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Political Ecology of Populism: a case study of Upper Austria

GEO 511 Master's Thesis

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Abstract

The challenge of climate change necessitates effective global cooperation, which is complicated by the rise of populist movements worldwide (Lockwood 2018). However, research and media often adopt normative approaches, acknowledging the growth of these movements while dismissing their arguments as unscientific and beyond the realm of legitimate politics a priori (Bosworth 2022; Jones 2023). This master's thesis examines linkages between the increasing popularity of populist movements, primarily driven by farmers' struggles, and adoption, integration, or resistance to environmental policies in rural Austria. Using ethnographic methods, our research focuses on Upper Austria as a case study, considering the success of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the region's agricultural history, and Austria's inclination towards environmental policies. Exploring the lived experiences of farmers, aiming to transcend the "empathy wall" (Hochschild 2016). Our findings point at a growing demand for increased democratic participation due to neoliberal and technocratic structures of environmental and agricultural policies. These policies leave farmers feeling disenfranchised, reliant on subsidies, and lacking autonomy while denying them political participation. Governments' implementation of such measures fuels anti-establishment sentiments, which populists capitalise on by framing a corrupt (urban) elite against "the righteous people". Our study sheds light on the complexities of addressing climate change within a populist context, emphasising the need for inclusive approaches that consider concerns and aspirations of local communities, particularly those engaged in agriculture. Understanding challenges posed by populism can aid policymakers and climate change initiatives in developing effective strategies that balance environmental protection and democratic participation.

Keywords: climate change, populist movements, farmers' struggles, environmental policies, rural Austria, democratic participation, neoliberalism, ethnographic research.

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Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative für Deutschland
AMA	Agrarmarkt Austria
BBB	Farmer-Citizen Movement (Dutch: BoerBurgerBeweging)
BP	British Petroleum
CAP	Common Agricultural Plan
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
EU	European Union
FPÖ	Freedom Party of Austria
GFC	Global Financial Crisis
IPCC	Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
Oö	Upper Austria (German: Oberösterreich)
ÖPUL	Österreichische Programm für umweltgerechte Landwirtschaft
ÖVP	Austrian People's Party (German: Österreichische Volkspartei)
RED III	Renewable Energy Directive III
RSPO	Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil
SPÖ	Austrian Social Democrats (German: Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs)
SVP	Swiss People's Party (German: Schweizerische Volkspartei)
UBV	Independent Farmer's Union (German: Unabhängiger Bauernverband)
UN	United Nations
WEF	World Economic Forum
WWOOF	World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms

1. INTRODUCTION

The escalating peril of climate change demands active global collaboration involving both political entities and individuals across the globe (Fraune & Knodt 2018, Wainwright & Mann 2018). The rising average temperatures are leading to greater unpredictability within ecological systems and a surge in extreme weather events. These climate-related challenges encompass a wide spectrum, from natural calamities like floods, storms, and wildfires to the growing scarcity of resources in agricultural and ecological systems. Consequently, the impact of climate change on the vulnerability of human and environmental communities is on an upward trajectory (Van Aalst 2006, Brönnimann et al 2014, Malm 2016). The escalating trend is not confined to academia alone, as it garners recognition for its threat to global and regional security from institutions such as the Pentagon and The World Bank (Davenport 2014, Evans 2011). This underscores the imperative for international collaboration in crafting strategies and mitigation measures to confront these pressing challenges. Indeed, the mounting repercussions of climate change are gaining such prominence that environmental concerns are emerging as the predominant catalyst for shaping political decision-making (Fraune & Knodt 2018, Wainwright & Mann 2018).

This global phenomenon is evident in the way natural disasters, extreme weather events, and resource scarcity contribute to conflicts, migration, and substantial economic losses (Hall 2009, Mathiesen 2015, Mekonnen & Hoekstra 2016). Although the direct impact of climate change on mass migration has faced scrutiny (Boass et al 2019), links to indirect effects, such as the aforementioned conflicts, are undeniable (L Perch-Nielsen, Bättig & Imboden 2008). However, Not all consequences of a changing climate are as overt, but they necessitate regional and international action. Rising average temperatures affect regions and ecosystems differently, with alpine areas experiencing more pronounced warming, sometimes up to 4.5 degrees Celsius in contrast to the global average increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius (Brönnimann et al 2014). This variation carries substantial implications for local ecological systems, agriculture, and infrastructure. Adaptation measures are required, including shifts in agricultural practices, the diversification of crops, and the use of drought-tolerant tree species in urban areas and for timber production (Oleson et al 2011, Burley et al 2019, Hanewinkel 2013).

Measuring the direct effects of climate change on local and cross-border scales is challenging, but the indirect consequences on global public health, agriculture, infrastructure, and social stability are even more complex to quantify. This emerging global challenge creates multifaceted problems across human and natural systems, where interconnectivity and the potential for problematic consequences and positive feedback loops add to the complexity (Lazarus 2008, Wainwright & Mann 2018). Emphasising the urgency of developing mitigation measures to address both the direct and indirect impacts of a rapidly changing planet. The growing imperative for international collaboration to address climate challenges faces hurdles as weather systems transcend national borders, necessitating policy measures beyond political boundaries. The rise of anti-establishment and populist movements globally poses a particular challenge, as some populist-led governments, like Brazil and the United States, withdrew from global climate agreements (Fehl & Thimm 2019). These dynamics emphasise the need for resilient and genuinely democratic mechanisms to tackle climate issues effectively.

Many current global climate proposals and policies are criticised for being undemocratic and shaped by elite think tanks or unelected bodies, often resulting in technocratic austerity measures that target various stakeholders, including farmers and workers (Phillips 2015; Fazi 2023). Such policies have triggered resistance and protests in countries like Sri Lanka, The Netherlands, and Italy, especially driven by the agricultural sector, which frequently bears the brunt of environmental policies (Mercola 2022; Mohan 2022). These instances highlight the resistance against ostensibly apolitical environmental policies that often serve existing neoliberal power structures, perpetuating extractivist capitalist practices (Brink, Vargas Falla & Boyd 2022; Vetta 2022). In addition to masking capitalist extractive systems, these mitigation approaches place the onus for change on ordinary citizens who wield limited political influence. Meanwhile, climate adaptation strategies tailored for highly profitable industries and large corporations not only inadequately address climate change but their carbon offset and market-driven mechanisms frequently result in increased emissions, all while permitting companies to portray themselves and their products as environmentally sustainable (Malm 2016; Greenfield 2023).

This master's thesis focuses on the increasing relevance between environmental issues in the context of a global populist rise. Undertaking ethnographic fieldwork with farmers in the populist stronghold of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) in the state of Upper Austria. Working collaboratively with farmers this research aims to situate how populist parties and supporters are integrating environmental issues into their politics and governance. Given the growing importance of environmental concerns in governance (Wainwright & Mann 2018) and recent agricultural protests in Europe against technocratic environmental policies (Furtula 2022), compounded by global supply chain disruptions due to conflicts (Reuters 2022), this study underscores the need for a rigorous critical evaluation of environmental governance. It aims to assess how technocratic environmental policies are received by populist groups and their constituents, examining acceptance, resistance, and the justifications provided by political officials, party members, and the broader public within a specific state that is a populist party stronghold.

Furthermore, the research seeks to explore how populist parties integrate pro-environmental positions into their platforms and governance. It aims to illuminate the *actually existing politics* within specific spatial contexts, recognising that space is actively shaped by capital interests (Smith 2010). The goal is to synthesise these findings to contribute to the development of an environmentally sustainable political framework. This emphasises the importance of democratic involvement in shaping policies and highlights the limitations of technocratic austerity measures in addressing global challenges. The study seeks to establish a preliminary framework for understanding the perception, incorporation, governance, and contestation of environmental issues in a local context where populist parties hold influence, acknowledging the urgency of adapting to multifaceted challenges in a world undergoing significant climate change.

The primary research questions centre on: **How do populist groups/parties integrate, frame, and leverage environmental issues in their political discourse? What motivates their adoption, rejection, or reframing of these issues?**

The first section is to set the context of a planet undergoing climate change in the context of a populist rise. Initially discussing how environmental issues, in particular those brought about by climate change, are becoming increasingly influential on guiding political decision making (Wainwright & Mann 2018). Demonstrating both the direct affects of a globally changing climate (Brönnimann et al 2014) and the flow on affects such as resource scarcity, conflict and migration (L Perch-Nielsen, Bättig & Imboden 2008). All underscoring the need for global cooperation to deal with this complex problem and the importance of genuinely democratic mitigation measures. Exploring the populist rise, particularly in liberal democracies, over the past decade and the challenges this presents tackling this global problem (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, Lockwood 2018). Highlighting the growing adaptation of environmental policies by populist groups and some brief examples of this shift to self proclaimed pro-environmental parties (Wainwright & Mann 2018, Tosun & Debus 2020, Turner & Bailey 2021).

Moving on to highlight the kinds of environmentalism that is oft coopted by some populist groups and critically questioning the framing and aims of many popular environmental groups. Giving examples of various political groups and environmental movements reducing environmental issues to problems of population and their inability to go beyond Malthusian and capitalist modes of thinking (Phillips 2015, Turner & Bailey 2021). Expressing the pitfalls of an anthropogenic framing of climate change that invisiblises the extractivist capitalism, letting the biggest polluters off the hook while laying the blame at the feet of the individual consumer, worker or farmer (Fisher 2009, Malm 2016). Discussing how in both right-wing and left-wing environmentalist circles, remnants of eco-xenophobia are discernible. This can be traced back to neo-Malthusian and limits-to-growth viewpoints advocating for population control and limitations on immigration. Furthermore, bioregionalist and localist movements, which endorse a return to traditional methods and regional economies while advocating detachment from global supply networks and cosmopolitan influences, may display exclusionary and non-universalist traits, further complicating efforts to deal with the global problem of climate change (Phillips 2022).

Lastly in the context section, giving a brief introduction to the FPÖ in Austria, a recent history of their relevant political endeavours ((Caiani & Graziano 2019, Tosun & Debus 2020) and the complex stance of being both a self-proclaimed leader of environmental policy while advocating for measures that could be seen as going against efforts for climate mitigation (Voss 2019). Finishing with a outlining for the research questions, and how this research aims to investigate the complex relationship between populist parties and environmental issues, exploring how these parties address ecological concerns and their potential impact on governance. By analysing how environmental policies are either adopted, rejected, or reframed by these parties and by examining the reactions of both political actors and the general public. Detailing that this study aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the changing dynamics in a world increasingly confronted by environmental challenges.

The following section *state of the art and analytical framework* aims to provide an overview of the current state of research on populism and outlines the analytical framework guiding this thesis. Firstly, it explores the origins of populism and anti-populism, emphasising their interconnected nature. It illustrates how framing anti-

populism as a natural component of modern society portrays populism as a threat to democracy, marked by nationalism and endangering liberal democratic values (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, Frank 2020). Secondly, it examines contemporary research on populism and anti-populism, highlighting the normative approach prevalent in popular media and academia, which portrays populism as an ever-growing menace to societal stability while often dismissing the concerns of populist groups and their supporters (Stavrakakis et al 2018, Frank 2020).

Thirdly, it delves into research on populism in Austria, with a specific focus on the FPÖ within the context of environmental politics and its impact on their political positioning. It acknowledges certain nativist, xenophobic, and anti-establishment tendencies within the FPÖ (Tosun & Debus 2020, Turner and Bailey 2020). But cautions against interpreting these implications solely through confirmation bias, as such a perspective may inadvertently bolster their support. Finally, the research adopts an analytical framework that transcends normative views of populism, drawing from Frank (2020) to perceive populism as a political force driven by the desire for democracy itself. It employs Hochschild's (2016) ethnographic methods to collaboratively construct narratives with the subjects under study, building upon prior work conducted in Austria (Dörre 2020, Schubert 2020). These frameworks and methods are utilised to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the shift away from liberal democratic values and the rise of populism within the context of mounting environmental pressures.

Section 4 *methodology* follows on to detail research approach of ethnography largely based off Hochschild (2016) work that utilises *keyhole issues* to scale the *empathy wall* and create a *deep story*, or grand narrative, that gives us a sense of political feeling for those being studied. Going on to outline some of the basic principles and approaches from leading scholars in the field of ethnography (Marcus 1995, Hume & Mulcock 2004, Pink et al 2015). Stressing for the importance of co-creating a narrative from the subject's perspective rather than a narrative about them from an academic point of view. As such, the positionality of the researcher and their points of departure are also outlined. Emphasising the need to acknowledge personal biases and influences when conducting ethnographic studies. Highlighting that this positionality is seen as both a starting point and a departure point for the research, aiming to remain conscious of biases while striving for empathetic understanding of the worldviews of those studied.

Furthermore, this section delves into the access to the field and keyhole issues used to guide the research and offer an entry point into exploring the research aims. Listing the reasons for focus group selection of farmers in Upper Austria due to the state being a populist stronghold of the FPÖ and the increasing focus on agricultural systems in climate mitigation measures (Caiani & Graziano 2019). Outlining the methods and limitations of contact and platforms used to create contact with farmers to gain entry to the field for this ethnographic research. Also detailing the other functionaries and bodies contacted such as party officials or agricultural bodies.

To gain access to the field and guide the interactions with the research a two pronged keyhole issue was selected: the European Green Deal and a contentious proposal within it, the Renewable Energy Directive III

(RED III) initiative. The European Green Deal, introduced by the EU in 2019, aims to transition the EU into a climate-neutral and sustainable economy by 2050, with a focus on addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and social inequality (European Commission 2021). Austria has made significant commitments to the Green Deal, including ambitious targets for climate mitigation and support for organic farming (European Commission 2019). Part of Austria's sustainable transition involves substantial reliance on biomass, particularly wood, as a renewable energy source (Schulzki-Haddouti 2022). However, a controversial RED III amendment proposed in 2022 sought to exclude wood from the list of renewable sources, sparking opposition both within Austria and across the EU (Aikawa 2022). This issue, which revolves around the classification of forest biomass as renewable energy, became a focal point for the FPÖ's opposition to the EU's policies, highlighting the party's stance on energy security and the Austrian population's interests (Austria Press Agency 2022). By examining this specific issue, this research aims to shed light on how populist groups in Austria engage with, accept, resist, or reframe climate policies in practice, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the evolving dynamics between environmental governance and populism in a world grappling with environmental challenges.

Lastly in the methodology it is detailed what and how fieldwork was undertaken, spending approximately three to five nights on separate farms, aiming to immerse in their daily lives to foster trust and generate valuable research material. Field work occurred during autumn and winter, offering more engagement opportunities. The approach was adaptable, tailored to each group's needs, involving active participation in various farm tasks and informal discussions during shared mealtimes. Informal interviews and audio recordings enriched the material, and follow-up discussions a month later allowed for deeper exploration. Eight farmers and workers were engaged in the research, with a flexible schedule accommodating discussions and work sessions. The dialogue remained open, guided by the farmers' needs, covering key research issues. Additionally, efforts to engage party officials and state representatives were made, resulting in interviews with an FPÖ member of parliament and the director of the Federal Agricultural College, supplementing the research with valuable insights and enhancing understanding. This is followed up by outlining the ethical considerations, limitations and data analysis for this thesis.

Being that this research involves ethnographic methods to create a narrative from the focus groups perspective, the results for this research are written in narrative form. Organised from the farmers and workers interviewed in a chronologically, then moving on to the party officials, functionaries and agricultural governing bodies. This decision for a narrative framing of results aim to better illustrate the perspectives from the subject's side of the *empathy wall*. Moving into the discussion, the *deep story* created builds off the work from Hochschild (2016) and Dörre (2020) with adaptations based off the narrative co-constructed from the ethnographic fieldwork. A story that aims to capture the frustrations, anxieties, fears, pride, hopes, and dreams of farmers and workers in Upper Austria, devoid of judgment, in order to delve into the subjective perspective through which they perceive the world. In Upper Austria's farming communities, the deep story of populism reveals complex feelings. While there is a strong desire to work with nature and the local community to address climate change, many farmers feel unheard. Although explicit populist support is rare, there is a growing sense that the populist party might be the only option for political change, akin to the sentiments of

disenfranchised workers and former SPÖ voters in Vienna (Schubert 2020) or the upheaval seen with Trump in the 2016 United States (Frank 2020). This shift reflects growing frustration and a willingness to support the FPÖ despite associated risks, as farmers feel politically outcast and ostracised by their communities (Schubert 2020).

Leaving the narrative form the rest of the discussion is based around rigorous critical reflection over the research aims and results. Organising the discussion around the sub-categories of the research aims detailed in section 2.5. Firstly, looking at the integration of environmental politics, using the findings to explicitly explore the main question of this research: the integration, framing, adoption and utilisation of environmental issues by populist groups and supporters. On how such politics manifest in Upper Austria on a broad level, for example around climate change, energy, forestry or general ecological policy. Discussing the linkages and lack thereof, or neo-Malthusian framings of environmental issues and the surprising outcome that such reductionist framings were much more prevalent in governing bodies such as the EU or ÖVP and Greens (Phillips 2016). Highlighting that almost all of the farmers interviewed centred their understanding, framing and integrations of environmental issues around democratic involvement and power. They all viewed climate change as a pressing issue that required attention but criticised the complexity of policy creation, particularly in projects like the EU Green Deal, which they found lacking in political autonomy and sensitive to local intricacies.

All interviewed farmers, whether openly supporting the FPÖ or cautiously acknowledging their political success, viewed climate change as a pressing issue that required attention. While many believed Austrian farmers were performing well, they perceived hindrances to progress due to the bureaucratic nature of government and agricultural bodies. Farmers expressed a genuine willingness to work with nature and modify their practices but criticised the complexity of policy creation, particularly in projects like the EU Green Deal. Their focus was on implementing adaptation measures rather than reversing the effects of climate change, challenging the idea that populist parties avoid climate discussions, as they emphasised the importance of addressing this issue at the local level and from the grassroots outward, in contrast to a narrow focus on national borders and immigration concerns. Populist supporters in Upper Austria exhibit nuanced and direct approaches to environmental issues, emphasising the seriousness of climate change and power dynamics within climate causes and mitigation strategies. They prioritise addressing major polluters and power-holders, highlighting concerns about the urban-rural divide and viewing themselves as nature custodians. Their unanimous focus on democratic mitigation measures challenges normative framings and underscores the need for a more open perspective on how populist parties engage with environmental issues to avoid inadvertently strengthening populist sentiments and radical parties (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017).

The following section focuses on the *actual existing politics* largely based off Smith's (2010) uneven development. Space is not merely a passive backdrop for economic endeavours; it is actively molded by capital's imperatives and the interests of influential actors, as the pursuit of profit and capital accumulation fuels capitalist development, concentrating wealth and development in specific areas and relegating others to economic marginalisation, according to Smith (2010). This section will draw on the experiences and worldview from the farmers to illustrate actual existing politics in the populist FPÖ stronghold of Upper Austria. Exploring

how populists prioritise environmental issues around agriculture, energy and forestry. Lastly, focusing on how access to the state is perceived by the focus group, and if results indicate as Smith (2010) suggests that the role of the state often implements policies that favour the interests of capital, such as providing subsidies, tax breaks, or deregulation, which can further exacerbate spatial inequalities and uneven development.

Demonstrating how the experiences and narratives of Austrian farmers shed light on how the operations of the EU and the Austrian state provide fertile ground for the rise of populist sentiments, a phenomenon substantiated by the case of the other farmers movements abroad (Mercola 2022; Mohan 2022), which emerged as a response to Neo-Malthusian framings and ensuing technocratic austerity measures (Croder 2023). In these instances, farmers' sense of disenfranchisement is exacerbated by insulated and unelected governing bodies that shape policies significantly impacting their daily lives, leaving them with limited avenues for influence (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). The existing political landscape in Upper Austria and beyond perpetuates a positive feedback loop, amplifying populist sentiments as technocratic environmental policies are enforced, thereby intensifying the challenges posed by the contemporary climate crisis (Wainright & Mann 2018). Detailing that to effectively address this issue, it is imperative to develop solutions that actively involve local populations in decision-making processes, transcending the confines of capital accumulation, as failure to do so risks the continued growth of populist sentiments fostered by the current political dynamics (Smith 2010, Ferris et al. 2011, Büscher & Fletcher 2020).

The section 6.4 then goes on to challenge the establishment narratives that exist around populism. A framing that historically frames populist movements in a normative and dismissive manner, often depicted as a democratic threat, inherently authoritarian, anti-establishment, and racially motivated, driving towards ethno-nationalist objectives (Malm 2021, Tosun & Debus 2021, Turner & Bailey 2021, Jones 2023). While acknowledging that some self-identified populist parties may exploit popular sentiment for nativist ends, it is essential to adopt a more nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to populist success and the sentiments they harness, which can be manipulated by malevolent actors, as demonstrated by insights from farmers and workers in Upper Austria and neighbouring regions (Postel 2016, Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, Frank 2020,). Utilising the experiences of farmers to challenge the anti-democratic and demagogue loving framing of populist. Rather that their plight is wholly centred around a desire for more democracy, not less (Frank 2020). How these framing foster greater division and benefit those in power while demobilising the peasantry and working class (Smith 2010, Dörre 2019).

Furthermore, this thesis offers a more nuance and complex view of populism being anti-establishment, treating to tear down any transnational institutions and cooperation (Frank 2020). Using the deep story and experiences of farmers to display the tension that, while there is certainly dissatisfaction with, in their view, corrupt and anti-democratic institutions. Rather, the findings did not reveal a clear-cut anti-establishment stance or actions, as posited by numerous scholars (Lockwood 2018, Tosun & Debus 2021, Turner & Bailey 2021). Instead, these results challenge the prevalent anti-populist narrative that dismisses legitimate concerns about institutions controlled by the elite and operating in favour of the powerful (Smith 2010, Frank 2020). The results hope to invite a more genuinely empathetic and democratic approach to such concerns.

Lastly, challenging the most prevalent grounds on which populist are strongly dismissed, namely their apparent inherent racist, nationalistic or outright fascist tendencies (Bugaric & Kuhelj 2018, Rydgren 2018). Our findings clearly highlight a strong emphasis on addressing agricultural and environmental concerns at the local level, gradually expanding to national and global scales. This approach is informed by the recognition of a world experiencing the challenges of climate change, guiding their efforts towards implementing sustainable solutions. Characterising these aspirations and struggles as nativist or racist is not only unjust, but also furthers feelings of division from farmers and workers and gives more legitimacy to the elites not caring about general people (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). Highlighting that this is not to ignore that their are populist sentiments that can be exploited in nativist or authoritarian manners by certain political actors, rather that it is even more important to not take a normative approach that dismisses genuine concerns raised through populist avenues or actors (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). The experiences of all the farmers indicated that they all had concerns regarding the FPÖ's policies or governance were they to be in power. Yet they all conceded that the Freedom Party was the only major political group looking out for farmers or average people's interests. Reiterated by the research demonstrated by Dörre (2020) and Schubert (2020).

The final section of the discussion aims to offer an avenue for how to approach populism, particularly in academia, in the context of a planet undergoing climate change. Offering the comparison of how much of the field of geography is very clearly able to see the detrimental influence of unelected bodies, large corporations, corrupted governments and solutions purely framed within the capitalist mode of production when viewing the Global South (Ferris et al 2011, Robbins 2012, Neimark et al 2019, Büscher & Fletcher 2020, Sultana 2020). Yet this very same field of academia seems unable to take the same approach when reversing the gaze into our own backyards, oft falling into dismissing normative framing of populist struggles (Bugaric & Kuhelj 2018, Rydgren 2018, Lockwood 2018, Tosun & Debus 2020 Turner & Bailey 2021, Malm 2021). Using examples from small holder farmers in Indonesia and Malaysia and their struggles with global agribusiness, unelected bodies and Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) certification (McCarthy 2012, Silva-Castañeda 2012, Cheyns 2014, Khöne 2014). Detailing how in these cases in the global south, the detrimental affect and disempowering processes of uneven development are clear, yet we seem blinded by anti-populist framings to very similar struggles back home. By drawing these linkages this thesis hopes to ask the uncomfortable questions posed by the populist moment as an opportunity to foster genuine democratic processes, rather than as a risk to liberal democracy. This research puts forth that populism serves as the essential safeguards within a functioning democratic system. It could be argued that the emergence of significant populist movements often occurs when our liberal democracies have become unevenly developed, primarily benefiting established power structures and the accumulation of wealth (Smith 2010, Frank 2020). Failing to address these uncomfortable questions and engage with them openly not only deepens societal divisions but also fuels resistance, as pointed out by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017).

Concluding that in this current era dominated by populism and amid the backdrop of a planet grappling with climate change, a pressing question arises: how should we respond? Drawing from insights in geography and political ecology, which underscore the need for authentic environmental solutions that challenge the existing disparities in development and the relentless pursuit of capital (Smith 2010), empower local communities and

indigenous farmers through democratic means (Büscher & Fletcher 2020), and acknowledge that mitigation strategies devised by transnational corporations, large enterprises, and unelected bodies tend to perpetuate prevailing power structures (McCarthy 2012, Silva-Castañeda 2012, Cheyns 2014, Khöne 2014), why do we not adopt a similar approach closer to home? Mark Fisher's observation that the connection between capitalism and ecological crises is not coincidental but inherent to capitalism itself (2009) serves as a stark reminder. If we can comprehend this relationship when examining global issues, we should also apply this understanding domestically. The more we dismiss populist concerns as inherently detrimental, the more destructive our approach becomes. It is, therefore, no surprise that the response to the populist wave has led to the ascent of right-wing populist parties across established liberal democracies (Fazi 2023b). Essentially, on matters pertaining to the environment, military conflicts, or public health, most established parties adopt an approach of "silence and compliance," while populist parties, whether genuine or not, proclaim "we hear you, we are you." This dismissive stance only serves to strengthen populist movements (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017).

Addressing climate change is an urgent global imperative that demands collaboration between political actors and people worldwide (Fraune & Knodt 2018, Wainwright & Mann 2018). If our approach to devising mitigation measures fails to genuinely challenge existing power structures through democratic means that empower those most affected on the frontlines, these measures are likely to fall short of their environmental objectives. Moreover, they risk exacerbating political divisions and enabling the continued growth of fossil-fueled capitalism (Smith 2010, Malm 2016, Büscher & Fletcher 2020). While this thesis offers a limited ethnographic study focused on one Austrian region, its findings underscore the vital importance of involving the affected population in both the creation and execution of environmental initiatives. If we persist in allowing the solutions to this existential threat to be crafted by those who hold power within the very system driving climate change, we must also anticipate widespread social resistance and increased support for populist parties.

2. CONTEXT

The following section sets the current global context both ecologically and politically and provides the scientific embedding with the contextual framework for this master's thesis to establish a deeper understanding of the research field. The initial steps demonstrate the increasing influence of environmental factors on geopolitics on a planet undergoing climate change. Followed by an overview that delves into the recent proliferation of populist political movements worldwide, spotlighting the intricate challenge they present to international collaboration. The next steps critically engage with Malthusian framings of environmental issues and movements and their links to populist parties, moving on to the circumstances of the focus of this thesis, namely populism and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). Lastly outlining the primary research questions that will guide the empirical study. These inquiries stand as guides to unravel the puzzle surrounding how the ascendance of populist parties shapes perceptions and cooperative efforts concerning pressing environmental concerns, such as climate change.

2.1 A planet in flux: the new Leviathan

The state of global geopolitical stability is under increasing pressure from environmental forces. The shifting climate is causing ecological systems to become less predictable and is increasing extreme weather events. From natural disasters such as floods, storms and wildfires to resource scarcity in agricultural and ecological systems, the effect of climate change on the precarity of human and environmental communities continues to rise (Van Aalst 2006, Brönnimann et al 2014, Malm 2016). This increasing phenomena is not only recognised in academia, as the threat it poses to global and regional security is acknowledged even by the Pentagon and The World Bank (Davenport 2014, Evans 2011). This highlights the need for international cooperation to create strategies and mitigation measures to deal with these challenges. Indeed the ever increasing consequences of climate change are becoming so prominent that environmental issues could be seen as *the* prominent driving force of political decision making. In essence, a new Leviathan (Fraune & Knodt 2018, Wainwright & Mann 2018).

What 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes referred to as *Leviathan* was the embodiment of an overarching sovereign power, or guiding authority that governs social order. Without it, he argues, social order is prone to chaos and conflict where human self interest is the driving force of society. Hobbes put forth the need for a ruling body in the form of an absolute monarchy or strong centralised government, where individuals citizens would be willing to sacrifice some of their freedoms and rights for law, order and stability. Through the lens of ecology we can see how the ever increasing influence of climate could be the new embodiment of Leviathan, where environmental issues are the main guiding force for political decision making (Wainwright & Mann 2018). Though there are certainly dangers of justification for totalitarianism in adopting this framing (which will be explored further below), the growing influence of environmental issues on regional and international stability cannot be ignored.

This new Leviathan can be seen throughout the globe in the way natural disasters, extreme weather and resource scarcity increase conflicts, causing migration and costing billions of dollars in damage and mitigation. We have seen examples of water scarcity drive conflict Syria (Mathiesen 2015), Niger, Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon (Hall 2009), or even the ongoing India-Pakistan conflict is exacerbated by climate change where hundreds of millions of people face severe water scarcity (Mekonnen & Hoekstra 2016). While the direct influence of climate change on mass migration has been challenged (Boass et al 2019), links to the indirect affect, for example the aforementioned conflicts, can certainly be drawn (L Perch-Nielsen, Bättig & Imboden 2008). Furthermore, in just the last five years massive bushfires in Australia burning over 15 million hectares (Van Oldernbrogh et al 2021), flooding in Pakistan in 2022 leaving more than 10 percent of the country underwater, killing thousands, leaving millions homeless and costing over 30 billion dollars (Youde 2023), and the 2019 cyclone Idai that devastated Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe, damaging infrastructure, agricultural and river systems (Chapungu 2020) offer just a few examples of extreme events that can be linked to this new Leviathan of climate change.

Not all effects of a changing climate are so dramatic, yet the more nuance influences still require action on regional and international scales. It has been shown that rising average temperatures are not uniform, affecting certain regions and ecologies differently. Alpine regions in Europe for example can experience a much more pronounced effect. Where a global average increase of 1.5 degrees celsius could be as much as 4.5 degrees in some alpine regions. This has enormous consequences not only for ecological systems, it drastically affects agriculture and infrastructure locally and downstream (Brönnimann et al 2014). Other examples of where adaptation measures are needed include shifting or diversifying agricultural crops to adapt to warmer and driers temperatures (Oleson et al 2011) or even replacing tree populations with more drought tolerant species for both urban use and timber production (Burley et al 2019, Hanewinkel 2013). The direct effects of climate change on local and cross border scales is difficult enough to measure on its own. The indirect flow on effects this has on global public health, agriculture and food systems, infrastructure and social order are even more difficult to quantify. This new Leviathan creates wicked problems across human and natural systems that are as diverse as they are numbered. Where no one system is isolated from another, the potential for problematic consequences and accelerating indirect positive feedback loops only adds to this high-stakes global conundrum (Lazarus 2008, Wainwright & Mann 2018). Highlighting the importance to create mitigation measures to adapt to both the direct and indirect consequences of a planet in flux.

The need for international cooperation to deal with these challenges is ever growing. Weather systems do not abide by human borders or regulations. This proposes a particular challenge to global stability as political systems vary from nation to nation and creating policy and mitigation measures will need to reach beyond these boundaries. This increasing necessity for cooperation is challenged by the rise of anti-establishment and populist movements worldwide (Fraune & Knodt 2018, Liverman 2015, Huber et al 2021). While the success of populist movements does not always equate anti-environmental stances, we can see with some of the largest economies in the world in Brazil and the United States, when “populist” or at least quasi-populist movements won power, they withdrew from global climate agreements in 2019 and 2017 respectively (Fehl &

Thimm 2019). The significance of this phenomenon underscores the necessity of establishing resilient and fully democratic mechanisms to address these challenges.

