Sweden Democrats have stated that the party aims to transform the climate debate in Sweden in a similar way as it changed the discourse on immigration (Golster 2022). In the 2022 election the party’s policies on climate and energy gained support. 46 and 59 per cent of the Sweden Democrats voters claimed that the party had the best policies regarding climate and energy, respectively (SVT Nyheter 2022a). Considering the discussion above on the influence of far-right media, it is likely that the climate discourses in these media, and the pushback against the climate justice movement in 2018 and 2019, was helpful for the Sweden Democrats in the election. In that case, the far-right media has indirectly had an influence on Swedish climate politics, which is turning increasingly towards orchestrated implicatory denial and discourses of delay.

Lip-service to the climate goals

For the first time ever, apart from rebound years after economic recessions, Swedish territorial emissions increased during 2023 due to the policies implemented by the new government, including lowering the amount of biofuel required in diesel (Klimatpolitiska rådet 2023). The Sweden Democrats, who previously opposed all Swedish climate goals, said in November 2023 that it stood by the 2045 net-zero target. The deal was showcased as a sign of unity among the government parties regarding climate politics. But rather than a U-turn by the Sweden Democrats, their acceptance came with a high cost to the arguably more important, short-term climate goals. When the government parties and the Sweden Democrats presented the deal, Martin Kinnunen, the Sweden Democrats’ spokesperson, said that: “I can’t read any new tax proposals or any new steering instruments in this agreement. I can read that it says clearly that we will review the interim targets, where the transportation target has been one part ... We think this review is good, and if you review something you are attempting, at least the way I see it, to change it” (Regeringen 2023b, 21:20).

Stated in the agreement is that there will be a review of both the mandate to the climate council, which has been critical of the governments climate politics, and the interim targets, which according to the climate council would not be reached with current policies. Kinnunen expects the goals to be revised, which is not

surprising as several other government representatives have justified higher emissions in the short term by pointing towards the net-zero goal of 2045. But this misses one crucial aspect of climate change – that it is a cumulative problem. The total amount of emitted greenhouse gases is what matters. So, when the government adopts policies that increases emissions now, it means that the emission curve will need to be steeper once it starts dropping, and that the target year, now 2045, will need to be moved closer in time to keep the same carbon budget. Using the typology of discourses of delay developed by Lamb et al. (2020), the quote above by Kinnunen is a literal example of “all talk, little action.” Kinnunen justifies his party’s support of the agreement by acknowledging that there are no policy instruments to reach the long-term goal – it is all just talk.

Indeed, the new government agreement on climate policies reads almost like a typology of discourses of delay (or implicatory denial) in that it redirects responsibility and argues that disruptive change is not necessary (Lamb et al. 2020). Apart from all talk little action, there is outspoken “whataboutism”, when the agreement states that: “If China had had per capita emissions as Sweden, the global yearly emissions would have dropped 16 per cent in one go” (Sverigedemokraterna et al. 2023, 2). This argument ties into a nationalistic discourse which argues that Sweden has done enough, while ignoring Sweden’s high historical emissions as an early industrialised nation from the late 19th century. It also ignores consumption-based emissions, and the fact that a lot of goods consumed in Sweden are imported from China. By speaking about per capita emissions, it also hides structural inequalities within countries. In both China and Sweden, the wealthiest are the most excessive emitters, who will have carbon footprints far above the national average. Similar to whataboutism, is the “free-rider” excuse, which argues that there is no point that we act if others do not. In the new agreement for climate policies, this is seen when it is noted that the speed of Sweden’s transition “is affected by the rest of the world keeping pace” (Sverigedemokraterna et al. 2023, 6).

Another delay-discourse present in the agreement is individualisation, meaning that it is mainly up to individuals and consumers to take action on climate change: “The coalition parties’ climate politics are not based on bans or whips but on creating possibilities for individuals and companies to act, innovate, consume, invest, finance and produce, more climate-smartly” (Sverigedemokraterna et al. 2023, 3). This quote also explicitly contains the “no stick, just carrots-discourse”. This discourse is prevalent throughout the agreement, which stipulates that the transition can only take place if suggested climate policies are deemed legitimate by the citizens. For the government and the Sweden Democrats, legitimisation is equalled to economic growth, and agreement states that fossil fuel phase-out can

“only be achieved in an economy that is growing and where prosperity increases” (Sverigedemokraterna et al. 2023, 4). This statement ignores the lack of empirical evidence for global decoupling of emissions from economic growth, and that there has been no national decoupling of consumption-based emissions sufficient to meet the Paris-agreement (Vogel and Hickel 2023). The agreement is also characterised by the discourse of technological optimism, especially around the expansion of nuclear energy, which is claimed to be “the single most important measure for us to nationally reduce our emissions through electrification of transportation and industry” (Sverigedemokraterna et al. 2023, 2).

In the agreement between the government and the Sweden Democrats six discourses of delay can be found: individualism, whataboutism, the free-rider excuse, technological optimism, all talk – little action, and no sticks, just carrots. Apart from this, further rhetoric is used to displace climate change mitigation in time and space. The purpose is to ensure that no further measures need presently be taken in Sweden. One argument used is that all policies need to be cost effective on a global market. This implies that Sweden can avoid costly national emission cuts, and instead pay to cut emissions abroad in low-income countries. This is controversial, both because of the inherent difficulty of accountancy when it comes to investing in emission reductions abroad and because of the risk of carbon colonialism. The former is connected to whether the emission reductions really are additional, or if they would have been carried out even without foreign investment, and whether they are permanent or temporary. As climate change is, again, a cumulative problem, it is necessary that any emission reductions last at least for a century or more. If, for example, a tree planted as a carbon offset is cut down and burned 20 years later, the offset will not have worked, as the carbon still ended up in the atmosphere. Carbon colonialism is connected to the risk that wealthy countries buy land in poorer parts in the world to offset their own rich, carbon intensive lifestyle, and in that way hinder development (for a critique of carbon offsets, see K. Anderson 2012). The displacement connected to global cost effectiveness is underlined when the government and the Sweden Democrats want to repel the constraints that currently restrict the proportion of emissions that Sweden can offset. The agreement is also marked by the new climate policies in the EU, Fit for 55, and the claim that EU legislation diminishes the need for Swedish politics on the national level.

To sum up: The Swedish Tidö-government, consisting of the Liberals, the Conservatives and the Christian Democrats, but dependent on the far-right Sweden Democrats, has since its election in 2022 adopted climate policies that increase Swedish territorial emissions. The Swedish Democrats have been aided by far-right alternative media, and I argue that the literal denial often seen within

both of these has influenced climate policies. During the years of cooperation with the Sweden Democrats, the rhetoric of several of the other parties has changed, for example when the now prime minister Ulf Kristersson in 2019 stated that he was more scared of the people he called the alarmists than of climate change (Rogvall 2019). Several representatives of the government coalition, including the minister of justice Gunnar Strömmer, have also argued the need for harsher penalties against climate activists involved in civil disobedience ('Riksdagens protokoll 2023/24:27' 2023). With the new agreement, the Sweden Democrats might have paid lip-service to Sweden's long-term goals, but the party and the current Swedish government is obstructing any further national, mitigating action.

9. Empirics: Five far-right digital media sites

Summarising the existing literature and historical overview, we have seen that there is a historical connection between nationalism, fossil-fuel capitalism, and mass-politics and expanded welfare within national-industrial modernity. When the environmental downsides to industrialisation started to be widely noticed at the end of the 1960s, a reaction was also noticed in neoliberal anti-environmentalism. In the late 1980s, climate change became a prominent political issue, but as a reaction, the concerted efforts of the climate change reactionary movement intensified. The fossil fuel industry, who had known about climate change since the 1960, became prominent in casting doubt about the science to protect profits. But the reactionary movement was not just about vested interests, it was also about neoliberal ideology, and masculine- and nationalist identities tied to industrialisation and fossil fuels. The reactionary movement was active all over the world, and during the last decade, denialism became increasingly influential within the European far right. In Sweden, the far-right nationalist party, the Sweden Democrats, has been influenced by the climate change reactionary movement. Aided by the far-right media ecosystem, the party has gained increasing support during the last decade, and during this time it has used denialist arguments in parliament where climate change has become a contested political topic.

Still, there has been gaps in our knowledge that are addressed by the papers in this thesis. Rydgren (2018b) argued that we have scant knowledge about the far-right beyond parties, and that we need more research to investigate different far-right actors. Forchtner (2019c) suggested that we need to look at far-right environmental communication in different genres, and further examine the relationship between far-right ecologies and gender. Schäfer and Painter (2021) highlighted how climate journalism on digital-born and online sites had been overlooked in research, and Rönnerstrand, Oscarsson and Axelsson (2023) suggested that consumption of far-right alternative media can be a road to climate denial, and that this needs more research.

This doctoral thesis narrows these knowledge gaps by studying climate reporting in far-right digital media in 2018-2019 (papers I-III) and in relation to the IPCCs sixth assessment report in 2021 (paper IV). The years 2018-2019 are important because of the attention paid to climate and the extensive mobilisation of the climate movement. It was a window of opportunity to act on climate, which the reactionary movement attempted to close; how this played out in far-right media is analysed in paper I-III. The election of 2022, and increased support for the

obstructionist policies of the Sweden Democrats, suggests that this attempt was successful.

In paper IV, I (together with my co-authors) analyse and compare the televised reporting of the IPCC report in both legacy and right-wing media in five countries. The IPCC is the most authoritative scientific body regarding climate science, and as such influences both policies and public perception of climate change. Previous research has shown that IPCC-reports in the anglophone world have often been contested, and this article reveals that this contestation is also found within the changing Swedish media ecosystems, as well as in Brazil, UK, USA, and Australia.

The far-right media ecosystem consists of a plethora of sites (see figure 2).⁵³ In this thesis, I analyse the reporting on climate change on five of these, namely Nyheter idag, Fria tider, Samnytt, Nya tider, and SwebbTV. The first three are chosen because they have for several years had the most extensive reach according to the annual Reuters digital news report-surveys (Newman et al. 2019; Newman et al. 2020; Newman et al. 2021). Nya tider is chosen for two reasons, the first is that it also has a print edition, which has meant that it has received state press subsidies for a long time. The other is that Nya tider reported favourably about a conference held by climate denialist networks in Sweden early in 2018. Thus, it engaged in the issue before the other news sites. SwebbTV is chosen in paper III and IV, because it was the most referenced source of climate information on the other sites in paper I and II. SwebbTV regularly invited guests from the climate change reactionary movement, many who had previously held prominent and influential positions within Swedish industry but now guested a conspiracist, far-right video channel.

There are ideological differences between the sites. Nyheter idag stands out because it has, for a long time, assented to follow the voluntary and self-regulatory Code of Ethics for Press, Radio and Television in Sweden. Nyheter idag has occasionally also had a traditional agenda-setting role, where legacy media outlets have recirculated its news stories. Nyheter idag can be described as a polarising, radical-right media outlet using the frameworks of Holt (2018) and Rydgren (2018b). The other four, Samnytt, Nya tider, Fria tider and SwebbTV, are all part of what is described as an “antidemocratic extremist environment” in a

⁵³ The Sweden Democrats launched its own online video channel, Riks.se, in 2020 (i.e. after the main period of this study). The site was prominent in the run up to the 2022 election (Holt 2022), and there is need for more research related to its climate content.

recent report from the Swedish Defence Research Agency (Sarnecki, Lioufas, and Jarlsbo 2023). In the years analysed here, they were clearly working according to the propaganda feedback-loop, and while SwebbTV and Samnytt have signed the media ethics framework (explicitly to get press subsidies), Samnytt has since left. These sites can be described as anti-system, extreme right.⁵⁴

Below I present an overview of all the five different media.

Nyheter idag

Nyheter idag (News today) is the largest of the Swedish far-right alternative media, reaching 12 per cent of the online population in 2020; a figure that dropped to seven per cent in 2021 (Newman et al. 2020; Newman et al. 2021).⁵⁵ It is the only news site in this study that for several years has been part of the self-regulatory media code of ethics. It is co-founded and run by Chang Frick who is the legally responsible editor, and who used to be an elected politician for the Sweden Democrats (Vergara 2012). The news site started in 2013, and the website-address (nyheteridag.se) was registered by the former Sweden Democrat member of parliament Kent Ekeröth (who is also a contributor to Samnytt). Both Chang Frick and Kent Ekeröth have stated that the news site is completely independent from the party (Freje Simonsson 2020a; Freje Simonsson 2020b). The news site is financed through donations and subscriptions, and all articles have a personal byline.

