



Breaking Dichotomies

Religion, Science and Secularism
in Environmental Politics

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Abstract

Through a critical, poststructural and interdisciplinary approach, this article aims to shed light on how a 'secular religiousness' shapes modern environmental politics. Tracing the complex historic entanglements between the religious and the secular, it argues that dominant 'secular' ideologies – conventionally perceived as promoting 'neutral' rationality – are in fact permeated by Christian axioms, in particular dualist conceptions of time and space. It further shows how the dichotomous division between a rational, immanent public space (the 'secular') and an irrational, transcending private space (the 'religious') engenders a politics of post-democratic consensus, which excludes non-dominant forms of belief from the arena of environmental politics. As the case of the Sami people in Finland illustrates, this has propagated fear-driven populist discourses of exclusion, both on the part of governmental bodies and on the part of marginalised populations. However, we can also observe the employment of tactics to renegotiate power through the adaptation of belief systems and the creation of liminal spaces of 'productive tension'. The article concludes that a 'desacralisation' of environmental politics, through facilitating creative and self-reflexive conflict between a diversity of belief systems, can constitute a first step towards more inclusive environmental politics.

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Contents

- Introduction1**
- Methodology: theoretical framework and methods2**
- Literature review.....2**
 - A. Politics and religion: Western secularism and modern democratic states2
 - B. The role of religion and secularism in environmental politics4
- 1. The hidden ‘secular religiousness’ of environmental ‘post-politics’6**
 - 1.1. Ordering the secular: Christian dichotomies of space and time6
 - 1.2. ‘Manufacturing uncertainty’: controlling time through apocalyptic narratives8
 - 1.3. Post-politics and populist exclusions in environmental politics 9
- 2. Case study: the Sami people in Finland confronting environmental policies.....10**
 - 2.1. Entanglements between religion, national identity and environmental conceptions ... 10
 - 2.1.1. Introduction: the Arctic as a space for Western imaginaries and political contestation 10*
 - 2.1.2. A history of religious oppression: Christianity and the Sami belief system..... 11*
 - 2.1.3. Contemporary context: the problem of the Nordic welfare state as a case of hidden ‘secular religiousness’ 12*
 - 2.2. Discourse analysis.....13
 - 2.2.1. The Finnish government and the New Forestry Act..... 13*
 - 2.2.2. The Sami population 13*
 - 2.3. Environmental resistance through religious adaptability.....14
 - 2.4. Conclusion of the case study: opening up the space for Sami rights.....16
- 3. Desacralising environmental politics: opening a liminal space for self-reflexivity16**
 - 3.1. Reinstating purity in the political realm and its dangers: the return of dichotomies..... 16
 - 3.2. Desacralising politics: productive tension as a marker for change 18
 - 3.3. Building new myths through uncertainty..... 19
- Conclusion: a paradigm to go beyond paradigms20**
- Bibliography22**

Introduction

Modern political responses to complex, multilevel environmental problems are predominantly based on a 'universal' scientific and rational framework (Hulme 2017). This approach to 'governing' that relies on the 'absolute truth' of data and science is not unique to environmental politics. Rather, it highlights a more global way of governing that has been driven by an underlying secular ideology of 'rational consensus'. As Cady and Shakman Hurd argue, secularism has been a defining component of modern democratic states since the end of the 19th century, regulating practices of the political and the cultural (2014: 60). While this ideology has informed governance across issue areas, it has been particularly relevant in the environmental politics of climate change, where issue framing is crucial in designing policies on a local, national, and global level. The current attempt to 'solve' climate change by framing it as a "problem" that needs to be governed and rationalised (Hulme 2009) has promoted environmental policies based on a monolithic conception of 'climate change absolutism' (Swyngedouw 2010). Excluding the specificities of local beliefs and cultures, these 'universalist' responses have engendered a "post-politics of consensus" (2010) eliminating dialogue and tensions in the political arena. This has in turn raised several issues in terms of inclusiveness and justice in environmental politics, whereby other forms of beliefs have been excluded from the discourse.

This paper shows how understanding the hegemonic secular ideology of environmental politics through its link to religious notions can help uncover the deeper constructions underlying the global environmental political agenda. I contend that the presence of Christian notions of the sacred and the absolute in the Western environmental politics discourse enlightens the need to go beyond traditional dichotomies between the secular and the religious. I argue that creating a space of productive tension for a plurality of beliefs to interplay can offer a path to rethink environmental politics as offering a voice for the specific.

I first engage with the literature to underline the ways in which the secular and the religious have traditionally been conceived in opposition to each other, a dichotomy that has been sustained in the environmental politics literature. I endeavour to highlight how going beyond dichotomies can offer an informative account to further new research on environmental politics. To this end, the first part of my argument focuses on how the secular discourse of traditional environmental politics relies on a Christian temporal and spatial framework. I highlight how this control of space and time has provided a discourse of 'post-political consensus' in the environmental arena, furthering 'post-democratic' policies that increase the vulnerability of populations most affected by environmental issues. The second part of this paper uses the case study of the Sami people in Finland to illustrate the need to encourage spaces of creative tension

between a multiplicity of beliefs. The final part underlines how 'desacralising' environmental politics by breaking dichotomies between the religious and the secular through spaces of creative tension can further more inclusive global environmental policies.

Methodology: theoretical framework and methods

I construct my argument through a critical approach based on both poststructural discourse analysis and historical analysis. I particularly focus on the ways in which notions of secularism and religion have been constructed through entanglements between a diversity of political and cultural histories, and how the Western historical influence of both Christian religion and secularism narratives has led to the contemporary construction of a dominant environmental discourse in Western national and intergovernmental bodies.

I maintain that a poststructural discursive analysis can help illuminate the issues contemporary environmental policymaking raises in terms of inclusion and justice by highlighting the dominant discursive construction of environmental politics and the discourses of contestation it provokes. I support my argument through a case study of the Sami people in Finland as a population being particularly affected by environmental issues linked to natural resources and land property. Analysing the discourses of both governmental bodies and the Sami population, I highlight the tensions between 'non-dominant' beliefs and the governmental discourse of 'secular religiousness'. I contend that the study may provide a useful empirical example to reflect on the broader relationship between conceptions of the secular and the religious in environmental politics.