Unfortunately many of the current global proposals and policies to attempt to mitigate the affects of climate change are anti-democratic (Fisher 2009, Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). Often created in the think tanks of elites or by unelected bodies, much of the proposed solutions result in technocratic austerity measures targeting farmers, workers and consumers as the sole vessel for change (Phillips 2015, Fazi 2023). Such policies unsurprisingly foster harsh resistance and often actually hinder progress on creating realistic solutions. Examples of this can be seen in popular uprisings across the globe in recent years. Exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its often technocratic management, protest and resistance to environmental policies have surged in nations such as Sri Lanka, The Netherlands and Italy. These movements largely driven by farmers, as the agricultural industry regularly bares the brunt of such policies as they are often portrayed as the scapegoat for environmental issues and lab rat for mitigation measures (Mercola 2022, Mohan 2022). These are but a few examples of a growing resistance to environmental policies that are often presented as apolitical, yet regularly serving existing neoliberal power structures that exacerbate further extractivist capitalist practices (Brink, Vargas Falla & Boyd 2022, Vetta 2022).

Further to concealing capitalist extractivist systems, these mitigation methods lay responsibility for change at the feet of everyday citizens with little to no political power. All the while the climate adaptation methods for ultra profitable industries and large corporations not only do little to genuinely tackle climate change, their carbon offset and market driven mechanisms often have overall negative impacts on emissions while allowing companies to sell themselves (and their products) as sustainable (Malm 2016, Greenfield 2023). Though it is unsurprising that such methods not only don't genuinely challenge power or address environmental issues but are more geared toward profit, when the creation of such policies are done in conjunction with the largest polluters across all industries (Fazi 2023). Recent analysis of the leading carbon offset schemes demonstrated that more that 90% of the carbon credits do not represent any actual emission reduction. Carbon offsets entail offsetting emissions by investing in projects aimed at reducing or eliminating carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Such projects encompass diverse activities like reforestation, renewable energy initiatives, and methane capture endeavours. Not only do many of these schemes have a net negative effect on climate change, reports from locals in Peru at on of the flagship carbon offset operations (used by Shell, Gucci and Disney to name a few), showed "homes being cut down with chainsaws and ropes by park guards and police. They spoke of forced evictions and tensions with park authorities" (Greenfield 2023).

It is clear that the circumstances not only presents us with high stakes and urgent challenge, but that the cure is often worse than the disease. We are confronted with this wicked riddle; on a planet undergoing climate change where the importance of cross border cooperation is ever growing, what does the growing challenge of populist groups and movements present? With mitigation measures that often favour increasing profit and "business as usual" for ultra wealthy, while unloading the brunt of radical change on to everyday citizens and a heightened focus on farmers (Phillips 2015, Fazi 2023), agriculture offers us a keyhole issue to potentially unlocking the puzzle of this populist rise. Farmers have been at the core of populist movements since the brith

of the People's Party, (later to be named The Populist Party), in the 19th century (Frank 2020). If we are to create robust solutions that are truly democratic, we need not only to understand and work with those in closest contact with nature, but we must invite all farmers, from the nomadic peasants to large scale ranchers, to actively participate in shaping and implementing these solutions (Büscher & Fletcher 2020).

2.2 The populist rise

Over the last decade there has been a sharp rise in populist movements across the globe. From the well documented examples of the successes of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the United States or the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom to the growing strength of populist groups in places like Chilé, Italy, France, India and Brazil (Lockwood 2018, Loftus 2020, Turner & Bailey 2021). While not all of these movements have been genuinely populist in the way their leaders have governed, it is without doubt that, genuine or not, political leaders have been able to harness populist and anti-establishment kindling to ignite successful political movements (Wainwright & Mann 2018, Frank 2020). What conditions manifest to explain this sharp rise in populism globally? While the definitive causes are still disputed, some of the documented major factors are global decline in political trust, growing neoliberalism and an increasing class and socio-economic divide (Citrin & Stoker 2018, Harvey 2018, Bettache & Chiu 2019, Frank 2020).

The case of the United States offers us a brief window into both the successes of a genuine populist and quasi-populist movement in Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump respectively. Furthermore, it gives insight to one of the causes in the populist rise; while as almost all nations across the globe have lost some confidence in their governments, most advanced industrial societies, or established liberal democracies, have seen sharp declines, none more so than the United States (Citrin & Stoker 2018, Perry 2021). Liberal democracy as defined by Galston (2018) rests "on a tacit compact between peoples on the one hand and elected representatives together with unelected experts on the other...this type of political order rests on the republican principle, takes constitutional form, and incorporates the civic egalitarianism and majoritarian principles of democracy" (p.10). While this reading may not be universal for all established democracies it generalises the notion that in most modern day democratic nations people will defer (decision making) power to politicians and experts if they are seen to be representing their values and economic wishes, however "if elites stopped managing the economy effectively, all bets were off" (Galston 2018 p.10).

As for established liberal democracies, the United States represents a global phenomenon of increasing neoliberal policies that foster a decline in political trust, institutionalise corruption and exacerbates socio-economic divides, all fertile ground for the sprouting of populist movements (Esaiasson et al 2019, Harvey 2018, Bettache & Chiu 2019). While Trump ran his 2016 campaign on populist and anti-elitist sentiment combined with feeding off anti-immigrant and anti-liberal values. His time in office however was coopted by the neoliberal order, spearheading tax-cuts for the rich and corporations at historic speed, and diverting the blame for economic hardships on to minorities and immigrants (Bettache & Chiu 2019). Concurrently, while not successful in his bids for the Democrat Party presidential nomination, the Sanders 2016 and 2020 election campaigns was able to harness working class and poor sentiment with his record breaking campaign

fundraising of individual donors with the average value at US$18. All the while having the most class, age and ethnically diverse supporters of those election cycles (Medina & Herndon 2020, Otterbein 2020). While not the main subject of this paper and not universally applicable, the success of these campaigns highlights the connection between declining political trust, growing neoliberalism and socio-economic disparities, and the emergence of populist movements.

In recent years, the convergence of rising populist movements and environmental policies has unveiled the interconnectedness and repercussions of this collision. While many populist parties have traditionally been seen as resistant or dismissive to the science of ecological degradation and climate change, the growing consequences of climate change has forced these groups to adapt (Turner & Bailey 2021). As climate adaptation and many new environmental policies ignite social resistance, understanding how such policies are constructed, interpreted, accepted, utilised and resisted will be of paramount importance in global cooperation to deal with a warming planet (Wainright & Mann 2018, Brink, Vargas & Boyd 2022). As populist parties grow worldwide, many are today integrating environmental policies into their platforms and agendas. Creating a shift away from groups seen as anti-environmental to (by some measures) the strongest advocates for change (Wainwright & Mann 2018, Tosun & Debus 2020, Turner & Bailey 2021). Today it is perhaps better suited to look at the mechanism and political mode of action to which environmental policies are constructed and implemented, to help determine how populist movement will integrate or resist.

Environmental policy is often abrasively technocratic and forced onto populations against their will, or at least, without democratic support. In just the last few years from nations as far apart as Sri Lanka and The Netherlands, we see clear examples of the clumsily constructed environmental policy by a detached and unelected elite igniting massive social resistance amongst the general population (Ferris et al 2011, Fazi 2023). In the case of the Netherlands, under the European Union's (EU) emission reduction rules, the Dutch government proposed to cut 50% of nitrogen emissions from agriculture. The EU commission document states this would be done by "extensifying agriculture, notably through buying out or terminating farms, with the aim of reducing livestock… [this would] first be on a voluntary basis, but mandatory buyout is not excluded if necessary" (Fazi 2023). This particularly affected small family owned and peasant farms, forcing them to either sell or abandon century old farming practices woven into Dutch culture. However it also sparked massive farmer protests across the nation. Creating blockades to infrastructure and strikes, it also spawned the uprising of the Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB). The BBB went from garnering 1% of the national vote in 2019 to now winning the first round of provincial elections in March 2023 (Croder 2023). By illustrating that when environmental policy fails to incorporate the perspectives of those most affected, expecting such measures to achieve the same level of success as those meticulously crafted in isolation by think tanks, is destined to fuel vehement social resistance. (Ferris et al 2011, Büscher & Fletcher 2020).

In an even more extreme case of forcing "green" policies into a population that give rise to resistance, Sri Lanka was seen as a laboratory for forcing necessary change and a poster child for sustainability. In 2022, under the guidance of the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), a darling project of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the United Nations (UN) Global Compact and Principles for Responsible Investment

programs and the World Economic Forum (WEF), Sri Lankan agriculture was forced to convert all of its farming practices to organic (Toledo 2022, Varadarajan 2022). This Green New Deal was intended to be a national experiment and green agricultural revolution to be exported worldwide. Instead it plunged the country into chaos, forcing nearly 2 million into poverty with food shortages, causing riots and the eventual collapse of the government (Varadarajan 2022, Fazi 2023). A WEF article boasting that ESGs would bring massive economic prosperity to Sri Lanka by 2025 has since been deleted (Toledo 2022). This highlights the multifaceted consequences of failure to create robust mitigation measures to deal with environmental issues, furthermore that it is these very ill advised technocratic measures that lead to more social upheaval and anti-establishment sentiment (Varadarajan 2022, Ferris et al 2011).

Cases like the Netherlands and Sri Lanka are just a pair of examples in global phenomena of populist uprisings in response to authoritarian and neoliberal policy measures. While certainly not only limited to agriculture, there are many lessons to be learned into how proposed climate change mitigation measures affecting farming industries. It is clear that growing populism presents a challenge to global cooperation in dealing with climate change (Lockwood 2018). However this only emphasises the importance of creating mitigation measures that are robust, dynamic and genuinely democratic. There is a contradiction between the need for robust environmental policies and the concerns raised by populist groups about their democratic legitimacy and socioeconomic implications. Finding ways to engage with populist groups, understand their concerns, and integrate their perspectives into policy-making processes can help bridge the divide and foster more constructive and inclusive environmental governance.

2.3 The pitfalls of Malthusian environmentalism and links to populist parties

> *"There's no practical way of stabilizing the population of the U.S. without reducing the immigration rate. When do we decide we have to do something, or do we wait until things are as bad here as they are in the countries people want to leave"*
>
> ~ Sen. Gaylord Nelson, founder of Earth Day

> *"Instead of controlling the environment for the benefit of the population, perhaps we should control the population to ensure the survival of our environment"*
>
> ~ Sir David Attenborough, naturalist and world leading environmentalist

Environmental movements are no strangers to Malthusian framings of nature conservation issues. Malthusian environmentalism suggests that human population growth will inevitably outpace the Earth's carrying capacity, leading to resource depletion, environmental degradation, and societal crises (Phillips 2015). Be it from leaders and activists of some of the worlds most popular environmental movements in the above mentioned quotes, to the more traditional 'fortress' conservation and more modern 'Half Earth' movement (Holmes & Cavanagh 2016, Sleicher et al 2019). Centred in Eurocentric Romantic notions of Man and Nature being separate entities, these conceptions of nature are deeply entwined with capitalist forms of value to be managed as a

resource (Phillips 2015, Turner & Bailey 2021). From spiritual leader and leading advocate in global soil health, Sadhguru, to Klaus Schwab of the WEF, these analyses see the critical problem for the environment being population growth and aim to control human behaviour and movement through legislation, market fixes, boundaries and force (Holmes & Cavanagh 2016. World Economic Forum 2022).



Figure 1: example of problematic misanthropic environmentalism from one of the the largest global environmental movements; Extinction Rebellion (Hudson 2020).

There are major problems with framing environmentalism in this manner. Firstly, the capitalist mode of resource extraction and value is effectively 'baked in' to be a part of human existence, while the main driving force of ecological degradation from fossil fuelled capitalism is made invisible (Turner & Bailey 2021). This easily feeds into neoliberal narratives and misanthropic assessments of the causes of environmental issues. Placing the burden of world changing events such as mass extinction and climate change purely on the narrow shoulders of the individual consumer (Malm 2016). Humans become the driver of all environmental destruction, as the morally and environmentally sensitive scramble to ethically purchase our energy saving lightbulbs, carbon offset our aeroplane travel and feel that our eco-friendly coffee cup is saving the planet (Fisher 2009, Phillips 2015). It is again unsurprising that framing environmental issues in such guilt laden and misanthropic manners fosters greater distrust in experts and establishment narratives and processes.

Secondly, the Malthusian framing of environmentalism propagates colonial notions of 'Wilderness' and 'pristine' and 'untouched' nature, best managed by those holding to post Enlightenment values. This was fundamental to shaping the construction of nature and its management in racialised, gendered and class dynamics of colonialism and continues to enhance the 'correct' environmental management of the Global North to be exported to, or even shielded from, the Global South (Turner & Bailey 2021). While actively promoting population control as common sense methods, it is not only blind to power relations but denies a history and reproduction of colonial exploitation and production. It is perhaps not a difficult leap to see the danger of such a framing, leading to passive misanthropy as expressed by parts of modern environmental activist groups such as Extinction Rebellion (fig 1), to the call of closing borders by nations (Phillips 2015). At its extremes this worldview even calls for active human removal, there has been an increase in mass shootings by self proclaimed eco-fascists worldwide. From the massacres in the United States, Norway and New Zealand, all of these shooters stated motivations of over population in their manifestos (Phillips 2022). This branch of environmentalism sanitises and consolidates problematic Malthusian approaches and fuels 'greenwashed' conservative and extreme anti-immigration policy (Turney & Bailey 2021).

While many populist groups and parties are skeptical on the grounds of climate change, there is a surprising amount of pro environmental politics within such groups (Lockwood 2018). This can be seen from conservative groups such as the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and British National Party having 'exposed' environmental protection's largest threat as immigration, or the the French National Rally claiming "borders are the environment's greatest ally . . . it is through them that we will save the planet" (Turner & Bailey 2021 p.3).



Figure 2: example of Malthusian environmentalism from the RWP Swiss People's Party framing water security/degradation as a problem of mass immigration. Claiming the roughly 1 million immigrants that have migrated Switzerland in the last 13 years, use roughy 59 million litres of water annually. Water that is for 'our farmers', hurting the environment and 'destroys our resources'. Lastly claiming anyone who wants to protect the environment in Switzerland must fight mass immigration (SVP 2019).

While this may leave us questioning the potential contradictions of a 'thin centred ideology' of climate-sceptic | pro-environment (Tosun & Debus), Lockwood (2018) explains that conservative European populist parties often do not reject climate science outright, such as in the United States, and that climate scepticism and resistance is partly a 'collateral damage' feature of the anti-elitism/anti-globalist expressions of populist groups. As such, to best understand this we must first delve into the roots of the marriage of populism and environmentalism.

This Malthusian environmentalism can be seen across populist groups worldwide. The nativist framing is prevalent across many European populist groups, with the French National Rally and Greek Golden Dawn party going as far as founding the 'green' movements 'New Ecology' and 'Green Wing' respectively, enshrining an ideology of nativist and malthusian environmental protection (Turner & Bailey 2021). More concretely, The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and Switzerland's SVP regularly depict their citizens as the 'pure' and 'native' inhabitants through imagery of farmers, foresters and tradesmen, working in 'pristine' and well manicured nationalistic landscapes (mountain ecologies/blue lakes/green forests) at risk from outside 'invaders' (see figure 2) and immigration (Huber et al 2021, Tosun & Debus 2021). The emerging far-right nationalistic ideologies can be seen as fetishising the fusion of nature and nativism, rooting pastoralism and agrarianism as an exemplary expression of national character. This ideology taken to its zenith is perhaps best expressed in the extreme 'blood and soil', private property and nuclear family imagery Nazi Germany, portraying symbols of the wholesome Christian, white, Germanic 'volk' (Turner & Bailey 2021). These are just a few examples of how some populist groups and movements can be seen to weaponise Malthusian forms of environmentalism to fit their nativist agenda.

Calls for more authoritarian measures of border control and people movement may seem like a staple of conservative populist groups, however much of the fortress style of environmentalism effectively calls for stricter border, population and behaviour control (Holmes & Cavanagh 2016). Phillips (2015), asserts that if environmentalist are willing to call for the technocratic implementation by force of stricter borders around a national park or protected ecosystem, they cannot be blind to the risks of promoting authoritarian violence around other borders. In this context if we read the seemingly benign and eco-friendly quotes above from Le Pen and Attenborough, we can see how environmentalism can be weaponised for more authoritarian control. With potential runaway climate change from the ever increasing use of fossil fuels, the support for authoritarian 'strong men' able to protect national borders could become the popular form of governments (Wainwright & Mann 2018).

Extreme versions of these manifestations are expressed in combating factions of the German party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). The party discussed embracing issues of climate change linking it distinctly to overpopulation and that the party should promote authoritarian tactics such as a one-child policy for developing countries (Turner & Bailey 2021). However many other European populist parties, including parties from Hungary, Finland, Norway and Austria often avoid discussing climate change or express sensitive scepticism instead of outright denial, preferring to focus on the protection of the environment within national borders from outside immigrants (Lockwood 2018). Figure 2 is just one further example of many, of how many conservative European populist parties from Britain, France, Austria or Switzerland harness Malthusian environmentalism for authoritarian control. Or as Turner & Bailey (2021 p.10) explain: "these claims remobilise longstanding colonial and eugenic influenced ideas of overpopulation and environmental protection but are here linked to contemporary [environmental] issues … there is also a professed fear, however, that migration will lead to an increased strain on finite natural resources and the threat posed to existing green spaces or agricultural land, as well as undermine the cultural homogeneity upon which green action will depend".

The way in which populist groups digest environmental issues through their populist/anti-elitist framing is perhaps most illustrative of how a conservative political group can align itself as climate-sceptic | pro-environment. International and transnational organisations such as the UN, the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) or European Union (EU) are painted as technocratic elites against the 'pure' people (Huber et al 2021). Furthermore, populist groups often portray climate scientists and environmentalists fighting for climate change as a part of the cosmopolitan elite, propagating their elite agenda for more control over the people (Tosun & Debus 2020). This is demonstrated in how the Trump administration justified reversing clean energy proposals and pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement (Lockwood 2018). Examples of these are seen regularly from the Polish populist Law and Justice party or Switzerland's SVP, claiming that the 'evil' elites from green/environmentalist community attempt to corrupt governments and control the 'pure people' with their climate agenda (Huber et al 2021). It is in this way they are able to disavow (if seen as politically expedient) the science and responsibility around climate change, presenting it a method of control by the 'global elite', while still being pro-environment and the 'only true government of the people' (Lockwood 2018, Turner & Bailey 2021).

There is an underlying link, often challenging for environmentally-minded individuals leaning towards the left, connecting right-wing xenophobia and the inclination towards localism among climate activists. Within both the right and left environmentalist communities, elements of eco-xenophobia persist. This can be attributed to neo-Malthusian and limits-to-growth perspectives that advocate for population control and immigration restrictions. Additionally, bioregionalist and localist movements that promote a return to traditional practices and local economies, emphasizing disengagement from global supply chains and cosmopolitan influences, can exhibit exclusionary and anti-universalist tendencies (Phillips 2022). Even in its non-Malthusian forms, from politicians such as Bernie Sanders to award winning Marxist ecologist and academic Andreas Malm, we see these heroes of the environmental movements calling for a complete wartime like takeover of the economies to switch away from fossil fuels (Malm 2016). Even if such calls are merited, if the anti-democratic nature of such

calls to action are not addressed, they will undoubtable foster massive social resistance and potential hinder needed progress in global action toward climate change.

2.4 The situation of Austria and the FPÖ

Austria presents an illuminating case study for investigating the integration of environmental politics by populist groups. Firstly, the country has a history of populist politics, with the FPÖ being one of the most successful populist parties in Europe. The party has been a significant political force since the 1990s and has been part of several coalition governments (Caiani & Graziano 2019, Jones 2023). Secondly, Austria has a strong environmental movement with a high level of public support for environmental protection measures. The country is committed to achieving carbon-neutrality by 2030 and has a strong focus on renewable energy (Diendorfer et al 2021). Thirdly, the above mentioned increasing trend of populist groups across Europe adopting environmental rhetoric and policies appeal to a broader base of voters by positioning themselves as defenders of the environment (Tosun & Debus 2020). Given this context, Austria provides a key case study into understanding the crossroads of growing populist politics and environmental issues. To explore the notions of how issues such as the increasing influence of climate change are integrated into populist framings and investigating just how these these challenges are framed within populist groups and supporters.

There is an illuminating tension established by the FPÖ as pitting themselves antagonist to environmental issues as the “motorists party” (Tiroler Tageszeiting 2020) while striving to be pioneers in nature protection in the Austrian government. In 1968 they were the first party in Austria to include a policy statement advocating for nature protection (Voss 2019). Drawing from a long established framework of anti-athroprocentrism and nationalist ecological framework, their environmental protection programs “comprehensively covers agriculture, animals, conservation, economics, energy, fish, immigration, individualism, international relations, science and technology, spatial planning, traditional culture, transportation, and waste management, and many associated sub-issues” (Voss 2019). While they may be portrayed as at odds with more openly established environmental parties such as the Greens, Austria’s political history, strong environmental movement, and the trend of populist groups adopting environmental policies make it an interesting case study for examining the integration of environmental politics by populist groups.

As mentioned above, the FPÖ has a history of forming coalition governments, and by some polling could be the most popular party in the upcoming 2023 elections (Jones 2023). In recent years however, with the 2017 snap election in Austria a ten year period of coalition government between the centre-left Austrian Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the centre-right to right-wing Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) had ended. Characterising the end of consensual democracy that had existed in Austrian politics since the Second World War in which the SPÖ had been the strongest party (Tosun & Debus 2020). Despite this, with the victories of the FPÖ a coalition government was formed relatively easy with the ÖVP. Largely due to their similar positions around immigration and border control, stoked by the refugee crisis of 2015 (Caiani & Graziano 2019). Even though these two parties had a large amount of political and ideological overlap the coalition was ended in May 2019 as Tosun & Debus (2020 p.228) explain:

"Chancellor Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP) ended the coalition with the FPÖ on 18 May 2019. The political crisis resulted from a political scandal known as the 'Ibiza affair', which involved the then vice-chancellor of Austria and the leader of the FPÖ, Heinz-Christian Strache. In a secretly filmed video, Strache hinted at corrupt practices in Austrian politics and made negative comments about Kurz. The dismissal of the FPÖ interior minister, Herbert Kickl, resulted in the parliamentary motion of no confidence, which dissolved the Kurz government. In June 2019, Austrian president Alexander van der Bellen appointed a technocrat government, which was in office until January 2020, when a coalition between the ÖVP and the Greens entered the government following the snap election of 29 September 2019. The remaining legislative period left the parties represented in the Austrian parliament in an unusual situation as neither a government nor an opposition camp existed, meaning the parties could form flexible coalitions depending on the issue at stake."

This unfolding of events not only demonstrated how political leaders capitalise notions of corruption and anti-elitism when it suits their need, while still being intertwined with authoritarian grabs for power. It also represents a potential beginning of what may be an increasing occurrence in European politics with the coalition of right (FPÖ/ÖVP) and left (SPÖ) or green (Die Grünen) political groups (Tosun & Debus 2020). Like many places across the globe, Austria presents us as an excellent case study into the growing popularity of populist groups and how environmental issues are further adapted, or even at the forefront, of their politics. How the changing prioritisation of environmental issues over those concerning traditionally populist concerns will be explored in greater detail below in section 3.1.3. While not currently in power, the FPÖ's growing success demonstrates a need to understand the causes, rather than the symptoms of this populist age.

2.5 Research questions

This research aims to situate how populist parties are integrating environmental issues into their politics and governance. Given the escalating prominence of environmental issues in governance at various levels (Wainwright & Mann 2018) and recent instances of agricultural protests in Europe as a response to technocratic environmental policies (Furtula 2022), further complicated by global supply chain disruptions exacerbated by conflict (Reuters 2022), this study seeks to underscore the imperative for a rigorous critical evaluation in the analysis, formulation, and execution of environmental governance. It aims to examine how technocratic environmental policies are received by populist groups and their constituents, encompassing their acceptance, resistance, and the justifications offered by political officials, party members, and the broader public within a specific state and contextual setting where a populist party holds political authority.

Additionally, this research aspires to investigate how pro-environmental stances are integrated into the platforms and governance of these populist parties. The objective is to shed light on the *actually existing politics* on the spatial dynamics, recognising that space is not merely a passive backdrop for economic activities but is actively shaped by capital logic and the interests of influential stakeholders (Smith 2010). The intention is to synthesise the findings in order to contribute to the development of a robust environmental politics that is ecologically, socially, and politically sustainable. It underscores the necessity for democratic engagement in shaping such policies while highlighting the drawbacks of technocratic austerity measures as a response to global challenges. This research seeks to establish a preliminary framework for understanding

how environmental issues are perceived, incorporated, governed, and contested within a local context where populist parties wield influence, acknowledging the urgency of adapting to the multifaceted challenges in a world undergoing significant climate change.

The primary research questions centre on: **How do populist groups/parties integrate, frame, and leverage environmental issues in their political discourse? What motivates their adoption, rejection, or reframing of these issues?**

These overarching inquiries are further explored through the following sub-categories of questions:
(1) How do environmental politics manifest within the context of populism and anti-populism in Austria?
(2) What is the response to specific issues related to agriculture, forestry, and climate policy in relation to ecological concerns?
(3) Actually existing politics: (a) In the context of a populist stronghold (e.g. FPÖ in Upper Austria (Oö)), what are the tangible outcomes and expressions on the ground? (b) Does their response and prioritisation vary concerning infrastructure, agriculture, and climate-related matters? (c) What is their level of influence and access to the state apparatus?
(4) How does the environmental stance of populist groups correlate with the actual implementation of environmental governance?
(5) Is there a discernible divide between frontline advocacy groups, unions, and the elite within populist movements on environmental issues?
(6) To what extent does the reality of populist parties and their members align with established academic characterisations, particularly regarding any anti-democratic and nativist undercurrents among party officials and members?

In summary, this research sets out to explore the intricate relationship between populist parties and environmental issues, delving into how these parties engage with ecological concerns and their implications on governance. By examining the adoption, rejection, or reframing of environmental policies and the reactions of both political actors and the public, this study seeks to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the evolving dynamics in a world increasingly grappling with environmental challenges. As we embark on this investigative journey, the subsequent section below will provide the necessary context by reviewing the existing literature and elucidating the analytical framework that underpins this research endeavour.

3. STATE OF THE ART & ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The following section attempts to detail a brief overview on the currents state of the research on populism and analytical framework which is used for framing and guiding this thesis. Firstly, exploring the origins of populism and anti-populism, detailing how the the two must be studied as inextricably linked and co-creating. By detailing the roots of both populism and anti-populism it is demonstrated that by naturalising the latter into all aspects of decent modern society, populism is portrayed as the destroyer of democracy, nationalistic and a dangers to liberal democracy. Secondly, utilising research into populism and anti-populism today, demonstrating the dangerous normative approach used by many in popular media and academic sources that portray populism as an ever-growing and powerful threat to the very fabric of society, yet dismiss populist groups, their supporters their concerns as beyond the political pale. Thirdly, exploring research on populism in Austria with a focus on the FPÖ in the growing context of environmental politics and how this influences their political positioning. Detailing that while there are tendencies of the FPÖ that can be interpreted as nativist, xenophobic or anti-establishment, to search for such implications in their messaging through confirmation bias for grounds of their dismissal from the political conversation only causes more harm and increases their support. Lastly, the analytical framework for this research is to go beyond normative framings of populism, drawing from Frank (2020) to see populism as political energy or will for the desire of democracy itself. Utilising Hochschild's (2016) ethnographic methods to co-construct a narrative with those being studied and building off previous work done in Austria ((Dörre 2020, Schubert 2020). Using these frameworks and methods to build a deeper and more nuanced understanding to the shift away from liberal democratic values and rise of populism in the context of increasing environmental pressures.

3.1 Current & Recent Research on Populism

3.1.1 The roots of populism and anti-populism

On the outset of this thesis the initial focus was to be on the political ecology of *right wing* populism. However during the research on both the history of populist movements and the usage of the label, populism alone as a name or identifier is often used as a pejorative, which rings even more true for "right wing populism". Throughout history whenever there has been anything resembling a populist struggle, there has always been a strong anti-populist response (Frank 2020). Where such movements are often problematically presented as an antagonistic one sided crisis, ignoring, or even invisibilising, the power dynamics and defining role of anti-populism. It is therefor incredibly important to "study anti-populism together with populism, focusing on their mutual constitution" (Stavrakakis et al 2018 p.1). The choice to relabel the focus of the work on populism on the whole, rather than exclusively right wing populism, was in hope to cast a broader net of understanding into the roots of populist sentiments and avoid a left-right divide that limits politics and society into a binary understanding that naturalises capitalist power dynamics (Fisher 2009).

To assist in defining just what populism is, it is helpful to look into the inception of the term and its coinciding reaction. In response to vast government overreach, rapid deflation, corruption and the gold standard in the

late 19th century, the United States birthed a collective of southern and midwestern farmers together with urban factory workers of the northern cities, coming together to create The People's Party (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, Frank 2020). Challenging both the Democratic and Republican parties the movement appealed to class solidarity, protesting "poverty, unbearable debt, monopoly, and corruption – and it looked forward to the day when these were ended by the political actions of the people themselves" (Frank 2020 p.11). According to Frank's account, far from the anti-democratic picture we are painted today, the original populist movement was clearly a struggle for more democracy, not less.

In May 1891, the People's Party founders and members coined the term "Populist" to signify their third party allegiance, in contrast to the Democrat and Republican political duopoly (Postel 2016). Aiming to define themselves as a movement that was fair, noble and courageous, standing up against the intolerant and narrow-minded, the group would have been surprised the word they invented would later come to represent "a noun signifying "mob-minded hater of all things decent"" (Frank 2020 p.9). To be a Populist meant to be an economic radical who fought to bring power back to the people and away from plutocrats and corporations, to invest in the welfare and rights of the people. Indeed the Populist movement was the countries greatest push against the capitalist system and perhaps last true third party challenge in American politics. The Populists, perhaps prophetically, saw their nation as being ruled by unaccountable bankers, railroad barons and elites that answered to no moral laws. Working with women and black farmers they fought to bring ordinary Americans on equal standing with the country's elite, fighting for women's suffrage, welcoming people of all race, gender, religious creed and political belief. Many in the populist movement were pro immigration, anti slavery and welcoming immigrants seeking refuge from tyranny abroad. They were the only party to have woman leaders and even won women the right to vote several western states (Frank 2020). Not to romantically paint this first populist struggle as completely pure, factions of the movement certainly had their issues with immigration and slavery (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, Frank 2020), however the main energy and momentum of the Populist movement was perhaps the very antithesis of how populism is represented today.

The movements success grew and eventually became so strong the Democratic Party saw its first openly populist leader win the party's nomination for presidential candidate in 1900 and 1908. Despite losing both elections to his Republican counterparts, Bryan and the populist movement transformed the party to be a progressive force that championed rights for workers and economic welfare all the way through to the neoliberal shift in the 1980s and '90's (Frank 2020). Throughout American history the movement grew and at perhaps the peak of its success, notably in response to some of the nation's darkest economic period of the Great Depression, seen as a great populist during the time of his election and still today, Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected as president. Introducing *The New Deal* which lifted millions out of poverty and unemployment with industrial and agricultural recovery measures, Social Security and financial reforms, his institutionalisation of populism made him *the* most successful president in United States history. So much so that he was in office for four terms until his death, leading to political elites successfully pushing for constitutional reform to limit the time in office to two terms (Brittanica 2020, Frank 2020).