In contrast to the other news sites in this study Nyheter idag has uncovered news stories which have been agenda-setting and widely reported in legacy media. Two examples are when it in 2017 reported on the misogynist and drunken behaviour of a Sweden Democrat MP, a story which led to the MP's resignation, and when it in 2019 exposed that Iraq's secretary of defence was a Swedish citizen. These stories have given the news site some legitimacy in legacy media, but still, most of the site's articles are about immigration and use populist rhetoric pitching the people against the elite (Friman 2018; Freje Simonsson 2020b). The news site

⁵⁴ Holt (2018) argues that Samnytt is a polarising, and not anti-system, media as their editor sought membership in the Swedish press club in 2013. Since then, however, the site has signed up to, and left, the voluntary ethical code of conduct, and representatives of the Samnytt has described the system as being corrupt and created by our enemies (see below). Hence, I think it is reasonable to label it as anti-system.

⁵⁵ The drop in reach between 2020 and 2021 marks a decrease in readership, but the figures might have been slightly affected due to changes in the survey, as communicated by research team leader Richard Fletcher to the author. This applies to reach-figures of Fria tider, Nya tider, Nyheter idag and Samhällsnytt.

presents itself as “resting on a libertarian and liberal-conservative foundation” (Nyheter idag 2020). Frick has explained that the news site was launched to fill an unexploited niche in the Swedish media landscape, and that legacy media, instead of being the people’s watchdog on the regime, had become the regime’s watchdog on the people (Holt 2016b, 137).

Fria tider

Fria tider (Free Times) has the second broadest reach of the far-right news sites. In 2020, it reached 11 per cent of the online population, a figure that dropped to 7 per cent the next year (Newman et al. 2020; Newman et al. 2021). It was also trusted by 26 per cent of those who had heard of the outlet (Newman et al. 2021). It has existed since 2009, and it gained readership during the Husby riots in 2013, when several suburbs in Sweden experienced civil unrest following a deadly shooting by the police in Husby (Wåg 2019). The parent company to Fria tider, FT news, is written in Estonia, and at least part of the business is conducted from Malta. None of the news articles in our corpus has a stated reporter, and the articles are mainly based on news stories from other media, rather than original reporting by Fria tider. The news site has not signed up to the self-regulatory code of ethics and. At the time of writing, it does not have a legally responsible editor, a position previously held by the founder Widar Nord (Holt 2016b). Similar to Chang Frick, Nord stated in an interview study by Holt (2016b) that the news site was first and foremost founded as an entrepreneurial project, and that it could fill an unexploited niche in the Swedish media landscape. Nord specifically mentioned the Daily Mail in the United Kingdom as a model, the tabloid which sent one of its contrarian journalists to cover the IPCC report in Sweden. The Swedish Media Council has described the news site as being part of the radical right movement by publishing “obviously racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic” material (Statens medieråd 2013, 60). Its opposition to legacy media is seen in its slogan “Ge Mediesverige en rak höger”, a pun on words which uses boxing lingo and translates to “Give Swedish media a right jab”.

Samnytt (Samhällsnytt)

Samnytt, short for Samhällsnytt (Community/Society news) is the latest reincarnation of a news site previously called Politiskt Inkorrekt (Politically incorrect) and Avpixlat (Un-pixelated). The legally responsible editor is Mats Dagerlind, who has contributed to both predecessors. The news site is run by a non-profit organisation called “Föreningen för Sverigevänliga intressen” (“The organisation for Sweden-friendly interests”) which was started by the Sweden Democrats in 2013, with the aim to “inform the public about anti-Swedish-

sentiment through opinion-making” (Freje Simonsson 2020a). Today the news site claims to be independent of the Sweden Democrats, but one of its most frequent contributors is SD politician Kent Ekeröth (who also was involved in setting up Nyheter idag). Samnytt has the third broadest reach of the far-right news-sites. It reached seven per cent of the online population in 2021, and was trusted by 41 per cent of those who were familiar with the news site (Newman et al. 2021). The news site was highly successful, more so than most legacy media, in engaging followers on social media leading up to the 2018 election (A. O. Larsson 2019). Most of the articles are about immigration or individuals deemed to be negative to the Sweden Democrats. Racist stereotypes are often used, for example when claiming that “violent Islamism is widespread” among Somalis in Sweden (Dagerlind 2019b). Its perceived corrective ambition can be exemplified by a quote from Kent Ekeröth from an interview in Public Service radio. Replying to a question regarding whether Samnytt would join the self-regulatory code of ethics for Swedish media, he said: “Why should we join a system for media ethics, formed and created by our enemies? It sounds completely idiotic” (Freje Simonsson 2020a, 2:12). However, due to the changed regulation for press subsidies, Samnytt did sign up to the code, and in 2021 received nearly €100 000 in government support. After repeatedly being adjudged to have broken the code, it has since left it again, claiming that “the left-liberal media-establishment is abusing the system to silence and demonise its conservative competitors” (Samnytt 2023).

In the discourse on Samnytt, Swedish public service is often referred to as “state television” (e.g. Dagerlind 2019a; Kristoffersson 2019). In the same interview as mentioned above, Ekeröth claimed that he roughly does the same work for Samnytt as he has done for the Sweden Democrats, and that alternative media helped the Sweden Democrats into parliament in 2010. Apart from supporting the Sweden Democrats, Samnytt regularly writes favourably about the extreme right party Alternative for Sweden, formed by expelled, former members of the Sweden Democrats. In an analysis after the national election in 2018, Erik Almquist (2018), who himself has been expelled from the Sweden Democrats, wrote that “we’ve now got four years to work, both inside and outside parliament, with culture-struggle and opinion-making both deeply and widely”. The message from Almquist and Ekeröth shows how Samhällsnytt, and far-right media, seek to influence politics by shifting minds and cultures.

Nya tider

Nya tider (New times) is the only news site in this study which is both online and is circulated as a print edition. It comes out twice weekly, once in print and once

digitally. According to the Reuters digital news report, it reached six per cent of the Swedish online population in 2020 and dropped below 5 per cent in 2021 (Newman et al. 2020; Newman et al. 2021). According to the official subscription figures for the same year, it had 7 300 subscribers (Media Audit 2021). It started in 2012, and as it has a print edition, it has been eligible for public press subsidies, and receives roughly €470 000 annually (Mediestödsnämnden 2020). In the Reuters Digital News Report 2020, the site was the sixth biggest of the far-right alternative media, but is included in this study because of its long-standing public funding and because it had already started reporting on climate in spring 2018 (thus before the other sites).

The paper is run by the publishing company AlternaMedia, and its perceived corrective and anti-hegemonic position against legacy media is evident in how it presents itself as a “political incorrect” newspaper for “freethinking humans who have seen through the hypocrisy in the established press” (Nya tider 2020). It is the only news site in our study that frequently publishes articles in English.

SwebbTV

SwebbTV started in 2015 and claims to be unaffiliated politically, but several of the channels most prominent figures have past or present personal connections to the Sweden Democrats or the Alternative for Sweden. The channel’s registered publisher and co-founder Mikael Wilgert used to be a contact person for the Sweden Democrats locally in a Stockholm suburb, and in 2018 another regular show host was an active politician for Alternative for Sweden (Freje Simonsson 2020c). From the beginning, the channel was mainly focused on immigration, and it was part of a concerted effort to stop the construction of temporary housing for asylum seekers in Stockholm’s western suburbs. The first broadcasts which reached a wider audience were from public dialogue meetings where local politicians invited citizens to talk about the temporary housing (Prawitz and Papapanagiotou 2017). In 2017, the first programmes concerning climate change were broadcast on the channel, and the issue became prominent after the summer of 2018. The other issues the channel focused on were immigration, feminism and, especially during the covid-pandemic, health. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the channel has often published pro-Russian propaganda (Sarnecki, Lioufas, and Jarlsbo 2023).⁵⁶ SwebbTV has regularly invited members from the

⁵⁶ See Sarnecki et al. (2023) and Shekhovtsov (2018) for more about potential Russian influence in Swedish and Western European far-right media.

climate change reactionary movement and during the years 2018–2019 became the most referenced source of climate information for Fria tider and Samnytt.

SwebbTV started on Youtube, but was expelled from the platform in December 2020 as Youtube claimed it had broken the rules regarding hate speech and disinformation about covid (Mattsson 2021). Before it was shut down, SwebbTV had more than 64 000 subscribers on Youtube and a daily average of roughly 30 000 views (Social Blade Stats 2022). It has since started its own platform, where several of the programmes have between 10 000 and 20 000 viewings, some reaching more than 30 000. It is also broadcast through Öppna kanalen (the Open Channel) in the Stockholm-region for roughly two hours per day. SwebbTV has recently joined the voluntary ethical code of conduct, and in 2021 it received approximately €121 000 in government grants.

10. Methods: Critical Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis

Critical discourse analysis is used to examine texts in paper I and II, and visual graphs in paper III. In paper IV, a manual, quantitative content analysis is used to compare prevalence of discourses across media and countries.

Discourses are important because language is ideological, both in representation and creation. It conveys meaning in how it portrays the world, but it also helps shape our thinking of the world: “Discourse contributes to the creation and constant recreation of the relations, subjects ... and objects which populate the social world” (Fairclough 2010, 59). Using Cohen’s schema of denial, discourses are also part of what connects orchestrated and cultural denial. By creating and influencing certain discourses, the climate change reactionary movement manage to get their message across to a wider audience.

The methods used in papers I and II are, to a large degree, based on the work of Norman Fairclough (2010, 74–77), who ontologically identifies both concrete social events and abstract social structures as part of social reality. Social structures are stable systems which govern what is potentially possible, while social events are the realisations of some of those potentialities. Between social structures and social events there are relatively stable social practices, which help select which potentialities that are realised in certain contexts. Fairclough argues that there are semiotic aspects to social structures, practices, and event. Consequently, language is the semiotic aspect of social structures, governing what is potentially possible to say; orders of discourse are the semiotic aspect of social practices and therefore help select how certain things are said or represented in specific texts, which in turn are the semiotic aspects of social events. The far-right media ecosystem, and arguably the wider far-right movement, is a relatively stable social practice which helps govern the social events of actors within this practice. The semiotic aspect of the far-right media ecosystem is therefore its orders of discourse, which can be analysed through a reading of a large selection of texts. A single text would, accordingly, be the semiotic aspect of one single event. The benefit of analysing the orders of discourse is that repeated keywords and metaphors might not convey much meaning in a single text, but when they are repeated continuously in the reporting of a site, they can pick up certain connotations.

The orders of discourse can be divided up in three main elements: genres, discourses, and styles. Genres are what Fairclough (2010, 75) describes as ways of acting, in our case they consists of, among others, opinion pieces, news

reporting, and studio programmes (in the case of SwebbTV). These might all represent slightly different genres which influence the texts. Discourses are ways of representing. Anti-feminist and racist discourses have long played a key role in how far-right media have represented the world, and as we shall see climate denialism has recently become prominent. Finally, styles are ways of being, which signal the identity of the person producing the text.

To analyse the orders of discourse, we (paper I and II were co-written with Martin Hultman as second author) have read a large corpus of texts, to find linguistic patterns and meaning-making. The text corpus for papers I and II was collected through the digital press archive Retriever, searching for all texts mentioning climate change and finding in total 721 articles written in 2018-2019 (see methods sections in the papers for exact search string and selection criteria). These were then read through at least twice, using the Nvivo software to categorise both semiotic aspects such as keywords, epithets and metaphors related to the discourse, as well as different themes and references used. We also looked at how different discourses related to each other, and finally at individual styles connected to industrial/breadwinner masculinities.

In paper III, looking at visuals in SwebbTV, I collected all programmes about climate change during the years 2018-2019, in total 54 programmes. I started by coding every new visual setting in the parts related to climate, in aggregate 22 hours of video. Finding that the two visual genres that were almost exclusively used were the talking head and the scientific graph, I focused my analysis on the latter. In doing this I used the classification scheme developed by Schneider et al. (2014), which also allowed me to discuss how the graphs were deceptive.

Paper IV is a comparative study, of how the first part of the latest IPCC assessment report was covered on television in five different countries. The first part of the report concerns the Physical Science Basis and is produced by the Working Group I of the IPCC. In the study we used manual, quantitative content analysis to identify which discourses were present in mainstream and right-wing television coverage of the report, in the UK, Sweden, the USA, Brazil and Australia. In each country, we studied three mainstream channels and one right wing-outlet; we focused on the main news programmes on each channel on the day of the report, plus the day before and the day after. We then selected the programmes that had substantial (more than one minute) coverage of the report. With this as our sample, we coded the parts of the programmes connected to the report. I was responsible for the Swedish sample, where I coded six programmes, in total 58 minutes of video.