As environmental issues affect both collective social structures and individualities, I furthermore argue that undertaking an interdisciplinary approach combining psychology, history and sociology with social sciences can offer complementary perspectives to social scientific studies of environmental issues. Observing how religion and secularism embody manifestations of both collective and individual practices, I particularly draw on the works of Carl Gustav Jung, Michel de Certeau and Guy Debord as informative accounts to enlighten the reflection on religion and secularism in environmental politics.

Literature Review

A. Politics and religion: Western secularism and modern democratic states

Exploring the connections between the religious and the secular in environmental politics invites us to observe how these notions have traditionally been conceived. As Calhoun and al. (2011) assert, secularism has mainly been assumed as a neutral basis of public life and politics,

in opposition to the 'subjective' religious existing solely in the realm of private life. In the established scholarly literature, this binary conception has led to mythical narratives of a secularisation of the world in combination with a historical decline of the religious (2011: 10).

It has, on the other hand, also led to the conception of a 'return' of the religious in the literature. Jürgen Habermas (2006) highlights the continued relevance of religion in the modern, 'postsecularist' era. However, by arguing for the necessity to base the public sphere on truly 'neutral' and 'value-free' secular conceptions and to limit the 'subjectivity' of religious discourse to the private sphere (2006), Habermas maintains traditional dichotomies and reinforces the association of secularism with 'factual objectivity'.

Both discourses of a decline and a return of the religious in the political sphere are based on linear conceptions of history as shifting between religious times and secular times. As Calhoun (2010) asserts, this conception has partly enabled a sharp hierarchical distinction between the religious and the secular, by associating 'religious' times of the pre-Enlightenment with irrationality, and the subsequent 'secular' times with a certain rational maturity. Yet, for Calhoun, "secularism is not simply a creature of treaties to end religious wars or the rise of science, or the Enlightenment" (2010: 2). He highlights how the modern "secular imaginary" (2010: 4) is entangled in a web of meanings shaped by specific historical and cultural contexts that are necessarily intertwined with the religious.

Arguing against a linear and ethnocentric 'secularisation' narrative focused on the Enlightenment and the separation of church and state as creating a new, more rational world, a growing number of scholars have attempted to redefine the way we see secularism as opposed to religion, by pointing at the ways in which the religious and the secular inherently interplay with each other in the political space. In this context, Haluza-DeLay (2014) invites us to reconsider the traditional view of secularism as associated with objectivity in opposition to 'value-driven' religion. He shows how belief systems are not solely the domain of what we conceive as religion, and provides a useful definition of religion as a "modern construct" (2014: 264) that can take several shapes, whether as a "symbolic system, a social institution, a relationship with the divine [...] or a moral code" (2014: 264).

In this context, a growing literature has condemned the secularist ideology in modern Western democratic states' politics as a form of authoritative belief system based on Christian conceptions of order. Charles Taylor (2007; 2011) has led the path to rethink notions of religion and secularism. Taylor highlights how the modern conception of secularism in Western states "developed within Latin Christendom" (2011: 32), rather than through a specific event. He further argues that the artificial distinction between the religious and the secular through Christian axioms has shaped the modern order by rendering the religious 'acceptable' in the domain of

the private sphere (2011: 35), while the public sphere was to be governed by a 'neutral' secular ideology. This has led to a "disenchantment of the world" (2011: 38), whereby the enchanted or magical elements of the religious are associated with superstition, while only a 'reasonable' religion of "individual devotion" (2011: 48) is accepted. According to Taylor, this conception of the religious based on Christian axioms has led to a secular public sphere that is to be conceived in purely immanent terms.

While Taylor's thoughts are illuminating, I nonetheless suggest that his vision of secularism as the negative absence of the 'true' religion of enchantment does not fully deconstruct the dichotomies between the secular and the religious. In this context, Calhoun et al. (2011) provide an informative reconsideration of secularism as more than a 'negative' modern dominant ideology. While building on Taylor's conception, they depart from his vision by pointing at how the separation between 'enchanted' and 'disenchanted times' can offer another narrative where secularism simply 'fills a gap' and strays us away from the 'true' religion. They particularly assert against a conception of the secular as simply an "absence of religion" (2011: 2), calling for a reconception of the secular as "a positive formation of its own" (2011: 11), that has both enabled and empowered certain processes and people, as much as it has excluded and obstructed others (2011: 11).

I contend that this observation of a "secular orientation to the sacred or transcendent" (Calhoun 2010: 2) is particularly insightful to reconsider the entanglements of science with secularism and religion in environmental politics. In this context, Connolly (2010) illuminates how "spaces of enchantment" are located within the secular, arguing against the simple separation between a 'pure' world of religious enchantment and a "disenchanted world of secular modernism" (2010: 15), that brushes over cultural differences and limits conceptions of enchantment within the secular sphere (2010: 15). Connolly thus contends that cultivating "spaces of enchantment" within what is observed as the secular realm can provide a path for an "ethos of engagement" (2010: 16) through a "nontheistic enchantment with the world" (2010: 16). While such 'nontheistic enchantment' fails to see politics as a conflictual space between multiple belief systems by seeing the secular as an "abstinence" from religion (2010: 15) rather than a presence, I nonetheless suggest that Connolly's 'ethos of engagement' is a good starting point to reconsider the way we think about environmental politics and its link with belief systems.

B. The role of religion and secularism in environmental politics

In the realm of environmental politics, questioning the division between religion and secularism also calls for a reconsideration of traditional conceptions of 'factual' science and 'value-based' religious belief systems. Thomas Kuhn (1962) demonstrates how science, rather

than being entirely factual, is crucially based on values, and can thus act as a belief system. He notes that scientific research is confined by “paradigms” (1962) that reflect the consensus of the scientific community, making it difficult to advance non-dogmatic ideas. Thus, conceptions based on ‘neutral’ science can in fact act as absolute ideologies shaping modern politics.

This observation is particularly pertinent in environmental politics which have been commonly based on the secular conception of an objective scientific discourse. Academics have traditionally viewed religion, and specifically Christianity, as negatively linked to progress in the field of environmental and climate change politics. Most prominently, Lynn White (1967) contends that the present ecological crisis is the consequence of a Western “democratic culture” (1967: 1204) resulting both from the fusion of technology and science in the middle of the 19th century, and “the victory of Christianity over paganism” (1967: 1205). White asserts that Christianity fundamentally acts as a barrier to environmental progress, stating that “Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion” (1967: 1205).