Figure 3: From political artist Judge (1896) "The people are "great beast," someone once supposedly said, and here is that beast in the flesh, advancing murderously in a French Revolution liberty cap while the respectable tremble before him. Hist name is "Populism,", and he has "Capital" on the run"" (Frank 2020)

Later in the 20th century populism continued to inspire some of the nations most influential movements. Martin Luther King Jr. continuously referenced the original Populists and their coalition of black and white farmers. Citing their movement in building the tactics and language for his transracial crusade for socio-economic justice. While remembered much more so for his civil rights activism and struggle against segregation, it was King's populist roots that actually challenged established capitalist power dynamics (Frank 2020). While these are only a few examples of the history of populism in the United States, by highlighting the success of these movements outside of the modern framing helps us to demonstrate what populism is, and equally as importantly, what populism is not. Populism is perhaps best understood as political energy, the driving force or will for democracy itself. How it is coopted or capitalised on varies in geography and history.

Since its inception, the reaction to the Populists from those in power was to demonise the movement as a monster of anarchy, violent and backward thinking, murderer of the respectable, against liberty and capital (see figure 3). While always pitting itself as defenders of the orderly, proper and just, the champions of anti-populism have always presented populists as demagogue loving, anti-democratic racists here to destroy society. Elites have invested millions of dollars and capital into portraying populism as inherently xenophobic and anti-democratic. For example, the aforementioned William Jennings Bryan and Franklin D. Roosevelt were both regularly painted as authoritarian loving dictators leading the country to demise by the nation's leading newspapers (Frank 2020). These examples help illustrate the importance to study both populism and anti-

populism as an inextricably linked dialectic to increase the scope and understanding of what populism is (Stavrakakis et al 2018).



Figure 4: From 2016 in *The Daily Beast,* "Team Crazy Wins the Sane State" reads the headline. With torches and pitchforks, populists candidates can be seen on both sides (Frank 2020).

By the mid 20th century, the famous American historian Richard Hofstadter published a seminal book on the 1890's People's Party, *The Age of Reform.* Familiarising himself with the Populists works, Hofstadter accused them of being "backward…against progress… profoundly nationalistic… referring to crackpot conspiracies… and chiefly responsible for anti-Semitism in America" (Frank 2020 p.154-155). The university professor claimed this was due to their lack of urban living and education, making them paranoid anti-intellectuals resentful of city folk. This scapegoating of the People's Party some 60 years later was used for justification of his vision of society run by professional and educated administrators of capital (Frank 2020). This Pulitzer Prize winning manifesto has massively influenced the narratives around populism while proverbially baking anti-populism into the cake of decent modern society and while not the only anti-populist work in history, its offers us an illuminating lens that very much still applies today.

3.1.2 Populism & anti-populism today

Fast forward to the early 21st century where populism has risen to its peak in popularity (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). Influenced by increasing wealth disparity, the global financial crisis (GFC) of 2008, expanding the War or Terror (and the consequential shifting of public money into bloated military budgets), many nations of the Global North saw a rise in anti-establishment fervour. Exacerbating these circumstances, many of the solutions to these socio-economic crises was greater neoliberal austerity measures where large corporations were bailed out while the general population bore the brunt of the hardship (Harvey 2017, Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). Indeed it was Barack Obama who harnessed these populist sentiments to successfully win the 2008 presidential nomination. Running on "Hope" and "Change", constantly referring back to his arguments of "Main Street vs. Wall Street" and promising economic equality, the rhetoric of his 2008 presidential run would have made the original People's Party proud (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, Frank 2020). However once coming into office, his policy was to bail out the banks, expand the War on Terror and implement a neoliberal healthcare system that still left tens of millions of people without coverage (Harvey 2017, Frank 2020). It is perhaps no surprise that this sparked even more populist outrage, manifesting into the Occupy Wall Street and Tea Party movements (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). This was just one example of politicians capitalising on populist sentiment in order to gain power, only to continue or further exacerbate the very causes that fuelled their popularity. A positive feedback loop of exploiting gaps in access to political autonomy to garner support, while further propagating their negative consequences when in power.

Staying in the United Sates, it was Obama's would be successors that ramped up the populist fervour in the 2016 election campaign. Both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump utilised populist rhetoric to become the two most popular politicians in terms of favourability. Very much like the original Populists, Sanders called for a political revolution, by using the electoral system of representative democracy to create a more humane and equitable society. Rallying against the "one percent", Wall Street bankers and health care inequality, the Sanders campaign had real plans for material change (Postel 2016, Frank 2020). Trump on the other hand veered much more toward a moralistic and cultural populism, though not exclusively. With constant reference to "draining the swamp", to those "left behind" and the "silent majority", his campaign's rhetoric constantly painted images of the *pure people* pitted against a *corrupt elite* (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). However while his material and economic populism was in rhetoric only, it was a rhetoric that sounded very familiar to the Democrats of old and original Populists. Railing against economic inequalities brought by the North American Free Trade Agreement, ending wars to bring more spending home to the nation, even calling for universal healthcare, Trump was able to win over some 9 million voters that had previously voted for Obama (Skelley 2017, Frank 2020). It is this fact alone that should give pause to many that would dismiss Trump or any other populists' popularity simply as being down to a xenophobic or nationalistic sentiment.

When looking through a frame of populism as political energy/will for more democratic autonomy of the general population, on face value there may appear to be some similarities between both Sanders and Trump, however what the latter enacted when coming into power clearly separated him from the original Populist ethos. Indeed "by the measure of this historical [Populist] legacy, Bernie Sanders looks very much like a populist for the "Second Gilded Age," both in his diagnosis of and solutions to society's ills. By the same historical measure, Donald Trump, with his gold-plated jets and mansions, looks very much like the type of plutocrat the Populists held responsible for the injustices and inequities of their time" (Postel 2016). Even though once coming into office Trump governed absolutely in favour of the establishment, with historical tax cuts for the wealthy, new free trade agreements benefiting transnational corporations and continuing the military occupations in the middle east, this did not stop major news sources bunching the two together as a threat to decent society (see figure 4). From the *New Yorker* and *Time* magazine to the *Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post* and *The Atlantic,* numerous articles were written conflating the success of both movements as "a crisis for democracy", of the "two populist peas in a pod" and how "It's time to give the elites a bigger say in choosing the president" (Postel 2016, Frank 2020). So much so it is as though they had pulled directly from Hofstadter's 1955 anti-populist manuscript.

This phenomenon of harnessing populist outrage was not exclusive to the United States, as much of Europe, Latin America, and other areas of the globe saw a similar rise in both populist and anti-populist sentiment in the last two decades. With Brexit and the success of the National Front and Five Star movements in France and Italy respectively, as well as the populist struggles in Chile, Bolivia, and Brazil, many of these movements' success lay in combating neoliberal policies that disproportionately benefit large transnational corporations while further hollowing out the middle class and the poor (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, Edwards 2019). Particularly in Europe and the English-speaking world, the reaction from both media and academia still rings

with the echoes of Hofstadter's elitist manifesto. Many of the largest media corporations hail this populist rise as a 'terrifying end to normality', an 'assault on human rights and democracy itself', all couched in a framing that almost exclusively sees these movements as racist or outright fascist (Roth 2017, Jones 2023). Similarly, much of academia pits these movements as authoritarian and demagogue-loving, threatening the rule of law and liberal norms, all bound in a 'master framing' of anti-immigration and ethnonationalism (Bugaric & Kuhelj 2018, Rydgren 2018). Perhaps illustrated best by Andreas Malm's (2021) statement on right-wing populists: 'ethnonationalism is the primary standpoint that subsumes all others, the beginning and the end of far-right politics' (p. 40). Again and again, from popular media and academic sources, there is laid bare a paradox: populism is gaining power and support, threatening the very fabric of society, yet its leaders and followers are beyond the political pale and should be dismissed outright.

Even within the more generous and nuanced framings of populism in academia, there is often still a tendency to portray such movements as threatening, divisive, leaning toward authoritarianism, and embodied by strongman politicians. The widely popular and frequently cited book, "Populism: A Very Short Introduction" by Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017), takes an ideological approach to explain populism. The authors describe it as a 'thin centred ideology' that consistently pits the 'pure people' against the 'corrupt elite' in an antagonistic manner. This thin centred ideology, as they argue, can align itself with any 'host ideology' and is frequently combined with nativism and authoritarianism within the radical right (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017).While this approach aims to engage with the causes, rather than the symptoms, of the political culture that allows populism to thrive, it still portrays populism, especially on the right, as an overall negative threat. This perspective, to some extent, overlooks or downplays the demonstrated causes of declining political trust and remains bound in a reactive approach that sees populism as the problem, rather than a consequence of socioeconomic decline (Citrin & Stoker 2018, Harvey 2018, Bettache & Chiu 2019). To address this limitation, this paper draws upon the insights of Thomas Frank (2020), who views populism as intrinsically linked to anti-populism—an expression of the desire for more democracy, not less. This perspective does not exclusively see populism as anti-establishment or against political institutions. Instead, it recognises that declining political trust and socioeconomic circumstances are not only the driving forces behind populism but also the greater problem.

If we accept that populism is the strive for democracy itself, the energy behind the will for self-governing autonomy, we can see that 'anti-populism always serves as a tool for justifying unaccountable power' (Frank 2020, p.35). It is precisely because of this struggle for power and the inherent reluctance of those in power to relinquish it willingly that studying populism and anti-populism becomes imperative. The interconnected nature of these phenomena suggests that an examination of one without considering the other would provide an incomplete understanding. This is not to absolve populist parties of the dangers of nationalistic, Malthusian or potential authoritarian tendencies. On the contrary, by adopting this comprehensive lens, informed by the examples discussed above, we can develop a more nuanced and insightful approach to studying populism and its implications.

3.1.3 Current & recent research on populism in Austria

As mentioned above, Austria presents us as an excellent case due to the success and pro-environmental politics of the FPÖ, the nation's overall willingness to adopt ecological measures and the rich agricultural history, particularly in the state of Upper Austria (Oö). Furthermore, it allows us to explore how anti-populism functions and the way in which the party and populist voters are portrayed. When looking into academic research on the FPÖ in Austria, much of the peer reviewed literature still succumbed to the above mentioned normative approach of pigeon holing their success into anti-democratic, xenophobic and anti-establishment tendencies (Heinisch 2008, Rooduijn 2015, Tosun & Debus 2020). Even after being ousted from the ruling coalition due to the *Ibiza Scandal* their popularity is rising and many voters, particularly after technocratic COVID 19 measures, see them as the only party that give voice to the people (Dörre 2020, Oysmüller 2023). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the FPÖ has used this dismissal from the formed government to further position itself as the only true party for the people and proclaims it is the 'best party for the environment' not corrupted by the elite agendas of the greens and globalists (Tosun & Debus 2020).

Even with the FPÖ's long history of strong environmental policies (Voss 2019), a shift from pro-environment | climate sceptic to 'best party for the environment' that is climate conscious but anti-elite is demonstrated in their evolution to official party stances on climate change and European Climate Policy. Official FPÖ election manifestos from the 2017 election make only one reference to climate change in regards to a malfunctioning CO_2 certificates system, whereas the 2019 election manifesto acknowledge the problem of climate change and proclaim that the "decarbonisation of the transport sector as one of the key political priorities" (Huber et al 2021 p.11). However, while being known as supportive of renewable energies the party publicly argues against any 'interventionist' and 'coercive' European climate policy such as carbon taxes or bans on diesel automobiles (FPÖ 2019). Capitalising on how many climate mitigation measures are technocratically crafted and implemented to then propagate populist narratives of being the only truly green party protecting the environment from corrupt elites.

Further academic literature exploring how populist parties integrate environmental issues into their strategy demonstrates both populist and anti-populist framing and reactions to such issues. Turner and Bailey (2021) claim that populist parties conflate nativism with environmental protection it to use the concepts of bloodlines, ownership and heritage of belonging. Delving into the FPÖ's (2021) Party Programme we can see this rhetoric comes up regularly. Portrayals of pure and unassuming voters/civilians as stemming from an 'ancient' and 'indigenous' civilisation and as the rightful cultivators and custodians of their 'homeland' full of natural beauty. There is constant imagery and outright linkages of belonging to Germanic 'volk', that the 'fatherland' must be protected for the ethnically correct, 'legal' and 'legitimate', German speaking citizens whom obey 'rule of law'. That the natural environment, biodiversity and 'animals as our fellow creatures' (within their border one might assume) are a part of the 'basis of existence of our homeland of Austria' (FPÖ 2021). This demonstrates that there certainly are nationalistic tendencies of the factions of party itself, but to use confirmation bias while searching for such framings to then dismiss the party and its popularity only exacerbates division.

However where the usual nativist imagery is challenged was a shift to more populist framings around environmental issues in recent years. With the parliamentary voting on a total or partial ban of Glyphosate in 2019, according to Tosun and Debus (2020) the FPÖ calculated the political efficacy of either sticking to their traditional nativistic politics that would protect farmers with a partial ban, or shifting into the more popular and environmentally friendly total ban. Perhaps recognising that amongst the voting public that a total ban was more popular the FPÖ aligned with the SPÖ and against the ÖVP to legislate a complete ban of the herbicide (see figure 5). Both major parties in favour (FPÖ & SPÖ) arguing on the grounds of protection of the environment, animals and the Austrian consumer (Tosun & Debus 2020). This is just one example of how populist parties, embodied in this case by the FPÖ, begin to adapt their politics in light of the new leviathan of climate change.

		SPÖ Proposal (total ban)		ÖVP Proposal (partial ban)	
Party Name	Abbreviation	Yes	No	Yes	No
Freedom Party	FPÖ	44	0	0	44
JETZT – Liste Pilz	JETZT	4	0	0	4
New Austria and Liberal Forum	NEOS	7	0	7	1
No fraction	-	1	0	0	0
People's Party	ÖVP	0	58	58	0
Social Democratic Party	SPÖ	49	0	0	50

Figure 5: Votes cast on the legislative proposals for a total or partial glyphosate ban in Austria (Tosun & Debus 2020).

This unanimous voting on a total ban as opposed to a partial ban is just one example that highlights the FPÖ's potentially contradictory preference for utilising authoritarian policy methods for environmental issues. This is further demonstrated in their Party Programme (FPÖ 2021) with calls for the government to do 'all in its power to protect its national territory', that Austrians are 'citizens of law and order' which is why they support compulsory military service for all male citizens and promote female citizens to take up voluntary military service. That the Austrian homeland, identity and nature must be protected from 'forced multiculturalism, globalisation and mass immigration' (FPÖ 2021). Demonstrating how the echoes of racialised, gendered and colonial dynamics of Malthusian environmentalism can be weaponised by some conservative populist parties to call for more authoritarian control (Tosun & Debus 2020, Turner & Bailey 2021).

All of these examples demonstrate how environmental degradation can be reframed in racialised, nativist and populist forms calling for stricter border control and authoritative measures (Phillips 2015, Turner & Bailey 2021). While this 'thin centred ideology' may have its contradictions and tensions, the case of Austria demonstrates how populist parties combine very real issues of structural and economic inequality, with global and local environmental concerns for political gain and consolidation of power. Allowing populist groups to further resist the "global elite" and technocratic measures to deal with climate change all the while politically outflanking the supposed champions of these measures by highlighting how the mechanisms of such change are thoroughly anti-democratic. There are clearly many questions left hanging when attempting to thoroughly digest how environmental issues are integrated into the politics of populist parties. However with the current geopolitical climate of rising populism all across Europe, combined with this new environmental leviathan, to dismiss any of these parties or their success as being purely bound in ethnonationalism and authoritarianism would be a mistake. Searching for the xenophobic and authoritarian implications of a populist party for grounds for their political dismissal will not only *not* solve any problems, but further exacerbate division and reactionary solutions of deep seated structural problems.

3.2 Analytical Framework

"In a period of political tumult, we grasp for quick certainties. We shoehorn new information into ways we already think. We settle for knowing our opposite numbers from the outside. But is it possible, without changing our beliefs, to know others from the inside, to see reality through their eyes, to understand the links between life, feeling and politics, that is, to cross the empathy wall?" (Hochschild 2016 p.5)

In light of the gaps of research into populism detailed above it is important that we go outside the current and oft dismissive approach to populism. Building from Frank's (2020) research to see populism as the political energy and desire for democracy itself, we need to explore the on ground, actually existing politics that leads to the success and popularity of these movements. To go beyond normative framings populism we turn to the ethnographic work of Arlie Russel Hochschild to climb over the *empathy wall*. In her 2016 work *Strangers In Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* the sociology professor aimed to climb this empathy wall to understand the cultural, emotional and political factors that lead to the support of the populist Tea Party group in Louisiana. To Hochschild the empathy wall is an obstacle built from differences of beliefs, upbringing and circumstance that hinder deep understanding of another person making us feel estranged or even hostile to others. As a self described left leaning academic and Democrat voter she chose to carry out her research in the state of Louisiana where the Tea Party and Republicans have some of the strongest support and where environmental damage and socioeconomic factors are at some of the worst in the country. By undertaking this multi-year ethnographic research Hochschild attempts to go beyond populism as we currently frame and digest this in academia and the left. Hoping to discover the actually existing politics for everyday citizens and their reasons for supporting such groups.

Part of the Hochschild's motivation in wanting to challenge these established narratives around supporters of the Tea Party or populist groups build off one of Thomas Frank's (2007) earlier concepts of *the Great Paradox*. This concept explored how the wealthy, exploit cultural and social issues around abortion, gun laws and religion to build support for Tea Party like Republicans. When in power these politicians would then pair such law changes around popular right wing cultural issues with economic and environmental deregulation, huge tax cuts for the wealthy and repealing welfare services. Frank argued that the Great Paradox was a bait and switch where everyday citizens were being mislead to vote against their own interest. While Hochschild (2016) acknowledges that "purchased political influence is real, powerful, and at play…as an expiation for why any of us believe what we do, duping - and the presumption of gullibility - is too simple an idea" (p.14). In order to help scale that empathy wall Hochschild utilised the focus on a *key hole issue:*

"I wanted to get up close. The best way to do that, I thought, was to come to know one group of people in one place, focusing on a single issue. This issue was not a case, as mentioned earlier, of well-to-do voters voting down government measures they themselves didn't need. Everyone I talked to wanted a clean environment. But in Louisiana, the Great Paradox was staring me in the face—great pollution and great resistance to regulating polluters. If I could truly enter the minds and hearts of people on the far right on the issue of the water they drink, the animals they hunt, the lakes they swim in, the streams they fish in, the air they breathe, I could get to know them up close. Through their views on this keyhole issue—how much, if at all, should government regulate industrial polluters?—I hoped to learn about the right's perspective on a wider range of issues. I could learn about how —emotionally speaking—politics works in us all" (2016 p.21)

During Hochschild's ethnographic work she eventually came to construct a narrative together with the shared experience of crossing that empathy wall, to create a *deep story*. A deep story is a story of feeling, that removes fact and judgement. A story that allows us, regardless of political orientation, to explore the subjective prism in how the world is seen through the eyes and minds of people we may normally "other" or see as political and cultural opposition (Hochschild 2016). The deep story that Hochschild constructed was one of that should metaphorically represent the fears, hopes, shame, anxieties, resentments and pride of the Louisianans she worked with. This deep story metaphor saw them standing in a line on a hill, all waiting in line. The harder one worked in and more money and economic security they had, the further in line and up the hill they would be. At the top of the hill was the "American Dream". The Louisianans wait patiently, but this endless line does not move. Worse yet, queue jumpers in the form of marginalised groups and migrants cut in the line in front of them unfairly, often being pushed in and celebrated by liberals, Democrats and left "do-gooders" who are already further up the line themselves. When those Tea Party voters or right leaning folk at the bottom of the line protest in anger, those same do-gooders and liberals turn back at them in disgust, dismissing them as racist, uneducated and sexist rednecks (Hochschild 2016). Hochschild demonstrates how this deep story, this grand narrative, ignites rage against the established liberal democracies and fosters support of populist politicians.

Furthermore, in the Germanic context Hochschild's grand narrative approach to populism has been taken further by Klaus Dörre (2019, 2020) and Livia Schubert (2020). Dörre and Schubert illustrate that in Germany and Austria, increasing employment and socioeconomic precarity has led to a turn away from liberal democracy with many workers feeling left behind. Where Hochschild and her Tea Party voters see the American Dream at the top of the hill, Dörre conceives the reward of the Germanic deep story to be access to the Welfare sate, particularly to retirement pensions (2020). Schubert (2020) expanded these ideas specifically with workers in Austria who had turned away from the SPÖ and why they now support the FPÖ. Running interviews with current, retired and unemployed former SPÖ voters there were many accounts of feelings of betrayal, lack of political representation and socioeconomic anxiety. The deep story she was able to construct consisted of three main factors:

- First, that the reduction of the welfare state and social safety net gives people the feeling of living in social decline. This is highlighted by one unemployed skilled worker who details that the anxieties placed on Austrians by the ever shrinking welfare state is exacerbated by refugees, making citizens feel totally at the whim of economic forces. According to the worker, this is what has made the FPÖ successful, the fear of changes, the fear of losing one's living standards and an exaggerated fear of Islamisation.

- Second, A feeling of betrayal toward the SPÖ, leaving workers behind and in turn a devaluation of professional and social status and culture. From the point of view of the interviewees the reaction to this is to shift toward exclusive solidarity based on national borders in order to secure a place in the shrinking welfare state. One retired industrial worker whom had previously support the SPÖ for over 30 years proclaimed that he is not even a large supporter of the FPÖ and doubts their ability to really govern in his

interests. However, “The FPÖ didn’t get votes because they are so good, rather because the SPÖ has made so many mistakes” (p. 236). The retiree no longer votes for particular political gains or success, rather as a vote to challenge the status quo.

- Thirdly, social devaluation has also lead to no representation politically. The interviewees felt that there is plenty of political representation for the rich and large corporations but none for the worker. As one precariously employed skilled worker described “The SPÖ is supposed to be the party of workers, is there even one worker in this party? They are all trained politicians, a politician is not a worker, how are they able to represent my interests if they studied political science?” (p.234)

Schubert (2020) concludes that experiences and feelings of social decline and professional devaluation has led to a turn away from liberal democracy. Livia Schubert builds off Dörre’s idea of a *demobilised class society* where, according to Dörre “classes are demobilised if they do not have appropriate active representation of economic, social and political class interests and therefore mutual competition, distinctions and social devaluation dominates” (2019 p.16). That the increasing precarity and shrinking welfare state coupled with lack of political representation leads people to defend their place in the welfare on the basis of exclusive national solidarity, leading to welfare chauvinism. Allowing the FPÖ to capitalise on the feelings of alienation and powerlessness and further foster the dichotomous framing of the “people” against the “global elite” (Schubert 2020). This demonstrates the very real feelings of abandonment and social decline created by increasing neoliberalism and selective corporatism that could certainly apply to more than just the Austrian context. A framing that could help us establish a better understanding of the actually existing politics that leads to a turn away from established liberal democracies.

In summary, the theoretical framework for this research will be as follows: to go beyond normative framings of populism and engage with the concept as political energy and desire for democracy itself (Frank 2020). Using ethnographic methods aiming to co-construct a narrative on the side of the empathy wall of those being studied. Using a key hole issue to gain access to the field in an areas relevant to them and the broader spectrum of environmental issues and climate change (Hochschild 2020). To build off previous work done in the Austrian context (Dörre 2020, Schubert 2020) to create a deep story of populist support in Austria. Using this grand narrative to help better understand the turn away from established liberal democracies and shift to populism. Moreover, to help us understand the importance of how to foster genuine democratic culture and process in creating robust and dynamic environmental policies.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Approach and Positionality

4.1.1 Research Approach

To be able to scale the empathy wall we must do more than just acknowledge our biases in perspective and analysis. As Hochschild (2016) states above “to see reality through their eyes, to understand the links between life, feeling and politics”, it is clear that simply conducting interviews was not going to take the research to the desired depths to really discover the motivations and actual existing politics that foster populist sentiment. For this reason, it was clear that the research must go beyond standard qualitative methods and really approach this endeavour ethnographically. This in depth method actively engages in the daily life and activities of the people and culture being studied (Hume & Mulcock 2004). Building off the ideas of cultural relativism, ethnography aims to understand the culture and people in focus on their own terms, rather than filtering through the researcher’s cultural biases (Marcus 1995). To explore the intricate interaction between climate change and populism in practice, the research selected a focus group of farmers in Upper Austria and identified the keyhole issue of environmental and agricultural policy. This deliberate choice aimed to shed light on the actual existing politics experienced by those closely connected to nature and frequently impacted by mitigation policies (Smith 2010).This approach sought to not only use formal and informal interviews and dialogue, but also participant observation driven by living, eating and working with the target groups. Not only to gain a profound understanding of their daily lives and experiences, moreover it was to build trust through cooperative physical labour and shared experience. Hume and Mulcock (2004) highlight that building of meaningful relationships is essential to doing successful ethnographic reaserach. Doing field ethnographic work should prioritise openness and collaboration. We make knowledge *with* participants, not about them. It is the coproduction of knowledge (Pink et al 2015). With the main aim being to co-create a narrative from the focus groups’ side of the empathy wall, rather than one’s observations as an academic.

For the purpose of this research the aim was to conduct the field work sequentially from the ‘front-line’, up to those in positions of power from party representatives to state and union functionaries. Front-line" refers to individuals or groups who are directly affected by or involved in the issues under investigation, such as workers, farmers, general population etc. This was to build a foundation from the grass roots perspectives of the focus group to help inform my questioning and critical engagement with state and party functionaries. This created the opportunity to construct a list of concerns, questions and themes from the front line to then address with the elites. Not only to base research with real on ground issues, but also to empower those from the general population to voice their concerns with the those in positions of power (Pink et al 2015). Care was taken to keep anonymity of interviewees as much as the subjects are comfortable with, while also offering follow up discussion toward the end of research with the front-line population. The specifics on accessing the field, keyhole issue, generating of material, data analysis and approach limitations will be detailed below.

4.1.2 Positionality: Points of Departure

To scale the empathy wall in ethnographic studies it is essential to recognise the researcher's role, influences and biases. It is natural for a researcher to absorb and digest information through the subjective framings we have grown up with and, especially in academia, studied and learnt from. When it comes to doing field work "ethnographers are inevitably marked in the field by their race, class, gender, education level, nationality, and other characteristics…in some contexts, aspects of the researcher's own identity may play a facilitating role; in others they may be crippling" (Gusterson 2008 p.94). As researchers we must be conscious of how our positionality influences our work, and the coproduction of knowledge and narrative (Pink et al 2015). By being aware and open about one's positionality we are able to highlight our limitations of research and biases that shape our worldview. Furthermore, this fosters a more nuance understanding of other's worldviews and challenges traditional normative notions of universal tSusanne and objectivity (Rose 1997). For to "truly enter the minds and hearts of people" (Hochschild 2016 p.21) we must, at a minimum, be able to acknowledge our own point of departure.

Doing ethnographical field work with farmers and workers in rural Austria means that my positionality is crucial to how and what my biases and inner walls are that would limit my understanding. First and foremost I come from a broken family of a single mother with six children, having lived much of our lives in poverty and government subsidised properties. Being born and raised predominantly in Australia but with Swiss heritage means I have grown up multilingual and with both German and Swiss German dialect. This was essential to being able to do field work with farmers in the rural areas of Upper Austria. Having grown up in poverty in a family reliant on the welfare state in Australia, moreover having lived independently away from any parental accommodation or financial support since I was 15, has been a large influence on my own worldview. Having had to work and pay rent since the age of 14, living pay check to pay check, shaped much of my worldview from a position of both privilege with even having access to welfare and employment but also the burden of having to sell oneself into the market to survive. Working in various professions such as retail, horticulture hospitality, healthcare and education but not beginning my own university education until the age of 29 means I did not approach field work simply from an academic lens, but also as someone from the poor and working class. Living in Switzerland since 2019 and working in alpine dairy farming has given me much familiarity with agricultural systems reliant on government subsidies. This would show to also be essential to crossing boundaries of understanding to focus group of my research. Furthermore, I am also a parent und still work alongside my research to support myself and my family. Living in a small town in the central alps of Switzerland and still participating in alpine dairy farming, cow herding and cheese making has given me essential insights and very much broadened my worldview. Although growing up in poverty, being a dual citizen of Switzerland and Australia has given me quite the privilege in both a multicultural perspective but also having the social safety net of nations both with a relatively strong welfare state and employment capabilities. However it is through my university education that my ability to both understand and articulate my worldview has really grown.

Starting as a mature age student I completed my first university degree in horticulture and environmental science at the University of Melbourne in Australia, with a large focus sustainable horticulture and agriculture in the context of a planet undergoing climate change (Brönnimann et al 2014). Adaptation methods on functional changes to plant types and practices to adapt to warming temperatures and more stochastic weather conditions (Burley et al 2019, Hanewinkel 2013). Much of my personal focus in my degree was around corporate greenwashing in the fields of climate mitigation and agriculture, with particular critique around the limitations of market driven measures (Fridell 2007, Harvey 2017, Phillips 2015). Having also been elected as president of the student union meant I was also involved in various projects in urban agriculture, particularly with refugee integration programs. I also worked closely together with the National Tertiary Education Union to successfully fight a neoliberal restructuring that sought to discontinue the horticultural program and reduce the teaching budgets and contracts by over 70%. Both the academic and professional experience at my time at the University of Melbourne helped inform my worldview ecologically as an environmental scientist, but also that of being part of a union in a time of crisis where technocratic measured not only ignored legal requirements, but actively sought to discontinue a successful university program to fund more money to the chancellery. This employment and education dispute was only won with the hard work of having an organised teaching and student cohort together with the wider community and media outreach. These invaluable experiences and learning achievements shaped my understanding to see climate change as a genuine global issue, but approach this with constructive criticism and always first seeing this from the grassroots or worker's perspective.

During my second undergraduate degree at the University of Tasmania is where I further developed my critical approach and worldview. The degree itself was in geography and nature conservation where my personal focus was in political geography. A large part of my approach was to critically engage with how climate change is framed as a problem of humanity (anthropogenic) rather than one of extractivist capitalism. This misanthropic framing not only holds every individual human, regardless of class, ethnicity, age or lifestyle equally responsible, furthermore it invisibilises fossil fuelled capitalism as the given reality we all operate from (Fisher 2009, Malm & Hornborg 2014). From this basis, if we do not have mitigation procedures that are not based on market fixes or a profit model, they are almost always exploited by large corporations. This handcuffs the imagination of people to only see solutions though consumption measures such as riding their bicycle more often or buying energy saving lightbulbs, all the while fossil fuel extraction and production increases every year (Malm 2016). Moreover if we do not dig deeper to see this as a problem of a whole system that functions on exploitation for profit, progress on climate change will be held hostage by those in power (Harvey 2007, Fisher 2011, Malm 2016). This has given me an acutely critical approach to any environmental, in particular climate change, solutions and policies that do not actively challenge the capitalist system or at least operate with genuinely democratic methods.

Concurrently with my studies in Tasmania I was also a teaching specialist in a public primary school in one of Australia's lowest socioeconomic areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). Part of a private public partnership that was a darling of local and national media (Mercury 2019, Carnevale 2020), my role as sustainability specialist was with creating teaching programs to national standards in the fields of science and

outdoor education while also focusing on teaching children practical horticultural skills and horticultural therapy. Much of my work also facilitated learning with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children, be that through disability, living situations and physical and emotional stress. While the work was incredibly valuable and successful for those individual children during there time at school, many of whom came from broken homes or drug and alcohol abuse, violence and extreme poverty, this was sadly an example of neoliberal bandaid solutions for larger systematic problems (Eslake 2021). Just one example of private public partnerships that focus on photographable opportunities for news and social media, not only not addressing the systematic problems that leads to such vulnerable youth, but further minimising a whole host of neoliberal capitalist factors that are the source of such outcomes (Fisher 2011, Phillips 2015, Harvey 2018). What this experience in particular has taught me is that much more effort, media attention and funding will be devoted to symbolic solutions that look favourably and existing power structures. It also taught me to hold the tension between functional solutions that can be all at once helpful to individual people while further propagating the very systems that leads to so much socio-economic vulnerability.