Needing the local knowledge and language expertise to do the coding in the different countries, this was by necessity a collaborative effort. Therefore, we needed to agree on a common terminology, and while I generally would be in favour of using Stanley Cohen's scheme (see introduction), here we chose to use the conceptualisation developed by Van Rensburg (2015). (1) Evidence scepticism, which is denial of the scientific basis for climate change regarding trend, attribution, and impact. (2) Process scepticism, which is critique of the scientific processes regarding climate change knowledge, such as arguing that the peer-review process has been corrupted to favour climate change research or that the IPCC are leaving out alternative explanations. (3) Response scepticism, which implies responding to climate policies by arguing that for example the cost of climate change action is too high or that jobs will be lost. We developed a binary coding scheme (see paper IV, supplementary information) to compare the prevalence of science sceptic discourses and response sceptic discourses in the coverage. Marking discourses simply as present or non-present allowed comparison across channels and countries, which would have been hard to do with the CDA approach in papers I and II. The limitation of the binary coding, however, is that it is difficult to distinguish between legitimate debate around climate policies and claims made to obstruct all climate policy. Using content analysis to mark a discourse as present, does not allow for deeper analysis of that discourse.

11. Introducing the articles

This doctoral thesis consists of four articles using the empirics and methods described above. In this section, I will summarise the main findings of the articles.

- I. Vowles, Kjell and Hultman, Martin (2021). "Scare-quoting climate: The rapid rise of climate denial in the Swedish far-right media ecosystem." *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, vol.3, no.1, 2021, pp.79-95. doi.org/10.2478/njms-2021-0005⁵⁷

This study examines the climate reporting on Nya tider, Fria tider and Samhällsnytt, which are three far-right news sites that are part of the propaganda feedback-loop. At the start of 2018, only Nya tider engaged in climate change science, but by the end of 2019, climate had become a prominent topic on both Fria tider and Samhällsnytt. However, instead of taking the science of climate change seriously, they used ironic quotation marks in a manner known as scare-quoting to mark it as a ridiculous topic. Quotation marks around words, such as climate, greenhouse gas emissions, or climate minister, were used to create a discourse where climate change was taken for granted to be a hoax. This finding is important, because it shows some of the difficulty that can be involved in exposing disinformation. The meaning of the scare-quotes might be difficult to realise for anyone not following the media for a longer period. It might also be difficult to recognise for trained computer models.

Apart from scare-quoting, another strategy used to oppose action on climate change was to divert blame to China, arguing that there is no reason for tiny Sweden to act if the big nations do not as well, an argument which disregards Sweden's high per-capita and historical emissions. The news sites also used populist argumentation and imagery, portraying political elites as hypocritical and corrupted, and arguing that the elites load climate change regulations and fuel taxes on the people but keep their own carbon intensive lifestyle. As the lead author, I have been main responsible for collecting the empirics, doing the preliminary analysis, writing the first draft and subsequent revisions.

- II. Vowles, Kjell, and Martin Hultman. 2022. 'Dead White Men vs. Greta Thunberg: Nationalism, Misogyny, and Climate Change Denial in Swedish Far-Right Digital Media'. *Australian Feminist Studies*, April, 1–18. doi:10.1080/08164649.2022.2062669.

⁵⁷ Errata: In figure 1 on page 83 in paper I, it should say 2019/12, and not 2019/121.

This article examines how Nyheter idag, Nya tider, Fria tider and Samhällsnytt opposed and portrayed Greta Thunberg. Nyheter idag is not part of the propaganda-loop in the same way as the other three, and while providing arguments to obstruct mitigating action, the site does not spread literal denial to any degree. Using the conceptualisations of industrial/breadwinner masculinities, the study shows how the climate change discourse was connected to discourses of nationalism and anti-feminism. We argue that the attacks on Greta Thunberg, using conspiracy theories and several different derogatory epithets, can be seen as a defence of the idea of a homogenous, patriarchal, and industrially prosperous nation. This imagined community of the far right is perceived to be threatened by immigration, feminism, and climate change. The article also highlights discourses around nuclear energy, and how the values of industrial/breadwinner masculinities are seen in articles regarding the industrial nation-state.

The findings are important as they support the notion that for the Swedish far-right it is foremost the period of national-industrial modernity that is the glorious past of the nation and that should be recreated, rather than more romantic visions of localism. As the lead author, I have been main responsible for collecting the empirics, doing the preliminary analysis, writing the first draft and subsequent revisions.

- III. Vowles, Kjell. 2023. 'Talking Heads and Contrarian Graphs: Televising the Swedish Far Right's Opposition to Climate Change'. In *Visualising Far-Right Environments Communication and the Politics of Nature*, edited by Bernhard Forchtner, 253–273. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

This article analyses visual graphs used by SwebbTV in its reporting on climate change during the years 2018-2019. In the empirics underlying article I and II, we saw that SwebbTV had become a go-to source for climate change information for the rest of the far-right media ecosystem. SwebbTV often discussed the science of climate change and invited prominent members of the Swedish climate change reactionary movement, who in many cases had held prominent positions within Swedish industry, as guests to its studio programmes. To discredit the IPCC and the rest of the scientific community, graphs were often used and proclaimed to show the pure, unmanipulated data.

In the paper, I have discussed the notion of mechanical objectivity and the notion of trust in numbers (Porter 2020). During the 20th century, quantification was central both to science and to non-partisan, democratic decision makers. State

bureaucrats could make decisions based on transparent data, rather than needing to rely on intimate, personalised, and opaque knowledge. But the trust in numbers, if taken to its extreme, can also imply a radical distrust of institutions or experts. By disregarding the experts as interpreters, you can claim to examine the numbers yourself to reveal the objective truth. The graphs in SwebbTV were used in this way, the invited guests claimed to have checked the unaltered data themselves, rather than believing the analyses of the IPCC. In this way, SwebbTV helped to create an ideologically appealing counter-knowledge to the scientific consensus, which was spread to the rest of the far-right media ecosystem.

Noticeable in the analysis of SwebbTV was that almost the only visible settings present were the studio and the graphs, and occasionally clips from other news media. Visual analysis of far-right communication internationally has often highlighted images of the rural and pristine landscapes, connected to ideas of localism or eco-fascism (see e.g. Burnett 2023; Campion and Phillips 2023), or the use of humour, irony or memes (e.g. Askanius 2021; Askanius et al. 2024), but both of these were absent from SwebbTV's reporting on climate. Instead, the opposition to climate change policies was anchored in an appeal for fossil fuelled industrial welfare, and it was articulated in a dry supposedly scientific way to make it trustworthy.

- IV. Painter, James, Joshua Ettinger, David Holmes, Loredana Loy, Janaina Pinto, Lucy Richardson, Laura Thomas-Walters, Kjell Vowles, and Rachel Wetts. 2023. 'Climate Delay Discourses Present in Global Mainstream Television Coverage of the IPCC's 2021 Report'. *Communications Earth & Environment* 4 (1): 118. doi:10.1038/s43247-023-00760-2.⁵⁸

The article analyses how television covered the first part of the IPCC's latest assessment report (usually referred to as the IPCC AR6 WG1: The Physical Science Basis) in five countries across channels either classified as mainstream or right-wing. What our analysis shows is how response sceptic discourses (or discourses of implicatory denial, to use Cohen's schema) were prevalent across both mainstream and right-wing television channels, whereas evidence sceptic discourses (cf. Cohen's literal denial) were mainly prevalent in right-wing channels. In the Swedish sample, the contestation regarding the IPCC-report which existed in mainstream channels, was mainly arguing that climate policies were not strong enough or that the IPCC-scenarios were too reliant on negative

⁵⁸ Supplementary material included.

emissions, and it was supported by more recent scientific reports than those available to the IPCC. This was a sharp difference compared to the contestation in SwebbTV, where both evidence and response sceptic arguments were used to dismiss any climate action. This finding points to the increased conflict around climate change in Sweden, and the differences between legacy media and the far-right media ecosystem.

As the only member of the research team based in Sweden, I was responsible for collecting the Swedish sample and doing the Swedish coding, I also contributed to the conceptualisation of the article, as well as the first draft and subsequent revisions.

12. Ethics and research practices

Individual integrity

The articles are concerned with climate change discussions in far-right alternative media during the years 2018-2019 (paper I-III), and in 2021 (paper IV, here my co-authors and I also analyse mainstream television coverage of the report). The main ethical considerations in this research consist of handling political information. In doing the analysis in papers I-IV, my data consists of published news articles, columns, and videos on the above-mentioned sites, and therefore can include the writers' and publishers' opinions about the science of climate change. As climate change science has become a contested political issue, mainly due to the efforts of the climate change reactionary movement, this could arguably be considered sensitive political information. However, these writers and publishers are public figures trying to influence the debate, meaning that my analysis poses no or minimal intrusion to their personal integrity. As professional opinion makers, they can expect their opinions to be discussed. The same goes for the politicians and voices of the climate change reactionary movement mentioned in the kappa, who have all tried to publicly influence the climate debate.

For a side project, my data consists of both articles in legacy media and Twitter-posts.⁵⁹ Twitter is a public forum and its users agree to Twitter's terms of service, which allows the company to share data with researchers.⁶⁰ However, even if tweets are public, not all Twitter-users can be judged to be public figures or opinionmakers in the same vein as people working in media, hence their right to privacy and anonymity needs careful consideration (Williams, Burnap, and Sloan 2017). Indeed, not all Twitter-users are trying to influence public opinion, and some might not think about the fact that their tweets are public, instead using it to communicate with a selected following. Therefore, I did seek, and gain, ethical approval for the Twitter-study.⁶¹

⁵⁹ This study was originally supposed to be part of my thesis, but it will now be concluded at a later stage.

⁶⁰ Twitter has since the data for this project was collected in November 2022 been rebranded as X, but for the sake of clarity and considering the scraping was done in accordance with Twitter's policies at the time, the name Twitter will be used in this thesis. I received the data through Twitter's API, which facilitated automated tweet-collecting and which researchers could apply to get access to.

⁶¹ Etikprövningsmyndigheten (Swedish Ethical Review Authority), dnr 2022-02722-01

The point that researchers need to be thoughtful about how to label and think about social media is made clear by Anette Markham (2018, 3), who writes that “Defining Twitter as an information stream or a blog as a published text invokes a different set of principles than if they are described as an extension of the person, or a diary posted in a place of perceived privacy.” The fact that Twitter-users have agreed to Twitter’s terms of services, should not be considered as a *carte blanche* for researchers to do what they want with Twitter-data. As has been pointed out elsewhere, stringent requirements on always signing consent forms, might limit the value of such forms (Coomber 2002). This has to a certain extent become the case with cookie-allowances on websites, where users often click “OK” to the default options, without reading the fine print about what they are consenting to (Utz et al. 2019). It is reasonable to assume that the same applies to Twitter, that many users have agreed to the company’s terms of service without reading them.

When it comes to privacy, ethical research practices can often go further than the law requires, and it is important to consider the location or forum of the potential privacy infringement (European Commission. Directorate-General for Research 2010, 75–94). There is a difference between alternative media sites and social media such as Twitter. Anyone writing in the former is purposely making their views public and will expect these views to be both challenged and spread, but the latter could be argued to be a semi-public arena. The possibility to block followers allow Twitter-users some means to govern who sees their tweets, and it is not certain that everyone posting on the forum would welcome their tweets to be picked up and spread in other publications such as, for example, research articles. Therefore, to protect the anonymity of Twitter-users and to minimise the privacy intrusion, I and my research colleagues have taken several measures that are stated in the project’s data handling plan.⁶²

A reflection on staying on the ground

We live in uncomfortable times.⁶³ 2023 was the warmest year on record, and during the autumn that year the 2-degree threshold for global average temperatures above pre-industrial levels was transgressed for the first time. It was only for a day, but in the coming years and decades this will happen more often: seas will continue to rise, ice sheets continue to melt, heat waves, droughts and

⁶² Contact author for details of the data handling plan for the Twitter-project.

⁶³ I am gratefully inspired by Gavin McCrory, and his thesis *The unseen in between* (2022) to share these reflections about lived experiences in my thesis. I believe it is essential that we talk about the uncomfortable stuff when we talk about how to be decent human beings in the current crisis.

downpours will, on the local levels, become more common and more intense. Some climate scientists claim that the incremental emission reductions that have been carried out in many industrialised countries are cause for optimism, and often technological innovation is highlighted as the key to change energy system. Considering the rapidly declining carbon budgets, the fact that holding warming to 1.5 degrees without overshooting has become close to impossible, and that equity on the global level is still a precarious issue, I argue that the picture is not very optimistic. This requires hard questions about how we as individuals, and as a society, are doing things. While it is true that energy systems need to change, this will not happen if there is no public support for it, and to create support for political change, it is paramount that we have leadership to inspire change. This is where the role of academia comes in, especially in connection to flying. Aviation is responsible for two per cent of global emissions (not counting the high-level effect), and it is a highly unequal practice. Before the pandemic, only eleven per cent of the world's population travelled by air, and no more than four per cent travelled on international flights. The most frequent fliers, at the most one per cent of the world's population, were responsible for half of the passenger related emissions (Gössling and Humpe 2020). Within this group, you will find many working in academia. Inspired by climate scientists such as Kevin Anderson (e.g. 2017), I therefore, even if it is uncomfortable, think we need to add credibility to our research by giving up – or at least minimizing – flying. The reason is not, of course, that our individual emission reductions will save the world, but that it could, and should be, a political statement hopefully inspiring grander reform. It might be comforting to remember that even for the fraction of the world's population who regularly steps onto an aeroplane, the period of frequent flying is a recent phenomenon.