The scholarly literature has predominantly supported White’s thesis. Multiple studies of Christian groups, particularly evangelical Christians in the United-States, have attempted to show a link between climate scepticism and religion. For instance, Johnston and Taylor (2016) argue that Christianity represents a barrier for environmentalism in the United-States. Clements and al. (2014) point in the same direction, stating that Christians in the United-States predominantly show less concerns about climate change. Likewise, Eckberg and Blocker (1989), in their survey on inhabitants of Oklahoma, find that Judeo-Christians are less inclined than secularists to consider protecting the environment as an important matter, leading them to conclude that “‘otherworldly’ orientations [...] could divert attention from here-and-now issues” (1989: 516-17). Beyond Christian groups in the United States, White’s argument also reverberates in more general accounts of dominant monotheist religions acting as a barrier in environmental politics. For example, Hope and Jones (2014), in their study of Christian, Muslim and non-religious groups in the United Kingdom, show that secularists are more prone to express anxiety on climate change as they do not believe in an afterlife.

A new wave of scholarly literature has nonetheless pointed at a more complex link between religion and environmental politics. Both Sheldon and Oreskes (2017) and Pepper and Leonard (2016) argue that political conservatism, rather than religion, directs environmental views. Zaleha and Szasz (2015) furthermore note the importance of positive environmental discourse in Christian faith, with diverse forms of Protestantism advocating that “God wants humans to care for creation” (2015: 20). These studies hence point to a more complex and ambiguous relationship between the secular and the religious in environmental politics. In this paper, I take a similar position, arguing that it is important to consider the role of religion in

environmental politics but without recourse to dichotomies or the over-simplistic notion of religion as anti-environmentalist in essence. While it appears that religion can foster climate scepticism through discourses of exclusion, it is not necessarily a 'barrier' to environmental politics.

In response to the dominant discourse, an emerging movement of environmental studies has thus been calling for a reconsideration of the role of religion in environmental and climate change politics. Mike Hulme (2009), for example, advocates for the 're-spiritualising' of climate change by seeing it as an 'idea' offering opportunities to reconsider our traditional conceptions and interactions within the world. Likewise, Hannah Fair rightly points to the need to view science and religion as complementary in environmental politics if we are to think about environmental policies in a more inclusive way (2018: 7).

Positioning myself within this new wave of environmental thought, I nonetheless wish to distance myself from both Hulme's and Fair's findings. While arguing for a 're-spiritualisation' of climate change, both researchers maintain dichotomies between the secular and the religious. They base their studies on the premise that religion is currently absent from the modern global environmental political agenda, seeing its secular ideology as an absence of religion. I suggest that Fair and Hulme miss the inherent 'religiousness' and 'sacredness' of the current global environmental political agenda. I endeavour to show that, while allegedly secular, the 'dominant' environmental political agenda is inherently religious, presenting a case of 'hidden religiousness'. Drawing on Calhoun's aforementioned argument to go beyond the conception of secularism as a simple "absence of religion" (2010), I thus assert the necessity to break down traditional dichotomies between the secular and the religious to understand how global environmental policies are shaped through a discourse of 'secular religiousness'. I ultimately argue that rethinking the notions of secularism and religion in environmental politics can provide a path towards more inclusive environmental policies.

1. The hidden 'secular religiousness' of environmental 'post-politics'

1.1. Ordering and regulating through the secular: Christian dichotomies of space and time

Considering how religion and secularism interplay in environmental politics first invites us to observe how the separation of the two notions is rooted in temporality. According to Taylor, the term 'secular' is originally opposed to the religious through its direct relation with the temporal. Etymologically linked to "the century" (2011: 32), the secular was first used as a "unit of time" (Calhoun et al. 2011: 8) in contrast to the 'religious eternal'. The division between the secular and the religious hence appeared first as a division between a temporal 'worldly' space and a time-transcending 'otherworldly' space. In this context, Cady and Shakman Hurd argue

that a “Christian theological framework” shapes modern Western politics through the temporal division between a secular ‘immanent’ frame and a religious transcendent (2014: 59). By giving a temporal order to the world, Christian dualist conceptions of time have thus enabled the creation of a secular ‘rational’ order based on immanent concerns.

Thus, as Connolly asserts, the secular sphere of politics remains “safe for Christianity” only if its underlying organisation is Christian (2010: 24). This presence of Christian axioms in the secular discourse of Western-dominated global governance institutions and national governmental bodies is particularly noticeable in modern environmental politics. The use of targets and deadlines by the 2015 Paris Agreement to meet collective goals such as staying below a 2°C rise in global average temperature (Hulme 2017) is an example of secular governance through a Christian temporal framework. Likewise, the prevalent use of scientific ‘predictions’ (Clover 2006) highlights how environmental issues are viewed through the lens of a ‘neutral’ science, resting on Christian conceptions of a worldly linear and finite time. Based on a temporal control of environmental issues, the global environmental political discourse hence sustains the Christian temporal dichotomy between a temporal ‘secular’ and an atemporal religious.

Along this Christian conception of time, the modern secular political discourse is also underpinned by a Christian conception of space as divided between private and public life (Taylor 2007). On this basis, political space is reserved to ‘public’ matters associated with the temporal secular, while the ‘eternal time’ of the religious is restricted to the private space of self-devotion (Calhoun 2010: 21). This secular regulation of public life through Christian-influenced spatial divisions particularly resonates with Agamben’s notion of the modern “sovereign state” as governing “*bare life*” (that is, ‘natural’ life) (Dickinson 2012: 67). For Agamben, the modern sovereign state has been able to forward hegemonic secular policies by using a Christian dualist logic of “exclusion and inclusion” (2012: 73), whereby everything that cannot be controlled is excluded from the political space of worldly matters as a form of punishment.

In the modern political space, religion acts as a mechanism to construct discursive subjectivities and divisions. The modern sovereign state thus embodies an absolute sacred object above divisions: it can regulate the law, while excluding itself from its rules (Murray 2010: 76). In this way, the secular ideology as a hegemonic model regulating life is based on a double “strategy of containment” (Connolly 2010: 26) that both contains the religious in the private sphere, while allowing Christian axioms to frame public life, thereby excluding other beliefs from its discourse. This ‘strategy of containment’ has nourished a narrative of secular ‘rational’ triumph over the ‘irrational’ religious (Calhoun 2010: 7), while allowing the persistence of a Christian-influenced ordering of the political (Calhoun et al. 2011: 35).