Since 2019 I have resided in Switzerland where I began my Master in Geography with the University of Zürich with my minor in forrest and landscape management with the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH). This further developed my practical knowledge and skills in the natural sciences while added a more in depth knowledge to my agricultural work of alpine farming each summer. Giving me perspective from both the academic side of local and global ecological systems and the on ground agricultural and political aspect of working in a farming system heavily integrated into the history and culture of Switzerland. My time at the University of Zürich has allowed for a much more detailed and complex understanding of political ecology. Both broadening and sharpening my theoretical framework to approaching environmental issues. While not locked in to any one specific framework, my geographical approach would best be described as a convivial Marxist lens focusing particular on power (Harvey 2007, Büscher & Fletcher 2020), that critically engages with framings of environmentalism that conceal capital (Malm 2016, Wainwright & Mann 2018) and are misanthropic/Malthusian in approach (Fisher 2009, Phillips 2015). A Marxist framing is one that fundamentally sees the capitalist mode of production as a system for generating profit with the use of exploitation, where the upper class control the means of production and the working class must sell themselves into the market place as a means of survival (Harvey 2007). To take a convivial approach, particularly to environmental issues, is to always search for solutions that actively challenge this capitalist mode of production, are not only conscious of existing power structures, but intentionally look for solutions that empower the working class, indigenous groups, the peasantry and poor. An approach that is also critical of theory and development created and promoted academia and elite of the global north, to be exported the global south (Büscher & Fletcher 2020). My critical engagement with approaches that conceal capital and are misanthropic and Malthusian in approach has been detailed in the above (section 2).

My positionality is not only my worldview and starting point for this research, it is also my point of departure. To go beyond these normative framings of populism discussed above and to attempt to scale the empathy wall, I must all at once be conscious of my framing and biases while also being able to leave them on my side of understanding. To use this ethnographic approach so that I may “understand the links of life, feelings and

politics… [to] learn about how—emotionally speaking—politics works in us all" (Hochschild 2016 p.5 & 21). To surmise, coming from a working class and poor upbringing to then develop my academic approach into one of political geography is both a blessing and a hindrance. My work must be careful to not assume the feelings of those I work with ethnographically, but to challenge my own perspectives to empathetically appreciate and understand their worldview.

4.2 Accessing the field: focus group and keyhole issue

4.2.1 Focus Group

As much of climate mitigation procedures are aimed at the field of agriculture this research focused on ethnographic work with farmers in rural Austria. The aforementioned willingness and long history of pro-environmental policy in Austria (Diendorfer et al 2021), with the state of Upper Austria in particular having both abundant environmental policies and is a stronghold of the FPÖ (Caiani & Graziano 2019), made this focus group an ideal selection to explore the political ecology of populism. Due to the time constraints of a master thesis, and being unable to take a multiyear approach such as Hochschild (2016) the use of international farming and employment networks were used such as World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) and Workaway. To actively gain the trust, insights and perspective of the focus group I offered my services and experience as horticulturist, farmhand and educator to live and work with the farmers for a number of days and to have both informal and formal discussions. Writing to them through these networks I detailed my position as academic master student from the University of Zürich doing ethnographic fieldwork on the politics of environmental issues and agriculture focusing on collaborating with farmers to learn their perspective on this issues on the whole and the keyhole issues mentioned below (an example of the written communication by email can be found in appendix A). These initial farms offered an access point into the field where, through the farmers I worked with more connections to networks and other farmers were made. As the field work was undertaken over roughly six weeks, time constraints meant my worked needed to delve into a dense immersion into the daily life and perspectives of these farmers. Being that Upper Austria is a stronghold of the FPÖ and a relatively short time period for ethnographic field work, the focus group did not exclude non FPÖ voters/supporters with the aims that their unground perspective would grant insights, regardless of political affiliation. However, care was still taken to attempt to engage with farmers that were either actively members of the FPÖ or their established farmers union Freiheitliche Bauernschaft, or who were at least sympathetic to their views.

Contact was also taken up with political and union representatives of the FPÖ and farmer's union respectively, however to no avail. It is through the work with farmers that contact was established with parliamentary and state officials. Interviews were conducted with a political representative at the municipal level from the FPÖ party and also with the Director of the Federal Agricultural College of St. Florian, one of the state's leading agricultural schools and part of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture. Contact was also established with the Chamber of Agriculture for Upper Austria to attend one of their General Assemblies where different farming unions and organisations are able to raise issues.

4.2.2 Keyhole Issue

To really explore the interaction between environmental policy and on ground politics of populism the keyhole issue selected was two pronged; the European Green Deal and a controversial policy proposal in the framework in the Renewable Energy Directive III (RED III) initiative. The European Green Deal is a comprehensive policy framework launched by the EU in 2019, with the broad goal of transforming the bloc into a climate neutral and sustainable economy by 2050. Hoping to address pressing environmental and social issues facing the EU and international community with a focus on climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and social inequality. The Green Deal is considered to be the EU's flagship initiative to build a competitive, sustainable and resilient economy (European Commission 2021). While at the broad scale it targets policy measures in the energy, transport, economic and infrastructure sector, for the purpose of this research its agricultural and climate mitigation mechanisms are the focus. The EU wide agricultural focus is to reduce the use of pesticides and fertilisers while also reducing waste and pollution. As this is the overarching policy framework that dictates much of the on ground policy creation and implementation on the national, state and municipal level in Austria (European Parliament 2021), it offered a perfect example as a keyhole issue to explore the on ground politics of this ethnographic study.

Austria's commitment to the Green Deal is wide-ranging with ambitious targets in regards to climate mitigation procedures. Part of the nation's efforts is a commitment to 100% renewable energy by the year 2030 and policies to support more organic farming through subsidies and the reduction of pesticides and herbicides (European Commission 2019). A part of the sustainable transition to renewable energy is a heavy reliance on biomass as source of renewable energy classified as such by the EU. Some reports placing this up to 60% of registered renewable energy coming from biomass, with a large portion of this being from wood, in the form of wood waste in forest, dead trees, cut wood, wood chips and pellets (Schulzki-Haddouti 2022). Aiming to reach the Green Deal's overall targets the 2022 amendments to the RED III initiative sought to declassify wood off the list of renewable sources. This controversial amendment was voted to not be adopted by the overall EU parliament, however many concerns came from both Austrian and other voting members that see forest biomass as more detrimental than coal and should be removed from the list of renewables (Aikawa 2022). This revision of wood outside the source of renewables is seen by some to be more detrimental than helpful and this became a rallying call for the FPÖ to rail against the EU (FPÖ 2022). One FPÖ delegate to the European Parliament, Georg Mayer, said in speaking of the president of the European Commission "Von der Leyen's officials, whose expertise in wood begins and ends with printer paper, are attacking the cornerstone of Austria's energy self-sufficiency with their attack on biomass, thereby endangering the energy security of the Austrian population" (Austria Press Agency 2022). As this issue is one that could have serious implications on both the energy, forestry and agricultural sector, it offered a more specific example to understand the actually existing politics of how climate policies are adopted, rejected or reframed by populist groups.

4.3 Generating Material

4.3.1 Ethnographic field work: participant observation & informal interviews

In this study, the ethnographic field work involved establishing contact with multiple farmers and arranging to spend approximately three to five nights on separate farms. The goal was to live and work alongside the farmers and their families, fostering trust and generating valuable material for the research. To maximise interaction and ensure a genuine understanding of the farmers' daily lives, field work was conducted during the autumn and winter months when there was more time for engagement, as the summer months were typically dedicated to harvesting with less available time.

To build rapport with the participants, a primary focus was placed on actively engaging in their daily activities and engaging in informal discussions, often during shared mealtimes. A flexible approach was adopted, tailored to each group's specific needs and interests, rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all methodology. Prior to field work, all farmers were informed about the study's intentions, facilitating natural and meaningful discourse throughout the research process.

The scope of labor and assistance provided during the field work was diverse, ranging from tasks like stable cleaning, fence fixing, and livestock herding to assisting with cooking, childcare, household chores, and horticultural work. Material for the study was largely generated through these informal discussions and interactions during work and meals. In certain cases, specific long-form open dialogues were audio recorded to delve deeper into relevant topics. Additionally, a second round of informal interviews was conducted a month later to allow participants time to reflect on the initial discussions and further explore the results with party officials and state representatives.

Eight different farmers and workers were engaged in the research, with the researcher either living with the farmers themselves or establishing connections with other nearby farmers. Half-days were devoted to informal discussions and work sessions, while sit-down recorded interviews were conducted as well. When audio recordings were not feasible, follow-up notes were taken during breaks or in the evenings. Special attention was paid to inquiries and note-taking related to the key issues and research aims, such as understanding the labor practices that qualify for federal and EU subsidies or examining in-situ heating and energy systems, particularly those utilising woody biomass.

The dialogue throughout the field work remained open and adaptable, guided by the farmers' work and needs. Specific time was also allocated to discuss key issues and concerns related to the research, which were recorded for further analysis. Even if some topics had been previously discussed, these formalised sessions allowed for deeper reflection and provided valuable insights into the farmers' lifeworld views, helping to construct a more comprehensive narrative from their side of the empathy wall.

4.3.2 Formal interviews with officials seminar participation

Requests were made via email to speak with party officials from the FPÖ and other state or union representatives, particularly from the Freiheitliche Bauernschaft. Unfortunately, responses were either non-existent or unsuitable within the given time frame. However, through effective network building during the fieldwork, opportunities for formal interviews arose. Meetings were arranged by the farmers involved in the research, leading to discussions with a member of parliament from the FPÖ, the director of the Federal Agricultural College (Dr. Hubert Fachberger), and representatives from the Chamber of Agriculture for Upper Austria.

One of the most insightful engagements occurred during the General Assembly held by the Chamber of Agriculture for Upper Austria, where concerns related to the RED III initiative and the EU Green Deal were raised by the Freiheitliche Bauernschaft in conjunction with the Independent Farmers Union (UBV). Details from the protocol of this assembly (Landwirtschaftskammer Oberösterreich 2022) were used to supplement the research.

The interview with the sitting FPÖ member of parliament took place over a meal and was conducted together with one of the farmers. Both interviewees preferred to remain anonymous for this informal discussion. The FPÖ politician emphasised that this approach would be beneficial for the researcher, mitigating any potential issues with the research. Due to time constraints, the meeting could only last approximately 90 minutes, and although it was not audio recorded, detailed notes were taken immediately after the discussion. The continuous opportunity to follow up with the participating farmer for further clarification proved to be extremely valuable in enhancing the understanding of the interview's content.

Conversely, the discussion with Dr. Hubert Fachberger, the director of the Federal Agricultural College, adopted a more formal approach. The entire interview was recorded, and it was held in his office with ample time dedicated to exploring the rough outline of a compelling narrative generated from the previous ethnographic work with the farmers. Subsequent follow-up emails were utilised to seek further clarification on open questions

4.2.3 Ethical considerations

As with all research, ensuring the protection and well-being of human subjects is paramount, especially in the context of in-depth, personal, and qualitative work such as ethnographic or face-to-face research (Pink et al., 2015; Arifin, 2018). To address these ethical concerns, I sought guidance from the University of Zürich's Political Geography's ethical representatives and my supervisors, receiving valuable insights on structuring my fieldwork ethically. Additionally, the university's Ethics Committee's guidelines from the Department of Human Geography (University of Zürich 2022) provided essential direction for preparing my fieldwork.

Informed consent and voluntary participation were of utmost importance in conducting the ethnographic fieldwork. Prior to our meetings, all subjects were informed of the research's intention and the involvement of the relevant university department. Where written communication was not possible, I established contact via

telephone with the subjects' assistance. Each subject was provided with written consent forms and given the opportunity to withdraw at any point. However, none of the subjects utilised this option, expressing contentment with our verbal or email agreements.

To safeguard subjects' anonymity, all participants were offered the option of remaining anonymous. For those farmers who chose to remain anonymous, I worked collaboratively with them to use pseudonyms in the paper. Additionally, subjects were offered copies of the written research before publication for review. It was reiterated during this process that they were satisfied with the information provided, and the opportunity to withdraw was extended once more. While not all subjects requested a copy of the research, none chose to withdraw.

To ensure an unbiased approach to engaging with subjects' worldviews (Hochschild, 2016), I refrained from preparing leading questions for the semi-structured and informal interviews. Avoiding predetermined biases, such as framing climate change as a crisis or the EU as an expression of "globalists" or "ruling elite," required meticulous attention to detail and self-reflection on my own positionality and worldview. During the fieldwork, I maintained a posture of humility and openness, fostering open dialogue where ideas and perspectives could be shared freely. This approach was essential for building rapport and facilitating respectful discussions even in areas of disagreement.

Beyond a commitment to "do no harm," my ethical approach sought to "do good where possible." As a researcher and academic, I leveraged my position to assist subjects in areas where they might not typically have access. For instance, when given the opportunity to interact with state, party, or union officials, I raised concerns on behalf of the subjects that they might not have been able to articulate themselves (Pink et al., 2015). Furthermore, as the research involved physical labor and general assistance on farms and with families, these acts of assistance contributed to fulfilling ethical goals while establishing trust and respect with the participants.

Given the immersive nature of the research, close relationships developed with the subjects, resulting in the sharing of intimate details about their daily lives and perspectives. While friendships naturally developed during this process, it was essential to maintain awareness of the professional aspect of the interaction. Although the relationships extended beyond the typical interviewer-interviewee dynamic, these long-lasting friendships enriched my understanding of their worldview rather than hindering the research process.

4.4 Data analysis

As any kind of qualitative research does not come with a specific recipe that fits all situations, how to structure data analysis is of paramount importance. This rings even more true with ethnographic work, where the analysis is guided by the ontological and epistemological stance of the researcher, where the identification of one’s research questions become the true guidance of how to structure data analysis (Heller 2008). As part of the core aims of this ethnographic study were to co-create a narrative from the subject’s side of the empathy

wall (Pink et al 2015, Hochschild 2016) the positionality of the researcher had to be held at the forefront of research both in the field and during analysis.

As LeCompte and Schensul (2012) have described, many researchers leave their ethnographic work underinterpreted, giving the reader a simple statement of facts explained locally without the wider social and political integration of those results that provide a more nuance and broad picture. For this reason the constant reflection and interpretation of both my position as researcher, how I interpreted and digested the data in the field and during analysis, and the position of my subjects and their social, cultural and political context. Furthermore, data "housekeeping" became of great importance, to allow for distinction between subjects and to then integrate the findings into a deep story.

Being that the nature of this work involved a mixture of languages and dialects, audio recordings became essential to generating data. I translated recordings of my own note taking and interviews where needed and transcribed relevant information into digital form. Where there were gaps in understanding due to language/ dialect or cultural barriers, clarification was sought either with the subjects that provided that information directly or with other subjects where continuous contact was maintained. Further clarification was also done with my supervisor whom is an Austrian native and was able to help broaden the scope of understanding in the wider Austrian political and cultural context.

Selection for relevant information for analysis was, as stated above, guided by the research aims. However, in field note taking was focused on absorbing as much information, both factual and interpretative, as possible. As this would help establish the wider more nuanced social, cultural and political circumstances of the subjects (LeCompte & Schensul 2012) while helping cross the empathy wall better understand and empathise with their worldview (Hochschild 2016). For example, while the local family history of a participant's farm and surrounding ecology may not provide obvious information related to how a subject viewed climate mitigation procedures at first glance, it helps inform to the feelings of how one might approach and react policy to measures that directly affect their daily life.

Transcribing relevant subject information followed a narrative structure, organised chronologically based on the fieldwork timeline. This allowed for the identification of emerging themes and facilitated the creation of a deep story. The process involved continuous feedback during and after fieldwork, incorporating reflections and feedback from interviews and interactions with state, party, and union officials. Understanding the positions of these functionaries helped contextualise their perspectives as political representatives and enriched the overall analysis.

4.5 Limitations

As the nature of ethnographic work is one that is highly subjective and reliant on qualitative interpretations, there will always be certain limitations. As my work focused on a very specific social, cultural and political setting to be interpreted as a learning example for wider context, results have to be analysed and understood as such (Pink et al 2015). Furthermore, as the aims of the research were to understand the on ground actually

existing politics and how they are interpreted by farmers sympathetic to populist groups/sentiment, this narrows the scope of understanding. It is important to not generalise these findings and apply them in any situation globally, or even nationally, however the ethnographic approach allows for a deep understanding and empathic approach to the participants being studied (Hochschild 2016). Ethnographic research is dynamic and requires research to adapt their approach and methods as they conduct research, to facilitate more genuine learning about the focus group (Gusterson 2008).

The data collection in this research was also subject to limitations. While I took efforts to minimise language and cultural barriers, there is still risk of limitations to understanding due to the strong dialect and cultural context of Upper Austria. Furthermore, as this is relying on the word and experience through participant observation of the subjects and researcher respectively, there is risk of subjects presenting a narrative they wanted to project or had reservations about the researchers positionality that may have hindered more genuine and fluid interaction. However, to minimise this problem the methods detailed above in terms of building rapport, cooperation in physical labour, house keeping and living with subjects provided a greater likelihood of genuine interaction and perspective.

In certain cases where farmers had particularly strong dialects that limited my understanding, care was taken to have another farmer during the interview for clarification. When this was not possible, in conversation clarification was always taken and sessions audio recorded to review with other subjects and academic supervisor when needed. Furthermore, having a second round of field work together with the majority of the subjects also offered the opportunity for clarification of specifics and feedback on emerging themes. That being said, misunderstandings or misinterpretations cannot be ruled out and this should be taken into account for this research.

The scale and scope of the research also lead to further limitations. Being a relatively small sample size over a period of roughly six weeks of field work means the findings to not necessarily represent a whole picture. Furthermore, while having a specific focus group of mostly farmers and some workers, and using a specific keyhole issue limits both the access to the field and data generated. However, being that this is the nature of ethnographic work, these findings should be interpreted as such, and offer insights into the lifeworld view, actually existing politics and in relation to the populist rise. This work can still offer valuable insights or a starting point into understanding the complex nature of how populist groups interpret, integrate and react to environmental policy and climate change.

My positionality as researcher also makes the work subject to limitations. While this was minimised through the methodology and research approach, one can not simply ignore personal subjectivities in doing ethnographic work. However, holding these biases at the forefront of my work and made visible for all subjects allows for an enrichment of the findings rather than a hindrance. By articulating my points of departure both to my subjects and in my research, helps reduce the amount my personal biases cloud findings and offers the lens in which results can be interpreted through.

Lastly, it is essential to acknowledge the potential limitations that arise from my personal attributes, such as age, upbringing, professional experience, gender, and the fact that I am a father. These factors could have influenced the research outcomes and their interpretation. While my farming experience in Switzerland provided valuable skills and insights, I remained cautious not to generalise or interpret the findings solely through this lens. Instead, I consciously acknowledged these biases during both the fieldwork and analysis phases. Furthermore, my role as a parent and coming from a poor and working-class background added an important contrasts that required careful consideration. Although this background might have enhanced my understanding of the struggles faced by farmers and workers relying on welfare and subsidies, it was crucial not to assume that my understanding of access to the welfare state in Australia explained the experiences of farmers in Austria. These diverse contexts demand careful discernment to avoid misleading interpretations.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Practitioners: Farmers and Workers

5.1.1 Texas Longhorn Ranch: Lisa

The first stop for my fieldwork brought me to a young farming family roughly 45 minutes drive from the capital of Upper Austria, Linz in the north eastern quarter of the state. Tucked away amongst the misty rolling hills emerged a very modern and impressive timber farm house with large stables and livestock roaming free. Upon entering the household I was greeted by a young mother, Lisa, her children and friendly dog. Welcomed into a house of warmth, her husband Herbert was busy cooking and I was made to feel instantly at home. After getting to know each other personally, naturally their curiosity toward my research became a launching point to discuss overall themes and how the next few days may look like working together.

Lisa, in her early thirties, had only recently gotten into farming in the last few years. A rather different path to most farmers, she is university educated and had previously worked in the marketing department of an international forklift manufacturer, dealing with sales and trades across the globe. Being fed up with the office life she sought a complete change in lifestyle and went to complete agricultural studies with the aim of starting her own farm. What kind of farm she chose to establish together with her partner offered the first insights into a deep story of famers in Upper Austria.

In careful discussion and consideration with Herbert, their aim was to create a farm that was not reliant on government subsidies and that could be financially sustainable within a few years. For this reason they chose to convert the very old and rundown farm and property they had purchased into a farm for hardy breed of cattle that requires less maintenance. For both the production of meat and for specialty breeding they had decided upon the unique Texas Longhorn breed of cattle. Lisa explained that these were bred over centuries to be weather hardy, fantastic for animal husbandry and suckling while also having balanced character and strong herd instincts. This unique breed of cattle allows them to sell their livestock at a premium for both the beef and breeding industry and they have already established connections across Europe. They also have a few horses, chickens, ducks and dog, all of which require lots of work.

Lisa explained that their first interactions with the local and federal state institutions with registering their property as a farm already raised cause for concern. “Basically all farmers are reliant on subsidies for survival, so when we registered our farm without applying for any financial assistance, this raised red flags for the authorities” she explained. “The Agrarmarkt[1] called us immediately and wanted to come and inspect our farm. I told them they are welcome to come and inspect but we haven’t even started building our house on the property and we're just getting started. Once they arrived to come and do the the audit, the inspectors explained to me that it is very suspicious for a farm to not apply for subsidies and they need to check we are

[1] Agrarmarkt Austria (AMA) serves as the regulatory and support agency for Austria's agricultural and food sector, overseeing quality standards, market regulation, and support for farmers, while also promoting local products and ensuring consumer safety.

not engaging in criminal activity" (Lisa 07.11.2022). The young farmer went on to explain, she feels like any farm or farmer that tries to operate outside their structure of relying on government assistance for survival already creates flags and roadblocks with the authorities.

Lisa explained to me that there is a vast and complex structure of regulations around agricultural assistance, and it is consulted and, in her view, intentionally inaccessible for the average farmer to understand. Furthermore, she explained to me "I have a masters degree, I have worked in international companies and am well educated, when I look at the documents for applying for subsidies, I don't even understand what they really mean or how they can be enacted and policed" (Lisa 07.11.2022). She explained that most farmers have to go to the Chamber of Agriculture to get assistance in to how to understand these documents. "I've been there many times, and I hear them, the employees at the chamber, trying to explain to farmers how and what to apply for and what they mean. They don't even understand what they are saying most of the time!" (Lisa 07.11.2022).

Lisa feels as though much of these policies and assistance programs are written in an intentionally vague manner that are left open to interpretation. "The only people that really understand them is the AMA (Agrarmarkt Austria). They are like the police and will come and inspect your property and decide how they see fit if a farmer is meeting the standards" (Lisa 7.11.2022). Lisa explained that these policies are created somewhere far removed from the local on ground ecology and practices and that they are far too generalised to take into account the on ground situation. Leaving policing and punishment down to the whim of the Agrarmarkt officials. AMA operates under the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions, and Tourism. Its main function is to support the marketing of agricultural products in Austria and to provide information and services to farmers, processors, and traders. They are also responsible for the understanding and enforcement of agricultural policy (Unternehmensservice Portal 2023).

Over the years they had established their farm operating their project organically. Eventually seeking out some subsidies under ÖPUL (Austrian Program for Subsidies) and BIO Austria, the largest organic farming association in the country and a program connected to the EU Green Deal and driving force to assist Austria achieve their national agricultural Green Deal targets. The Texas Longhorn farmer explained to me that she does not apply for many subsidies at all, especially compared to your average Austrian farmer. The subsidies she receives are mostly related to the prohibition of using antibiotics or pesticides and the amount she receives in financial support just covers the cost of her personal agricultural insurance. Lisa presented me with the over 150 pages of regulations and, in her words, jargon that she has to adhere to be registered as organic. "There are thousands of measures that must be upheld" she showed me and continued "often referencing and referring to other obscure practices to be found in some other document" (Lisa 08.11.2022) (see appendix for sample).

During one of our mornings working together building fences and cleaning stables, Lisa explained that now being part of BIO Austria means she hast to uphold her land to certain standards to qualify for subsidies. Part of these standards, calculate how much manure she can use per acre. However being that these standards

are created in general and do not take into account breed of cattle and style of farming this causes quite a large difficulty for her:

“According the regulations my cattle produce too much manure for my land and I am supposed to dispose of 300 cubic metres of it per year on to other farms to be used as fertiliser. I figured I could do this with my neighbour, but these regulations are so arbitrary they state I have to dispose of this for use on another BIO Austria registered farm. This just makes no sense! I would understand if me as an organic farmer, can’t take on the manure from a non-organic farm, but the other way round!? You would think it would be promoted for organic farmers to give their manure to non-organic farmers, not ban it!” (Lisa 09.11.2022).

Furthermore, Lisa goes on to explain that her breed of cattle and style of farming means she barely even collects half this amount of manure. She explains that Texas Longhorns used predominantly for breeding and suckling do not produce anywhere near as much as dairy cows or heifers for beef production. That and being her cattle are free range and able to come and go into the stables as they please, means to meet these targets she has to go around her land searching for manure to collect. “This is impossible with the time I have being a (solo) farmer as Herbert [her husband] is always at work, that and looking after two young children you can imagine how difficult this is” she continues “I take a lot of care to look after my soil ecologically, but because of these rules created on an EU level my cows apparently produce too much manure” (Lisa 09.11.2022). Lisa goes on to explain that his is just one example of coming into conflict with the brunt of the regulatory processes that all farmers have to rely on in a much more dependent fashion than her.

Lisa has taken care and time to build a special relationship with her cattle and the love and strength she runs her farm with is truly impressive. As her operation also deals with the breeding and selling of cattle she is also required to weigh and take physical details of her livestock. Even though there were only young, the calves we had to herd and place on scales were extremely powerful for their few hundred kilogram size. This requires her to have a special relationship with the mother cows and two bulls that roam with the herd. Lisa took the time to explain each cow, ox and bull’s character and demeanour as this was imperative for function and safety in working with such huge animals. Just the cordoning off the young calves from their mothers and bulls proved a delicate task. It took the two of us half the day just to complete the process of weighing roughly ten calves, with constant management of the concerned mothers and massive bulls. “You can imagine how hard this is alone”, she explained, “and I am supposed to also have time to read and interpret all these convoluted documents, or go down to the Chamber of Agriculture to try and get them to help me interpret them!” (Lisa 10.11.2022).

During my time there we also discussed the situation in Holland (mentioned in section 2) and Lisa herself came into contact with farmers after government crackdown on nitrogen use for Dutch farmers. “I have sold some cattle to farmers in Holland who have had to change their whole operation away from milk production or their land would be seized” (Lisa 08.11.2022). Lisa explained that she worked with other Texas Longhorn farmers in Austria to sell and transport a number of cattle across the border to her Dutch customer:

“Because of all of the crazy regulations, I wasn’t able to bring the other cattle on to my property because they didn’t come from a registered organic farm. I had the same problem when trying to purchase new cattle for my own farm. This is important for the emotional state of the cattle and herd. I had to find a place temporary place to store them while dealing with these impossible bureaucratic hurdles” (Lisa 08.11.2022).

During the Texas Longhorn transport conundrum Lisa spoke with one of the local vets that helped her organise a board for the non-organic longhorn cattle to be shipped together with hers. Her vet had explained to her that in Austria, if you want to get around regulations you just need to start a “Verein” (association)[2]. Upon hearing this information Lisa began the process to form a breeding association for Texas Longhorns. “You wouldn’t believe it, after I had done this all of a sudden all doors were open to me, all the red tape was gone” she exclaimed “I almost never ran into these kind of issues, like brining other cattle to my property, again” (Lisa 08.11.2022). Lisa went on to explain this gave her insight into why there are so many different associations and feels this is done more of as a way of getting around regulations and potentially even institutionalise corrupt practices.

In further conversation about this controversial policy decision in Holland I questioned Lisa’s viewpoint on this. She believed it to be on the one hand crazy, but on the other hand not unsurprising considering the way the EU operates. She speculated that perhaps Holland being so close to Brussels and the EU headquarters that this could be a testing site for how similar technocratic agricultural policies could be implemented continent wide. She repeated a point that had come up regularly in our interactions:

“These policies created in Brussels and at the EU level can’t be applied broad on such a broad scale without considering the local ecologies and practices. First the have to be translated from French or English into German and then placed into practice here in Austria. Who knows what gets lost in translation. It often doesn’t match the on ground circumstances nationally or regionally” (Lisa 08.11.2022).

Lisa gave further insight into being a “new” farmer. With the ability to set up new practices and organise her land as ecologically friendly and time efficient as possible being a rarity, most farmers do not have the luxury of working from a clean slate. This was partly only possible because they started their farm with some capital behind them from her previous work and Herbert’s, and were able to construct their land and practices to be sustainable ecologically, time-wise and financially. She speculated how much harder it must be for the average farmer, or full time farmer with no other source of income. “They are so reliant on subsidies for survival and when they go to the Chamber of Agriculture for assistance on subsidies, all they hear is “Euro”” she sympathises “they become stuck in this hamster wheel where they have no autonomy because they rely on these convoluted support systems but because they don’t want to bite the hand that feeds them, farmers can’t really do anything about it” (Lisa 07.11.2022).

[2] A "Verein" refers to an association or a club. It is a legal entity formed by a group of individuals or organisations with a common interest, purpose, or goal. This could be an agricultural association or club formed by farmers or agricultural stakeholders to collaborate on shared goals such as sustainable farming practices, marketing agricultural products, or advocating for agricultural policies. These associations provide a structured framework for agricultural professionals to work together toward common objectives within the industry.

Lisa expressed what came to be perhaps the deepest running theme throughout my work with farmers in upper Austria: in her view, AMA, the ÖVP and its farmers union “Der Bauernbund”, Raiffeisen Bank, Chamber of Agriculture and Lagerhaus (the largest agricultural cooperative and supply group in Austria) are all utterly intertwined and have institutionalised their corruption and control of the agricultural market and systems. Making any effort to enact change, have access to the state or foster political autonomy utterly handcuffed by their structure. Her dealings with these bodies confirm the belief that agricultural regulations are intentionally written in an opaque manner, allowing them to be enacted in ways that suit this multi-bodied political structure.

When broaching the subject of the current government and political representation in Austria, the young cattle farmer explained she feels this has changed rapidly in the last few years. Detailing how the current coalition government Austria, particularly the Greens (Die Grünen)[3] more so than the ÖVP, have shifted to a much more authoritarian philosophy and governance since gaining power. “The Greens started out as an environmentally friendly party that was mostly for organic farming and looking after nature. Since gaining power they are constantly painting farmers as the bad guys and drivers of ecological damage creating new authoritarian agricultural policies without any consultation of actual farmers” explained Lisa “they are all for these new EU policies that don’t consider the on ground circumstances of farmers here in Austria” (Lisa 08.11.2022). She went on to explain that often, be it on a local or national level, the FPÖ are the only party that seems to genuinely be looking out for farmers and pointing out these technocratic policies. Another aspect that was a recurring theme was that the FPÖ especially in contrast to the ruling parties, were one of the only voices that spoke out against the authoritarian COVID19 measures. “You know they tried to make it [the vaccine] mandatory here? They gave fines and threatened prison for those who didn’t, and tried to lockdown just the unvaccinated” (Lisa 08.11.2022). Lisa explained that in the last few years, be it in agricultural or civil rights, the FPÖ is often the only party speaking for the people.

Lisa’s worldview and approach toward agriculture and climate change was one of willingness to do what she can working *with* authorities and policy makers. There was a very strong sense of knowing her land, her cattle and community and Lisa has impressively built a healthy foundation into operating her overall practices and approach into an ecologically and socially friendly manner. She felt it is very much for this reason that such hostility shown by the current ruling government or dismissiveness toward their personal or regional circumstances, in how agricultural policies are drafted and implemented, creates resistance and distrust.