In 1978, four years before I was born, my parents moved to Gothenburg. My mum had grown up on a smallholding outside Timrå in the boreal forest, while my dad had moved to Sweden from Nottingham to teach English in the early 70s. For several years they lived in Umeå, a coastal university town in northern Sweden. The reason they moved to Gothenburg was twofold, partly because my dad did not enjoy the snowy winters, but also because the England-ferry moored and departed from its port. In the age before cheap aviation, a move to Gothenburg became a move closer to home for my dad. Essentially, my parents settled on living in a city between Nottingham and Timrå; approximately a 27-hour boat and car ride to the former, and a 10-hour train or car ride to the latter. When growing up, we used to travel as a family to the UK every two or three years, and each time we stayed away for perhaps three weeks. The same year as I left high school, in 2001, Ryanair started its low-fares flights from Gothenburg. With two of my

brothers living in the UK at times, it became convenient to fly for longer weekends or weeklong trips to the UK. As a young adult I also wanted to experience the world, and get as far away from Gothenburg as possible, which led me to spend a year at university in New Zealand, before travelling and later working for an NGO in India and doing a volunteering-holiday maintaining trails in the USA. A later exchange visit to the UK and a long-distance relationship led to further air travels. It was a period when I was also trying to figure out what to do in my adult life, and I shared the same dream as many young backpackers, to be able to make a living out of travelling and writing. And the expansion of aviation had changed my horizons, with the Himalayas and the Grand Canyon a day's flight away, I forgot the forests and mountains closer to home.

The difference between my childhood experiences and my early adulthood in relation to aviation is mirrored in national aviation behaviour. The amount of international return flights per person, per year in Sweden doubled from 0.5 in 1990 to roughly 1 in 2017 (Kamb et al. 2016). Also, anyone who flew more than once a year, as I did for a decade, will quickly realise that the average is not the median. A large share of the Swedish population do not fly at all. In total, I made roughly ten return flights to European destinations, two return flights to India, and one each to New Zealand and the USA during the years 2001-2012, reaching about 14 tonnes of CO²-equivalents, or 1.3 tonnes per year.⁶⁴ I was working as a journalist at the time, and in 2012 became the editor of a climate magazine called *Effekt*, which was covering climate change and the transitions from social and political perspectives. I became convinced that I was using way more than my reasonable share of the carbon budget and squeezing the carbon space available for coming generations, and people in poorer parts of the world. The yearly emissions from my flying were roughly equal to what we in 2050 can emit in total annually per person to hold warming to 1.5 degrees (if we ignore the aspect of responsibility for historical emissions, in that case the Swedish per capita emissions need to be lower). Thus, I took the decision to stay on the ground.

The decision changed my career as a journalist. I could not report on stories across the world, but it made me discover places in Sweden that were seldom covered in the media. Moving into academia, the choice of staying on the ground meant participating in fewer physical conferences and workshops. I carefully selected one or two per year in places where it is possible to travel by train or

⁶⁴ As calculated through klimatsmartsemester.se. There is scientific uncertainty around the non-CO²-effects related to high altitude flying, and some calculations would assign higher emission estimates to my flights.

ferry. Limiting the amount of conferences, makes it possible to combine time-consuming travelling with having small children at home, without leaving an unequal burden on my partner. I am grateful to my supervisors, one who himself is staying on the ground, for their support in this decision. Nevertheless, I have noticed the many incentives within academia that promote an unsustainable, highly mobile, frequent flyer lifestyle. This is connected to research visits, workshops, and conferences, as well as employment practice, where it is often encouraged that academics should see the world as their arena. And while I have, myself, stayed on the ground, I realise that I might be considered a hypocrite when welcoming flying guests to Sweden. During my doctoral studies, I have been part of the organising team of two larger conferences on the Political Ecologies of the Far Right, and to which we have invited keynotes across the Atlantic. Several insightful scholars have come to our research group and division; visits and knowledge sharing that I have greatly appreciated. Thankfully, and partly due to the covid-pandemic, I have managed to be part of international networks and I have collaborated on paper IV with researchers in the UK, USA, Australia and Brazil. I firmly believe that it is possible to create a more sustainable academic community, while maintaining knowledge-sharing and international collaborations, but this requires us as researchers to have some uncomfortable conversations. To a small degree, my experience is that these conversations are starting to take place, and Chalmers and several other universities in Sweden have taken steps to reduce their carbon footprint from aviation.

The justification for my research is that it might help the transition to a low carbon society, by understanding and explaining some of the tactics and interests that are trying to block action on climate change and spread disinformation. This is important because rising temperatures are already affecting life on the planet, and the most vulnerable communities will face the worst consequences. Carbon inequality is one of the injustices connected to climate change, where the world's poor, who have the lowest per capita emissions both now and historically, will suffer the most, while the richest communities, who are responsible for most of the emissions, have the best resources to adapt to a changing climate (Chancel and Piketty 2015). As a researcher in the Global North researching opposition to climate mitigating policies, this implies an extra responsibility. If I were to fly to conferences across the world to speak about my research, I would vastly increase my carbon footprint, which already is large through living in a developed and rich country like Sweden and earning an academic wage. I would thereby be perpetuating climate change and carbon inequality to further my academic career. At the same time, I would also undermine the justification for my own research. If

my research is important because it might hasten the transition, it would be counterproductive to continue such a carbon-intensive practice. One of the discourses that I have found in my research (paper I and II), concerns hypocrisy, where far-right actors accuse political leaders of pushing a climate agenda on the people, while at the same time continuing their own luxurious and global lifestyle. If I too would be frequently flying to academic conferences, I would lend justification to that argument. In contrast, if academics show leadership by advancing the changes that are needed to break our fossil fuel dependency, this could inspire others to follow. Indeed, recent research has shown that there is an increased willingness among individuals to follow political leaders who themselves are changing their lifestyle. If leaders can be seen to be adopting low-carbon practices and taking their message about climate change seriously, then credibility increases (Westlake 2023).

13. Discussion

Taken together, the four empirical case studies show a pattern of far-right alternative media holding up the virtues of a society remarkably similar to what Ulrich Beck described as first modernity. In this discussion, I will elaborate on this conceptualisation, and argue that the Swedish far-right is longing for national-industrial modernity. I will also expand on the effects of nationalistic thinking when it comes to climate change.

Revisiting reflexive modernity

Early scholarly work on orchestrated climate denial often described it as an anti-reflexivity movement (e.g. McCright and Dunlap 2010; N. Young and Coutinho 2013; McCright 2016). Hence, it was argued to be a reaction to the reflexive shift in modernity, which had been suggested by, perhaps foremost, Ulrich Beck. I will come back to the idea of *anti-reflexivity*, but to explain it I need to revisit the proposed *reflexivity* being opposed. Ulrich Beck presented his theory around first modernity and reflexive modernisation in his classic book *Risk Society* (first published in 1986, in English 1992). He, together with scholars such as Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, then developed the theory in several volumes; Beck's last contribution being the posthumously published *The Metamorphosis of the World* (2016). The reason to revisit Beck's work is because the industrial modern nation-state that he describes as first modernity is the gender-based, ethnically homogenous, and environmentally ignorant society that is the focus of Swedish far-right nostalgia.

First modernity was the societies of the industrialised nation-states, especially the capitalist societies of Western Europe and North America. As a nationalist political project, it promised increased welfare and material wealth to its citizens. The nation-state was in first modernity “the dominant ‘container’ model of society, which (often tacitly, and the more tenaciously for that) identifies society with the nation-state, presumes a large number of interlocking social institutions. Among them are: a reliable welfare state; mass parties anchored in class culture; and a stable nuclear family consisting of a single breadwinner, his housewife and their children. These institutions are supported by, and in turn support, a web of economic security woven out of industrial regulation, full employment and life-long careers” (Beck, Bonss, and Lau 2003, 1). Due to processes that Beck considered to be inherent in modernity itself, however, the society was being destabilised and transformed to something called second, or reflexive modernity. The success of first modernity in industrialised nations after the Second World War, led, according to Beck, to both positive and negative side-effects

undermining its stability. This would create a second modernity, where these side-effects were considered and reflexively handled. The positive effects would be institutionalised, and the negative effects lessened.

Mass-education, individualisation and the increased need for industrial labour had broken up the gendered divisions of the male breadwinner and the female carer. In early industrialised society, the reproduction of labour became part of the unpaid family sphere. But increased education and the expansionist welfare state led to more women claiming their rights and demanding access to paid labour markets and public life. In this view, feminist struggle both came out of, and undermined, the success of first modernity. The regulated labour market of first modernity was also undermined by corporate, capitalist rationality and globalisation. Industrial society had for the most part of the 20th century promised lifelong careers and stable employment to the breadwinning men, which had also helped create class-based politics and mass-unionised labour.⁶⁵ But according to Beck, the outsourcing and restructuring that came with global markets created unemployment and the need for requalification.

Another aspect of Beck's first modernity was that it was based on the view of linear science, and the division between politics and technology. Technological progress was equated with social progress, and engineers and scientists claimed to be rational in their understanding of the world and in the production of technology; scientific expertise would lead to innovation and technological breakthroughs which would improve society. The claim to rationality became an argument for separating science and technology from politics; the latter was to deal with conflicts regarding values and ideology, and negotiating between the interests of different groups, whereas the former could continue its job to improve society for all. Technological advances, however, created transboundary environmental risks that became a threat to the whole system. Nuclear fallout, acid rain, chemical pollution were side effects of industrialisation, they were negatives that had not been taken into account in the engineering. Even though the rational scientist often claimed to be able to control them and designate safe limits, the perceived risks among the rest of society did not cease. Published just after the Bhopal and Chernobyl disasters, and at a time when the hole in the ozone-layer had become well known, Beck argued in *Risk Society* that we now know that we cannot know everything, which also means that we know that adverse side-effects will happen. "In point of fact, the *actual* consequences remain

⁶⁵ However, Mitchell (2013) argues that the power of mass-politics to a degree was diminished with the expansion of oil instead of coal.

more incalculable than ever. At the same time, however, secondary effects are robbed of their latency and thus become assessable in the following threefold sense. Knowledge of them is (in principle) available; nor is it possible any longer to make the classical excuses of uncontrollability, and to that extent one is under pressure to make a move because of the knowledge of *possible* effects.” (Beck 1992, 171, emphasis in original). The perceived engineering rationality could never stop these accidents from happening.⁶⁶

The same can be said of climate change, it is the ultimate negative side-effect of fossil fuelled industrialisation. With climate change being a problem of cumulative carbon emissions, and burned carbon from fossil fuels contributing to increased atmospheric CO²-levels for centuries and millennia, we are still feeling the heat from the coal fired factories of the 19th century. Even though Svante Arrhenius in 1896 discussed what he thought would be the perceived positives of higher temperatures, there was no engineering or scientific rationality that could have foreseen how the problem would develop a century later.⁶⁷ Beck argued that the most important, and perhaps dire, consequence of the societal risks becoming more profound than the gains created by industrial society, was that the “*sciences’ monopoly on rationality is broken*” (Beck 1992, 29 emphasis in original). This did not mean that science had become irrelevant. Society certainly needed science to detect and become aware of a problem such as the hole in the ozone layer, but it meant that science also needed a social rationality to judge the meaning and consequence of such risks.

Beck emphasised that technical and social decisions that were made outside of elected parliaments, were a threat that was amplified because first modernity had lost its utopian pull. With mass-education, expansionist welfare systems, and raised living standards (to a majority of the population), it had achieved what it had promised. At the same time, the side effects of continued industrial production became more apparent, creating a situation where the undemocratic technocracy imbedded in the industrialised nation-state was being questioned. The technological and economic realms had been claimed to be unpolitical, and to a large part, been placed outside democratic control, as they would guarantee progress. If this progress no longer could be delivered without overshadowing

⁶⁶ The precautionary principle, which gained salience in the 1970s and which “asks us to pause and to review before leaping headlong into innovations that might prove disastrous” (Read and O’Riordan 2017, 4), can be regarded as a type of reflexive governance.

⁶⁷ That is not to say, of course, that climate change denial is a problem of knowledge. As discussed above, fossil fuel companies have been aware of the knowledge, but consciously hidden or downplayed it, since the 1960s.

side effects and long-term societal and individual risks, the elected politicians would be left to handle the adverse consequences of decisions made outside of their control. It would be the boardrooms and engineering divisions of global companies that would have the power to create change through innovations and decisions about production, but it would be democratic parliaments that would need to negotiate and try to regulate the risks caused. This would become a legitimisation crisis for the system.