1.2. 'Manufacturing uncertainty' in environmental politics: controlling time through apocalyptic narratives

This control of a secular space and time based on Christian axioms has enabled the creation of what Stenmark calls “myths of the Absolute” (2015: 924) in environmental politics. Defined by the transformation of “beliefs [...] into certainties”, discourses of the Absolute are rooted in the fear of an uncontrollable and uncertain future (2015: 924). In environmental politics, the uncertainty provoked by future-oriented environmental issues is thus filled by absolute ‘scientific certainties’, reflecting a desire to control time through a ‘rational’ and ‘neutral’ scientific framework. As Hulme asserts, these discourses of the Absolute are particularly manifested through the deep reliance of environmental policy-makers on climate models, with “climate scientists [acting] as prophets” (2017: 112).

Thus, governmental bodies use scientific predictions as a way to control an uncertain threatening future, often using apocalyptic discourses to justify policy choices. Ironically, this is not dissimilar to populist narratives employed by climate deniers, who also use the fear of uncertainty, albeit to promote scepticism and inaction rather than a sense of urgency (Dunlap and McCright 2019: 2).

In fact, Stenmark asserts how discourses of the Absolute are related to apocalyptic discourses, in that both are based on fears of uncertainty (2015: 934) and a populist narrative of exclusion of the ‘other’. In environmental politics, narratives of emergency (Hulme 2017: 89), based on ‘rational’ science, are used to justify the exclusion of a diversity of perspectives and the imposition of consensual policy solutions to environmental issues. Drawing on Zizek’s (2006) conception of populism as the defining of an objectified enemy that is both external and vague, this discourse can thus be linked to populism in two ways. First, the authoritative character of the modern environmental political discourse excludes other forms of narratives by blaming them for offering irrational responses and furthering the ‘apocalyptic risk’. Second, it uses the fear of ‘external intruders’ to forward specific policies. Being uncertain and uncontrollable, climate change is thus seen in modern Western politics as an external ‘intruder’ that ought to be governed and rationalised.

Building on Agamben’s conception of the modern sovereign state’s absolutism through its “act of labelling something as necessary” (Murray 2010: 54), we can observe how apocalyptic discourses have allowed governmental bodies to implement hegemonic secular policies based on the ‘necessity’ to protect the imaginary populist homogenous ‘we’ of the people from the risks of a threatening future. The desire to ‘govern’ time through environmental issues has thus been echoed by the institutional attempt to control individuals by identifying “responsible agents who can be rewarded or punished” (Hulme 2009: 71) according to a discourse of necessity.

1.3. Post-politics and populist exclusions in environmental politics

This populist logic based on discourses of exclusion has propelled what Rancière (2004) calls the modern 'post-democratic' political space. For Rancière, democratic politics are based on a "singularisation of the universal" (Nash 1996: 175) constantly putting into question dominant conceptions and power configurations. Democracy is thus founded on the constant disruption of logics of domination through contention (Rancière 2004: 5), whereby specific subjects renegotiate spaces of power by questioning universal notions. In this way, democratic politics are based on "subjectivisations" (Nash 1996: 174), that is the recognition and naming of subjects as forming different social groups with specific issues to raise (1996: 174). Contrary to democratic politics, post-democracy is constructed on a universalisation of subjective truths (1996: 175). By denying the specific, 'postdemocracy' acts as a consensual form of democracy that can be reduced to "the sole interplay of state mechanisms" (Rancière 1999 :102), hence eliminating any form of tension. These mechanisms ultimately deny the specific proper to social and cultural relations and impose a hegemonic discourse based on limited conceptions of political issues. In environmental politics, the post-democratic manifests itself through the "use of global temperature levels" (Hulme 2017: 139) as a universal 'objective' yardstick for 'reasonable' global policies. This conception of global temperature as offering 'neutral' accounts of the global state of the environment has allowed environmental issues affecting the local to be directly regulated by national and international governmental bodies.

Swyngedouw (2010) illuminates how modern conception of climate change have furthered the creation of post-democracy through "post-politics" (2010: 225) of absolutism and consensus. By definition, 'post-politics' is the embodiment of modern Western governance that uses an absolutist ideology of consensus in order to promote specific policies to 'manage' problems and risks (2010: 215). As Swyngedouw argues, rather than acknowledging the complexities and uncertainties of climate change, policymakers tend to frame it in absolute and apocalyptic terms. Seen "as a global humanitarian cause" (2010: 217), Western climate change politics are thus voided of the political through the "management of fear" (2010: 219). This in turn creates consensus around 'rational policies' based on scientific expertise and the calculation of risks through CO2 measurement (2010: 220).

This 'climate reductionism', which promotes a simplistic view of climate change as the main driver of *all* social change, often serves specific political interests (Hulme 2017a : 69). For example, some observers may blame climate change for the civil war in Syria as a strategy to dismiss local political causes and redirect "political and diplomatic interventions ... in ways which serve some interests, but not others" (2017a: 78). By establishing climate change as a

hegemonic “category of explanation” (2017a: 79), the control of global mean temperatures becomes the main instrument to control an unpredictable future.

2. Case study: the Sami people in Finland confronting environmental policies

2.1. Entanglements between religion, national identity and environmental conceptions

2.1.1. Introduction: the Arctic as a space for Western imaginaries and political contestation

The following case study demonstrates how environmental politics are much more than climate change reductionism: they embody issues relating to property, sovereignty and everyday life resources. In light of my previous argument, I contend that the case of the Sami people in Finland – and their interaction with national and global environmental policies – provides a useful example of the different responses a dogmatic ‘secular’ ideology has engendered. As a space of deep power contestations, the Arctic has historically been associated with imaginaries of a deserts region ‘open to all’ (Körber et al. 2018: 17). These imaginaries have furthermore been sustained by an ideology of “Western modernity and ‘progress’” (2018: 2), with the Arctic being framed by politicians and scientists as a void space usable for resources exploitation. This discourse is becoming particularly relevant as the melting ice field of the Arctic has opened the space for new territorial power struggles between nations (Hall 2018). In this context of growing exploitation, local environmental issues have significantly increased, consequently affecting the inhabitants of the surrounding regions.