On our follow up interactions Lisa and I were able to have more time to reflect and articulate the interaction of the current circumstances for herself, farmers in general and the state in Upper Austria and on a wider scale. When reflecting on the role of the state in Upper Austria and nationally Lisa explained:

[3] Die Grünen, or "The Greens," is a political party in Austria that focuses on environmental and social issues. They advocate for policies aimed at addressing climate change, promoting sustainability, and advancing progressive social agendas within the Austrian political landscape.

“In general, especially towards entrepreneurs, be it farmers and foresters or entrepreneurs. The state blocks or delays projects of entrepreneurs to a great extent and is an obstacle to the implementation of any projects. In my opinion, this happens under the pretext of wanting to protect the citizens, but in fact it has nothing to do with the welfare of the citizens, but rather with a power struggle and control compulsion of the authorities. There are countless rules and regulations that have to be complied with. For any project, you are forced to obtain a huge number of permits, which not only takes a lot of time but also costs a lot of money. As a result, many entrepreneurs lose courage and eventually give up. In my opinion, it is only possible to simplify and accelerate the approval process by means of "good contacts" in politics. Especially in our region, it is important to know the right people, or to know someone who knows someone, and so on. Until you get to the person who can/may actually make decisions. This leads me to the next serious deficiency in our system. It is very difficult to get in touch with decision-makers. If you have a concern and you address it to an authority, it can take a long time to get to the right person who can give you information. In our country we say "everyone talks their way out of it to someone else". Civil servants don't like to be definite in their statements. So it is difficult to get a clear and unambiguous answer and often depends on who you talk to. In my opinion, rules and regulations should be so clearly formulated and worded that there is no ambiguity and no room for interpretation. In Austria, one speaks of "grey areas" or "matters of interpretation” (Lisa 23.02.2023)

When we further discussed the relationship and role between Austria and the EU Lisa proclaimed “In my eyes, the EU is often seen as a large untouchable institution. Austria, as a "small" country, does not have much say in this and, in my opinion, does not represent its position very strongly. I feel that it is more important for Austrian politicians to satisfy the EU than their own citizens” (Lisa 23.02.2023). She repeated how in agriculture, the EU is basically the only source and authority that created and decides what policies should be and how they are implemented. Stating how on a local level there is no manoeuvrability while on a personal level farmers are completed beholden to the EU created subsidy policies they have no say in creating. She continued that:

“subsidies are designed in such a way that they tend to benefit large farms and our small-scale farming structures suffer as a result. A high degree of bureaucracy is necessary to receive the subsidies. The subsidy guidelines are formulated in such a way that a normal farmer can hardly understand them and is again dependent on the support of the Chamber of Agriculture” (Lisa 23.02.2023).

The final dissatisfaction Lisa voiced regarding the EU was how the abundance impenetrable and opaque regulations further exacerbates the impossibility for famers to understand or benefit form them. Stating that “personally, I am not a big fan of the E.U., because I think that vast sums of tax money are wasted in an uncontrolled and unaccountable way” (Lisa 23.02.2023).

As we discussed the ideal state and how access to it should look like Lisa expressed her doubts to the long-term viability of current democratic structures. Lamenting that there is little to no accountability of politicians, especially when there are elections every few years where the government, and its members who enacted policy, can be changed, while their policies remain. She explained that “laws must be formulated so clearly that

everyone understands them" and that they "should be reduced to a minimum" while social principles, such as "not to harm others" should be principles people adhere to. "The state should encourage citizens to be productive. It should be easy to start a business or implement a project and the state should support this" Lisa (23.02.2023) stated while adding that civil servants should be rewarded for prompt and efficient work to encourage swift support for citizens and to minimise the negative effects of bureaucracy.

Overall the Texas Longhorn farmer and her family understand that things are changing environmentally on a regional and global scale and Lisa is trying her best to build organic and environmentally friendly practices. The strongest notion that kept recurring for Lisa that she stated regularly:

"I just want to run my farm how I want to. Without the government overseeing every little step, without having to play the beggar just to just survive. I am doing extra practices to look after my land ecologically but its very difficult to even understand what these EU created [subsidy] regulations are, let alone to meet them" (Lisa 09.11.2022)

5.1.2 Texas Longhorn Ranch: Herbert

As my time on the Texas Longhorn Ranch was utterly immersive and collaborative, discussions with Herbert also offered valuable results and insights into the perceptions of political practice in Upper Austria in the context of populism and climate change. Father of two young children and husband to Lisa, Herbert took over the family run timber processing company at a young age. On the brink of foreclosure, the banks only agreed to continue support for the business if ownership changed and presented a financially viable plan. Bringing the over 200-year-old business from the edge of ruin to now being one of the leading companies in the timber industry, employing over 100 people and having expanded to 3 locations. This has definitely moulded Herbert's outlook and integration into the local community and ecology. As he states, he wants to leave the world, nature and local environment in a better state for all future generations. His business has now created the largest renewable energy power plant in Upper Austria.

On my first night with their family in Upper Austria, Hebert and I discussed a wide range of issues crossing regional and global scales. His wealth of knowledge of the local level, whilst also being a leader in both the timber and renewable energy industry proved very insightful for our discussions. Again a recurring theme that arose was the disconnected and technocratic nature of EU created policy in both forestry and agriculture. "Policies on an EU level are created to cast a wide net and do not acknowledge or integrate the on-ground history, ecology or community practices" he proclaimed "the policy makers in Brussels have no idea what the situation is like here in Upper Austria" (Herbert 07.11.2022). This naturally brought us to the recent RED III initiative amendments on removing woody biomass from the list of renewables for heating:

"This (RED III) is a perfect example of this [aforementioned one-size-fits-all EU policy|. Most farmers are already struggling just to get by with all the subsidies they rely on, so many of them collect fallen trees or dead wood off their property and sell them to make a bit of money. This is also good forest and land management practice

and they supply this wood for heating for local schools, municipal buildings or sell them to our company" (Herbert 07.11.2023).

When I asked why this initiative did not go through even though many of the voting members on the EU parliament level representing Austria were in favour, Hebert explained this is mostly because of the strength of lobbying from the timber industry. He further went on to explain that Austria is one of the largest timber producers and he lamented that often lobbying is the only way to enact any change politically or have some sort of political autonomy. "This leaves most small farmers with no power, yet almost always its the small farmers that are targeted, or at least, are the most disadvantaged by these kinds of policies" (Herbert 07.11.2022)

This lead our discussions to a wider context of climate mitigation policies and their enactment. Expressing his doubts about the unreliability of solar and wind "we've just seen in the last few months, having mostly cloudy conditions and little wind they [renewables] didn't produce enough energy… ¥et they [the EU] are trying to remove woody biomass as a renewable when it is one of the most reliable and sustainable forms of energy" (Herbert 07.11.2022). We went on to discuss, this process of burning woody biomass, particularly old, diseased or dead wood, and his feelings that this is not only proper forests management practice, but a sustainable process that people have be doing for thousands of years.

Herbert also expressed his scepticism to how climate change is portrayed and in turn dealt with: "You know the climate has always been changing, and throughout history it's been shown that CO2 actually assists plants in growth. There has even been a lot of reforestation happening recently yet the way climate change is presented is to scare us and create policies that affect small farmers or average citizens, while ignoring the biggest polluters" (Herbert 07.11.2022). Hebert went more in depth to also explain much of these policies are, in his point of view, created in conjunction with the biggest polluters and, raising the example of Holland, are often more about power and dispossession of property form farmers. Interested in my own knowledge on such matters Herbert questioned me "do you know who the largest private farmer owner is in the USA? It's Bill Gates, one of the very people who invests money in helping construct these policies of dispossession" (07.11.2022).

We went on to also discuss the greater role of political power when framing issues around climate change. Herbert and I both agreed that in regards to whom some of these biggest polluters are, the largest is by many metrics the United States military (Renner 1991, Webb 2017, Neimark, Belcher & Bigger 2019), yet somehow, they remain out of bounds for political discussion regarding emissions. Furthermore, Herbert highlighted that enormous fossil fuel industries are often the largest investors into climate mitigation policies, naturally making it impossible to hold them accountable when they are the bodies creating the laws to deal with emissions. Again Hebert surprised me with a question I was not expecting to be asked by someone in rural Upper Austria: "You know it was BP [British Petroleum] that invented the whole idea of the "carbon footprint" to shift the blame and taxes away from them?". When acknowledging this fact (Solnit 2021) he continued to reiterate that these policies are almost always created by elites to further enhance their own power while stripping it away from the

average citizen. Herbert also added he believes many of these industries try to foster division amongst average citizens, point out how many of these radical climate activists groups protesting on highways or in museums are getting funding from the fossil fuel industry.

It is clear, that Herbert is well versed into both local and global politics with an acute eye for political power. During my time with him and his family, I never sensed any climate denialism or xenophobic tendencies or even sympathy for such policy. On the contrary, being someone who has worked closely with the forestry and timber industry his whole life, Herbert was very focused on how to implement practical changes to deal with climate change in a democratic manner. His role as both business owner in an industry completely intertwined with environmental policy and parent concerned about a liveable future for his and all children, Herbert's worldview is an insightful window into how the actually existing politics manifest in Upper Austria in the context of populism and climate change.

5.1.3 Stephan & Susanne

The second farm during my field work represented a modern adaptation of an age-old farming practice for the region. Located in the south eastern area of the state Stephan and Susanne worked lead a farm using horses for therapy, particularly for children with disabilities. However, this was only a relatively recent change in the scheme of things as, as Stephan explained "this farm had been in my family for over 500 years. Your typical Austrian dairy farm of roughly 12 dairy cows, producing milk, butter and some offspring sold for meat" (Stephan 13.11.2022). This was sold regionally to local markets, stores or directly to consumers. To make this more financially viable, throughout their history his ancestors had also used pears and apples to make cider plus his parents also ran a working holiday program, done in many locations in the state, called "holiday on the farm". Where families, often from Germany or Belgium would come and live and work on the farm, assisting with the dairy production and general land and household chores.

To attempt to expand on this project Stephan's parents put in much hard labour to renovate the farm house with the aim of making it a multipurpose farm and inn/guesthouse. "In the early 1970's" he explained "shortly after the renovations were complete, a fire broke out burning most of the farmhouse. Meaning we had to repair and re-renovate everything. This really took a toll on my parents, not just physically but emotionally. Especially on my mother" (Stephan 13.11.2022). We discussed the very physical and hard labour of working with dairy cows and how this was all his parents had done all their life. Being personally familiar with this kind of work, but only on a seasonal basis, I could well relate to the physical demands of cow handling, herding, milking, butter making and all of the cleaning of stables and dairy equipment. The demands this puts on the body over a whole lifetime are extreme. "My mother is in a retirement home now, if you see her standing, she still looks like she is sitting her back is so bent after all those years of labour" reflected Stephan (13.11.2022).

Being one of three siblings, whom all went off to Vienna to study, it was always agreed upon that Stephan's brother, who studied agriculture, would take over the farming practices and the other two siblings would also live in the farm house. "When the time came for my brother to take over the farm, because of the way regulations were built around welfare, her [Stephan's mother] pension and subsidies, we had to delay the

official handover for a few years. This didn't suit my brother so he went on to do his own thing and I thought "alright, I'll take over the farm" (Stephan 13.11.2022). Stephan went on to explain that having dairy cows was so much back breaking work, where you have to milk twice a day and all the other labour involved with dairy cows, it was not at all financially viable to continue this practice, even though this had been done for half a millennia in their family. In the late 1990's he decided to switch the farm over to mother cows for meat production. "I remember when I went to tell my mother that we were changing the practice, I was scared it would upset her that I wasn't continuing the tradition. On the contrary, she was so happy to not have to go in and work so much with all the milking and cleaning twice a day! You know, it's a hard job" (Stephan 13.11.2022).

For a number of years they continued the practice of mother cows and beef production but this became less and less profitable. Stephan explained how even with the subsidies, he eventually would only end up making 200 euros of profit for each calf he sold, leaving him open to other options. In roughly 2007, a hippotherapy (horse therapy for physical, occupational and speech development) farm was leaving the region. "The owners wanted someone to take over the horses and therapy and after some consideration we realised this would be more financially viable than mother cows" stated Stephan (13.11.2022). After selling their cattle and taking over many of the horses they, to assist in making this venture more financially sustainable they also rent out parts of their stables to other horse owners. "Though this can come with its own tensions" reflects Stephan "different people all using the one farm rightfully means there can be conflicting views on who has autonomy" (Stephan 13.11.2022). He explained that the only way he could even consider changing his practices and run a farm as they do is because they have other sources of income.

"You vary rarely find any "full time" [income solely from farming] farmers anymore. Unless they are on a really large scale. Almost all farmers are "Nebenerwerb"" (Stephan 13.11.2022). *Nebenewerb* is perhaps best describe as additional part-time work carried out on top of full time or household family occupation and income. Having studied architecture and working in consulting in the industry, Stephan is able to support this farm together with his wife Susanne. Susanne , who works as a child and baby physiotherapist also works closely with the horses, trainers and helping manage the property and gardens. Mother of two children in their teens she has been living with Stephan and his son (until he left for university) for a number of years. Susanne explained to me that "only when you have other sources of income is running a farm like this possible" (Susanne 11.11.2022).

This dual income combined with the minor subsidies gives them flexibility with how they run their farm, unlike many other farmers, or especially full time small scale farmers. Susanne explained one of the neighbours they bought rabbits from always tells her "I can't wait till my retirement comes, then I can finally start farming how I want to farm" (11.11.2022). Both Susanne and Stephan actively do not want to be so heavily reliant on subsidies to get by. By changing over the therapy farm they received a one-off Land Use subsidy that comes under regional programs promoting tourism and outdoor activity, rather than from agriculture. Since yen they still receive some government assistance under this same scheme for roughly 9000 euros per year, which they explained does not amount to too much when you consider all of the costs involved. Stephan offered a

differing opinion to most on government support for farming: “I don’t want to use up subsidies that are for agricultural farms when others are more reliant on them. Plus I find on an EU level there is far too much money going in to supporting agriculture, rather than finding ways to make it more self sustainable” (Stephan 11.11.2023).

Upon arriving on these alternatives Stephan explained some of the efforts in his region promoted by local governments. Promoting farmers to produce products unique to the region, be they specially ciders or food products, or offering consumption and activity alternatives to on the one hand bring in more tourism, while on the other make the farmers a little more self sustainable. Both Stephan and Susanne reflected, that this is very difficult in regards to the division of time and labour, even for a farm like theirs that isn’t solely reliant on farming for income. “For one of your classic dairy farmers with no other source of income, this is asking too much” Stephan explained “as you can imagine, this hasn’t gone as well as they (the tourism industry and local government) had hoped” (Stephan 13.11.2022). While some farmers have tried to do this, they explained it is more of a bandaid solution and that there needs to be more radical change driven by the farmers themselves to break out of these systems they are beholden to.

Delving deeper into what these structures are that bind farmers dependency on government assistance without any autonomy to change it, Stephan confirmed what I had heard from my pervious contacts thus far “Wether you’re speaking to a functionary from the ÖVP, AMA, Bauernbund, Lagerhaus or Chamber of Agriculture, your basically speaking to the same civil servant. It makes no difference who you are speaking to, they all represent the same mafia-like structure” (Stephan 13.11.2022). When I stated that I had heard this from other farmers, Stephan laughed “of course, everybody, especially farmers, know this very well”. The next logical step seemed to me to ask what should be done, where do farmers that are not part of this structure have a voice? Do you feel the FPÖ is the answer? While admitting that often the FPÖ and their farmers union (Freiheitliche Bauern) are oft the only ones speaking against this super structure they were both very sceptical if the populist party is the solution. “I am thankful for the FPÖ and that they speak against this” Susanne professed “but that makes me uncomfortable” (13.11.2022). Reflecting that she does not like that the current circumstances make her feel thankful or indebted to a party she has so many disagreements with on other matters. Both Stephan and Susanne agreed that often the FPÖ is the only party that speak out against much of the corruption that exists, especially in agriculture, but they both suspect this is could just be an oppositional stance to garner more support. If they would actually govern any differently when in power is questionable. Stephan in particular felt that often the FPÖ oversimplifies complex political problems, which are very real problems that need change, but it is often in a sense that is combative rather than cooperative.

Susanne further expanded on her views on the FPÖ, explaining while they are giving a voice to many important issues, she feels they would do well to not be so combative toward the EU and institutions, always frame everything as railing against the elites. “Making constructive change takes time and cooperation” said Susanne “they would do well to be more diplomatic in their tactics, even if they are the only ones speaking out against the in built corruption” (13.11.2022). Though this being said, both Stephan and Susanne reiterated the point

that “Austria is separate from Brussels” and repeating that a one-size-fits-all approach that the EU often utilises is a large part of the problem.

When I queried on what the aforementioned radical change might look like, both Stephan and Susanne where excited to tell me of a local case of a group of dairy farmers who actively break free from this mafia-like structure:

“A number of local farmers were fed up with how they were never able to genuinely make a profit, as the prices and supply of milk is totally dictated by this mafia structure. Working with the Freie Baueren [Freiheitlich Bauern union] pulling themselves out of the current dairy association to invest in their own dairy plant and sell the milk directly to consumers, supermarkets or other industry themselves. When this didn’t succeed over the years and these same farmers tried to get back in, the ÖVP Bauernbund forced the dairy association to not let these farmers back in and take their milk. They even tried, to no avail, to get help from the local bishop because every other avenue didn’t work” (Stephan 13.11.2022).

I asked them how they felt like things would look like ideally for famers. Much of their response focused on farmers becoming as independent as they can (from state support) and building more cooperatives. Sharing land, equipment and resources to break free from the structure while only relying one their local connections rather than the state or the subsidy systems. When I further queried what the role of the state or farmers and general citizens access to the state looks like, Stephan felt that there needs to be more direct democracy particularly on a regional and municipal level. Both Susanne and Stephan reflected that a large problem is the urban-rural divide and that in previous generations, people were much more connected with the land and agriculture. Meaning that when decisions were made or policies drafted, the population and political representatives had a deeper understanding of the connection and importance of farming. Stephan also felt that partly due to this urban-rural divide, much of the problems in agriculture and forestry are indeed complex, leaving many people unable to understand and in turn support the required change to constructively improve circumstances.

One strong example discussed of the urban-rural divide or (as stated regularly by both) “Brussels is not Austria” in practice was the RED III initiative’s amendments around removing wood-biomass from renewable energy. “Every farmer in our region has a little forest on their property, it is important forest management to remove dead wood, particularly ash trees, from these forests” Stephan explained “it’s tradition that every farmer sells some of this wood and also uses for heating” (12.11.2022). Their farm has a very large stable entirely full of wood chips that is used for heating their’s and their neighbours’ properties, over 1000 square meters. They detailed that, in rural areas, the very vast majority of farms and buildings have heating systems like this. When we reflected on why then so many Austrian politicians on an (EU parliament level) supported this, Stephan felt this was due to the urban rural disconnect and that many do not realise heating with woody biomass is very much sustainable.

On follow up conversations on their farm we reflected on the overall circumstances of the plight of farmers in this moment of environmental and political change. Stephan felt that it is important that the narrative of farmers having no autonomy and often being at the whim of “die da oben” (elites) and their policy decisions. Expressed in the creation and implementation of agricultural policies from the EU level down. He is sympathetic to the views of farmers and feeling they have no voice, other than in the FPÖ and in their farmers union but is doubtful they populist party is much more than an opposition party rattling spears to garner support. That being said, both Stephan and Susanne stated in a very matter of fact manner that there is an absolute mafia structure from the aforementioned ÖVP, Bauernbund, Raiffeissen Bank and so on, that has infiltrated every level of government and association on a federal and municipal level. “Many farmers have their financial loans Raiffeisen” explained Stephan “making it very difficult to even attempt to go against this power structure” (10.12.2022). Reiterating the attempted change of the Freie Bauern to sell their own milk independently, to now be banned, almost as example, to not go against this mafia like structure. “It is pretty crazy, for the Bauernbund who are supposed to support farmers, go after farmers like that” Susanne reflected. Their vision for what an ideal future or solutions looks like involves less politics and more regional cooperation, that farmers need to do more to work together rather than complain.

5.1.4 Renee

During my travels in the south east of the state I made contact with a stable hand, whom previously worked for the Austrian military, in interior construction and as a mechanic. Renee had worked for Harley Davidson for a number of years, but from the stress of the job demands and the culture of the job was pushed the edge of a burnout. During this time he injured his hand and was unable to work. During his physical rehabilitation and with the employment services he began what he framed as “more meaningful work”. With animals and still in some compact in interior construction, often consulting with people one more holistic aspects of this work and their homes. He explained that other than his time in the Austrian military mission to the UN Peacekeepers in Syria, he has been in Austria his whole life. Born to an Austrian mother and father from former Yugoslavia, Renee is very much interested in the cultural history and what he calls the “generational social energy of a place” (Renee 11.11.2022).

Upon our meeting and working together he was first interested in the study I was undertaking and what my aims were, as we had not previously had contact. Upon explaining my aims and the overall outlook of exploring environmental politics, particularly relating to agriculture in the context of populism in Upper Austria, Renee was quick to dispel a lot of modern notions about the FPÖ and how they are framed. “The way the FPÖ is presented is almost always with a focus on them being racist or extreme, but they are not actually like this” he stated “They definitely have right leaning views on immigrations and asylum seekers , which was the backbone of what made them popular. It is a mistake to just frame them like this around these issues, as it ignores peoples genuine concerns and questions” (Renee 11.11.2022). Renee felt strongly that the local people whom accept immigrants and refugees should have some say in how many are accepted and what the integration process looks like. “Trust me, I have been in war torn areas in Syria, no one deserves to live like this. But we should be able to democratically decide how many people we can help and how they should be

integrated. But it is always forced upon us, and anyone who has concerns is called racist" claimed Renee (11.11.2022).

Over hard physical labour cleaning stables, doing repairs and tending to animals, Renee happily divulged deeper into his view on the FPÖ. Stating that they are the only major party standing up for regular people and farmers. Not just in the area of agriculture, but on forestry, energy, COVID19 and the war in Ukraine, the only political voice against these authoritarian measures is, in his view, the FPÖ. "In the last (federal) election I voted for the Greens. This was the biggest mistake! They have been the biggest tragedy in Austrian politics… totally authoritarian and technocratic" he lamented "and in agriculture, they have no idea, they bring in all of these technocratic policies and never consult with farmers. They have no idea how to actually implement these policies because they don't know how it works on a ground level" (Renee 11.11.2022).

When I questioned what this actually looks like in action the stable hand expressed his frustration with the functioning of climate politics. "It is very different on the ground to how they (policy makers) imagine" continued Renee "responsibility and punishments is always placed on the citizen or the farmer, never on the ones with power" (Renee 11.11.2022). Renee also further expressed his reservations to Austrian and European politics on a whole, feeling that (US) American politics have infiltrated every level, intertwining their framing of issues always in a way that benefits America, to the detriment of Austrians and average people. While much of this was around the focus of the current war in Ukraine and the crippling of economies by cutting off many ties with Russia, particularly around energy, it was not only limited to this military conflict. Renee reiterated that of the major parties, the FPÖ are the only ones standing up to this kind of imperialism.

When I queried if FPÖ is the solution, Renee had his doubts. "I feel politically homeless" he stated "even if the FPÖ are the only ones standing up for people, what they did when they last came into power gave me cause for concern. One of the first actions by the minister of the interior Kickl when they came to power was to spend millions on mounted police in Vienna. That is a pretty concerning show of dominance and power in my eyes" (11.11.2022). When I then queried about their popularity in Upper Austria Renee had some somewhat alternative views on their success here:

"People here in Upper Austria are very in tune and critical of any authoritarian power, due to our history. Adolf Hitler came from here you know? The birthplace of National Socialism. This has made people here very weary of anything like that happening again. We have inherited a particular fighting spirit against anything authoritarian. Even now people still go out every Sunday, rain hail or shine, to protest the authoritarian covid measures" (Renee 11.11.2022)

When questioned if this explained some of the resistance to EU environmental and climate mitigation policy, Renee felt it certainly was. Feeling that this strong sense of cultural and generational resistance to anything technocratic or authoritarian means any policy that does not integrate democratic processes of the local population will always be met with strong resistance here. The FPÖ are very easily able to capitalise on this inherited resistance to anti-democratic policy implementation, though he still questions if their solutions would

be better. “Everyone always talks about what needs to change, but never about how” he stated (Renee 12.11.2022).

Upon return visits to Upper Austria and meeting with Renee we were able to share and reflect what I had also heard from other farmers. When mentioning the mafia like structure he reflected that in some ways it is worse than organised crime syndicates “at least when you mess with them they will come and tell you straight that they if you are not with them you have to leave. The AMA comes from behind and ruins everything for you” he proposed (Renee 11.12.2022). When we further discussed the intricacies of what this looks like for farmers on the ground “you know when you are trying to be an organic farmer, there are so many convoluted regulations you have to adhere to. They just turn up at your property without warning, it could be up to two times a year, if you have anything they are not happy with, it could now be five times a year. Then they restrict your subsidies and always put pressure on you. It is always about power and demonstrating that they are the ones in power” (Renee 11.12.2022)

When we then discussed what solutions exist, what kind of political representation or access to the state farmers have, Renee’s outlook was cautious:

“For ever, almost all farmers, close to 90%, are part of the Bauernbund and with the ÖVP, but now that that is starting to change, more and more farmers have no other voice so they are shifting to the FPÖ. What many of them haven’t realised, or maybe don’t care, is that this could be a Trojan horse. I hope they that they [the FPÖ] aren’t just leading us all like the pied piper, but they are able to use their particular inclination, regardless if it is left or right politics it doesn’t matter, they stand as the only party in opposition to all this corruption and pitting themselves as for the people. Welcome critique from every side, to show they are ones who really stand up to corruption, but they also have nothing to lose” (Renee 11.12.2022)

Upon querying on then what the FPÖ offers in terms of solutions, Renee felt this is their main weakness, they are always just railing against bad circumstances, rather than for positive change. “It is a fine line between protesting for or against something but it makes a big difference” he said “if you go to an anti-war protest, the war takes some so much space. But if you go to a peace rally, it is peace that is the main agenda” (Renee 11.12.2022). Renee reflected that the FPÖ needs to offer more solutions but states that the Greens fell into this same trap. Always speaking about what needs to change, then offering no real solutions other than authoritarian measures when in power. Going back to people being wary of this with the FPÖ, Renee felt a lot of the time it doesn’t matter anymore because people are getting so fed up with all of the power structures and lack of autonomy, they just want the possibility of anything different.

When pushing Renee on what his personal beliefs are about that the state represents and access to the state he felt the situation “is not good”. Feeling that Austria is completely beholden to the EU and can’t act independently. On all issues, not just agriculture, he felt Austria needs to build more independence, because the way the state operates now “is just a puppet on a string of the EU” (Renee 11.12.2022). On his personal views on access to the state, Renee stated it is almost impossible to go it alone and that you need

collaboration to have any chance of getting anything done “especially when you are swimming against the current, like with corona, you could just say yes to all the measures and swim with the stream, but if you push against it you are robbed of all your will and energy it is really hard. But there is a third option, you try to get together with a few people, say a few farmers, and build your own community and try to help each other… you need to be selective where you pick your battles and work collectivity, or else you will be crushed by existing power structures” (Renee 11.12.2022). When I asked to relate this in the context of the FPÖ, he stated every politician tries to capitalise on populist sentiment, the FPÖ just do this to on a more extreme level, going against the current in every aspect to gain popularity.

“It is unfortunate but farmers need to step out of their comfort zone to improve their circumstance” stated Renee (12.11.2022) when we discussed what solutions my look like. When I relayed the story I had heard of of the Freie Bauern starting their own dairy processing system only to be crushed by the mafia like structure then banned from rejoining the existing Bauernbund milking association and questions is this not an attempt to go out of the comfort zone? Renee felt this isn’t really going out of their comfort zone “there isn’t profit in dairy cows. To really going out of their comfort zone they need to do something completely different to be financially sustainable” (11.12.2022). At the same time, Renee acknowledged it is very difficult to go against this mafia like structure and still felt politically, farmers need to do more just to create a greater voice other than the ÖVP and Bauernbund. “If the at least get out of their comfort zone and give their voice (and vote) to something different, that will already be a difference. But many are afraid to bite the hand that feeds them, but that is exactly going out of the comfort zone” (Renee 11.12.2022).

Discussing what the future of politics and the FPÖ looks like in Upper Austria, Renee was quick to point out that their popularity is growing all over the country, not just in the state. He felt this has been largely due to their ability to stand up to extremely technocratic politics, especially to covid measures. Feeling that this, the deployment and reaction to the pandemic measures, has made more and more people more in tune with the power dynamics of how politics in all areas operates. “The FPÖ is able to capitalise on these gaps very well and not just in Upper Austria” (11.12.2022). Overall, Renee’s outlook is all at once positive about the populist awakening that is happening over much of Austria, an awareness and desire for more democratic involvement of the people, while being sceptical of the FPÖ. “We are not completely powerless, we just need to be careful with whom we give our hand (our support)” he claimed “I look at it on an issues basis to whom I give my support. While it is unlikely but I hope that we can get out of the EU” (Renee 11.12.2022). He reiterated his concerns about the FPÖ, saying that while there are some genuine people involved in the party who try for more democratic involvement, you also have power hungry authoritarians like Kickl. Again he iterated, on so many issues, technocratic policies in agriculture or climate change, being anti imperialist or against authoritarian covid measures, of the major parties, the FPÖ is the only one speaking for people.

5.1.5 Jakob

Another farmer I was able to speak with during my field work in Austria was a jovial permaculture famer in the state's south eastern quarter near the city of Steyr. While only a limited few hour informal discussion over coffee, Jakob's perspective still offered insights and further deepened the understanding of the on ground politics and political culture in Upper Austria. Inheriting the farm from this parents, Jakob explained this was your classic Austrian small sized farm. "Roughly 12 dairy cows, calves sold for meat or to other farmers" he detailed "but I never wanted to work with cows, so when I took over, more than 25 years ago, I immediately switched to permaculture" (Jakob 14.11.2022). Jakob explained that this was only possible because he had previously worked in administration and had another job, an other case of Nebenewerb. When querying more about his journey, he was proud tell me he went to study and practice permaculture in India, Brazil and Rwanda. Where is interested and passion were so strong, he eventually go into teaching.

Part of Jakob's desire to not continue the classic 12 dairy cow farm was being caught in the "hamster wheel" of reliance on subsidies and no autonomy. Pushing him on what he meant by that, to my surprise Jakob, like many other farmers, referred to a "mafia" like structure of the Bauernbund, Raiffeisen and Lagerhaus. "You know, after the Second World War Raiffeisen did a lot to help rebuild (the country), giving farmers loans and helping them get on their feet" he reminisced "…but now they only have one goal, not to help people, but to make profit" (Jakob 14.11.2022). He felt that over time, the corrupting nature of having so much power is what has turned them into a mafia like structure. When I confirmed I had heard similar stories from other farmers about this power structure, Jakob reiterated what many others had said "When you speak to the Chamber of Agriculture, AMA or Raiffeisen, your basically speaking to the [ÖVP] Bauernbund" (Jakob 14.11.2022).

"The Bauernbund always talks like they are focused on regional production, but their dream is really to sell dairy products to China. This is why they are closing down or small and regional dairy processing plants and pushing everything into large scale ones" (Jakob 14.11.2022).

Again to my surprise Jakob went on to explain the example I had heard of about farmers in the region wanting to break free some the hamster wheel and start their own dairy processing plant. Only to be blacklisted by the Bauerbund and their dairy plant shut down. When I asked what then can farmers do he explained;

"there are a thousand different roads depending on each farmer, there are always possibilities, farmers must become independent but it is hard" (Jakob 14.11.2022)

"What do you mean by independent?" I asked.

"Independent from subsidies and relying on them. Say a dairy farmer wants to make changes, shift away from dairy farming to beef production, you would need to get a loan. From what Bank? Most likely Raiffeisen. Where do you get your seeds and grain from? From Lagerhaus. And straight away you are stuck back in this hamster wheel" (Jakob 14.11.2022).