An inherent part of Beck's first modernity was the nation-state itself. As a container model, the nation-state was – and still is – both ubiquitous and invisible. Beck saw the nation-state of first modernity being undermined in two different ways. The transboundary environmental risks needed supranational governance. Nuclear fallout, chemical pollution and global climate change knew no national borders and new organisational forms would be required to come to terms with them.⁶⁸ The effects of Chernobyl were felt in Scandinavia, carbon from USA cars raised the temperatures in Bangladesh. Similarly, economic globalisation had created financial risks that would ripple across borders. The collapse of the Lehman Brothers in New York in 2008 is an example, when bankruptcy echoed throughout the financial system leading to bank bailouts and austerity politics in Europe. Beck also discussed the threat and fear of terrorism, which led to surveillance politics that dismantled Western liberal institutions. These global risks were, according to Beck, impossible to control or govern within the nation-state boundaries, and therefore undermined the existence of the nation-state itself. “Climate change is the embodiment of the mistakes of a whole epoch of ongoing industrialization, and climate risks pursue their acknowledgement and correction with all the violence of the possibility of annihilation. They are a kind of collective return of the repressed, wherein the self-assurance of industrial capitalism, organized in the form of nation-state politics, is confronted with its own errors in the form of an objectified threat to its own existence” (Beck 2016, 36).

In his theory of first modernity, Beck strung several aspects of industrial society together into an explanatory model of the way Western, fossil fuelled capitalist states worked throughout the most part of the 20th century. Yet, he missed important discussions in how this system was always based on the exploitation of natural resources and otherised people, and failed to recognise that risks would not be distributed equally (Marshall 1999; Curran 2018). The consequences of

⁶⁸ See Buns (2023) for a discussion regarding the 1974 Nordic Environmental Protection Convention and how it was to serve as role model for international cooperation.

climate change will be felt according to class, race, and gender, and it is the most vulnerable who will suffer the most. Bonneuil et al. (2021, chap. 8) show how discussions about environmental concern and negative side effects of industrial modernity had been raised throughout the 19th century, but that these had been purposefully ignored. It was not a sudden reflexive awakening towards the end of the 20th century.

Beck acknowledged the role of fossil fuels and energy in the industrialised system, and also discussed how “marginalized regions are already confronted with *side effects* of global industrialization while still awaiting the arrival of modernization” (Beck 2009, 186). However, he paid little attention to how these marginalised regions were essential for the modernisation of the core to start with, and that the unequal exchange of land and labour between the industrialised north and the global south enabled the industrialisation of the former. As well as dominating nature and women, first modernity built its success on the domination of otherised people deemed not to be part of the nation. These others could either be located inside the boundaries of the nation-state, such as the case with indigenous populations, or outside the borders, such as the case with overseas colonised populations. These failings of Beck’s model, are, paradoxically, important in understanding the national-industrial nostalgia of the Swedish far right today.

The ignorance of national-industrial modernity

Ulrich Beck argued that the first modernity would be undermined by its inherent contradictions. A new type of modernity would be needed to handle these contradictions, which include: environmental pollution; the feminist, indigenous, and anti-racist movements’ righteous claim for equality; the crisis for the idea of continuous progress supported by technological innovation and economic growth; and the ontological crises for scientific rationality. This is what Beck named reflexive modernity or second modernity. While claiming that we still could only see the contours of this new society, the argument was that within second modernity there would be reflective consideration of these adverse side-effects, and the inherent risks created by industrialisation would be considered and thoughtfully acted upon.

Beck was in essence optimistic: the crises for first modernity would lead to an even more rational rationality, which would not only be rational in terms of measurements and calculation, but also considering emotions, risks, and justice. This would also be a cosmological society, beyond the nation-state which had been proven to be inadequate for dealing with the challenges posed by globalised

capitalism and transboundary pollution. In *The Metamorphosis of the World* he flips the climate crisis on its head and asks: “What is climate change good for (if we survive)? The surprising momentum of metamorphosis is that, if you firmly believe that climate change is a fundamental threat to all of humankind and nature, it might bring a cosmopolitan turn into our contemporary life and the world might be changed for the better. This is what I call *emancipatory catastrophism*” (Beck 2016, 35).⁶⁹

This positive notion has rightly been critiqued on several grounds. The neoliberal economic turn of the Reagan and Thatcher era in the 1980s, and which continued after the end of the cold war, increased the divide between economics and politics, making a critique of economic growth even more difficult. Antonio and Brulle (2011) argued that the political changes and globalisation that happened after the cold war were to a larger extent a conjunctural shift in capitalism rather than a meta-shift to a new social order. For example, union busting and financial bailouts after the 2008 financial crisis showed that it was neoliberalism, and not a reflexive version of it, that guided policies around the globe. Writing in 2011, two years before the IPCC-meeting and the release of the fifth assessment report in Stockholm, Antonio and Brulle lamented the absence of reflexivity. They called for social movement mobilisation to create just and sustainable alternatives to economic growth and capitalism. “Given the estimates of ecological risk posed in the IPCC’s AR4, surely to be heightened considerably in AR5, the lack of reflexivity and plain imprudence among policy elites is considerable. How long can unplanned, unregulated, exponential growth hold sway in a globalised capitalist world, which has massively accelerated resource consumption and waste production, and where increased [greenhouse gas] emissions and the intensity of other ecological problems grow at such speed that irreversible ecological damages would outpace even a reflexive democracy?” (Antonio and Brulle 2011, 200). Young and Coutinho argued in a similar vein in their analysis of the Harper and Howard governments in Canada and Australia, respectively. The actions and rhetoric of the two governments in defending fossil fuels disproved the idealistic belief that climate change will provide the world with a “golden opportunity to rethink how we, as a global society, would like to live” (N. Young and Coutinho 2013, 90). These critiques I believe, are enough to conclude that there never was an inevitable shift built into modernity itself. The forces of fossil fuelled capitalism defending the status quo were always too strong to easily relinquish

⁶⁹ Emancipatory catastrophism can be regarded as the antithesis to Naomi Klein’s (2008) “Shock Doctrine”. While beyond the scope of this thesis, the latter might well be used in a productive critique of the former.

power. This makes the notion of *first* modernity difficult, if it is not certain that it will be followed by a *second*. Instead, I use the term national-industrial modernity.

Though the nation-states have continued to be addicted to growth, fossil capitalism, and resource extractivism, some of the structures described by Beck have been challenged. Feminist, indigenous, and anti-racist struggles have decreased inequality and created an awareness of how Western welfare states have been based on the suppression of otherised people. Environmental campaigns have lifted pollution and climate change up the political agenda. In Sweden, there was a cross-party consensus for nearly three decades from the late 1980s that climate was important, even if emissions never decreased at the required rate (Vowles, Ekberg, and Hultman 2024). There was also a tacit agreement that all kinds of cultural or ethnic racism were bad, while chauvinism was frowned upon. What Dunlap and McCright argued was that these challenges to the existing orders would create a reactionary response. The climate change reactionary movement was in this light a force of anti-reflexivity, a push-back against the supposed reflexive modernity, and a staunch defence of the values that held up national-industrial modernity. Anshelm and Hultman (2014a, 176) also discussed the intensifying debate over climate change at the end of the 00s in relation to Beck, arguing that when awareness of rising carbon emissions destabilised society, “a fundamental political disagreement was articulated in the environment and climate debate.” Also, both industrial/breadwinner masculinities and petro-masculinity, have been argued to be reactionary to both feminism and ecomodern masculinity (Hultman 2013; Daggett 2018). Indeed, movements in the manosphere have been described to “not seldomly be looking back to a time ‘before’ feminism, when men were men, didn’t need to be ashamed and could demand their right” (Gottzén 2022, 87). When it comes to science, Martinsson and Mulinari (2023) have described how the far-right describes gender scholars as a threat to democracy lacking objectivity and scientific rigour. Beck himself, writing during the 2010s and seeing the return of nationalist parties in Europe, acknowledged that a backlash was likely; that what he called an *anti-cosmopolitan movement* could form which would resist the emancipatory changes taking place. These would be “anti-modern ideologies that insist on the alleged naturalness of nation, ethnicity, culture, gender and religion” (Beck 2016, 66). With anti-modern, Beck, however, did not mean that these movements resisted all forms of modernity, but that they were resisting the move to a reflexive modernity.

To reach a better understanding of the reason for this combined reactionary movement, where nationalism goes hand in hand with anti-feminism and anti-

environmentalism, we can go back to the failings of Beck's model of first modernity. The argument against the inherent contradictions of the success of first modernity, is that these contradictions were not inherent to the *success* of first modernity, but inherent to its *inception*. The system was built on fossil capitalism, the domination of nature and women, patriarchal worldviews, ethnic and racist nationalism, and the unequal exchange between core regions and the periphery. These systems of extraction and domination engendered national-industrial modernity and have expanded welfare and mass-education to the people seen to be belonging to the nation. To borrow Stanly Cohen's description of late capitalism, it is "by definition a system that denies its immorality" (S. Cohen 2001, 293).

It is this immorality that has been exposed and acknowledged by political struggle, environmental science, and critical social research. This has, to a degree, shifted the system, and as a reaction, the nostalgic longing to the ignorance of national-industrial modernity has come to the fore. This is a longing to the industrial nation-state as it was before the concept of the Anthropocene. It was a time when complete domination over nature at the local or national level in general was deemed possible, but when it would have been considered hybris to think that the nation was contributing to changes on scales of geological time and planetary space. Nationalism in Europe in the late 19th century could be both a reaction against the force of modernity, a claim to the naturalness of the homeland as in the case of Germany, and an aspiration to national-industrial modernity as in Sweden. But in both cases, nationalism was something to hold onto in a time of turmoil. This is what we see today as well, when climate change and the Anthropocene is changing how we view the world. As the anthropologist Thomas Hyland Eriksen (2022, 177) has argued: "In precisely the same period that economies have become outsourced, disembedded and globalized, certain forms of nationalism have been strengthened, but unlike the situation in the nineteenth century, it is no longer the ideology of modernity and the future, but of modernity and the past, a nostalgic clutching at straws amid accelerated, uncertain and frightening change".

The nostalgia of national-industrial modernity in Swedish far-right media

What we see in the discourses of the Swedish far-right media ecosystem is that they are trying to defend the immoralities and ignorance of national-industrial modernity, including domination over nature, patriarchal ideals of the male breadwinner, an extreme trust in numbers and scientific rationality, a belief in continued economic growth and technological improvement for the progress of

the industry, and an acceptance and (sometimes glorification) that this nation-state is dependent on the extraction of labour and land from otherised people. The far-right reactionary movement is not only opposed to the climate justice movement, but also feminist, environmental, anti-racist, and indigenous movements, as well as cosmopolitanism and global capital, all of which are perceived to be a threat to Swedish national-industrial modernity.

A clear example of this is the anti-feminist critique against Greta Thunberg seen in paper II. In the discourses of far-right media, she is described as irrational and emotional, and this is pitted against rational masculinity. This was clearly seen when Samnytt commented on the self-proclaimed feminist foreign politics of the then Social Democratic government: “That the Swedish government calls itself feministic is just a small step in a process from rational patriarchy to emotional feminism” (Tullberg 2019). The argument is that this is a “destructive cultural revolution” from modernism to postmodernism happening all over society. Apart from the move to emotional feminism, it is also about an “infantilisation” of the debate, according to Samnytt, where society is listening to children such as Greta Thunberg rather than authorities. Claims for social justice will, accordingly, be the end to meritocracy: “‘Everyone’s equal worth’ becomes a dogma which is supposed to see everyone as equally good and therefore they should have the same chance. The handicapped [sic] has a “right” to assistance and a life as if he didn’t have his handicap. Meritocracy unearths the talented and diligent which is seen as unjust against the untalented and lazy. Justice thus becomes more and more quota-fulfilment.” This argument ignores that what has been called meritocracy in national-industrial modernity has always favoured certain parts of the population, mainly white, male, ethnic nationals; and disfavoured others, such as women, indigenous communities, immigrants, and ethnic minorities.

Kari Marie Norgaard (2019) has conceptualised the spectrum of denial, which Laura Pulido (2024) in a keynote-lecture specified as moving from ignorance to refusal. Taking Cara Dagget’s (2018) idea of refusal as being active and angry, and demanding struggle, I argue that the Swedish far-right is using refusal to try to move the discourse and society back to a state of national-industrial ignorance.

Celebrating industrial/breadwinner masculinities

Another example of how the gendered division of labour and rationality is coupled in national-industrial modernity can be seen in the argumentation regarding nuclear energy in Nyheter idag, also discussed in paper II. Here it is claimed that “Sweden as a nation is being dismantled” because naïve political leaders are not listening to “natural authorities, not seldom so called ‘white

middle-aged CIS-men’’. Nyheter idag’s founder Chang Frick describes his experiences working both with scrap dealing and dismantling power lines.