This has been particularly the case for the Sami people in Nordic countries, as their region is considered an opportunity for natural resources exploitation and transport building to the Arctic (Kaján 2014). As the only natives of Europe, the Sami people are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the national and global political ‘management’ of environmental issues. While the Sami case illustrates more broadly the vulnerability of native populations to environmental issues (cf. Fair’s (2018) and Kempf’s (2017) studies on the Pacific regions), it is particularly interesting given the political context of the European Nordic countries. I argue that the model of the Nordic ‘welfare state’, often acclaimed for its social policies and inclusiveness, constitutes a particular case of ‘hidden’ secular religiousness affecting environmental policies linked to the Sami. More particularly, I contend that the cultural, geographical and historical specificities of Finland and the Sami people living within its borders provide an illuminating case of land property conflict. By analysing the historical and contemporary political context in Finland,

I endeavour to demonstrate how the 'hidden' secular religiousness in Finnish environmental politics has engendered a multiplicity of responses and contestations on the part of the Sami.

2.1.2. A history of religious oppression: Christianity and the Sami belief system

Before studying the current power contestations between the Sami people and national and global environmental politics, we first need to explore the broader historical context of religious tensions between the Sami belief system and Christianity. As I will argue, fundamental differences between the Sami pre-Christian belief system, or Sami shamanism, and monotheistic Christianity, led to divergent conceptions of the environment. Unlike the Christian division between a temporal and worldly 'secular' and an otherworldly and eternal 'religious', Sami shamanism's spiritual world was inherently holistic, with the spiritual seen as part of the material world (Vorren and Manker 1962: 126). Sami shamanism was based on animism, a form of belief holding that "various objects, places, and creatures possess distinctive spiritual qualities" (Pinto-Guillaume 2019: 4). Rather than a 'religion' in the modern sense of the term, Bäckman and Hulkrantz have thus argued that Sami shamanism was first and foremost "a configuration" (1978: 11) that helped the Sami understand their environment and conceive their everyday life. However, the environmental conception of pre-Christian Sami belief slowly disappeared as a result of Christianisation. From the late 18th century and the 19th century, the Sami faith and language were completely banned in an effort to promote a single national identity (Minnerup and Solberg 2011: 81).

This Christianisation was combined with diverse colonial political measures that led to a change in both the culture and everyday practices of the Sami. The introduction of state taxation "in the form of dried fish and tame male reindeer" (Dixon and Scheurell 1995: 149) during the 17th century represented the first "direct state intervention in the Sami's indigenous food sector" (1995: 149). This consequently led the Sami to change their livelihood, which had been based on small-scale fishing and reindeer hunting (Hulkrantz and Bäckman 1985: 27), leading to a great increase in production and excessive exploitation (Dixon and Scheurell, 1995: 149). Along these taxation measures, a Christian conception of land ownership was introduced that was foreign to the Sami's conception of the land as divided in small communities named *siida* (Mollberg 2003). The 1751 convention drawing borders between Norway and Sweden-Finland led to the creation of new international laws on land and water property (Dixon and Scheurell 1995: 150). Likewise, the governance of Finland by Russia from 1809 led to the extension of "exclusive rights of the Sami to hunting, fishing and reindeer herding [...] to all Finnish citizens" (1995: 150). We can thus observe how a combination of religious and political interventions, in particular those directed at the creation of a collective Finnish national identity based on Christian axioms changed the Sami relationship with their environment.

2.1.3. *Contemporary context: the problem of the Northern welfare state as a case of hidden 'secular religiousness'*

While the oppression of the Sami is commonly seen as 'past history', I argue that the present Nordic welfare state model has produced new power asymmetries. Through the dominance of its 'secular' discourse based on principles of equality, the Nordic welfare state acts as a space of 'post-politics' that universalises specific 'secular' cultural conceptions through law. Beginning in the early 20th century through welfare legislation and parliamentary politics (Minnerup and Solberg 2011: 82), the Nordic welfare state model was founded on principles of social equality and egalitarianism contributing to a strong emphasis on both individualism and a 'homogenous' collective national identity (Dixon and Scheurell 1995: 177). As a model of politics where the state acts as the "natural state of affairs" (Minnerup and Solberg 2011: 82) to create an 'inclusive' collective identity through social welfare services, the Nordic welfare state model is thus directly implicated in the regulation of the *bare life* of its citizens.

Through the creation of a national identity based on 'democratic' principles, the Finnish welfare state has thus effectively limited Sami rights (Minnerup and Solberg 2011: 90). By reducing the Sami to "a minority language group" (Körber et al. 2018: 9) and codifying them in a simplified way as reindeer-herders (Dixon and Scheurell 1995: 178), the Finnish welfare state's attempt to assimilate the Sami into the national 'secular' culture has made the Sami more vulnerable. This has also led to tensions over environmental politics, where secular conceptions of land property and sovereignty (Körber et al. 2018: 8) conflict with the Sami's use of local environmental resources to provide for their needs (Dixon and Scheurell 1995: 156).

These issues have led the Finnish government to adopt consensual measures to 'include' the Sami in modern politics, namely through the establishment of a 'Sami Assembly' in 1975 (Dixon and Scheurell 1995: 161). However, the fact that the Sami Assembly in Finland "serves only as an advisory body to central government" (1995: 161) illustrates that 'secular religiousness' is deeply embedded in the welfare state. Although Finland is a highly legitimate actor in international organisations and has a good record in terms of colonial issues (Minnerup and Solberg 2011: 90), the Finnish welfare state nonetheless favours the universal over the specific, granting no real power of contestation to local communities and imposing a secular discourse through invasive social policies that regulate the *bare life* of citizens and undermine Sami values and beliefs.

The following discourse analysis demonstrates how the persistence of a hegemonic discourse of 'secular religiousness' in Finnish environmental politics has led to the creation of a double discourse of exclusion. I first take the case of the 2016 New Forestry Act as an example of the Finnish government's discourse of 'secular' hegemony. I then observe how this discourse

has engendered a second form of exclusive discourse from the Sami, as reflected in articles of British media interviewing Sami, the Sami-written manifesto Charta 79 (1982) and a Sami-run seminar.

2.2. Discourse analysis

2.2.1. The Finnish government and the New Forestry Act

I contend that analysing the 2016 New Forestry Act allows us to understand how the discourse of 'secular' hegemony of Finnish environmental politics affects issues of land property in Lapland, where vast areas of land have been subject to power contestations. The Act puts "2.2 million hectares of water systems and 360,000 hectares of land" (Rhoades and Mustonen 2016) in Lapland under direct regulation by state authorities for free exploitation.