When I pushed on, what then are other possibilities for farmers Jakob reiterated it is dependant on individual circumstance, but gave his situation as an example. “If you are nebenewerb there is already room for flexibility” he states “in most situations now, if you are lucky, the farmer is at home on the farm and the partner will work a separate job to also bring in income” (Jakob 14.11.2022). Detailing how having a separate source of income himself allowed to to fill a niche. “I wanted autonomy, I didn’t even know I could get subsidies” he exclaimed “then the people (officials) from environmental protection came and told me I could get these subsidies, and they wanted to support what I was doing” (Jakob 14.11.2022). Now Jakob receives subsidies to under Land Use and Environmental Protection programs.

Continuing on, describing his personal circumstance he explained he has turned away from political involvement, turned off his TV, no longer reads news, has left the church and just liked to focus on teaching his students. Then another recurring surprise came up in our conversation:

“One of the best things I ever did was to start an association” he laughed “everything is easier in dealing with the state now, the association gives you so many opportunities … you become an institution supported by the state, on a general level… to give you an example, the police can’t just come into my property to do a check anymore. If I deal with authorities I now represent an association and can request for anything they want from me to be done on paper with official documents and channel. Rather than just them giving me orders as a poor farmer. For example, if I have employees and I pay them cash , which would be against regulations, if I have an association, they are automatically part of the association now the authorities cannot touch me… it protects me and me workers. There are over 40 people registered in our association… we don’t want it to get bigger or make more money or anything, we just want our personal freedom to run things how we want” (Jakob 14.11.2022).

When I asked about what his vision then was, politically, Jakob stated that politics should work from the ground up. “First you make sure your family is okay, then you look on a municipal / community level, then you can move on to the national level” he continued “how things operate now is the exact opposite, then came the EU, further pushing this backwards notion of how things should work. We need to operate with political autonomy on this level” pointing to the ground “from the grass roots up, not from the EU down” (Jakob 14.11.2022). Jakob also felt that the mafia structure of Bauernbund, Raiffeisen, Lagerhaus and so on, had been partly responsible in propagating more globalisation, rather than grass roots autonomy.

Pushing him on what his ideal political and social operation would look like then, Jakob explained that farmers need to get back to basics, working and supporting each other form the family level, to community and outwards. But he feels they need to be more positive, not just focused on what they are against or what is bad, but to work together, sharing land, resources and manpower to break free from the state’s subsidies and have more autonomy. “Farmers need to to get out of this political dimension and focus on what they can do in their areas” he stated “creating and sharing energy on our properties from water, solar or firewood. They need to break free from the hamster wheel. It is hard when you are in debt to them” he admitted "but all the more reason to break out” (14.11.2022).

Jakob was also curious about my work, what I was doing here in Upper Austria. Upon explaining the broad scope of my work he felt “it is really good you actually come and look around, on the ground” (Jakob 14.11.2022). Upon detailing that my work was to build a narrative from farmers and average citizens view point collaboratively, about the FPÖ and populism in the region and in a global context respectively, Jakob stated the FPÖ is certainly not how they are always portrayed outwardly. However, he does not feel they are the answer. “They talk a lot, say a lot of the right things, like they are standing up for famers, but I don’t think they would do things much differently when in power. The whole thing is corrupt and it corrupts you, no matter now good your intentions are. They have already had (corruption) scandals” (Jakob 14.11.2022). When I got to the specifics about looking at the EU Green Deal and RED III initiative Jakob answered with a rumble “the first thing we would do if that came through [RED III] would be laugh about it. We are are pretty grounded people here” he jokingly referred to removing woody biomass from renewable energy sources “no really it would be impossible, this can’t change just like that. This is a classic example of the EU disconnect from the on ground circumstance, now they are talking about removing firewood from renewable but putting nuclear energy on there. It is totally crazy” (Jakob 14.11.2022).

When I asked then about his thoughts on the overall outlook of the future, rather than his ideal vision Jakob was positive. Feeling that more and more people were turning away from being caught up in the drama of the world and politics and getting back to basics. He admits it is probably going to get worse first before it gets better, but had a strong sense that a return to grass roots community building is happening, and in time, this will be the key to making genuine positive change, first on a local scale, then moving outward.

5.1.6 Max

Just on the outskirts of the capital Linz, I came to another former dairy farmer whom had switched over to mother cows for meat production. Living on the over 200-hundred-year-old farm with his wife, two children young children and both of his parents, Max was a happy to share much of his story with me. Switching over away from dairy cows over 20 years ago, he was tired of the struggle of relying on subsidies, so much daily work of milking twice a day for very little profit. “It is not worth it” he explained “this was before I was with my wife and had her income to also support (the farm). But even with the help of my parents at the time, it was so much work to be begging for support, just to survive” (Max 16.11.2022). Now his parents, both over 80, still help with what they can around the vegetable garden, with the chickens and with the children.

Max had converted part of his property into an impressive organic production garden which he sold the produce at the local weekly markets. “Even after switching over to mother cows you still need other projects to make money or you won’t survive” he explained “I sell vegetables, apples, pears, we also make cider and other seasonal specialties depending on the crops” (Max 16.11.2022). When asking if this is financially sustainable he stated barely. “If it wasn’t for my wife’s income it would be very bad, but we are not trying to make lots of money, we just want to be comfortable” (Max 16.11.2022). Querying further to his experience with subsidies Max loudly gestured “It’s all a cheat, just to keep you stuck in the system… one branch hanging

too far over a fence here, subsidy gone, you have a season of heavy rain and loose some river bank to erosion, subsidy gone" (Max 16.11.2022).

"Do you mean when AMA comes to do an inspection?" I asked.

"Yes, exactly. Then it always depends on who you get. Maybe they are a nice person or in a good mood and everything is okay this time. Maybe he and his wife had a fight, or you made a bad joke, then you will probably get a few bad marks" (Max 16.11.2022).

When I asked about how much he understood the regulations for subsidies Max exclaimed "No one does! Not even AMA! They just enforce it to they view and mood at the time". Wanting to hear his viewpoint I withheld stories from other farmers on this occasion, asking him further where these regulations come from. "From those [people] up there! The elites with no idea about what farming is or how to milk a cow" he continued "These EU regulations are intentionally vague, so the ones with power can always chose what they mean" (Max 16.11.2022). Max went on to confirm what I had heard from other farmers "Bauernbund, Lagerhaus, AMA all of it, they are all Black, you know what this means, Black? It's all part of ÖVP, all of it" (Max 16.11.2022). Pushing him a little further on what he meant by this I then did divulge what I had heard from other farmers of the mafia-like structure but he protested "It's not mafia "like" it is a mafia, maybe worse, they have so much power" he continued "especially with the Raiffeisen Bank, its it all a big system of corruption, just made legal because they are in power, every farmer knows this, but most of them just keep voting Black" (Max 16.11.2022).

When asking then whom represents farmers better Max smiled and said "you want me to say FPÖ? Look, at least they are the only ones talking about this, really, the only ones in politics. Same with corona, same with Ukraine, same with the EU. If they are better, I don't know for sure, but at least they are saying something against it" (Max 16.11.2022). When I pushed what him one what he meant by this Max explained he saw no certainties in politics "just look what has happened in the last few years, the Greens are the most fascist party now…if you asked me this just a few years ago I wouldn't think this possible" (Max 16.11.2022). He went on to detail that while he doesn't feel the FPÖ are the overall solution, they are the only party that offers any chance for change.

Continuing on the Greens Max explained full of energy "These idiots, sorry to say, talk about being "green" when they have no idea, they go to universities and live in cities and they always hate farmers, yet we are the ones working closest with nature, we have been for thousands of years" (Max 16.11.2022). Asking what he believed led to this, Max felt a lot is to do with not actually being in nature and what he called "subtle brain washing".

"I feel sorry for them, lot's of them just read fear driven media, they think the planet is burning, they believe a virus is killing everyone, they believe all this with the Ukraine war, everything is fear…you look at how they [the media] portray climate change, everything is about how much everything will die and it is all your fault. But the

climate has always been changing, we have had much warmer periods in history, much more CO2, its not just atmosphere it is also the solar cycles, poles and the core… the poles always shift and the core influences the ocean temperatures and then the atmosphere much more than CO2 or methane. But they don't tell you that, they don't tell you they have only have been measuring these average temperatures since the 1800's….of course the climate is changing, it always has, of course we have an influence, but does that mean you or me should be punished for it?" (Max 16.11.2022).

Max wen't on to explain that he feels there needs to be much more focus on what we can change to adapt, but he felt the fear driven framing of how climate change is portrayed is always about putting the blame and punishment on people, leaving corporations "innocent". He had very strong views that rather than active positive change to deal with a changing environment, more authoritarian measures will be brought in to keep people under control. "Soon it will be carbon credits, digital currency, they will try to control how much you can carbon you can use" he proposed "and farmers!? Look at what is happening, they will put masks even on cows to stop methane… everything is about control, I worry about it, I worry they will want to take all of our cattle soon" (Max 16.11.2022). When I further asked Max about how likely he thought this would be, he referred to the RED III initiative and removing woody biomass from renewables, which we had discussed via email before meeting. "Look at your RED III [initiative] you are interested in, normally you would think measures like this are impossible, but just look at what happened with corona" he exclaimed "they wanted to lock us unvaccinated in jail! I got sent a fine, I never paid, but they threatened me with prison… I tell you, after corona I wouldn't put anything past the government" (Max 16.11.2022).

We went on to discuss his outlook on Austria in the context of the EU and the world. Max felt Austria must get out of the EU "it is our only chance to survive, in the long run" he stated (Max 16.11.2022). Feeling that the way politics are operating is become less and less transparent and ever more authoritarian by the day. Raising concerns that he believes climate change will be utilised for justifying more government control. "We will probably have climate change lockdowns soon" he claimed "while the elites will still be able to eat what they want, use as much energy and carbon as they want, move freely in planes, while we all get restrictions" (Max 16.11.2022). Max felt very strongly that the state, as it is now, is so beholden to elites, corporations and US American interests that unless there is drastic change, they can only offer more rules and orders, rather than solutions.

Asking what he felt his, or farmers in general, access to the state is, Max felt "unless you have a very large farm and a lot of profit and connections, you are just an annoyance to them, that they occasionally have to say some things to please you, but they don't actually care about small farmers" (Max 15.12.2022). He felt that political representation and democracy only works if you have a somewhat free and open media, feeling much of it is corrupted by profit and only showing what elites what you to see. When I asked if the FPÖ speaks for farmers like him, Max felt some are, and some are not "it is not all the same in the party, some are probably just wanting power for themselves, but some are at least speaking for us, politically, it is all we have got" (Max 16.11.2022).

5.1.7 Niederösterreich: Franz

During my second round of field work I was able to track down one of the farmers involved in the effort to process and sell their own milk. Just over the border from Upper Austria into Lower Austria I came to a hilltop farm in a mountainous region where I was able to sit down with Franz. The first full time farmer I had been able to interview, Franz took over the farm from his father in the late 1990's. "My father worked as long as he could, but just couldn't do it physically anymore" he said "that is when I took over the farm completely" (Franz 12.12.2022). Living there with this wife and four children between 8 and 21 years old, Franz explained that his wife goes to a little bit of part time work twice a week, so they can stay afloat.

"I have one of the smaller farms in the area" stated Franz "35 dairy cows, 25 bulls, however the rearing of calves to dairy cows is done on my neighbours property" (Franz 12.12.2022).

He has roughly 33 hectares of fields and an additional 10 hectares of forest, however in winter, due to snow, cows are in the stables the vast majority of the time. This naturally has its pros and cons, on the one hand cows always need to be fed, let out on occasion and involves much more stable cleaning. We discussed how being a dairy farmer means you can never really have a holiday, you have to milk twice a day and then all the rest of the work. Unless you have family or know someone you can really trust to with the animals and work, this becomes highly difficult. I reflected I am familiar with this due to my own experience in working with cows, but the addition of also having so many bulls, adds another layer of complexity to the work and trust you must build with the animals.

"If you are a Nebenewerb farmer you have more flexibility… but I am still my own boss as a full time farmer… I can sit here with you three, four hours , that is my choice. No one is watching me. But also I have to get up in the middle of the night if something is needed with the cows… but we cant all just sit here and complain.. there are good things and bad things about being a full time farmer… yes its hard, but you have to look at the positive things" (Franz 12.12.2022).

Franz explained he used to be a part of ÖPUL and BIO Austria (under the EU Green Deal), but with everything you have to do just to hold up to the regulations standards it was not worth it;

"That we (farmers) are dependant on subsidies is normal, but (under ÖPUL) you have to spread yourself so thin and expend so much time and energy just trying to meet these standards, and because you lose so much time for everything else, it didn't even cover all my basic costs… You have to fight with AMA about where a certain tree is overhanging on the property… little things like this take up so much time and energy…it's a catastrophe, all of the rules they have on land area, you have to go and measure exactly how much land and where. With digitisation it got a little easier, but it is not totally accurate…then something doesn't suit them (AMA), this is wrong, that is wrong, money gone. But that is just the way it is" (Franz 12.12.2022)

Franz explained that he doesn't understand all of the requirements and regulations to receive subsidies even the basic agricultural programmes he now receives. Explaining that if he ever wants to apply or understand

them, he has to go to the Chamber of Agriculture for assistance. “In my area there is also very poor interest infrastructure, so it is difficult to look up or apply for any subsidies” Franz explained (12.12.2022). Due to all of these difficulties in restrictions and reliance on subsidies Franz and a group of other farmers in his region wanted to start processing and selling their own milk.

“We wanted to get away from the whole Black Mafia” he stated “so we started our own dairy cooperative *Freie Milch*[4]” (Franz 12.12.2022).

This was the first I had heard the power structure so explicitly referred to as “Black” (ÖVP/Bauerenbund) Mafia.

“The foundation of our idea of Freie Milch was to break away from this power structure where all of our prices and profits were controlled” he added “We started it back in 2010, it went okay for a bit, but then they (the Black Mafia) started to block us from every side…you see, they saw what we did as a protest, so they blocked us everywhere, not just selling our milk regionally, but with the banks, with word of mouth, putting pressure on us everywhere” (Franz 12.12.2022).

Franz detailed that during this process at some stage their cooperative even was blocked from working with Lagerhaus “what milk has to do with Lagerhaus, I don’t know” he stated “our mistake was also that we took out a loan with Raiffeisen Bank to start Freie Milch” (Franz 12.12.2022).

Eventually opportunities to sell their milk because so difficult they had to start shipping the milk across the border to Germany and Italy. With all the additional costs involved for transport and cooling alone, they were, at the lowest point in their cooperatives struggle, selling milk for 18 cents per litre. Unsurprisingly their venture ended up failing after a few years and Freie Milch was no more. However even after disbanding their cooperative every single member was now banned from rejoining the established dairy processing cooperatives and selling their milk to local plants. Now they have sell their milk through double and triple channels of handling, sometimes still across borders, other times to the processing plants many kilometres our of their region who then resell it back into their local region. They currently receive roughly 59 cents per litre, but they still have to pay value added tax on all of the different transactions.

“Can you sell to any dairy plants here in the region?” I asked.

“NO! We all have a big black stamp on our foreheads, there is no way we can ever sell milk here again… We’ve tried every few years, through the unions, knocking on the doors of the dairy processing plants to see how it looks, if we can sell milk there again. They say there is no chance, can’t happen. They won’t allow it, they will never let us in there again” (Franz 12.12.2022).

“I heard your group went so far as to ask the local priest for help?” I queried.

[4] Free Milk in this context refers to freedom/liberty rather than do to with price.

Franz laughed “that, I am not so sure about, I wasn’t as deeply involved as others, but we definitely went to the authorities. We went to an event where we knew the minister of agriculture would be in attendance to approach him about our situation. He said he would look into it. We didn’t hear from him for four weeks, so we went to the next event we knew he would be at. He said, “I had a brief look at your case, I can’t do anything”… at the beginning he really seemed interested and open you know, like he wanted to help. Then when we saw him a second time, he didn’t even want to talk to us. I know he definitely recognised us as soon as he saw us, but didn’t want anything to do with us” (Franz 12.12.2022).

This naturally brought our discussion to the role of, and access to, the state. Franz felt that at the moment, while the ÖVP are in power, the state is just an expression of this Black Mafia. “Look at the Chamber of Agriculture, over 70% of it is made up of Bauernbund” he claimed “as soon as you are not part of this structure they have zero interest in you at all. In Upper Austria it is a little better, but here, on principle, if you are not part of the Bauernbund, there is no point in even trying anything” (Franz 12.12.2022). Interestingly Franz pondered a loud if their efforts of Freie Milch had happened in Upper Austria, maybe things would have turned out differently.

“Why do you think that is” I queried.

“Upper Austria has always been more independent in that sense, they have always fought more” (Franz 12.12.2022).

“Do you think this has much to do with the FPÖ” I asked.

“The FPÖ definitely helps, they are the only ones fighting against this structure, but they also have some very radical ideas that you want to take with caution” (Franz 12.12.2022).

In regards to farmers Franz felt that representation was better left independent from political parties. Detailing the UBV is a much better solution. We discussed how they have even collaborated with the FPÖ on certain issues such as the resistance to the RED III initiative. Feeling uncertain that if successful, if it really would have affected the more rural and small farmers and infrastructure, Franz felt on the scale of mass production, maybe these updates were not the worst idea.

When I asked Franz about his overall outlook of the future for agriculture in the context of climate change and politics the dairy farmer had strong views on rural urban divide.

“Many people don’t even know the work that goes in to making food, milk or meat. But we need to present ourselves better to the general public. We need to be better ambassadors for working with nature and producing food. And why we do this work, why our work is what it is, we need to be open to the public, hide nothing so people really understand the what our work involves… we can’t just think people who don’t live in

rural areas will never understand, we can not hide away and we need to be better at explaining what our work involves and how we are integrated into the whole system. Because the way everything is represented in media it is just done for headlines, oversimplified and painting the negative sides, say of farming or beef production" (Franz 12.12.2022).

Franz felt strongly that things need to change in line with environmental changes. When we discussed Holland and the recent changes dispossessing a lot of farmers, he was sympathetic to the farmers plight, feeling it is a very extreme policy and radical implementation. However, Franz also detailed that "they have a huge amount of beef production for a small area of land, the amount of nitrogen and run off that they produce can't go on forever" (Franz 12.12.2022). However he also felt that this method of mitigation, to have technocratic policy that leads to the dispassion of farmers will likely expand to Austria.

"What you see first in Holland, then goes to Germany, then eventually comes here" he claimed "that how it is" (Franz 12.12.2022).

"What will you do if that happens here?" I asked.

Franz laughed loudly "In my area, due to the topography in a mountainous area, and the soil, you can't do much else here, like crops or other kinds of farming. I don't think they would have much interest in land like this" (Franz 12.12.2022).

When I asked Franz what efforts can be done to improve things for farmers in Austria he was quite emphatic "that is for others to try. I stuck my neck out and paid the price, I am not going to risk everything again to try and make change. Maybe others benefited from what we tried to do in the long run, I don't know. But I am not trying anymore" (Franz 12.12.2022). However the full time dairy farmer did reiterate that there must be better representation and knowledge of what goes into farming and food production, so that people can better understand the processes and work together to build a future that can adapt to climate change.

5.2 Officials and functionaries

5.2.1 FPÖ Member of Parliament (MP)

In the first portion of my field work I was able to organise a sit down over breakfast in a local bakery with a member of the state parliament for the FPÖ. Preferring to remain officially anonymous, the local MP and I sat down for breakfast with one of the farmers I worked with who had helped organise the meeting and also wanted to remain anonymous for this interview. One of the first things the politician did when meeting me was hand me a newspaper article showing the recent vote of the Austrian members of the EU commission level on the amendments the RED III initiative what would have seen wood be removed from renewable energy. "Look at this" he exclaimed pointing to the voting results "every single other party voted for this!" (FPÖ MP 13.11.2022). Detailing that other than one or two ÖVP members, only the FPÖ were against such a

technocratic measure. He went on to explain this is a perfect example of how such policies from the EU level are never well thought out. “They would ban everyone form burning wood. Not just people, whole villages, farmers, industry” claimed the politician (FPÖ MP 13.11.2022). We discussed his view that no other party even thinks about implementing changes democratically, that they will happily just force in new regulations without discussing those that it affects the most.

“The Greens are the worst, always just forcing in new agricultural or forestry policy without discussion. And right now Austria and Germany are in a race to see who can be more climate neutral first, all to the detriment of normal people… It is clear we need to work to protect nature and deal with climate change, but not just by bring in more and more technocratic measures. One-size-fits-all policies like the EU Green Deal are usually funded by unelected NGOs, many of them corrupt or from the industries that profit the most off environmentally destructive practices” (FPÖ MP 13.11.2022).

This offered an immediate launching point to discuss his views on the EU Green Deal. Feeling that these policies are built in a laboratory for “a matrix that should fit all over Europe. They don’t consider the industrial, agricultural, cultural or ecological differences in an area. We aren’t the same as Greece or Norway” (FPÖ MP 13.11.2022). Before giving me an example of what this might look like in Upper Austria, the passionate politician first explained to me the functioning of the now familiar power structure of how politics works in their nation. Detailing, in his view, the “completely intertwined” structure between the ÖVP, Bauernbund, Raiffeisen, Lagerhaus and state institutions. Through lobbying and corruption he felt they have a strange hold on the agricultural industry. “They control the prices of grain and milk, and if the farmers ever start making too much profit, they increase or drop the prices accordingly” explained the politician “then a lot of the farms and buildings where grain and equipment are stored is own by Raiffeisen” (FPÖ MP 13.11.2022).

“We have a joke here in Austria that everyone laughs at but it is sad but true” he laughed “”Das Lagerhaus raubt den Bauern aus”” (a rhyme meaning ***the Lagerhaus is robbing the farmers***) (FPÖ MP 13.11.2022).

Then moving on to reiterate the story of vaguely formulated subsides regulations meaning farmers always need assistance from the Bauernbund controlled Chamber of Agriculture to understand them.

“They go in there and to get help and are told “you just need to do it cut this shrubbery back here or register this part as biodiversity bridge that to get this subsidy”. All there can hear is 80 euros here, 200 euros there, because they are so dependent on it for survival not realising that they are getting trapped into this system” he loudly explained “they have no say over how the subsides are constructed and at the end they even shake their hand and say “thank you”” (FPÖ MP 13.11.2022).

Moving on to AMA being the organisation dealt with inspecting and enforcing the subsidies; “they randomly inspect 5% of farms across Austria for audit on the subsidies. Then comes AMA and will pick something so arbitrary such as a tree with too many branches hanging over a fence, they cross out one subsidy. Every time you get a cross you have more change to get audited again on a national level and then it gets sent off to a

European level to be audited. And those people aren't even from Austria so how would they know what the on ground conditions are here for some small farmer" (FPÖ MP 13.11.2022).

Despite acknowledging this mafia like structure's tendency to leave farmers dependant with no autonomy the FPÖ politician felt strongly that they should know better. Feeling very strongly that they should be more savvy and not just always vote for the ÖVP and Bauerbund. "Really, they [farmers] need to be smarter about it, every time they vote for the very people that keep them oppressed in this whole system and at the end of it say thank you" (FPÖ MP 13.11.2022) feeling that there were too scared to go against the Bauernbund because of their reliance on the subsidies and what retaliation there may be.

"Politically, where else do farmers have to go?" I asked

"No where, the FPÖ are the only party trying to change this, this is why I ended up getting into politics with them" he stated "but sometimes the farmers are just too dumb, really. It is all right in front of them" pointing to the news article again "they need to be smarter" (FPÖ MP 13.11.2022).

When asking about his personal journey into politics the MP detailed that he never had ambitions to run for office form the outset, but by chance came into the job. Currently working in the forestry industry, he explained that he was always interested in politics and frustrated with the amount of corruption. On one occasion during an event in the industry he met other people involved in the FPÖ and got discussing politics with them. Convincing him that he should get involved, he took their advice and ran for the local municipality. After a few years he eventually also ran a successful campaign for district president. Since then he is now a sitting member of state parliament and has a lot of support in his region.

Constantly greeted by almost every local we saw, he always took the time to lend an ear or exchange a joke with the people who approached him. During our few hours of conversation the MP was open, friendly and very interested in my research. I explained I had made a few attempts to get in touch with the FPÖ and Freie Bauern via email to no avail. He offered to help asking me to send him the emails and he would see if he could help organised a meeting or build contacts. When I mentioned the aims of my research, to co-construct a narrative with farmers from their side of the empathy wall. To challenge normative ideas around populism that are dismissive and always framing populists as xenophobic, nativist and antidemocratic. This briefly lead our conversation to refugees where the politician had some rather nuanced views.

"Much of the refugee crisis we have is because of American imperialist intervention in Lybia and Syria" he stated (FPÖ MP 13.11.2022). Much more focused on the source of the problem he claimed he was not anti-refugee but felt it should be up to the people of each nation to decide how many are accepted. Feeling strongly that there should be democratic involvement in generating policy on numbers and integration of refugees.

When I asked about his ideal vision of the future, particularly in regards to agriculture and climate change the state MP felt that there should be more promotion of local produce and food. “We shouldn’t be able to bananas year round” he stated “we need to be more ecologically sustainable and not always just looking at what creates the most profits”. The three of us had further discussion that subsidies should also be more focused on promoting local food within the region. That they should be more focused on lifting up local farmers sustainably and not just on generating profit. With the main ethos always being that these things need to be decided on democratically.

5.2.2 Director of the Federal Agricultural College

To broaden my understanding and scope into the worldview of both on farmers on the ground and state functionaries, I sat down for a formal discussion with the director of the federal agricultural college in St. Florian, Dr. Hubert Fachberger. Growing up on a farm, after doing his civil service Dr. Fachberger decided he wanted to study agriculture at university in Vienna. After finishing his studies in the Austrian capital he came to the federal agricultural college and eventually took over as director of the school some 18 years ago. In addition to running the college the Hubert is also an ÖVP member, holding a political mandate on the ÖVP list on a municipal level. He stated that he was not all that interested in becoming politically involved however felt the party best represents his Christian-social values.

Our discussion offered valuable insights into that could described as the other side of the empathy wall from what I had heard from farmers so far. Initially discussing the feeling of reliance on subsidies by farmers, Dr. Fachberger went to to explain he believes many farmers do not understand the purpose of what subsidies are for.

“Our society supports agriculture through subsidies” he explained “society then has a right to be involved in how such agricultural practices should be done, and for this we need a given amount of bureaucracy. I can sympathise why farmers might feel like this at times, but no farmer is forced to get subsidies… I don’t think the farmers that complain about being reliant on subsidies are really aware of what these subsidies are actually for… again I can understand where they are coming from, because farmers are typical Einzelkämpfer (lone warriors)… this partly due to geography, being so far from their neighbours, often 200 metres away and the next 400 to 500 metres… any farmers that make statements that the whole system of subsidies is just forced on to them from above, should really better inform themselves with the process” (Fachberger 15.11.2022).

Dr. Fachberger explained that the combination of being Einzelkämpfer and living in this populist moment makes farmers easy targets of over simplified messaging by populist groups such as the FPÖ. He explained that while the populist party has a good history and relationship with agriculture, originally being very much for freedom and liberal value for farmers, they also developed in the direction of nationalism and national socialism. The school director detailed a relevant history of agriculture and politics in Austria. Stating that until the 1848, farmers were not independent and worked on land in a feudal relationship. Only after this were farmers liberated and able to purchase land privately and then pass this on to their heirs, however many could not afford to do this and had to give up their land and join the proletariat. With national socialism there were

also able to use very simple messages to win over farmers and stating “farmers also profited from national socialism” (Fachberger 15.11.2022). By position farmers as responsible for feeding the Reich during the Second World War many farmers were also spared from military duty. Reflecting on these interrelationships of being able to own private land and positioning in culture to a noble cause “this does something to you emotionally” (Fachberger 15.11.2022).

We further discussed the role of complex bureaucratic in agriculture on a national and European level. Dr. Fachberger felt that “complexities in such systems are what give them strength and resilience” (Fachberger 15.11.2022). I relayed stories of farmers feeling everything is decided as a one-size-fits-all policy but does not take into account local cultural, ecological or social circumstances. “Naturally this is not true” stated the agricultural college director (Fachberger 15.11.2022). He explained that on a foundational level, there needs to be a EU wide matrix for something such as the Green Deal “this is also like this for freedom of movement or for the free market” (Fachberger 15.11.2022). He claimed that Austria is already on of the leading nations in the EU in regards to operating farming sustainable and much of this was achieved through ÖPUL. “We need such EU regulations to being other nations up to standards like we have here in Austria” said Hubert (Fachberger 15.11.2022). Stating that if there is to be EU wide subsidy programs there needs to be some uniformity on basics, but also detailed that it is not as over simplified as many farmers make it out to be.

“You can’t on the one hand benefit from this system and on the other hand say this is keeping me oppressed… that is not how a society works…like in a family, you have to be prepared to make comprises” (Fachberger 15.11.2022).

Stating that while there is European matrix, how this is then implemented is still decided upon on regional and national levels. When I asked where I could find details on how regulations and decisions on these regulations are made he provided me with two internet sources: CAP 2023[5] and bml.gv.at[6] .

“So if I am to put on my farmers cap, many would say I don’t have any say in these policies are constructed and formulated” I put forth.

“All of these processes are don’t through a democratic process in the political systems, though voting systems on a national and European level, especially in agricultural systems, all of the subsidy program run via citizen participation processes. So really, any one that really wants to, that is ready to take the time, to take the energy, can inform themselves with this. It really is just a FEELING that this comes from above… this is a part of living in a democracy, you can go and vote for who best represents you and your values, but then you have to respect what the majority decides” (Fachberger 15.11.2022).

[5] The Common Agricultural Plan (CAP) “Strategic Plans encourage the transition towards a smart, sustainable, competitive, resilient and diversified agricultural sector, while ensuring long-term food security” (European Commission 2022)

[6] The website for the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Regional Water Management

Dr. Fachberger felt that as a part of the process of generating subsidies, society also has a say as to how these subsidies are used and expect certain results from agriculture.

“So do you think famers should better informed themselves with all these processes” I asked.

“No, they should become entrepreneurs… they should know and decide what they need to survive, economically. They would very quickly realise that basic production costs will not be financially viable…they could then look to grow, purchase land, which will probably be to expensive, or lease land.. eventually they will realise they need subsidies, and with that they will need to fulfil certain regulations to receive this support” (Fachberger 15.11.2022).

When I asked then what are some of the challenges to overcoming these differences in perception, on the one hand farmers feeling at the whim of EU regulations and on the other hand such a disparity between what them and what regulations they see, such as RED III, Hubert and I came on to the topic of urban-rural divide. He felt that this is also a growing problem that leads to such feelings of disparity as many people to not understand where food comes from or the processes involved into eventually getting milk into a bottle for sale at the supermarket.

“Are there possibilities to bridge this urban-rural divide?” I queried.

“There are always possibilities to bridge these divides, a lot of things that we usually took for granted have been brought to light in the recent crises of the pandemic and conflict in Ukraine… we need to work much better on communication, so that people are aware on the important things in life, the basics. Namely, how you nourish yourselves, where food comes from” (Fachberger 15.11.2022).

I also asked Dr. Fachberger what then the role of the state is, particularly relating to agriculture and the EU in the context of this populist rise. He stated that the state operates as a system of rule, defining certain sovereign rights over a given territory and and its people. In the current context he stated:

“Since Austria is a representative democratic republic with a distinctive party system, interests must be taken into account in corresponding party programmes in order to help them achieve a political breakthrough. As interests are becoming more and more particularised, especially in the agricultural context, it is becoming more and more difficult, especially for the major parties, to "serve" voters. Combined with a difficult economic environment, this leads to increasing dissatisfaction with the existing structures and systems and attracts those political forces that promise seemingly simple (populist) solutions” (Fachberger 15.11.2022)

Overall Dr. Fachberger gave an impression of the strength of a system, especially one with transnational goals such as the EU Green Deal, that certain complexities are not only essential, but desired. While sympathetic to the views of famers feeling alone and lacking autonomy, this is mostly due to their geographical and cultural

isolation, but with effort and time, they would be able to break free from these feelings and better involve themselves on a political and business oriented level.