“At the same time, I met many clever blokes. These were company owners who had come up with some idea which in turn became a whole industry. It was also blokes with a background in publicly owned utilities who could hold a two-hour lecture on how the Swedish grid is built with domestic solutions that later have been exported.

Similarly, I met blokes who worked on the railways. And it was just the same there, loads of inventions have been developed in Sweden, ideas which not seldomly have been exported and created new businesses.

These blokes don’t need any PR-consultations or “buzzwords”. They do not need any advanced promotional material or beautiful illustrations on glittery paper. They don’t need to dress anything in fluffy words, the opposite – they know exactly what they are doing.

Something was special about these blokes. They were proud of what they had done, and they were a natural part of a bigger machinery that was bound to work. They never reasoned in terms of how you in the shortest time can earn a penny, instead there was long-term thinking and a responsibility for the future. Many times, these blokes got engaged in issues that lay way beyond their areas of responsibility.

...

Another area where Sweden, undoubtedly, has contributed to great innovations is vehicles and motors. For a long time both Saab and Volvo built hundreds of thousands of cars in Sweden. It was seen as slightly unbelievable that a small country like Sweden could have not just one, but two, domestic car brands. And the Volvo-corporate group – based in Gothenburg – is much bigger than that.

The Swedish engines, primarily diesel engines, are placed in excavators, wheel loaders and boats all over the world. This is also a direct consequence of those clever blokes having done the research and reasoning.”

This lengthier quote is worth consideration, as the sympathetic tone towards these proclaimed, but unrecognised heroes of Swedish nationalism can give us a clue to how the far-right is attracting support beyond the most ideologic circles. The author is here applauding national-industrial modernity, and the industrial/breadwinner masculinities that were prevalent in its success. The technological improvements created by these blokes would automatically lead to social progress, it would further the Swedish society. At the same time, it can be assumed that the railway workers mentioned were workers with lifelong careers working on the railway and who felt a belonging to a grander project, where industrial productivity would lead to improved welfare for everyone. The article also decries economic globalisation. Even if it praises Swedish exports, it is writing about a nationalistic past, where the industrial economy was supposed to serve the nation, and not globalised capital. It also clearly defends the patriarchal division of labour when it argues that part of the problem is that decisionmakers are listening to young women, such as Greta Thunberg, rather than the clever industrial blokes. Finally, it glorifies Swedish diesel engines, and thus, the continued burning of fossil fuels.

In the beginning of the article, one of the examples of how Sweden is being dismantled is through the closure of maternity wards. Any attempt to move away from an industrial society, is hence suggested to mean that health services must be limited. What this article does is that it describes the success of national-industrial modernity for the people belonging to the Swedish imagined community; the sense of comradeship on the railway line, the identity of being part of a grander, national project, the idea that technological innovation meant social improvement, and that economic growth would lead to the expanded welfare for members of the imagined community. What it hides, are the structures this system is built on. The blokes on the railway line would have needed women to take care of their families. The building of the railway depended on the extraction of iron ore, which in Sweden, apart from leaving environmental scars, had been connected to the damming of rivers and dislodgement of Samis (Össbo 2014). The diesel-engines obviously required the burning of fossil fuels, which was raising temperatures and sea-levels. So, while the picture painted by Nyheter idag might have nostalgic appeals to a time when men worked together and felt a sense of pride of working in national-industrial modernity, it needs to deny the immorality of the same system.

Denying complexity through the linear view of science

The far-right defence of national-industrial modernity is also seen in its appeal to data and figures when discussing the science of climate, as seen in paper III. Here,

SwebbTV is often claiming to go back to the data, to check the supposedly objective numbers to find out the universal truth. This is defending the idea of scientific rationality as something that will forever increase our knowledge and capabilities to dominate nature, an idea that Beck described as inherent to early modernity, but which has been undermined by both feminist ontological claims and complexity sciences. The former argue that while all knowledge claims must be critically examined, there is no one universal, single knowledge, and the latter has shown that in complex ecosystems and societies, we can never exactly calculate or predict risks. Scientific rationality is also tied to mechanical objectivity and the trust in numbers. Porter (2020) shows how quantification in science in the late 19th and early 20th century, was tied to the expansion and development of organisational capacities. Modern institutions were just as important as modern instruments to obtain comparable, and in that sense objective, data. Simultaneously, quantified measurements expanded in the bureaucracy of modern, democratic nation-states, where numbers could be seen to provide an objective, non-partisan assessment, compared to the personalised knowledge of experts. This has led to the success of numbers and quantified measuring all over industrialised society. But when this trust in numbers is taken to its extreme, even the knowledge which is needed for collecting, measuring, and interpreting the numbers in a coherent manner tends to be disregarded.⁷⁰ Instead, it is claimed that anyone can look at the data to see the objective truth.

Climate science is a case in point. Local temperature measurements have existed for centuries, but with more interconnected institutions sharing data it has become obvious that temperatures were measured in different ways. Hence, continuous improvements are made to compensate for disparities in temperature records. This is also seen in attempts to reconstruct past temperatures using, for example, tree rings. These measurements need expertise and organisational resources to be conducted in a way that makes the temperature series coherent and reliable. With the expansion of modelling technologies in the 1960s and 1970s, this has become even more essential. If large amounts of data are fed into the models, these can provide useful future scenarios. The models, however, are also complex, and expertise is needed to interpret the outcome. The trust in numbers in this case, must be accompanied with a trust in the institutions producing them. But what we see in SwebbTV, and many contrarian settings, is the idea that the numbers in

⁷⁰ Extreme trust and extreme distrust should be regarded as opposite ends of a spectrum, rather than a dichotomy. Karin Gustafsson (2013) shows how laypeople can be involved in activities of more moderate claims of trust and distrust regarding local biodiversity issues, and that these can be important activities in social knowledge production.

themselves are objective and present a true picture of the environment, and therefore do not need interpretation by, for example, the IPCC. Instead, SwebbTV often cherry-picked a graph of for instance sea-level rise in a specific location, and by claiming that it was examining the unaltered data, it would use this to make universalist claims about climate change.

The linear view of science was part of national-industrial modernity and is based on the idea that more basic science will lead to technological innovation and social improvement. It is also grounded in a pre-Anthropocene world, with a belief that it was possible to control nature on a local level, but that global systems were beyond human powers of influence and understanding. Thus, it was impossible for human actions to affect planetary environments such as the global climate. These were also too complex to understand, and any models attempting to do so were thus inherently flawed. This linear view of science is conspicuous in several of the discourses on SwebbTV and within the climate change reactionary movement.⁷¹

Another part of the far-right's defence of national-industrial modernity is in the critique of global capital, often in the form of anti-establishment conspiracy theories. In the discourses of the Swedish far-right media ecosystem, as described in papers I and II, there is an attempt to denounce climate change as a globalist agenda, run by political and financial elites. Especially focal in far-right conspiracies, sometimes with an antisemitic undertone, has been the World Economic Forum in Davos, as well as US-Hungarian businessman George Soros. What lies at heart in these discourses, is that the globalists are deemed to have portrayed, the true, national people. In particular, the antisemitic conspiracies become powerful, for the Jews are deemed to have never belonged to the nation in the first place.

The defence of national-industrial modernity is ultimately a defence of the privileges enshrined in the system. The gendered division of labour privileged men, who were the ones who was supposed to earn an income and provide for the family, and who were able to hold influential public positions, while it excluded women from public life. The container model of the nation-state privileged the national citizens, who were part of the promise of the expansionist welfare state, but it excluded populations not deemed to be part of the national community, such as indigenous populations and ethnic minorities. Fossil capitalism also privileged

⁷¹ It is, however, not expanded upon in the thesis' papers, as these were completed before I started using Beck to conceptualise the idea of the ignorance of national-industrial modernity.

the already wealthy through unequal ecological exchange, and the wealthy Global North could disproportionately extract natural resources and export pollution to peripheral regions of the world. It also privileged human life above non-human life, ascertaining the right of man to dominate nature.

Nationalism to sustain the unsustainable

Climate change is asking hard questions regarding national-industrial modernity. It is questioning the fossil fuel and extractivist logic that has built Global North societies, and it highlights global environmental injustices. The wealthy, who are mainly white and male, are emitting the most, and it is the poor, who have done the least to contribute to the crisis, who suffer the worst consequences. For the wealthier parts of the population, nationalism can be utilised to defend their privileges. To investigate how this is achieved, it is useful to turn to the conceptualisations of nationalism in the works of Benedict Anderson (2016).

A basic premise for nationalism, Anderson argued, was print capitalism. The printed word allowed new imagined communities sharing a common written language, which consolidated histories and territories. Apart from print capitalism as an essential condition, Anderson outlined three main ways in which nationalism took hold of people's imaginations: creole, populist, and official nationalism. Creole nationalism referred to how anti-metropolitan resistance in the Americas in the early 19th century was shaped in nationalist forms through the kinship created between creole pioneers travelling to colonial administrative centres. Populist nationalism referred to forms of nationalism in Europe in the mid- and late- 19th century. Here nationalism was centred around the dissemination of newspapers printed in the vernaculars, which created regions sharing a common language. Populist nationalism was built around these territories, and by arguing that everyone within a nationalistic community was equal, it became easier to argue against dynasty rule. Official nationalism, in turn, was a reactionary nationalism, created by the aristocracies as a response to the popular uprisings. Official nationalism was an attempt by dynasties to keep their privileges, by arguing that they and the people belonged to the same nation. Of these three, it is populist and official nationalism that is most relevant in understanding the appeal of nationalism today, especially within the far-right.

The present far-right is often populist. It argues that the true people, who is ethnically homogenous, has been betrayed by the politics of a globalist elite. As discussed above, the far-right is defending the values of national-industrial modernity, a society which privileged the people considered to be belonging to the nation. In the modern far-right populist version of nationalism, it is argued that

supranational organisations such as the EU, the UN, and global capital, are the dynasties. The elite has in this discourse reasserted the dynasty-rule of old, at the expense of the people of the nation.

In a carbon unequal world, nationalism can also help defend privileges in a similar way as official nationalism did, and this is not just done by the far-right. By arguing that the nation is the essential community, and aided by methodological nationalism that sees the nation as the basic point of analysis, structural hierarchies of gender, class, locality, and race are hidden. When emissions are calculated on the national level and divided per capita, it conceals the vast inequal distribution within nations, where the richest 10 per cent of the population stand for nearly half of the emissions (Chancel and Piketty 2015). We know that gender aspects affect environmental concern and practices, and income and class are connected to consumption patterns (K. M. Norgaard 2012). The environmental footprint within a country also varies according to locality. In Sweden, the consumption-based per capita emissions in the wealthy municipality of Danderyd are 8.2 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents. This is 23 per cent higher than the national average, and 33 per cent higher than the lowest, Burlöv, with per capita consumption emissions of 5.5 tonnes (K. Axelsson et al. 2022). Considering discussions about a rural-urban divide, it is worth noting that four of the five municipalities with the highest consumption-emissions are part of greater Stockholm. As Daniele Conversi (2020, 631) notes in regard to regional fossil fuel powers such as India, Russia and the USA: “it has been relatively easy to mobilise nationalism to conceal the ruling class’s incapacity to comprehensively address the threat of climate change.” I believe this is applicable for countries such as Sweden as well.

Using nationalism to hide unsustainable practices is also a concern in relation to carbon sinks. It is vital to develop land use practices that protect and expand carbon sinks while not contributing to biodiversity loss or other adverse environmental impacts, but such initiatives cannot be used to justify continued national fossil fuel emissions. In Poland for example, there was during the late 2010s an attempt from the government to use what it called Forest Carbon Farms in international negotiations to claim that the country’s coal industry was waste-free and that the continued emissions would be compensated by the forest sink (Maltby, Szulecki, and Szulecka 2024). As research concerning negative emissions make clear – whether they are nature- or technology-based – they cannot be used to replace urgent and radical emission reductions. The carbon budget is so small that negative emissions should only be seen as a potential helping hand in removing excess carbon from the atmosphere (K. Anderson and Peters 2016; Carton et al. 2020).

Official nationalism can also be used to defend global carbon inequalities and racial structures. Norgaard shows in her ethnography how Norwegians' appeal to the nation's impoverished past is used as an argument as to why they have rightfully earned today's wealth. By imagining themselves as part of an historically continuous Norwegian community, they can hide current environmental privileges. It is the temporal sense of the nation that binds the national community together over time. Earlier generations of Norwegians are often claimed to have built the nation in the same way as the dead white men seen in paper II are argued to have built Sweden. Their labour is used to justify the privilege of present day Norwegians to be "living in a 'core' or advanced capitalist nation, the privilege of being a producer of oil and natural gas, the benefits of which are garnered at home and the hazards of which are exported into the common airshed" (K. M. Norgaard 2011, 219).