This is justified using a narrative of 'necessity' that emphasises 'democratic' principles "required by the EU law" and the need for "competition neutral" policies that promote "ecological, economic and social sustainability" (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Finland 2016). In addition, land property is seen through the discursive lens of a 'common national identity', whereby the lands and waters to be used by the state are declared as "our common national property" (2016). The Act is thus discursively constructed by the Finnish state as a 'rational' solution to maintain a 'sustainable use' of the land and waters benefitting the 'collective' of Finnish citizens. In this way, the specificities of the Sami's conception of land and environment are excluded for the 'collective good' of national identity, based on 'neutral' secular principles of democracy and sustainability. This example underlines how a hidden 'secular religiousness' underpins discourses in Finnish environmental politics that impose a universalist 'secular' welfare state conception of the environment through land property.

2.2.2. The Sami population

The Sami people in Finland have responded to this discourse of dominance with their own discourse of exclusion. This is particularly apparent in the use of 'climate change absolutism' to blame 'external enemies' threatening the Sami traditional lifestyle, and advocate for the return to the 'pure' traditional Sami culture. As Axelsson and Sköld assert, the discourse promoted by the Finnish government and international institutions has led many Sami to "believe that the balance between people and Nature can be restored only by respecting the knowledge gleaned by Sami living close to nature through the ages" (2006: 125). One example of this discourse can be found in an article of *The Guardian* on the Finnish government's desire to build a railroad across Lapland. Asserting that the Finnish state "took the religion, then [...] broke the Siida system", Sanila-Aikio, the president of the Sami Parliament in Finland, states that the

railroad would mean “the end of the Sami people, because there are no possibilities to practise traditional livelihoods” (Wall 2019). A similar discourse can be observed in a Sami seminar led by Juho Keva, the Vice Chairman of City Sámit, a Helsinki-based organisation that supports Sami culture. Keva asserts that “[f]or us, environmental protection is a way to safeguard our language and our culture” (Keva 2017: 7). Using the term ‘us’ to designate the collective ‘we’ of the Sami people in opposition to a Finnish ‘them’, Keva sustains the dichotomy between a ‘pure’ traditional Sami collective identity and a threatening ‘profane’ industrialisation facilitated by governmental policies.

In a similar way, the Charta 79, a manifesto by “the Sami Action Group” (1982: 2), whose “purpose was to spread information about the situation of Samis in Northern Europe” (1982: 2), has also adopted a discourse based on the dichotomy between a ‘pure’, ethical approach to environmental issues, as opposed to a ‘profane’ industrialisation. By blaming the “shadow of industrialisation which threatens to annihilate the Fourth World” (1982: 16), the Charta 79 provides an example of populist discourse based on narratives of blame, where the object of industrialisation acts as the external other. Using expressions such as “boundaries imposed by foreign states” (1982: 2), “which threaten to engulf them” (1982: 2), the Charta 79 hence creates a discourse based on the fear of dominant ‘nation-states’ threatening an ‘untouched’ Sami livelihood.

Mainstream Western media have also contributed to the sustaining of a consensual discourse of exclusion based on the purity of the traditional lifestyle of native populations in face of the ‘profane’ world of governmental politics and capitalist industrialisation. For example, an article in *The Independent* states that climate change driven by “industrialised nations” is “playing havoc with traditional communities’ reliance on the land” (Howden 2011). Likewise, an article in *The Guardian* quotes “Helander-Renvall, head of the Arctic Indigenous Peoples Office at the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi” (Tisdall 2010), who sustains that “[t]he Sami people have an ethical relationship with nature” (2010), juxtaposing them with an ‘unethical’ governmental approach to nature. These discourses advocating for a return to traditional and pure livelihoods hence contribute to maintaining dichotomies, narratives of blame and exclusive conceptions of environmental politics.

2.3. Environmental resistance through religious adaptability

The above discourse analysis demonstrates how populist discourses of exclusion reinforce dichotomies, thus limiting opportunities to rethink environmental politics. As Zizek asserts, populism “cannot be used as grounds for the renewal of emancipatory politics” (2006: 567). In this context, Hansen and Olsen highlight the need to “challenge the image of an

authentic, homogenous, and static Sámi culture” (2014: 7) which has prevailed in the literature. They argue that ‘static’ conceptions of traditional Sami culture have created the impression that “the Sámi’s encounter with other cultures, state formations, market economies, and modernity always brings about disruption, decline, and ‘loss’ of culture” (2014: 7). In contrast, more balanced accounts of a changing Sami culture show how the interaction with other values and beliefs does not necessarily inhibit, but may also promote, alternative environmental policies.

In this context, Guy Debord’s *détournement* and Michel de Certeau’s (1984) notion of ‘tactics’ can inform the ways in which the encounter of the Sami culture with other forms of discourses can promote more inclusive environmental policies. De Certeau sees “tactics” as subversions of everyday practices by ‘the powerless’ through their reappropriation in a way “foreign to the system” (1984: xiii). For de Certeau, these ‘tactics’ thus constitute “techniques of sociocultural production” (1984: xiv), in that they displace the traditional cultural conceptions associated with everyday practices to a liminal space open for political contestation and change (1984: xvii). Likewise, Debord’s (2012) *détournement* acts as a similar form of political resistance, by taking out of its context an object bearing a cultural meaning that reflects a dominant ideology.

These tactics have in fact already been used during the Christianisation of the Sami in the nineteenth century. For Hansen and Olsen, the absence of a traditional hierarchy and fixed texts in the Sami belief system (2014: 313) has enabled the reappropriation of dominant traditional myths, namely through the incorporation of “foreign gods, symbols, and rites into a Sámi religious context” (2014: 313-14) and the adoption of “certain elements of Christianity”, while subverting them by voiding them of their Christian meaning and recontextualising them through a Sami lens (2014: 315).

The flexible character of the Sami belief system and the conscious use of techniques of political resistance can also facilitate the promotion of alternative conceptions of environmental politics. While lacking regular implementation, a recent example of the tactical use of public practices is the Sami Parliament’s endorsement of the “Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Nature” in 2018 (Deep Green Resistance News Service 2018). By writing a parliamentary motion using the pre-Christian Sami conception of nature, the Sami Parliament has thus shown how the tactical use of traditional governmental institutions can encourage a reconsideration of environmental politics in a space of ‘productive tension’ between divergent beliefs. In this way, the use of ‘tactics’ and *détournement* by the Sami people has proven to enable opportunities for democratic power contestation.