On my second round of field work with farmers I sat down together with a number of them on separate occasions to go through the given resources mentioned by Hubert above (CAP 2023 and bml.gv.at). While on the EU level (CAP 2023) there was an enormous wealth of information (most publications in English), particularly on overall goals and circumstances regarding climate and agriculture, amount of subsidies and distribution of them, we could find no specifics on to how these subsidies are then qualified on the on ground level. For the federal agricultural and forestry resource the story was similar. Plenty of information regarding goals, current conditions, importance of subsidies and amounts distributed, it was very difficult to find any specific information on how such policies and subsidies are then implemented on a regional level. In particular what this actually meant for the individual farmer when searching for relevant policy information regarding their region. Even with hours of research into the matter with the knowledge and skills combined of myself and the farmers, we unfortunately found it very difficult to find the particular relevant information relating to them.

5.2.3 Chamber of Agriculture General Assembly

On the 28th of September 2022, the Chamber of Agriculture of Upper Austria (LK Oö 2022) held one of its general assemblies where a number of prevalent issue were discussed relating to the scope of this paper. All quotes in the following section are taken from their protocol (LK Oö 2022). For example an ongoing theme of discussion around the EU Green deal was to the “Green Deal implementation must not jeopardise food supply security”, clearly demonstrating the prevalence of this concern. More specifically the UBV and FPÖ’s Freie Bauern presented a resolution "Veto against the EU Forest Strategy and the RED III Directive” reading as follows:

"Veto against the EU Forest Strategy and the RED III Directive The EU Parliament has spoken out in favour of biomass that comes directly from the forest being taken almost completely out of energy use and no longer being considered sustainable. In contrast to this EU assessment, wood is a renewable raw material and, if used sustainably, a secure source of renewable energy. In Austria, for example, more wood grows every year than is used. The EU does not take national characteristics into account either in its forest strategy or with the RED III Directive, and thus denies the sustainability of commercial forests in a factually incorrect and sweeping manner. The use of wood for energy accounts for 60 percent of renewable energy in Austria. If the EU is now planning to ban wood as an energy source and even to lower it, this means a massive threat to the domestic energy supply and to our farms that are active in this sector. In doing so, the EU is going down a dangerous path and putting jobs and energy security at risk.

The plenary assembly of the Upper Austrian Chamber of Agriculture therefore calls on the Federal Government, in particular on Norbert Totschnig as Minister for Agriculture, Regions and Tourism, to immediately veto both the EU Forestry Strategy and the RED III Directive in the relevant EU bodies." (LK Oö 2022).

Speaking on the presented motion FPÖ MP and provincial chairmen of the Freie Bauern Franz Graf detailed his concerns. Acknowledging the overall efforts of the Green Deal and the EU forest strategy as necessary, for

carbon sequestration and the importance of old growth forests, the Freie Bauern chairman detailed that the fundemental problem being “The EU is trying to centralise a problem…there are very different problem situations in the most diverse member states. Obviously, the national differences and particularities are not really properly reflected in it” (Graf 22.09.2022). Expressing this as an example of his concerns with EU policy being too centralised and generalised in technocratic measures. MP Graf stated that this amended may be suitable for a nation like Norway where "overexploitation of forests must be stopped” (Graf 22.09.2022. However he claimed that Austrian forest management has already been sustainable for some time and that “in total much more wood grows than is removed” (Graf 22.09.2022). He continued to point out that the fossil fuel industry is known to be a greater contributor to climate change yet cannot understand why suddenly such aim is taken toward, what has been seen as a sustainable energy process for many years. Furthermore, he mentioned that “to qualify wood as unsustainable and at the same time to put a green label on nuclear power does not fit at all in my view” (Graf 22.09.2022).

Explaining that especially in times of an energy crisis, and soaring energy costs for consumers, due to the conflict in Ukraine, that such a measure would be severely detrimental to Upper Austria and Austria on the whole. Feeling that such measures would not only increase costs on energy production, but also have flow on down stream effects into jobs, rural infrastructure (particularly in heating) and economic security. Furthermore, Franz Graf’s arguments where that “The EU is closing its eyes to reality here” and that it would be “jeopardising its own climate targets” (Graf 22.09.2022).

The first response from Bauernbund member Dominik Revertera was to paint Franz Graf as apologetic to genocide in the context of the military conflict leading to the energy crisis. Normalising the view that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was unprovoked he stated “you did not speak of the war of aggression and extermination of Mr Putin and his war criminals; you did not say that. Who started the war in Ukraine and why and how?” (Revertera 22.09.2022).

Only after this attack, did the Bauernbund representative then delve into the substantive response on the issue of their motion against the RED III initiative. While agreeing with many of the points made by the FPÖ member, Dominik Revertera he also expressed his views on the threats to democracy from both populism and unelected NGO’s:

“The energetic use of sustainably produced wood is now partly not to be counted as renewable energy, while nuclear energy is considered environmentally friendly. How did it come to this? It was a massive lobbying effort, an unholy alliance of industry of various origins and of NGOs. KR Stammler, you rightly pointed out earlier the threat to our democracy from nationalist right-wing populists. Another threat to our democratic system is the unchecked proliferation, growth and undermining by NGOs of all stripes. This threatens our democracy and our democratic system” (Revertera 22.09.2022).

Eventually the Bauernbund member rejected the motion on strategic manners, stating the FPÖ Member Graf had ample opportunity to work on drafting the upcoming more comprehensive and better suited motion together with the Bauernbund, UBV and SPÖ Farmers.

The next rebuttal coming from Greens party member and sitting MP, Clemens Stammler, stating that he agreed with the criticism of the EU Green Deal being too generalised and broad spectrum. Calling on his own experience as a farmer, the Green MP went into more detail how the Austrian forestry management system, in particular the removal of wood by farmers being “managed in a near natural way…for over five generations” (Stammler 22.09.2022). Pointing out again that Baltic and Scandinavian states are not in a wood surplus like Austria, and drafting policy to be applied to all EU member states broadly does not make sense.

However Mr. Stammler went on to detail that this is not the intention of the draft and it only be aimed at large scale production plants. Acknowledging again that while the Austrian nation does not face the problem of burning too much wood, as say the Scandinavian states, that it is still an EU wide problem:

“If you look at these measures in a pan-European context and consider, for example, the situation in the Baltic States or in Scandinavia, then I know that we have a European problem. We also have a problem with climate change in this respect. We also know that wood that is burned immediately releases an extremely large amount of CO2. Wood does bind CO2, but the periods during which unburned wood binds CO2 are also relevant. After clear-cutting, the forest floor also very quickly becomes an emitter of CO2. We simply have all these problems, even if we don't have them in Austria” (Stammler 22.09.2022).

Going on to point out his view on the necessity of the RED III inactive amendments on woody biomass in the wider European context. Stating such measures are importance to battle climate change on the whole, in particular with the increased burning of wood dues to natural gas shortages as a result of the conflict in Ukraine.

The motion was rejected by majority vote with all Bauernbund and Greens members voting against it, with Freie Bauern, UBV and SPÖ Famers members voting for it.

However the aforementioned motion against RED III drafted without the FPÖ members was then voted and accepted on, with the only no votes coming from the Greens members. This motion was less aggressive than the previous veto motion:

“Therefore, in line with the objective of a climate-neutral Austria by 2040 at the latest, which is anchored in the government programme 2020 - 2024 "Out of Responsibility for Austria", and in the interest of Upper Austrian forest owners and boiler manufacturers, the plenary assembly of the Upper Austrian Chamber of Agriculture urges the responsible Federal Ministry for Climate Protection to vigorously advocate the further expansion of sustainable domestic biomass use and to continue to recognise biomass as a renewable energy source in the further discussion process in the upcoming negotiations at the level of the EU Council of Ministers” (LK Oö 2022).

An other motion to be raised at the general assembly was one again put forth by the Freie Bauern and UBV. Aiming to simplify the processes for application, installation and subsidies for photovoltaic (solar) energy systems in the context of the energy crisis and climate change. Even with the support of every member outside of the Bauerbund, all Freie Bauern, UBV, Greens and SPÖ Farmers voting for it, the motion was rejected by majority due to the strength of the ÖVP famers union. Other motions were put forth by both the UBV and Freie Bauern, often relating to improvements to meet climate change goals or support farmers in the promotion and use of renewable energy, particularly solar, however oft rejected by the Bauernbund members. Demonstrating that as long as the the ÖVP formed union vote in one block, they have power to sway any motion in their favour.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Deep Story

If we are in a stage of political tumult due to this populist rise (as discussed in section 2), then as Hochschild (2016) puts forth, the tendencies to rapidly shoehorn information into normative framings, particularly of our political others, is at once more common and more damaging. To broaden our understanding, the motivations and overall integration of environmental issues in the populist worldview, a *deep story* grants us a narrative to reflect on and empathise with. While both Hochschild (2016) and Dörre (2020) envisage the deep story of the radical right as one of "waiting in line", the case of Austrian farmers as portrayed here is somewhat different. While not all encompassing, the grand narrative proposed below offers us a method to learn about the "political feeling" of those with populist sentiment in agricultural in Upper Austria. A story that reflects the frustrations, anxieties, fears, pride, hopes and dreams of farmers and workers, without judgement, to explore the subjective prism with which they see the world. The grand narrative co-constructed from the ethnographic fieldwork is as follows:

The deep story of Upper Austrian farmers is one of being stuck in the hamster wheel of dependence. Where you are told by the makers of that rat race that you must be more creative and entrepreneurial to escape it. Said constructers of this hamster wheel operate like a mafia, controlling just how fast it moves, how much support you get, where resources are kept, how much they cost and how much you can sell them for. When making any genuine attempts to free yourself from its bonds, your efforts are punished and the wheel is sped up, making you even more reliant on the meagre handouts for your survival. When you try to voice your concerns about this to the wider public, you are deemed as being "complainers" or "lone warriors" and when you make alliances with other farmers or political groups speaking out against this paradox, you are called dangerous to democracy, fascist, racist or ignorant of how the world really works. Furthermore, you are painted to be some of the worst people for the environment. With many people, particularly those living in cities or from upper classes, targeting your community as the most extreme perpetrators of climate change and thus the subject of the most radical mitigation measures. Even though you work closest with nature, and have been for centuries, no one from the urban areas or political class comes to speak to you about how to make these changes. The frustration with the whole structure makes you want to break the wheel, but you fear to bite the hand that feeds you. Many feel so fed up with this system they are searching for any voice that will support their cause, even if those offering it may have quite severe disagreements with you on other matters. You try to do your best with what you have, are willing to adapt to help with a changing planet, but want to be involved with how these changes are made, otherwise you will just further your dependence on this hamster wheel run by a mafia like structure. Most of the farming community fear this will only get worse with pressures from even larger unaccountable undemocratic structures such as the EU.

In this case the hamster wheel clearly represents the current structure of dependence on subsidies for survival mentioned by all the subjects. A system that has been so engrained into Austrian farming, that when any new

agricultural ventures are set up that do not seek out government support, this raises red flags and immediately invites inspection and auditing of your operation. While this may seem at face value to be a harmless bureaucratic process, this can be felt as a demonstration of power to any farmer of “we are watching you”. When inspections are undertaken, policy around this is constructed it what feels like an intentionally vague manner so that interpretation is left those wielding power. Further instilling a sense of helplessness and lack of political autonomy. Many farmers mentioned this, with more than one of them giving the examples of having subsidies removes coming down to “branches hanging over a fence”. This never ending cycle of dependence is not only enforced through limited subsidies bonding you to the structure itself, you are constantly reminded of the feeling of being policed by Austrian Agrarmakrt (AMA).

The mafia like structure refers to the constantly mentioned stranglehold on all facets of the state, from a municipal to national level, private enterprise, financial support and market forces. This structure operates predominantly through the ÖVP and their famers union, Bauernbund in conjunction with AMA, the Chamber of Agriculture, Raiffeisen bank and Lagerhaus. Almost all farmers spoken to either referred to it as either mafia or mafia like, with some interviewees even naming outright a “Black Mafia” (Black referring to ÖVP/Bauernbund). Many of the farmers mentioned that wether speaking to a functionary of any of the aforementioned organisations, it is always as though you are speaking to the same member, namely one of this mafia like structure. This structure has a hold of all levels of government in many factors, but particularly relating to agriculture and forestry policy. Farmers mentioned that when profits of farmers begin to lower their dependance, prices of grain or feed are risen or sunk by the Lagerhaus and banks, or milk costs are controlled by the Bauernbund run dairy associations, or machine and infrastructure facilities owned by the Raiffesien bank can change their costs to meet the needs of those controlling this system, at the detriment of individual farmers.

When farmers spoke of voicing concerns of this system of dependance and institutionalised corruption, many felt that, on a political level, only the populist FPÖ were speaking against this. While none of the farmers interviewed where what we might picture as outright “fans” or single party supporters of the FPÖ, on the contrary many had their doubts of the party, all them them acknowledged that it is only the populist party that appeared to be putting interests of the farmers needs first. Furthermore, the Freedom Party were on many issues ranging from climate mitigation methods, pandemic response or war, the only party advocating for democratic decision making, rather than technocratic policy. This further amplifies their own calls as “the only true party of the people”, fostering more support in many political aspects. This meant that, even those with large disagreements with certain policies of the FPÖ are willing to align with them on certain political matters as they see it as the only means for genuine change, even if that change is risky.

When ever voicing such concerns these are often dismissed or outright suppressed by the mafia like structure, while ignored or painted as backwards by the wider community in Austria and Europe. This is demonstrated with both the stories and experiences shared from farmers, while also in the way other political operatives, particularly from the ÖVP, reacted to such concerns in both interviews undertaken and in the exchanges at the Chamber of Agriculture’s general assembly. Dismissal at times came on complete different grounds than the

concerns being addressed. Often farmers felt that the FPÖ were just painted as racist or nativist to be able to dismiss any concerns they were raising. While on a political level, the response from the Bauernbund representative on the FPÖ motion on the RED III initiative was to first, paint him and his party as apologetic to genocide, before then engaging with his concerns. These are examples of how many farmers or those with populist sentiment feel they are being both dismissed and painted as politically beyond the pale.

Adding to this dismissive approach to farmers in Austria, many felt that in efforts spearheaded by the EU and the Austrian Greens party, the current agriculture is framed as a prehistoric and environmentally damaging. On both the national and European level of government, new agricultural and energy policies are constructed to without any consultation of the people it directly affects and implemented with a far too broad scale in mind. This was demonstrated with the recurring sentiment of “Brussels is not Upper Austria”, where many farmers felt that EU policy was to generalised and one-size-fits-all, without considering the on ground intricacies on ecological, political and social levels. This all adds to a feeling of both being the “bad actors” and target of climate change and mitigation policies respectively. Leaving many feeling an overwhelming sense of being at the whim of a mafia like structure nationally, which has even greater pressures placed on it from above on the EU level. Where there is a rapidly increasing taste for more radical environmental policy change with their community potentially harbouring the most drastic costs of change.

Furthermore, when raising issues about the dangers of these structures and dependencies farmers are told to be more business savvy and entrepreneurial. However when actually undertaking efforts to better their living and business circumstances, not only are they handcuffed and provided with hurdles on every corner, they are then after punished for ever daring to go against the Black Mafia. This is demonstrated in the responses from many feeling that there is no hope and they must share resources and land to survive, but more so in the actions taken by the Freie Milch and Texas Longhorn farmers. In the case of the new dairy collective, they were hamstrung and forced out of local sales to then be blacklisted from selling milk to the established dairy associations when their project succumbed to pressures. On the more subtle side, the Texas Longhorn farmers had pressure put open them when they were not already in the system of dependence with the ad hoc inspections, plus all of the bureaucratic red tape blocking their efforts in establishing a business. Many farmers mentioned this red tape being almost magically lifted in many areas once establishing their own associations. However this itself reqiures both a certain amount of financial and social capital, often exclusive to Nebenewerb farmers (farmers with another source of income).

While all farmers and interviewees felt there needed to be change regarding climate change and practices in agriculture, forestry and energy, they all also had concerns about these being implemented technocratically. There was no outright climate denial whatsoever and the much stronger current of feeling was that policies around climate change will be constructed and implemented to benefit those already in power, to the detriment of average people and in particular farmers. While some farmers had questions about the causes of climate change and its resulting affects, all of them were still aware and supportive of democratic change to practices. Even on the political level, FPÖ party statements and interviews with sitting MPs demonstrated the

willingness and concern to build good climate policy, further adding to the feeling of being unfairly dismissed by establishment views and framing.

Overall, the deep story of populism in farming communities of Upper Austria is a story of complex feelings. There is a strong willingness to continue to work with nature and the local and wider community to adapt to climate change, but many feel their concerns fall on deaf ears. While outright populist sentiment or exclusive support for the FPÖ was rare, if not non existent, there is a definite cautious but growing feeling that the populist party may be the only avenue to enact any kind of political change. Regardless of how that is then interpreted by the wider community, as farmers already feel ostracised and politically outcast by these same communities. Perhaps similar to the sentiments felt by union workers and formers SPÖ voters in Vienna (Schubert 2020), and equally similar to the proverbial brick through the window that Trump represented in 2016 United States (Frank 2020), many farmers and populist leaning citizens are so fed up with the current system and growing feelings of disenfranchisement that they are willing to support the FPÖ regardless of the risks that might entail.

6.2 Integration of environmental politics

In the following section we will be using the findings to explicitly explore the main question of this research: the integration, framing, adoption and utilisation of environmental issues by populist groups and supporters. On how such politics manifest in Upper Austria on a broad level, for example around climate change, energy, forestry or general ecological policy. Explored further with the viewpoints of farmers on keyhole issues (Hochschild 2016), namely the EU Green Deal on the whole and the recent RED III initiative specifically. Being that this is building from ethnographic work to form a narrative of understanding (Hochschild 2016, Dörre 2020), we will often refer to the above *deep story* as a point of reference, while analysing this through the lens of populism as political energy (Frank 2020). Aiming to shed light on the rise of populist movements and move away from normative framings around their methods and success.

Initially, based on prior academic works (Lockwood, 2018; Loftus, 2020; Tosun & Debus, 2020; Turner & Bailey, 2021), we expected to find that populist parties and supporters would commonly frame environmentalism and climate change in a Neo-Malthusian manner (Phillips 2016). However, our findings diverged from this assumption, as we discovered that the Neo-Malthusian framing was more prevalent among governing bodies, such as the EU and establishment parties like the ÖVP and Greens. Contrary to our expectations, the FPÖ and its supporters did not adopt this framing as extensively. We observed how many climate mitigation policies promoted austerity and framed environmental issues as problems stemming from population growth and resource overuse (Phillips 2016). These perspectives were more commonly espoused by political bodies like the EU and establishment parties, rather than by the FPÖ or its supporters. Notably, farmers expressed concerns about framing environmental issues solely within the context of profit-driven capitalism. Some farmers, like those engaged in Texas Longhorn farming or beef farming near Linz, demonstrated a nuanced understanding of political power dynamics. Many farmers pointed out that such

climate mitigation policies often targeted those with the least power, while absolving the largest polluters of responsibility or excluding them from the framing altogether.

This establishment framing of climate change as anthropogenic obfuscates the responsibility of some of the largest polluters, such as the fossil fuel industry or military operations, while laying the blame on the shoulders of average consumers or farmers (Malm 2016). Where solutions to such issues hold those without power accountable to systematic problems, normalising the capitalist mode of production, and placing the mode of action of our survival on the control of consumption and production on individual consumers and the peasantry respectively (Fisher 2009, Phillips 2016). Such framings are not only misanthropic, but they are counterproductive to creating actual lasting change. It is because of such framings that the message driven from populist groups like the FPÖ very easily can pit themselves as the only party for the people. Leading to a rise in populist sentiment and feelings of disenfranchisement in the general population. This was highlighted by the referral of many farmers to unaccountable elites, unelected NGOs or Green Party members dismissing their concerns when discussing issues such as climate change. And the uniform feeling of all subjects that the Freedom Party was the only established political party speaking out against such issues.

Additionally, all farmers interviewed, be they open supporters of the FPÖ or cautious acknowledgers of their political success, saw climate change as a prevalent issue that needs to be dealt with. Many felt Austrian farmers were already doing quite well, but all felt that progress on this issue was hindered by the mafia like structure of government and agriculturally relevant bodies. There is a genuine willingness to want to work *with* nature and change their practices accordingly. However many farmers felt that the existing policy creation and structure of projects such as the EU Green Deal are too complex on a subsidy level and leaving farmers with no political autonomy. Examples of this can be seen across all subjects interviewed, with many referring to a broad matrix or one-size-fits-all policy structure that did not take into account local intricacies. Overall, farmers were acknowledging of climate change and its risks, even if they had questions regarding its causes, but were all more focused on the implementation of adaptation measures rather than trying to reverse its effects. This challenges, as Lockwood (2018) suggests, that populist parties often avoid discussing climate change or express sensitive scepticism instead of outright denial, preferring to focus on the protection of the environment within national borders from outside immigrants. Rather, the farmers interviewed all felt this was a pressing issue that did need to be dealt with, however focusing on a local level and moving from the grassroots outward. Best expressed by permaculture farmer Jakob in stating “First you make sure your family is okay, then you look on a municipal / community level, then you can move on to the national level…how things operate now is the exact opposite, then came the EU, further pushing this backwards notion of how things should work” (Jakob 14.11.2022).

The above notion that Lockwood (2018) and many other scholars (Loftus, 2020; Tosun & Debus, 2020; Malm 2021, Turner & Bailey, 2021) have suggested, that framings of environmental issues will always be with a nativist focus on the protection of nature from immigrants is challenged by these results. While certainly on a political party level, there are certain notions that could be interpreted as nativism or xenophobia in FPÖ statements (see section 3.1.3). However from the experiences shared by the farmers to the interview with the

sitting FPÖ member of parliament, this framing needs to be engaged with more complexity. As this is only a small scale ethnographic study, there are certainly limitations and we must not generalise to all populist groups or supporters, however there can still be lessons drawn from the findings. There was never any mention of the damage to the environment being driven by immigration or refugees. Rather the focus was more on those with actual political power. This is highlighted by various farmers referring to the American military imperialism, large corporations or the fossil fuel industry being the greater causes of environmental degradation. Further expressed by Herbert, Renee and Max feeling that much of the climate mitigation policy is drafted in combination with the biggest polluters and transnational unelected bodies, leaving those with power unaccountable. While more research would need to be done with a larger cohort, these findings suggest it would be detrimental to frame populists as always operating through a frame of nativism or xenophobia.

What can be demonstrated through these findings is that, while many populist supporters felt there was reason for caution with the FPÖ, they appear to be the only party that frames climate change and environmental policy with the people, in our case farmers, at the forefront of their concern. Wether this be through the EU Green Deal as a whole, or particularly with the RED III initiative, the framing by the FPÖ in the Chamber of Agriculture's general assembly makes this very apparent. There is constant referral to the concerns of farmers, jobs and energy security for the people of Austria, both in the official motion against their RED III initiative, and the commentary made by MP Franz Graf when presenting it. Furthermore, when presenting motions to attempt to make solar energy systems more viable for farmers, this was framed in the the context of an energy criss in relation to climate change and the conflict in Ukraine. Even though this had the support of every party other than the ÖVP/Bauernbund, this motion was rejected. Strengthening the notions in the deep story of Austrian farmers of being at the whim of the "Black Mafia". Allowing the FPÖ to present itself as politically outflanking the establishment and governing bodies that is, as Graf stated, "jeopardising its own climate targets", and positioning the FPÖ as the only party really trying to deal with climate change.

What these findings demonstrate is that as Frank (2020) and Stavrakakis et al (2018) make clear is that populism can not be studied exclusively from anti-populism. That it is the anti-populist framings by elites and establishment figures around issues of ecology that dominate how we view populist groups (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). When peeling back the layers of these narrow framings we can see that supporters of the FPÖ and even factions of the party itself aim to engage with issues around climate change in a genuinely environmentally focused manner. With the caveat being that any policy discussion or implementation is done through the lens of how this effects the general population, and in our case farmers. While the results could, with some effort, be interpreted as confirming anti-establishment or nativist sentiment (Tosun & Debus 2021), this would be, as Hochschild (2016) describes, shoehorning information in to established ways of thinking. In this case, into the anti-populist way of thinking. While there is certainly criticism of establishments such as of the EU, the oft mentioned mafia operated agricultural infrastructure and current government, out right anti-establishment sentiment was not present. Another way to articulate this sentiment is many of the populist supporters are anti-establishment insofar as to who is governing that establishment currently. The notion of their deep story demonstrates that what we may describe as the establishment, is an entity captured by

specific power interests. This will be discussed further below in how our focus group views the state. However to determine them as completely anti-institutional, which is often how the pejorative "populist" is used (Frank 2020), would be a mistake (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). Instead farmers often felt a need for governing institutions, withe the main driver of such systems being that they, in their views, should be more democratic.

This is not the say that certain actors within the FPÖ party would not capitalise on this for political gain. On the contrary, it demonstrates how easy the party is able to do this. On environmental issues, almost all subjects agreed that there was skepticism needed when addressing if the FPÖ would actually govern any better. With some farmers feeling that they would very likely not. All of the subjects could agree that on issues of climate change and its mitigation measures, the Freedom Party was the only political voice that had any interests in their concerns, even if only for political gain. Highlighting this in particular was Renee's concerns around the FPÖ being a Trojan horse. His statements of feeling politically homeless, the former Green party voter articulates a sentiment confirmed by Schubert's (2020) work in Vienna. Be it on environmental issues or in a wider context, the success of the FPÖ could be attributed to the failures of other parties just as much as to the methods employed by the populist group. That the neoliberal and technocratic governance of the other parties leaves both farmers and workers feeling disenfranchised and ignored. Lacking political autonomy and a clear case of a demobilised class society (Dörre 2019).

In summary, the way that populist supporters in Upper Austria approach, integrate and adopt or reject environmental issues is nuanced while still being rather direct. Many of the subjects interviewed understood the importance of climate change and ecological issues as a concern that must be taken seriously. There was also a framing that engaged with power dynamics around both climate causes and mitigation issues. Preferring to focus on the causes from the largest polluters and those with actual power. The majority also highlighted the urban-rural divide being a large concern. Feeling that they are custodians of nature, constantly working with the environment, while many city folk are detached from the basic processes of working with nature and produce food. Where all the farmers were certainly in unison is the very direct framing around mitigation measures needing to be democratic. Each of them expressed a particular concern that governing bodies are more concerned with the interests of large business than with actually working toward genuine change. What these results indicate is that there must be a much more open approach taken when considering the way populist parties approach environmental issues. If we continue to employ normative over simplified framings, we will often only strengthen populist sentiment and in turn radical parties that are seen by many, as a risk to liberal democracy (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017).

6.3 Actual existing politics

To explore the *actual existing politics* in the context of populism in Upper Austria this work draws on the ideas of Neil Smith (2010) that space is not just a neutral container for economic activities but is actively produced and shaped by the logic of capital and the interests of powerful actors. Smith emphasises that capitalist development is driven by the pursuit of profit and accumulation of capital. As capital flows and seeks the most advantageous sites for investment and exploitation, it leads to the concentration of wealth and development in

certain places while leaving others economically marginalised. This framing is so prevalent within the context of climate change that all discussion of mitigation measures around it normalise the capitalist mode of production as reality (Fisher 2009, Malm 2016). Using their deep story the following section will draw on the experiences and worldview from the farmers to illustrate actual existing politics in the populist FPÖ stronghold of Upper Austria. Exploring how populists prioritise environmental issues around agriculture, energy and forestry. Lastly, focusing on how access to the state is perceived by the focus group, and if results indicate as Smith (2010) suggests that the role of the state often implements policies that favour the interests of capital, such as providing subsidies, tax breaks, or deregulation, which can further exacerbate spatial inequalities and uneven development.

The on ground politics in Upper Austria from the viewpoint of farmers is unique in its specificity to the region, while giving us insights to a wider context of the populist rise. The constant referral of interacting with a system of intentionally vague bureaucracy that favours those with power demonstrates the uneven development mentioned above (Smith 2010). For many farmers their very survival relies on this system of subsidies, which all of them felt was formulated in intentionally opaque regulatory jargon. The vagaries alone however cannot be viewed in isolation from the wider system of power dominated by the interconnected bodies from ÖVP, Bauernbund, Lagerhaus, Raiffeisen Bank, Chamber of Agriculture and AMA. The many examples of this *Black Mafia* from all of the farmers is perhaps best highlighted by discussion with Stephan & Susanne where they detailed “wether you’re speaking to a functionary from the ÖVP, AMA, Bauernbund, Lagerhaus or Chamber of Agriculture, your basically speaking to the same civil servant. It makes no difference who you are speaking to, they all represent the same mafia-like structure”. Furthermore the explicit statements by Lisa that only the AMA really understand or are able to interpret these regulations, confirms that economic activities are produced and shaped by the logic of capital and the interests of powerful actors (Smith 2010). While the experience of being stuck in this hamster wheel of dependance run by a mafia like organisation is unique to their region, as Jakob suggested, he does not believe that they, ÖVP and Raiffeisen, started out with sinister intentions. It is by the very logic of capital that power is accumulated into such organisations, and this articulation of it in Upper Austria is but one expression of a worldwide phenomenon (Fisher 2009, Smith 2010, Harvey 2017).

When it comes to environmental issues, being dependent on subsidies or requiring an other source of primary income (Nebenerwerb) is what regularly determines their flexibility to be able to implement change. All of the farmers were willing to make changes to their practices but being hamstrung by this uneven development and lack of autonomy meant they are also bound by what is financially profitable (Smith 2010). Farmers such as the Texas Longhorn breeders, permaculture and therapy horse farmers all had other major incomes in the household to support change of practices to what was more ecological. When being full-time/single income, farmers are expected to be more entrepreneurial, business savvy and build toward being less reliant on government support. Converstations with Dr. Fachberger about farmers needing to better inform their business acumen very much articulate this expectation. Furthermore, regional governments encouragement for farmers to become more self-sustaining by making unique consumption products to their region explained by Stephan and Susanne , also demonstrates further neoliberal tactics. These solutions are so bound in a neoliberal mindset of lifting oneself up by their own bootstraps (Harvey 2007). All of the farmers spoke of the

very little time they had already just to attempt to keep inline with current subsidies regulations. Encouraging change with more work and generating more personal profit is at once dismissive of their circumstances while being trapped in capitalist realism (Fisher 2009, Harvey 2017).

What this results in is forced prioritisation of environmental issues being bound to only functioning when operating in a neoliberal profit model. Farmers are forced to triage their overall practices to what keeps them financially above water. Where all solutions proposed do very little to address the symptoms of their circumstance while further exacerbating the causes of this uneven development and capital accumulation (Smith 2010). Franz, Max and Lisa all explained that they already operate in very ecologically friendly manners, and attempt to work with regulations to bring themselves up to BIO Austria and EU standards. In Franz's case, he had to abandon attempting to keep to these standards due to the style of farming and being full time (not nebenerwerb). Mentioning the feeling of hopelessness when dealing with AMA and auditing, and that his socioeconomic circumstances and lack access to infrastructure leaving him unable to meet the standards. In the case of the Texas Longhorn farmers, Lisa mentioned how the policies are not only vague, but do not accommodate to circumstances where her race of cattle actually produce much less waste. These are not the only examples that demonstrate how farmers are handicapped by existing neoliberal practices when attempting to operate more ecologically. They also disqualify practices that do not fit into the technocratic policy framework of BIO Austria and in turn, the EU Green Deal. Demonstrating the importance of crafting policy and environmentally sustainable programs that take into account the dynamic and nuance on ground reality of the places they are implemented (Ferris et al 2011). Only by acknowledging the very power structures that cause these imbalances, and creating policy that actively engages with solutions that work with local communities, outside of the profit model, will such programs be able to enact sustainable change (Smith 2010, Büscher & Fletcher 2020).