In a similar way, media discourses in Finland show a pride in the country's forest industry, as both connected to the national landscape and being a key in the future transition. Both in Sweden and Finland, media discourses have helped create a nationalistic identity where being Swedish or Finnish is to be, on the individual level, conscious of the environment (Berglez, Höijer, and Olausson 2009; Ridanpää 2022). At the same time, this consciousness is often undermined in high-carbon practices that also ties into the national consciousness, such as Swedes flying to Thailand or other resorts on vacation. Here the implicatory denial of high carbon lifestyles kick in, when such practices are described as an anomaly separated from broader trends, or something that has been rightfully earned, or something that can be done, because everyone else in Sweden does it (Wolrath Söderberg and Wormbs 2022; Berglez and Olausson 2023). The nationalist discourse, helps to defend environmental privileges.

14. Contributions

In this final section of my kappa, I will first discuss my empirical contributions to the literature, before highlighting theoretical contributions to the research fields. I will end with a discussion on the potential societal benefits of my research and ways that we can move away from the climate denial of the far right.

Empirical contributions

The first two research questions stated at the beginning of this kappa were: 1) What climate change discourses occur on Swedish far-right digital media? and (2) How have they been shaped? These are mainly empirical and the answer to the first question is provided by the four articles. The climate change discourses on far-right digital media mix literal denial, interpretive denial, and implicative denial. Combined with anti-establishment and misogynist discourses, these discourses discredit climate science, Greta Thunberg, and politicians and actors who have argued for mitigating emissions in Sweden.

The answer to the second question is that the discourses have to a large degree been shaped through the propaganda feedback-loop in four of the five far-right alternative media outlets examined. SwebbTV often invited members from denialist organisations in Sweden to spread a variety of climate disinformation, which ranged from literal to implicative denial. The disinformation usually concerned the science, and not seldomly graphs were used to lend weight to the arguments. The arguments, and sometimes the graphs, had often been previously used by the USA climate change reactionary movement. SwebbTV was then often referred to by the other far-right news sites in the propaganda feedback-loop, namely Fria tider, Samnytt and Nya tider. These created a discourse where climate change was scare-quoted and thereby it was taken for granted to be an irrational and ridiculous concern. Nyheter idag did not spread literal denial, and was not part of the propaganda loop, but it still discredited Greta Thunberg and used implicative denial.

These two research questions provide the basis for the two empirical contributions of the thesis to the literature on climate change obstruction and far-right alternative media. Regarding climate change obstruction, the thesis provides an in-depth case study of how the climate change reactionary movement and the far-right in Sweden merged, and how this often was done as a reaction to the climate movement and heightened social awareness of climate change. In this kappa, I have tried to outline the long history of the climate change reactionary movement, the climate debate in Sweden, and the salience of climate change as an issue in the

years 2018-2019. What I argue is that the far right and the climate change reactionary movement met in their disregard of legacy media, which they regarded as a dishonest, corrupted, propaganda machine. Hence, they needed their own media eco-systems to bypass legacy media's gatekeepers, and the climate change reactionary movement could use the system that was being created and expanded by the far right.

The contribution to the literature on Swedish far-right alternative media is that the four papers are the first studies of how they report on climate change. Most studies of far-right media have either been quantitative in examining networks and reach on social media, or qualitative in examining anti-immigration discourses or journalistic practices. But with the continuing climate crises, and the significance of the far right and far-right media in Sweden, I believe this thesis provides a valuable contribution to expand the literature beyond the issue of anti-immigration.

Theoretical contributions

The answers to the third research question, "What do the discourses reveal about the ideological drivers behind far-right opposition to climate change?", composes two of the three theoretical contributions of the thesis, concerning anti-reflexivity and the connections between climate change and nationalism. These will be developed below, but first we need look at the third theoretical contribution, concerning the use of Stanley Cohen's schema of denial (2001). Especially, this thesis demonstrate the usefulness of considering denial beyond Cohen's three answers to the *what* of denial. While Cohen has often been used to highlight the distinction between literal, interpretative, and implicatory denial, it is seldom highlighted how he discusses aspects regarding how denial takes place and by whom it is done. In the thesis, I have shown how the digital far-right alternative media uses both literal and implicatory denialist arguments to become part of the orchestrated obstructionism of the climate change reactionary movement. By using the schema of Cohen, and by adding the vocabulary of orchestrated denial, obstructionism, and ignorance, we can keep analytical categories separated, and understand how various types of arguments can be utilised by different actors in context specific ways. For example, the anti-environmentalism of the USA republican movement, which Naomi Oreskes and Eric M. Conway (2011) argued was a defence of free market values and in opposition to Soviet-communism, is in the Swedish context used by the far-right to defend a specific idea of national-industrial modernity. In both cases, it is often literal and implicatory denial that has been used in orchestrated ways, but strategies have been contingent on variations in funding structures, media access, and political systems. In Sweden, it

has been necessary for the climate change reactionary movement to join hands with the far-right to create a new media ecosystem, as the gates to legacy media for the most part remained closed. This has mainly happened since the mid-2000s, when blogs and social media created an accessible infrastructure to create and spread new digital media. In the USA, which has a longer history of a polarised media system, conservative media outlets provided access to climate change contrarians at an earlier stage.

Using Cohen's scheme, it also becomes clear that the orchestrated denial in Sweden, is aiming towards manoeuvring Sweden into a bystander state of cultural ignorance. This takes us to the second theoretical contribution. I have revisited discussions around anti-reflexivity in the early work on the climate change reactionary movement. But while these discussions were mainly centred on environmental risks and views on science, I have returned to Ulrich Beck's (1992) theory of reflexivity and first modernity and argued that anti-reflexivity is not just about environmental risk and views on science, but about gender, labour roles, and nationalism as well. In Sweden we have seen the rise of a far-right *reactionary movement* that is longing back to the ignorance of national-industrial modernity of the record years of the 1950s and 1960s. This is the era described by Beck as first modernity, which was built around the nation-states, gendered divisions of labour, lifelong industrial careers, and a linear view on science. These years are regarded by the Swedish far right as the pinnacle of Swedish industrial society; the society is described as ethnically homogenous and void of serious conflict, a time before social movements started demanding rights for women and minority groups. It was a time before environmental movements started raising the alarm about the negative side effects of pollution and before the Social Democrats started talking more about international solidarity than the Swedish welfare state. In short, the nostalgia of the Swedish far right towards the ignorance of national-industrial modernity is a nostalgia of a perceived time-period when things were simpler for the white men who were the most powerful, both in the family and in the society, and never saw that power questioned.

The third theoretical contribution is to the recent, and still limited, research on nationalism in connection to climate change (e.g. Conversi 2020; Hausknost 2020; Conversi and Friis Hau 2021; Posocco and McNeill 2023; Kashwan, Liu, and Das 2023). Industrial modernity has been tightly coupled with the growth of the modern nation-state. In Sweden, nation-building in the 19th century was focused on the idea of an industrial state, it was technological progress and engineering ingenuity that would lead the country to a better future. But the idea of the nation, is of course also intimately connected to the idea of the people. It was the Swedes that were to benefit and be part of this promised future state,

whereas for example the Sami, many of whom were forced off their land and displaced in the building of hydropower, had their rights circumscribed rather than expanded. Their way of life was an obstacle to the modern, industrial nation-state. The idea of Sweden as a modern state, and the far-right nostalgia of national-industrial modernity, can also help explain the absence of ecofascist ideas and arguments on far-right alternative media. In the empirical material of the papers there is little romanticising of a pastoral, subsistence way of life in connection with the soil and local environment, instead the focus is on the industrial welfare of the nation.

Nationalism homogenises culture, language, and structures, but it is a homogenizing process that is only partial. There are still divisions and inequality within a nation-state, and we know that these matter when it comes to carbon emissions. We know that the wealthy contribute to more carbon than the poor, and that men on average have a higher carbon footprint than women. The connection between economic inequality and other hierarchical social structures such as class and ethnicity makes it likely that these also matter when it comes to carbon footprints. But these structures are all hidden when it is the national identity that becomes focal. When the Swedish far-right puts ethnicity as the central identity, it hides all these other structures, and thereby defends the environmental privileges of societies' higher strata.

Unlocking the transition

I started writing this thesis in 2019. Since then, the carbon rate in the atmosphere has increased by about 10 ppm, from an average of 411.43 in 2019 to 421.08 in 2023, according to measurements at the Hawaiian volcano Mauna Loa. At the same time, temperatures have kept increasing. 2023 was the warmest year on record. Spurred on by a global El Niño-event, the average global temperature was 1.48 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial average according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service. Globally, roughly 50 billion tonnes of carbon have been emitted to the atmosphere during these five years (Friedlingstein et al. 2023). At the current rate of emissions, the carbon budget for keeping a 50 per cent chance of staying below 1.5 degrees will run out in roughly seven years (Friedlingstein et al. 2023).

During this time, Sweden has contributed to roughly 54 million tonnes of carbon (Friedlingstein et al. 2022). With the Tidö-government taking office in the autumn of 2022, Swedish territorial emissions will increase. Considering that Sweden has, in some ways, been a forerunner – the country's per capita emissions are below several other high-income countries – it is deeply concerning that the present

government, under direct influence of the far-right Sweden Democrats, are adopting policies that are pushing the country further away from the Paris-agreement, rather than closing the gap between promised emissions cuts and current policies.

The broad aim of this thesis is to contribute to the knowledge of why, on a societal level, we are not taking sufficient action on climate change. Here, I will outline how we might overcome some of the obstacles that have been identified. Society is complex, and social change is always messy, meaning that we can never know the future nor what policies that necessarily will be both effective in reducing emissions and socially acceptable. But a deepening understanding of why we have failed the transition so far can provide clues to how we might succeed in the future.

The first obstacle concerns the influence of the fossil fuel industry and the international climate change reactionary movement as outlined by for example Ruth McKie (2023). Several of the arguments used to sow disinformation about climate change in Swedish far-right alternative media, such as the talk of a warming pause, or the attacks on climate researcher Michael Mann, and indeed some of the exact graphs (as seen in paper III), have previously been employed by the USA reactionary movement in various anglophone outlets. This shows the persuasiveness of these arguments and how they can be used and adopted in different contexts. While there are no strong primary fossil fuel interests in Sweden promoting these arguments,⁷² the idea that fossil fuels are a necessary part of the industrial modern lifestyle has become paramount for the Swedish far-right. Even though the far right often uses anti-establishment rhetoric, portraying the people against the elite, the fossil fuel industry has managed to avoid being targeted as part of this elite. In an ironic twist, some of the most powerful companies in the world have managed to produce disinformation that is used by the Swedish far right to defend imported fossil fuels and what is defined as the Swedish ethnic people.

By highlighting the origins of these arguments, it might be possible to prevent some of their appeal. Several studies (e.g. Lewandowsky and Linden 2021; for a review, see Mendy, Karlsson, and Lindvall 2024) have shown how inoculation works in experimental settings. Inoculation is the idea of prebunking; if a person is exposed to misinformation but if the misleading arguments are explained, this will make them less likely to fall for the arguments when they come across them

⁷² Though they have been pushed by think tanks close to the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise.

later in a different setting. It has also been suggested (Farrell, McConnell, and Brulle 2019) that this will be even more effective if not only the argument is explained, but that the source of the disinformation is disclosed. Counter-industry messaging has also been successful in real world settings when it comes to counter the disinformation from the tobacco industry (Hershey et al. 2005). By showing how arguments used by the Swedish far right have been produced by the global fossil fuel industry, this thesis can contribute to inoculation attempts among the Swedish public.

The second obstacle that has been identified is the ideological appeal of national-industrial modernity. The far right in Sweden has managed to tell, and gain support for, a story of a modern society where the gendered division of labour gave the male breadwinner both societal status and a stable, professional identity. This was a society where there was a firm trust in technological progress leading to economic growth and expanding welfare, and where the firm national boundaries made it convenient to deny, and be blissfully ignorant of, global inequality, racial exploitation, and environmental risks. To counter the appeal of these arguments it can be important to both discuss the historical processes that helped dismantle the local communities that are often mourned in this type of thinking, and to highlight what is at stake if we do not act rapidly to mitigate climate emissions. It is also important to discuss the difficulties in the transition, while acknowledging the positives that may come out of it.

Regarding historical processes, the car is often made out as a condition of rural life. In far-right anti-establishment rhetoric, and discussions on hypocritical elites, it is often explicitly stated or presumed that these elites reside in inner cities, whereas the betrayed people are living in the countryside. In this context, it is important to acknowledge how the mass car society in the 1950s and 60s contributed to reduced services in rural towns and villages. Rationalisation and effectiveness in industry and social planning led to centralisation and urbanisation, and it was the car that was the pronounced means of transport. The expansion of car roads and increased automobile ownership impacted the railway with several lines being closed and dismantled. The increased personal mobility has also made it more difficult for local shops and retailers to survive when shopping malls have led to more profit for owners and money saved by consumers (Amcoff, Möller, and Westholm 2009). The car society has also resulted in decreased use of public transport (Eriksson 2010). Even today, there is little political drive in Sweden to expand public transport with the purpose of reducing the use of cars. When the Russian invasion of Ukraine contributed to record oil prices in early 2022, the most visible counterstrategy from both right- and left-leaning political parties in Sweden was to try to reduce fuel taxes, rather than

argue that this was a time to collectively move away from individual car travel towards buses, trams, and trains.