2.4. Conclusion of the case study: opening up the space for Sami rights

As Axelsson and Sköld assert, while the Sami are currently “not living on the brink of extinction” (2006: 117), their exclusion from traditional environmental politics has increased their vulnerability. On a broader level, the Sami case study illuminates the issues native populations face in making their voice heard in the environmental political arena. It illustrates how, rather than a confrontational response to governmental discourses based on populist rhetoric of ‘us versus them’, the use of tactics and *détournement* based on tension and adaptability in everyday practices can encourage alternative environmental policies and actions.

The study has furthermore shown how environmental issues are first and foremost based on conceptions of sovereignty and property. As Minnerup and Solberg assert, the problems raised by environmental politics call for a recognition of “land rights” as a crucial part of citizenship (2011: 91) and a way to enhance the role of Sami people in Finnish politics. Deconstructing a discourse of ‘climate change absolutism’ based on ‘secular’ imaginaries can thus provide vulnerable populations with opportunities to challenge dominant environmental policies.

Both the ‘populist’ and the ‘subversive’ responses of the Sami to national and global environmental politics can be understood in terms of Jungian notions of ‘archetypal influences’ and ‘syncretic process’. For Jung, ‘archetypal influences’ spur a return to past influences and old myths as a response to “a state of crisis” (Stein and Jones 2010: 59), while the ‘syncretic process’ embodies the process of mixing parts of one cultural tradition with another (2010: 91). The former is shaped by fear of an environment in constant change, whereas the latter conveys an acceptance of the uncertain and indeterminate nature of society. This ‘syncretic process’ is reflected in the Sami’s ‘combination’ of diverse cultures as a way to adapt to a constantly evolving environment. I argue, that this approach can further alternative and inclusive responses to environmental issues affecting the Sami people, and vulnerable populations more broadly.

3. Desacralising Environmental Politics: Opening a Liminal Space for Self-reflexivity

3.1. Reinstating purity in the political realm and its dangers: the return of dichotomies

The case study of the Sami people in Finland has shown how traditional conceptions of the secular and the religious can further discourses of exclusion that argue for a return to purity. This can be linked to attempts by several scholars to recreate an ethically pure space in politics. Similar to Habermas’ (2006) conception of an utterly ‘neutral’ space of politics, one such ‘politics of purity’ has been advocated by Hannah Arendt (1968), who calls for a reinstatement of “purity in ‘the political realm’” (Connolly 2010: 14). Her concept of a ‘pure’ political space presupposes

the existence of a “teller of factual truth” (Arendt, 1968: 262) who is distinguished by “non-commitment and impartiality, freedom from self-interest in thought and judgment” (1968: 262). By maintaining the notion of an absolute ‘factual’ truth (1968: 264), Arendt reinstates the religious division between a ‘pure’ and ‘sacred’ space of politics based on an ethics of factual impartiality, on the one hand, and a ‘profane’ space of partiality and interest, on the other. In the domain of environmental politics, this raises several issues, the most prominent one being the risk of recreating populist narratives of exclusion through what Boström and Klintman call “ethical fetishism” (2017: 13).

By dictating a ‘right’ way to do environmental politics, ‘ethical fetishism’ forwards narratives of exclusion by blaming individuals or other agents for not behaving in a ‘pure’ ethical way (2017). Reinstating purity in environmental politics can thus lead to its own discourse of absolutism and single-belief fetishism. The aforementioned Sami discourse, which juxtaposes the ‘purity’ of traditional beliefs and lifestyles with the ‘corrupted’ approaches of dominant institutions, provides a useful example of the dangers of ‘ethical fetishism’. It replaces absolute notions of rationality based on dichotomies between ‘secular’ science and religion, with absolute concepts of a sacralised and untouched ‘natural world’, essentially sustaining these same dichotomies.

In this context, I argue that Connolly’s “ethos of engagement” (2010: 16) can provide, to a certain extent, a useful framework to scrutinise the role of ‘purity’ in politics. Connolly clearly opposes the return to a ‘political pure’ based on a division between an “enchanted world of medieval Christianity and the disenchanting world of secular modernism” (2010: 15), which simplifies cultural differences and excludes “possibilities of enchantment on each side of its fictive divide” (2010: 15). Connolly’s ‘ethos of engagement’ thus relies on engaging a variety of metaphysical conceptions as a way to forward democratic politics (2010: 39). While Connolly’s conception of an ‘open’ political space where a diversity of beliefs can collaborate (2010: 5) is useful, I nonetheless assert that his ‘ethics of care’ – posited through a care for the world “against unnecessary suffering” (2010: 17) – risks falling into a dogmatic secular narrative in the space of environmental politics.

Connolly maintains that his concept of ‘ethos of engagement’ does not constitute any form of absolutism, but rather one path amongst others (2010: 16). I nonetheless contend that his attempt to forward a specific conception of political engagement through a ‘nontheistic enchantment’ based on the denunciation of secularism as the simple ‘absence of religion’ provides in itself a form of dogmatism paradoxically based on secular ideals and concepts. Connolly’s argument hence risks to replace the conception of universalist environmental

'solutions' through a universal vision of 'caring for the world' that can act as another form of ethical puritanism.

3.2. Desacralising politics: productive tension as a marker for change

I contend that the fallibility of the 'ethical purity' discourse underlines first and foremost the importance of 'desacralising' environmental politics as an absolute discourse. Rather than attempting to provide another way to conceive environmental politics, I approach environmental issues as 'ideas' shaped by a multitude of value-laden beliefs.¹

Drawing on the case study of the Sami people in Finland, I construe the desacralisation of environmental politics as the use of tactics and *détournement* in everyday practices to highlight the constantly changing character of belief systems. Rather than following Arendt's (1968) conception of truth as the 'unchangeable nature of things', I argue for the necessity to acknowledge the presence of constantly evolving beliefs, rendering the search for a 'sacred truth' in politics impossible. 'Desacralising' environmental politics by using adaptive tactics of negotiation between a diversity of belief systems to question an immutable, sacred conception of secular ideology in environmental politics can constitute a first step to reconsider dominant environmental conceptions and discourses.

Following Eliade's (1959) established conception of the presence of the sacred in the sensuous and immanent realm, which can lead to 'sacralised politics', I thus argue for the necessity to 'desacralise' secular politics. Building on Haluza-DeLay's conception of religion as constantly evolving social phenomena (2014: 273), 'desacralising' environmental politics forecloses a 'return' to an imagined 'pure' space of environmental politics. It also entails a reconceptualisation of 'conflict' in politics. Marked by 'tense' negotiations between divergent belief systems, desacralised environmental politics enable the emergence of social and environmental alternatives within a space of (what I call) 'productive tension'. Thus, I contend that, in contrast to politics of consensus, 'positive' conflict and tension allow for alternative environmental discourses, policies and actions to emerge.

It is hence the collision between traditional conceptions of the secular and the religious that provides a space for the creation of inclusive and plural environmental policies. Rather than a "politics of absolutism" (Alston 2017: 12) devoid of compromise, the very tensions and negotiations brought about by the breaking of dichotomies between the religious and the secular can encourage creative reconsiderations of our everyday engagement with environmental politics.

¹ I build on Hulme (2009) who argues that climate change must be understood not just as a physical phenomenon but also as an idea that manifests itself differently in different cultural contexts.

3.3. Building new myths through uncertainty

It is important to stress that this space of 'productive tension' must engage with the inherent uncertainty of environmental issues rather than trying to control it through temporal frameworks. Building on Stenmark's (2015) conception of uncertainty as challenging our conceptions of the absolute, I argue that uncertainty about the future enables the creation of a liminal space where opportunities can emerge. As Bubandt asserts, "spirits thrive, [...] in conditions of doubt rather than belief" (2017: 125). Thus, uncertainty in environmental politics does not inevitably produce populist discourses of exclusion, it can also drive the creation of what Wright and Nyberg call "new political myths" (2013: 220) that challenge dominant political myths by addressing political issues through new imaginaries (2013: 220). The concept of 'new political myths' thus encourages us to embrace the liminal space uncertainty offers rather than 'fill the gap' it creates by discourses of fear.

This creation of new myths must entail the surpassing of the dichotomy between the religious and the secular. Failing to go beyond this dichotomy risks producing new 'old myths' that follow dualistic notions of conflict. To guard against the emergence of such absolutisms, new political myths must engage with each other in a context of self-reflexive tension. This conflictual interplay of new political myths can bring us closer to Rancière's definition of democracy as the reconsideration of the universal through the specific (Nash 1996) and restrain populist temptations in environmental politics.

Desacralising the space of environmental politics by creating new political narratives and myths thus requires recognising the inherent presence of the religious in shaping our perception of politics. Drawing on Jung's notion of the religious as an 'archaic presence' through the "collective unconscious", that is, an unconscious composed of archaic symbols common to all humans (Stevens 2001: 47), I contend that seeing the secular as a space void of religion limits our ability to grasp an inherently 'religious' political sphere. Thus, one cannot attain neutrality or objectivity by trying to control and govern environmental issues through the use of science and data as 'value-free' objects. The 'archaic' religious, understood here as the presence of value-laden symbols of meanings and myths rather than institutional forms of faith, is inherently present in the political space, and shapes both our beliefs and values, whether they are scientific or religious.

Therefore, 'desacralising' the space of environmental politics does not mean rendering it 'unreligious' by giving it back a 'profane' character. On the contrary, it recognises environmental politics as intrinsically permeated by the archaic religious. By acknowledging that environmental politics are shaped by beliefs and values, whether these are based on scientific or religious understandings of the world, one can open the space for a 'productive

tension' between multiplicities of mythical belief systems. This, I argue, can compel us to rethink the way we interact both within and outside the space of environmental policymaking.

Conclusion: a paradigm to go beyond paradigms

Providing a liminal space of productive tension where different belief systems interplay with each other can constitute a first step towards the inclusion of the specific into environmental politics and preventing the formation of what Alston calls a populist "coalition of the willing" (2017: 3). By going beyond dichotomies between the secular and the religious and dualist notions of 'us versus them', it can also provide a framework to tackle the 'post-political' problem in global environmental governance and the sources of populist discourses of exclusion. Throughout this piece, I have therefore endeavoured to underline the ways in which the historical division between the religious and the secular has led to the creation of a discourse of hidden 'secular religiousness', whereby other forms of belief are excluded from global and national environmental policymaking. By underlining the use of religious notions of absolute truths in the 'secular' space of politics, I have furthermore illustrated how modern global environmental politics use discourses of fear and exclusion to provide simplistic 'rational' solutions to complex local environmental issues. I have ultimately asserted that these discourses embody a 'post-politics of consensus' based on 'sacred' universalist environmental policies. This has generated political agendas that negatively affect populations most threatened by issues related to land property, natural resources and climate change. Using the example of the Sami people in Finland as a particularly insightful case of power struggle in environmental politics, I have shown how this hidden 'secular religiousness' led to a double-discourse of exclusion both on the part of the Sami population and the Finnish government, hence sustaining dichotomies between a secular approach to environmental politics and a spiritual one. However, as I have highlighted, this has also engendered creative environmental resistance based on tactical tensions between the Sami faith and the 'secular' national discourse. Thus, the case study demonstrates the value of techniques of resistance that acknowledge and utilise the tensions between multiple beliefs systems in environmental politics. Arguing against a return to an imagined absolute purity in environmental politics, I have hence argued that the uncertainty and complexity of environmental issues can enable the creation of new political myths that break dichotomies between the religious and the secular. I have concluded that 'desacralising' the space of environmental politics can promote creative environmental policymaking through the collision between a diversity of beliefs. However, I would like to stress that my attempt to imagine alternative approaches to environmental politics is not intended to serve as an absolute model or 'way to do' environmental politics. Rather, it is a call for 'a paradigm to go beyond paradigms'. Arguing against a politics of absolutism, it encourages the development of a liminal space to creatively

rethink alternative pathways in environmental politics. Rather than the need to meet deadlines, it highlights the value of stepping back to reconsider our spatial and temporal frameworks and our everyday social interactions. In particular, the intergenerational dimensions of environmental issues invite us to rethink how we see time as a way to control and govern environmental politics, and our public sphere in general. Beyond environmental policymaking, this calls for creativity on a diversity of levels and areas. Breaking dichotomies hence does not solely mean to go beyond the division between the religious and the secular: rather, it calls for the entanglement of the global and the specific, and for a larger effort to go beyond paradigms as a way to desacralise environmental politics.

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