Regarding what is at stake, we know that the continuing and deepening climate crisis are changing the conditions of life on the planet. The latest IPCC-report confirms that increased temperatures have contributed to record heat waves almost all over the world, heavy precipitation events in northern Europe, Asia and the USA, and increased drought in Africa and southern Europe (IPCC 2023). In Sweden, we know that the record heat wave in 2018 was influenced by climate change (Wilcke et al. 2020; Yiou et al. 2020). But what was then an anomaly will soon become normal; a recent analysis suggests that even at 1.5 degrees average global warming, a 2018 summer will happen two out of three years. In a 2-degree world, it will most likely happen every year. And when the old extremes become the new normal, what is now closer to apocalyptic sci-fi becomes the new extreme. In a 2-degree world, northern Europe will see extreme summers with more than four times the excess heat of 2018 (Rousi et al. 2023). At the same time sea levels will continue to rise and glaciers will continue to melt. Increasingly, research is showing the risks of transgressing global tipping points already at 1.5 degrees (to which we are disconcertingly close), and that the risks rapidly increase if warming passes 2 degrees or comes close to 3 degrees. The latter is roughly where we are heading if all countries continue with current climate policies (United Nations Environment Programme 2023; Wunderling et al. 2024). I believe it is vital to state the severity of the crisis, in order to understand why the transition is needed. At the same time, we know that more information is not sufficient, and it will not on its own lead to better or more considered responses. As research has shown, gaining intimate knowledge and motivation to act is a process involving both emotions and information (Wormbs and Wolrath Söderberg 2021). One cannot be overlooked for the other.

The high stakes involved are important when discussing the role of emotions in the transition. The empirical analyses, especially in paper II, show how identity matters; the industrial/breadwinner masculinities are perceived to be threatened by a low-carbon transition. Many of us – even if we do not disbelieve the science – can relate to the sense of discomfort that comes with having to question your own lifestyle and habits and realise that these need to change. I believe it is vital that these emotions are recognised and taken seriously, and not disregarded as being backward, nor that they are ignored in some fantasy where we pretend that the climate transition will happen without any kind of material sacrifice or lifestyle change. These are difficult subjects for politicians to talk about, but there are positive examples of how policies that negatively impact the electorate in the short run still can receive popular support. During the pandemic, restrictive

measures were widely adopted, and supported, in several European countries (e.g. Sabat et al. 2020; Nilsen et al. 2023). This is encouraging news when it comes to the climate transition, but it is important that climate policies are perceived of as fair (Bergquist et al. 2022). An effort should be made to design policies so that it is the wealthy emitters that must reduce their emissions more rapidly. The aspect of fairness also points towards the need to act responsibly as a climate leader, in order to inspire others and not be accused of being a hypocrite (Westlake 2023). This can be a way to counter the appeal of far-right climate obstruction. By designing fair policies which mandate the greatest emission cuts from the highest emitters, it will become more difficult for the far right to utilise anti-establishment and hypocrisy arguments to defend the status quo.

When discussing fairness and equality, it is important to acknowledge the global perspective. As discussed in chapter 14, national-industrial modernity has been dependent on the exploitation of others, fossil fuels, and unequal economic exchange. It is necessary to highlight these inequalities, to show how expanded fossil fuelled industrialisation will lead to increased suffering in other parts of the world. It is the poorest communities, who have done the least to contribute to climate change, that will suffer the worst consequences of increased emissions. Discussing global equalities also makes it clear that national-industrial modernity as it appeared in the Global North cannot be a model for other parts of the world to follow, as it would mean that the global carbon budget for 1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius would be transgressed. The Global North has already vastly blown its fair share of the carbon budget, and if every other country were to do the same, the budget would soon be used up. This unfairness should be considered when dividing up carbon budgets among countries, and the Global North must aim to compensate by decreasing its emissions as rapidly as possible.

To sum up, we need to acknowledge the climate crises, the need for an unprecedented transition, and the fact that this will require changes in both lifestyle and technology. But what the Swedish far-right has increasingly been able to sell is an imaginary of a national, industrial community which is safe and secure, and which provides welfare to everyone who is considered part of the ethnically homogenous nation. Apart from being discriminatory against those not belonging to the nation, this imaginary is incompatible with the insecurity of accelerating climate change. What is needed, therefore, are visions to counter it. While certain things, such as aviation and petrol cars, need to decrease to reach the climate targets, other things can increase in an appealing vision. These might include increased public transport, expanded local services, better health with decreased pollution, and investment in public welfare instead of private consumption. These are all policies which have the potential to gain widespread

popular support while contributing to reduced emissions. The climate transition necessarily needs to be a socio-technic one, but focus has so far mainly been on either the technological side or on individual lifestyle choices. While the former cannot be sufficient, the latter disregards the systematic aspects. Instead, we need to talk about both lifestyle and technology as crucial parts of our present society, and how society needs to change to unlock the transition.

Future research

The nostalgic gaze towards national-industrial modernity is glowing the strongest in the eyes of the far right, but they are not alone in their celebration of the industrial project. Social democrats, labour unions and conservatives have all strongly supported the idea of a large-scale industrial transition in Sweden, claiming that the transition is an economic opportunity, and that Sweden should take the lead against competing countries. At the same time, there is a fundamental contradiction in discussing a global transition – which per default needs every country to act – as a global race. What happens if Sweden is not the forerunner, should it not undertake the transition in that case? If the economic argument is the strongest, it might make sense for some countries to compete with low prices and fossil fuels? If the best argument for Sweden's transition is increased competitiveness on the global market, it becomes difficult to argue against countries making other decisions to maximise their profitability. If there is a globally binding treaty specifying emission levels and equal rules for all – which would guarantee that no country goes beyond their carbon budget – it might make sense to speak about it as a competition, as those who lag behind would still be onboard. But in the absence of such a treaty (the Paris-agreement has no mechanism in place to enforce compliance to meet the temperature targets), it becomes difficult to see how a global transition can be fulfilled through international industrial competition.

The focus on industrial competitiveness risks leading to resource nationalism. Several of the world's oil producers, such as Norway, Canada, and Saudi Arabia, have argued that their oil is the cleanest or most progressive in the world. In Brazil it is the meat industry that has been the most focal obstructionist actor, and in Sweden there is an intense debate about the forest sector. While it has been easy for Swedish governments (of different political allegiances) to sign up to the Powering Past Coal Alliance seeking to phase out coal, the present government in 2024 declined to sign a letter to the European Commission about more stringent climate targets to the year 2040. According to the conservative EU-minister Jessica Roswall, it is not because the government disagrees with anything stated in the letter, but because it does not explicitly make any reference to the role of

the forestry sector. The government claims that a wood mass based bioeconomy is essential to reach the climate goals. The refusal to sign the letter is a continuation of a disagreement between the European Commission and the Swedish government when it comes to forestry. The commission argues for less intensive methods to protect biodiversity and the forest carbon sink, but the government claims that biofuels and other intensive forestry products are necessary to increase the economy while facilitating the transition. More research is needed to understand how resource nationalism, both in Sweden and internationally, can obstruct climate action in various ways, and to find out which industries might finance such obstruction. We also need to know how the desire for industrial competitiveness might obscure other ways leading towards a transition, and how the protection or support for national industry might work as a rhetoric device connecting the far right with other parties.

A focus on nationalism also shows the need for more research on identities and communities, and how this interacts and might obstruct the transition. It is important to know more about how the unstable world order is affecting the youth of today. In the 2022 Swedish national election, the support for the Sweden Democrats among first-time voters nearly doubled from the previous election as the party received 22 per cent of the votes according to the exit polls (SVT Nyheter 2022b). This made it the second largest party after the Conservatives among young voters, who seem to have been attracted by the Sweden Democrats' anti-immigration and climate obstructionist policies. More research is needed to understand the underlying factors of this attraction. For example, in Sweden the EPA-tractor – a car with a throttled motor limiting the speed to 30 kilometres per hour – has become part of a rural, fossil fuelled youth culture. You are permitted to drive an EPA-tractor from the age of 15, and through the EPA the internal combustion engine has again become the centre of a cultural scene concerned with driving, music, sex, and drinking, and not seldomly pointing the finger at the urban middle class. Within the EPA-music scene, one artist has taken the satirical name Greta Tuborg, and the artist Trenden has a song called Greta Thunberg with the wording “I shout fuck Greta Thunberg/I step on the gas/I don't give a shit about the environment/I only want to feel the speed.” Anti-environmentalism within rural motor-culture, is also seen in one of few studies of the phenomenon so far (Areschoug 2022). Counter-cultures based on the internal combustion engine have to a large degree been overlooked both by academics and journalists, and while the EPA-scene is Swedish, there might well be other subcultures internationally that are aiming to keep society in the fossil fuel era.

This thesis has studied the far-right alternative media ecosystem, and we need to understand more about its impact, networks, and finance. Considering the vast

money flows to climate obstructionist organisations especially in the USA, it would be valuable to know more about how the media outlets spreading climate denialism in Europe are funded. A recent study showed several connections between German far-right alternative news outlets and the Kremlin, a matter that needs to be explored further in other countries (Beseler and Toepfl 2024), as well as possible connections between far-right media and the international climate change reactionary movement.

When it comes to the impact of the far-right media ecosystem, we need more knowledge considering the effect on readership and the effect on legacy media. We know that within politics, successful far-right parties have often influenced the rhetoric and policies of other parties. The success of the Sweden Democrats, for example, has lately led to what can be described as a race to the bottom between the Social Democrats and the Conservatives in arguing which party has become the most tough on immigration, when they both used to pride themselves on welcoming refugees and asylum seekers (Strömbäck 2024). Such an obvious shift has not happened within the media sector as a whole, as seen in paper IV, but we still know little about how legacy media – or parts of it – has responded to far-right alternative media. More research is needed to find out whether climate has become more contested in news reporting or opinion material beyond far-right media. More knowledge is also needed about the effects of far-right climate obstructionism; how is it affecting climate discourses and policies?

This thesis has also contributed to an ongoing discussion regarding the Swedish state press subsidy system, but more inquiry is needed to find a good structure. The discussion concerns whether a media outlet's eligibility for subsidies should in any way be dependent on its content? Broadly speaking, there are two sides to the argument. One side is that there should be no political interference in decisions regarding who is granted subsidies. This should be a decision based solely on quantifiable and transparent criteria to block any potential political attempts to discriminate against media outlets based on ideological leaning or unfavourable reporting. The other side is that no press subsidy, or official funding, should go to media outlets that are spreading disinformation or do not agree to basic democratic principles regarding human rights. To uphold such a principle, however, some kind of subjective decision regarding media content is needed. The new law for press subsidies in Sweden, which came into effect on the 1st of January 2024 states that media, “which does not substantially work against the principles of democratic governance or is in substantial conflict with the respect of every humans equal worth or the individual person's freedom, dignity and personal integrity” is eligible for subsidies (*Lag (2023:664) om mediestöd*, para. 6:2). Consequently, someone needs to judge the compliance with these criteria. In

Paper I, I show how climate change disinformation was often concealed by scare-quotes. A close reading of hundreds of articles over an extended period was needed to detect how the ironic quotation marks were used, and the meaning they submitted to the reader. This shows that any decision related to content can be quite time-consuming and difficult to make, which I believe needs to be taken into consideration by anyone suggesting a subsidy system containing criteria related to content. It is no use simply stating that a media should be compliant with principles of democratic governance if there is no way to follow up on such a criterion.

Finally, regarding far-right political ecologies, a future line of inquiry is how the articulation of the true nation-state affects climate- and environmental politics. Whether the nation-state is glorified through its industrial prominence or through its pristine landscape and rural aesthetics, might affect whether climate obstruction becomes prominent or not. Also, this might impact the possibility of far-right actors getting support from fossil capital and therefore grow in influence. As seen in the case of Norway, for example, the fossil fuelled-state ideology of implicative denial had no problem to incorporate the climate denialism of the Progress Party into government, as it would allow continued oil production and business-as-usual in the North Sea (Holgensen 2024). Similarly, Donald Trump, has had wide support from the fossil fuel industry, while arguing that his Make America Great Again-slogan will restore jobs in the coal sector (J. Schneider and Peeples 2018; Brulle 2019). As temperatures continue to rise, and carbon budgets continue to dwindle, the pressure on the fossil fuel industry to keep its product in the ground will likely increase. In that case, the industry might well be keen to help expand the influence of a national-industrial nostalgic far-right, who will keep the fuels burning.

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