The drafting, attempted implementation and response to the RED III initiative of removing woody biomass also offers further insight how politics actually operates on the ground in Upper Austria. Many farmers laughed at the level of detachment with local practices and infrastructure with the drafting of this policy. Even when admitting that Austrian forestry and energy practices are already at a high standard that the rest of the EU member states can work towards, both Dr. Fachberger and Greens MP Stammler still felt this was a necessary process to battle climate change. With Clemens Stammler stating "If you look at these measures in a pan-European context and consider…we simply have all these problems, even if we don't have them in Austria". What this would mean for farmers and rural infrastructure on the ground could be for many a complete overhaul of heating practices and valuable source of income and forest management. Forestry business owner Herbert, Jakob and Stephan all explained this is a sustainable practice, often of removing dead wood and trees, that reduces fire risks and offers a small additional income farmers are reliant on. Once again demonstrating the importance of creating policies with the local communities they are going to affect. As Ferris et al (2011) put forth when discussing implementing good environmental policy, projects developed in isolation by academics and NGO's in the laboratory often fail in the field, causing more harm than good.

What then does the role of the state play within the context of the populist rise in Europe on a planet undergoing climate change? For some of the farmers there was such a level of ambivalence to the state that their feelings of access to it were almost irrelevant. Stephan, Susanne and Jakob all felt that farmers needed to move away from thinking about the state and focus more on local community building. This was somewhat backed up by Dr. Fachberger's view that farmers need to be more business savvy and cooperative to build more financially viable solutions and practices. However the way with which all of those aforementioned farmers viewed the local to national governments in Austria as being controlled by the Black Mafia, makes it "very difficult to even attempt to go against this power structure" as Stephan explained. This demonstrated such a level of hopelessness with the prospects of the state that even if not an outwardly FPÖ supporter, these farmers strive for more local democratic involvement, the very essence of populism is discussed by Frank (2020). It further demonstrates, Dörre's (2019) *demobilised class society* where people have no appropriate presentation of political, social and economic interests and are dominated by mutual competition and social devaluation. This also confirms the process of uneven development where governments often implement policies that favour the interests of capital which can further exacerbate spatial inequalities (Smith 2010). All of this resulting in a populist sentiment ripe for the picking by parties such as the FPÖ (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017).

Another prevalent view of the role of, and access to, the state is one of a marionette to the EU and large corporate interests while being impenetrable for smallholders and average citizens respectively. Indeed as Mudde & Kaltwasser (2017) explain that "the EU has significantly reduced the room for manoeuvre of national governments, sometimes even forcing them to implement policies they openly oppose" (p.110). This sentiment is further demonstrated by farmers such as Renee and Max openly calling state a "puppet" and not caring about you "unless you have a very large farm and a lot of profit and connections". However this is perhaps best articulated by the response from Lisa that saw the state as actually hindering progress on climate change and beholden to the "untouchable" institution of the EU. Furthermore, the FPÖ MP detailed how both Austrian and German governments are so beholden to EU policy they attempt to outcompete each other on who can implement new climate goals first, to the detriment of their own people and without consultation of the population they will affect. These sentiments were also shared by many of the members of the Chamber of Agriculture across all parties. Even the members from the Bauernbund and Greens acknowledged the danger of Austrian politics being beholden to overgeneralised EU policies. It is exactly these kind of resource limiting policies bound in the philosophy of austerity and degrowth that enacts over simplified and destructive Neo-malthusian solutions to complex and wicked problems such as climate change (Lazarus 2008, Phillips 2016). Promoting a greater sense of the state as being captured by elites and feeding further populist sentiment.

However the case of farmer Franz and the efforts of the Freie Milch cooperative demonstrate best the way in which politics actually operate in relation to the access to the state for farmers in Austria. If we take the general sentiment expressed by the ÖVP member Dr. Fachberger that the state in Austria operates in the form of representative democracy guided by political party programmes combined with his views that farmers need to be more business savvy and entrepreneurial, Franz's experience offers very valuable insight. What could be seen as exactly the kind of innovative efforts expected by the establishment functionaries, the Freie Milch

project attempted to better their own circumstances through a new business venture that would leave them less dependant on the system of subsidy dependance and perceived mafia like power structure. To not only be thwarted on many levels of business process and eventually have to fold their cooperative, but to then be banned from re-entering existing dairy associations for milk sale demonstrates the raw reality of access to and role of the state. Being forced to approach the minister of agriculture at events they knew he would attend, to then receive a dismissive response, and by some accounts even seek help from religious institutions to attempt to exercise some sort of political autonomy and gain access to the state. This clearly demonstrates the perception that the state is completely beholden to corrupted institutions and elites (Frank 2020). While governments processes further exacerbate spatial inequalities and feed more populist sentiment (Smith 2010, Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017).

For a concise reflection on the role of the state in a populist context we can again return to Mudde & Kaltwasser's (2017) seminal work on populism:

"Populism asks uncomfortable questions of liberal democracies… in Europe transnational corporations , private companies and the (in)visible hand of the market … with widespread neoliberal reforms … restrict local and national politics and political access…seriously limiting control of elected politicians. Mainstream politicians have often implemented these policies…. either not discussing them or presenting them as inevitable… not opening up the reasoning and consequences of such policies for discussion… often producing more harm than good. In fact elites have used growing influence of unelected bodies to depoliticised many contested political issues such as austerity and immigration, and to minimise the risk of electoral defeat. No better example of this can be cited than the EU. An organisation consciously constructed to delegate power to institutions that were unelected and therefore largely insulated from popular pressures." (p. 116 - 118)

The experiences and deep story of Austrian farmers very much articulates how the current operation of the EU and the Austrian state build fertile ground for populist sentiment. This is further demonstrated with the case of the BBB in Holland, where in exact response to such Neo-malthusian framings and resulting technocratic austerity measures gave birth to a new, very successful populist movement (Croder 2023). In both cases the feelings of disenfranchisement are verified by an insulated and unelected governing body is dictating a majority of policy that directly affects the daily lives of farmers, leaving them with little recourse to influence said measures (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). The actual existing politics in Upper Austria and beyond operate in a positive feedback loop of creating more populist sentiment the more technocratic environmental policy is implemented. Exacerbating the effects of the climate leviathan moment we live in, jeopardising the very goals climate mitigation policies attempt to implement (Wainright & Mann 2018). If we do not work at building solutions that actively integrate local populations into the decision making process and that genuinely go beyond capital accumulation, the populist sentiment fostered by the actual existing politics of these measures will continue to rise (Smith 2010, Ferris et al 2011, Büscher & Fletcher 2020).

6.3 Frontline / elite divide

As this paper is based on a small scale ethnographic study focusing predominantly on the "frontline" of farmers and workers bound to the environment for their survival, findings on the divisions between them and elite/establishment perspectives on ecological issues are limited, but offer insights for further research. The following section will use the results and deep story to explore how large the divide is, and what these gaps are in regards to environmental issues in the populist moment. Exploring the driving factors in this division and potential consequences when not addressing these perspectives. All through the lens of viewing populism and anti-populism as concurrent and related phenomena (Stavrakakis et al 2018, Frank 2020). Holding at the forefront of our understanding of the causes, symptoms and consequences of this moment, that just as much as populist parties over simplified solutions to complex problems, so does anti-populism. That the anti-populist approach often employed by established parties and media to be dismissive of the genuine grievances of people that populist parties can capitalise on, often causes more harm than good (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017).

The overall feeling that many farmers expressed was one of an urban-rural divide, in which many of those in positions of power have little to no understanding or interest in what the requirements and practices are that go into farming and producing food and energy. A number of farmers such as the beef farmers near Linz and dairy farmer in Lower Austria acknowledged this divide with varying solutions. While Max felt this was at the results of being educated in nature in theoretical isolation of universities, his approach was more combative. Franz on the other hand felt much of this is as a result of poor integration of farmers and farming culture into the daily lives of people. Detailing how he felt farmers must do more to present themselves as vital to the functioning of society on the whole. What all the farmers acknowledged however, was that any change on environmental issues and farming practices was completely beholden to the Black Mafia structure. Further demonstrated by the voting processes and results at the Chamber of Agriculture, that as long as the Bauernbund members stayed unified, they had total control of what motions would be implemented. If we combine this with viewpoint of some farmers that the state and industry is beholden to this mafia like structure, the sentiment that this fosters is one of a further divide between elites and the frontline (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). One that can be capitalised on by populist parties such as the FPÖ and, as our interviewee from the party framed it "the FPÖ are the only party trying to change this".

While the ÖVP federal college director agreed with the dangerous of this divide, his solutions that farmers need to become more entrepreneurial and better informed around the political and assistance processes, offers a good representation of the divide from the elites to the frontline. Dr. Fachberger's views that farmers and populists often oversimplify complex problems and that if receiving subsidies, farmers should accept the rules and regulations imposed on them by these institutions dismisses the genuine concerns many farmers have. This viewpoint very much embodies a neoliberal sentiment that holds individuals personally responsible for systematic inequalities. Where they are told to lift themselves out of poverty and dependence by their own bootstraps, all the while that the very system that brought them to this state of reliance continues (Harvey 2017). This is also a further demonstration on uneven development where the logic of these solutions always benefits those in power and capital accumulation (Smith 2010). Furthermore, it represents an oversimplified

anti-populist solution to complex personal problems that ferment more populist sentiment (Mudde & Kaltwassser 2017).

Franz's experience of having his entrepreneurial efforts not only thwarted by these structures of power, but to then also be made example of through punishment, further demonstrated that the elite worldview is detached from frontline reality. The experience of permaculture farmers and Texas longhorn ranchers also highlights this divide. That both of them felt continuously hamstrung by the state, regulations and industry until forming their own agricultural associations demonstrates how power actually operates for those on the frontline. However many farmers acknowledged that to even have the capital to consider such a strategic move is both very difficult for full time farmers and still only offers some protection. What appears from the experience from the farmers is that, as long as your endeavours to not actively challenge the power structures of the ÖVP/ Bauernbund, such as a permaculture or specialty cattle breeder, you are largely left to continue practices with less bureaucratic hurdles. However when, as the Freie Milch collective attempted, you try to break free from the chains that oppress you and genuinely become more self sufficient, the weight of that power will come crashing down over you, as Franz stated; "from every side". Again demonstrating that if bound within the capitalist mode of production, the divide between elites and the frontline will further be exacerbated by the practices and governance of those in power (Fisher 2009, Smith 2010, Feriss et al 2011).

It is this very capitalist mode of production that many of the farmers were aware as being the cause of environmental issues and their personal agricultural difficulties. Nearly all of the farmers and the sitting FPÖ MP mentioned that solutions to environmental problems need to be about empowering local farmers to be sustainable rather than generating profit. They all felt a very strong sense that these solutions also need to be decided on democratically, region to region, then building outward toward national and European levels. On the side of the Greens, Bauernbund and functionaries in power the sentiment is quite the opposite. Blanket solutions for large regions were acknowledged of being problematic but still encouraged. Examples of this demonstrated in their response to the EU Green Deal and RED III initiatives. This demonstrates the dangers of such unelected bodies such as the EU and its policies being used as both "inevitable" and out of the realm of discussion, depoliticising them from public discussion and minimise electoral consequences (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). It demonstrates a contradiction oft employed by elites that such changes on environmental issues are complex and require radical solutions, but shift the policies and governance around them to, as farmer Lisa stated, "untouchable" realm of transnational institutions.

What this all demonstrates is that the divide between the frontline and the elite that sows the seeds of populist is rapidly becoming a chasm. So much of the framing of issues on climate change and construction and integration of environmental politics by those in power is almost entirely captured in the anti-populist mindset. Where so many of the solutions proposed by the elite are constructed by unelected bodies are unable to see beyond the capitalist mode of production, and thus further exacerbate power relations and feelings of disenfranchisement (Smith 2010, Harvey 2017). Their solutions are borne in a misanthropic Neo-malthusian worldview that holds individual consumers and farmers as responsible for the problem and the target for austerity measures that limit resources and practises within borders (Malm 2016, Phillips 2016). There was a

definite feeling of fear of circumstances getting worse for the frontline. Many farmers claiming that such tactics employed in Holland could soon be in their own backyards. As Mudde & Kaltwasser (2017) demonstrate, it is exactly this kind of dismissive approach of presenting environmental governance as inevitable and forcing in measures technocratically, that fosters further division and creates a greater threat to liberal democracy.

6.4 Challenging establishment narratives

One of the driving motivations for undertaking this study was to critique how populism is framed through media, academia and establishment actors. A framing that, as discussed in section 3.1, has throughout history taken a normative and dismissive approach to populist struggles and movements. Almost always painting them as a threat to democracy, inherently authoritarian, anti-establishment and as racist at their very core, always building towards their ethno-nationalist goals (Postel 2016, Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, Frank 2020, Malm 2021, Tosun & Debus 2021, Turner & Bailey 2021, Jones 2023). This is not to say that certain parties espousing to be populists do not capitalise on popular sentiment for their own nativist gain. It is to encourage a more nuanced approach as to what factors lead to the success of populist movements, and in turn foster sentiment that can be capitalised on by bad actors. This section aims to utilise the experiences shared by farmers and workers in Upper Austria and surroundings to critique how populist is often framed in establishment institutions and communities. Keeping at the forefront that we cannot separate a view of populism from anti-populism, as the two coexist within the same political ecology (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, Stavrakakis et al 2018, Frank 2020).

What does the experience of our focus group of farmers tell us about the first claim about populists being antidemocratic and demagogue loving authoritarians? Perhaps the most prevalent ethos in the daily lives and worldview of the farmers and workers interviewed was a desire for more democracy, not less. Every single one of them made reference to feeling locked out of decision making and lacking political autonomy. Their desire for local democratic involvement was expressed explicitly by many. From the permaculture and therapy horse farmers to the Texas Longhorn ranchers and cattle farmers, all of them pointed out one of the driving forces of their struggles was a lack of democracy and political autonomy. This was sentiment was so strong a both Jakob and Lisa mentioned doubts in democracies as they exist today still being functional, or at least, only being functional for the interests of the powerful. This confirms Dörre's (2019) theories of a demobilised class society leading to more populist sentiment. The farmers pains with lack of political autonomy also represent a clear case of Smith's (2010) uneven development, where the actually existing politics governed by state actors always favours capital accumulation, condensing power with the elite.

The second charge placed against populists is the claim that there are anti-establishment with dreams of tearing down any transnational institutions and cooperation (Frank 2020). The deep story and experiences of the farmers offers a more nuanced explanation to the type of anti-establishment sentiment that certainly did bear out in the results. That sentiment being one of feeling the establishments have been captured by special interests, in their case by the Black Mafia and unelected bodies on a regional and Austrian/European level

respectively. There was still a desire to have institutions and a willingness to work with those institutions towards environmentally sustainable goals. However, there was a very strong sentiment of hopelessness with these institutions actually bringing about positive change for those farmers, all the way to the level of feeling they will exacerbate the damages by climate change. This is expressed on the ground with interviewees such as Max, Renee and Herbert feeling genuine challenge to emissions cannot be done when the biggest polluters are involved in drafting climate mitigation policy. However it was also expressed by both FPÖ MPs Franz Graf and our anonymous interviewee that the current institutions "jeopardise their own goals" to the detriment of farmers and people. None of the results demonstrated an outright anti-establishment framing or operations as suggests by many scholars (Lockwood 2018, Tosun & Debus 2021, Turner & Bailey 2021). Instead it is this very anti-populist framing that dismisses genuine concerns about elite captured institutions governing in favour of the powerful that is challenged by these results (Smith 2010, Frank 2020).

The grounds on which populist are dismissed most strongly is the inherent racist, nationalist and even outright fascist accusations laid on them within anti-populist framings (Bugaric & Kuhelj 2018, Rydgren 2018). Framings that use such claims to dismiss them and their concerns as "politically beyond the pale" or that "'ethnonationalism is the primary standpoint that subsumes all others" (Malm 2021, Jones 2023). This oversimplified solution to the populist moment we live in is not only unhelpful, it fosters even more populist sentiment (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). What our results indicate was that there is certainly a desire to prioritise agricultural and environmental issues on a local scale, then moving outward to a national and global scale. All the while keeping the prospect of living in a world undergoing climate change to guide how to implement change and new sustainable practices. To then shoehorn such desires and struggles into a reading of being nativist or racist is not only in bad faith, it contradicts the viewpoint within western academia and geography has approaching similar circumstances in the global south. However this will be discussed further below. At no point did any of the farmers or workers interviewed ever frame their concerns about agriculture, the environment or climate change as being caused by, or at the risk of, immigrants or outsiders. When they did address issues around immigration it was always about the lack of democratic involvement in functional solutions, rather than any outright anti-immigrant sentiment. Furthermore interviewees such as Herbert, Max and the sitting FPÖ MP all took a much more nuanced approach. With their focus on the causes of refugee crises being due to imperialist military interventions and solutions being symptom focused and undemocratically implemented. Much like the original Populists of the midwest Unites States, all of their concerns around these issues almost always came back to the core of what makes populists populists. The political will and energy for more democratic involvement in their lives, communities and country (Frank 2020).

Once again it must be iterated that this is not to state that there are not populist sentiments that are exploited in nativist or authoritarian manners by certain political actors. As discussed above, in Brazil, the USA and even examples from the FPÖ or National Front have demonstrated this certainly is a risk that must be acknowledged and engaged with. Even more reason to not take a normative anti-populist approach when dealing with the concerns raised through populist avenues or actors (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). What our results lay bear is that many feel pushed to a level of disenfranchisement and lack of political autonomy that they feel they have no where else to go. All of the famers and workers voiced their concerns about wether or

not the FPÖ would be a genuine solution. Yet even when not FPÖ supporters, they also all acknowledged that the Freedom Party was the only established political group in Austria addressing their concerns. That some would be willing to risk the consequences of a party they are uncomfortable with just for the chance of bringing about some sort of change. Like Schubert's (2020) work with union workers and former SPÖ voters in Vienna, it is often the failure and lack of political representation from the other established parties that leads to populist support. That the situation in Austria for farmers and workers represents a demobilised class society where they have no social, political or economic representation. Where social devaluation and mutual competition and distinction dominates (Dörre 2019).

6.5 Moving forward: reversing the gaze & the importance of inclusive politics

"While populism often proposes simple solutions to complex problems, anti-populism does so too. … the best way to deal with populism is to engage, as difficult as it is, in an open dialogue with populist actors and supporters. The aim of the dialogue should be to better understand the claims and grievances of the populist elites and masses and to develop liberal democratic responses to them. At the same time practitioners and scholars should focus more on the message than the messenger. Instead of assuming a priori that populists are wrong, they should seriously examine the extent to which the proposed policies have merit within a liberal democratic regime. In trying to win over populist supporters and perhaps even some elites, liberal democrats should avoid simplistic solutions that pander to the people, and elitist discourses that dismiss the moral and intellectual competence of ordinary citizens. Both will only strengthen the populists"

(Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017 p.119-120)

Throughout the field work and writing of this paper a tension that exists within the field of geography and political ecology became ever more present. On countless occasions when our community spreads its gaze and efforts to the global south, we are hyper aware of the existing power relations that foster uneven development (Ferris et al 2011, Robbins 2012, Neimark et al 2019, Büscher & Fletcher 2020, Sultana 2020). Particularly in the field of environmental politics, when it comes to farmers and workers in developing nations such as Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Kenya or Colombia the field of geography is, and rightly so, very determined to engage with a critical viewpoint of how large business, transnational corporations, NGO's and governments often work along existing lines of capital accumulation. Where the interests of the fossil fuel industry, large agribusiness and the elite dictate how policies and practices are constructed and implemented in a colonial manner to the detriment of local communities. Where solutions proposed to this imbalance explicitly address the absolute necessity of democratically empowering local communities and farmers in ways that challenge the profit based capital accumulation model (Smith 2010, McCarthy 2012, Silva-Castañeda 2012, Cheyns 2014, Khöne 2014, Lawrence & Dixon 2015, Büscher & Fletcher 2020). Yet when we reverse the gaze on to the communities in our backyard, we are very quick to label very similar concerns of local communities in an utterly anti-populist framing. A framing that dismisses these very same grievances of uneven devolvement and power imbalance as nativist, anti-democratic and anti-establishment (Bugaric & Kuhelj 2018, Rydgren 2018, Lockwood 2018, Tosun & Debus 2020 Turner & Bailey 2021, Malm 2021).

One strong example that came to the forefront when working with these farmers in Upper Austria was the similar plight of indigenous small holder farmers in Indonesia and Malaysia under the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) certification (McCarthy 2012, Silva-Castañeda 2012, Cheyns 2014, Khöne 2014). How the on ground realities for the small famers in these nations are dictated by the power dynamics of large agribusiness and NGOs under the guise of sustainability. Furthermore, large agribusiness firms have entire legal teams, already set business standards and documentation and are incredibly familiar with such operating practices. Smallholder farmers largely rely on advocacy NGOs, at times in other countries entirely, to assist them to present their concerns in a business friendly format (Khöne 2014). This means that only industrial forms of evidence are seen as legitimate justifications, leaving social issues such as indigenous and local land rights being disqualified as they do not fit the technical format (Silva-Castañeda 2012). It is clear that the existing power imbalances of global agribusiness not only remain, but in some cases are exacerbated. In globalised value chains large transnational corporations have disproportionate influence, leaving RSPO's to be at best "limited learning tools" (McCarthy 2012 p.1871). I would personally argue that at worst, they operate as neo-colonial tools from western for-profit organisations to subjugate indigenous and local communities into neoliberal working standards and language that delegitimise at times hundred year old traditions and ways of being.

When we reflect on the deep story of farmers in Upper Austria, and their continuous referral to being at the behest of vague and opaque regulations that are implemented and policed by corrupted existing power structures, the similarities draw themselves. In a system where unelected bodies, transitional corporations and NGO's dictate how policy is constructed and implemented in our own communities why are we so quick to dismiss the plight of farmers and workers as anti-democratic, anti-establishment and nativist? (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, Frank 2020). These uncomfortable questions that populism forces us to ask ourselves should not be seen, as many scholars state, a "risk" to liberal democracy. They are the checks and balances to a system to healthy democratic system. Perhaps it is when our liberal democracies have developed so unevenly to benefit those already in power, down lines of capital accumulation, that gives rise to so much populist fervour (Smith 2010, Frank 2020). If we cannot even allow these uncomfortable questions to be asked, let alone be genuinely dealt with, we only create more division and resistance in society (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017).

Be it in the field of environmental policy, military conflict or public health measures, what the establishment response has been in many liberal democracies in Europe and the United States is to succeed the pro-democratic, pro-peace and anti-interventionist position respectively (Fazi 2023 b, Oysmüller 2023). The latter two issues perhaps best articulated by German Minister for Foreign Affairs and Green Party member Annalena Baerbock when speaking of the 2022 energy crisis and military support to Ukraine "no matter what my German voter(s) think…we are facing now winter time where we will be challenged as democratic politicians, people will go on the street and say "we can't pay our energy prices"…but we will stand with Ukraine, even if it gets really tough for politicians" (Newstarget 2022). A policy that continued sanctions on Russian natural gas, that met much resistance by the people of Germany and to the detriment of the environment where new coal plants were constructed (Eckert & Sims 2022). It should be clear that this exact sort of dismissive sentiment

toward peoples genuine social, economic and environmental concerns would lead to more populist sentiment. One that has been capitalised on by parties like the AfD, FPÖ or 2024 Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump (Fazi 2023 b).

This very sentiment of being unheard, dismissed and with no where else to go was very much expressed by many of the focus group of this paper. The decline in political trust demonstrated by all of the farmers is representative of a global phenomenon in established liberal democracies (Citrin & Stoker 2018, Perry 2021). Linking this with research showing that increasing distrust and populist sentiment can actually be from a yearning for more democratic processes (Geurkin et al 2020, Werner 2020). While people have become so frustrated with the current political situation that any alternative seems viable, wanting more direct democratic processes is a “medicine they must take in order to keep the disease of greedy politicians and special interests from getting further out of hand” (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2002 p.13). Once again, this is not to discount or assume there are not authoritarian and anti-democratic values in populist movements. For example, while Donald Trump ran his 2016 campaign on populist and anti-elitist sentiment combined with feeding off anti-immigrant and anti-liberal values. His time in office however was coopted by the neoliberal order, spearheading tax-cuts for the rich and corporations at historic speed, and diverting the blame for economic hardships on to minorities and immigrants (Bettache & Chiu 2019). While not a conclusive explanation and critique on the question if there is fatigue with liberal democracy, this paper attempts to demonstrate that on the contrary, it is the strive for more genuine democratic processes, civic engagement and a more fair and just political culture that explains the loss of political trust. Further research could delve deeper into linkages of declining political trust being a merited cause of the global uprising of populism and a strive for more, not less, democracy.

So what then is to be done in this populist moment on a planet undergoing climate change? If the field of geography and political ecology can be so clear about the need for genuine environmental solutions that challenge uneven development and capital accumulation (Smith 2010), that empower local communities and indigenous farmers democratically (Büscher & Fletcher 2020), that understand that the mitigation measures drafted by transnational corporations, large business and unelected bodies will always exacerbate existing power structures (McCarthy 2012, Silva-Castañeda 2012, Cheyns 2014, Khöne 2014), why then can we not have the same approach in our own backyards? As the late Mark Fisher highlights; “the relationship between capitalism and eco-disaster is neither coincidental nor accidental: capital's 'need of a constantly expanding market', its 'growth fetish', mean that capitalism is by its very nature opposed to any notion of sustainability” (2009 p.19). If we can understand this when examining the global south, surely we can understand this when we turn our gaze back home. As the opening quote of this section details, the more we dismiss the concerns of populists as inherently bad, the more destructive that approach will be. It is then perhaps no surprise that the current response to the populist moment has seen a sweeping rise of right wing populist parties across established liberal democracies (Fazi 2023 b). Simply put, be it on issues of environment, military conflict or public health all most all established parties have an approach of “be quiet, follow our rules” where the populists parties, be it in good faith or not, are the only parties saying “we hear you, we are you”. This dismissive approach "will only strengthen the populists” (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017 p.120).

Climate change is an increasing threat and requires dynamic global cooperation between political actors and people in all nations (Fraune & Knodt 2018, Wainwright & Mann 2018). If our approach to create mitigation measures does not genuinely challenge the existing power structures in a democratic manner that empowers the frontline actors they most affect, they will not only fail on their environmental goals, but foster more political division while allowing fossil fuelled capitalism to continue its detrimental growth (Smith 2010, Malm 2016, Büscher & Fletcher 2020). While this thesis was only a limited ethnographic study in one region of Austria, the findings from it clearly demonstrate the importance of including the targeted population in the creation and implementation process of environmental measures. If we continue to allow the solutions to this apparent existential threat to be drafted by those in positions of power of the very system that drives climate change, surely we must also expect consequences of massive social resistance and increased populist party support.

7. CONCLUSION

This master's thesis has engaged with the daily lives, struggles and worldview of farmers in Upper Austria in the context of the global rise in populism on a planet undergoing climate change. Firstly highlighting the increasing geopolitical affects of a planet undergoing a changing climate and the challenges proposed by this populist moment. Highlighting the way that many climate mitigation measures are implemented on large scale are often abrasively technocratic, igniting more populist fervour. While outlining the dangers of reductive and Malthusian framings of environmental issues employed by some of the most popular environmental movements and some populist figures. Giving brief examples of how environmental issues have been incorporated by populist groups around the world and introducing the recent political circumstances of the FPÖ in Austria. Outlining the research gap that offers a blindspot for much of academia and media, often dismissive of genuine concerns raised by populist actors or avenues. Detailing these research aims to help illuminate how populist groups/parties integrate, frame, and leverage environmental issues in their political discourse. And what motivates their adoption, rejection, or reframing of these issues.

Using the concepts of *uneven development* from Smith (2010) to explore the actual existing politics of farmers in Upper Austria. How capital accumulation and development always flows down lines of existing power, further intensifying socioeconomic disparities. This thesis embarked on ethnographic fieldwork largely based of the work of Hochschild (2016) and Dörre (2020) to build a grand narrative, co-created with the subjects to help answer the questions outlined by the main aims of this research listed above. By creating a political story of feeling to help build a more nuance and unbiased understanding to the lived experience and worldview of farmers in the FPÖ stronghold in Austria. To then critically engage with the populist moment in the context of a planet undergoing climate change.

By giving a brief history of populism and anti-populism, this thesis aimed to stress the importance of the inextricable links between these two phenomenon, and how one cannot be studied without the other (Stavrakakis et al 2018, Frank 2020). By demonstrating that anti-populist framings always seek to dismiss the genuine concerns raised by populism as authoritarian, nativist, racist or anti-establishment, this normative approach serves as a tool for justifying unaccountable power. The necessity of studying populism and anti-populism becomes evident due to the ongoing power struggle and the resistance of those in authority to relinquish it voluntarily (Frank 2020). These intertwined phenomena require a holistic examination, as focusing on one without considering the other would yield an incomplete comprehension. This comprehensive perspective, as exemplified by the discussed cases, enables a nuanced and insightful approach to understanding populism and its potential implications, without absolving populist parties of nationalistic, Malthusian, or authoritarian risks. Drawing from Frank (2020) populism is best described as the political energy or will for democracy itself.

The research approach of living and working with farmers for multiple days was to truly go beyond normal qualitative research and pursue genuine ethnographic fieldwork that creates knowledge *with* participants, not about them. By focusing on a keyhole issue intricately linked with the daily routines of the study's participants,

the EU Green Deal served as a starting point for discussions and provided a unique perspective on the real-world implications of technocratic transnational climate mitigation policies. There were very few practices by the farmers that were not directly or indirectly affected by the aims of the Green Deal, from subsidy programs and national regulations to restrictions around land use or energy consumption. All of the farmers expressed that their main gripe with such measures was their lack of political autonomy in the drafting or implementation of such measures. Furthermore, all of the farmers interviewed felt these problems were further exacerbated by their view that the Austrian agricultural industry is completely beholden to a mafia like structure centred around the ÖVP, their farmer's union the Bauernbund, Raiffeisen Bank, Lagerhause and various agricultural bodies both locally and nationally. Further demonstrating the importance of building solutions that genuinely challenge existing capitalist structures, focusing on empowering those most affected by such measures (Ferris et al 2011, Büscher & Fletcher 2020).

By highlighting how environmental issues are integrated, framed, adopted and utilised by both populist groups and supporters and anti-populist narratives, this thesis aimed to challenge the oft dismissive approach when dealing with populism. One of the initial findings that bore out in the results was that the reductive and neo-Malthusian framings of environmental issues as a problem of population and resource overuse to justify authoritarian austerity measures was much more prevalent by the establishment parties and governing bodies, rather than in populist supporters. Such measures are not only anti-democratic, they also dismiss genuine concerns of people and foster more populist sentiment. As Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) iterate, oversimplified and dismissive responses to challenges raised by populism only serves to increase distrust in existing political culture and give more fuel for populist parties to capitalise on. What many of the farmers expressed was a nuance understanding of power dynamics in relation to climate mitigation policy. That the target of such measures was often aimed at those with little to now power while absolving the largest polluters of responsibility.

Echoing the findings from Schubert's (2020) work, these results demonstrated that while all of the farmers and workers interviewed acknowledged the FPÖ was the only major party speaking to their concerns, they all had varying reservations if they would genuinely govern any better when in power. Some of the farmers acknowledging that their support of the Freedom Party was more to do with the failures of the other political parties and lack of class representation. Demonstrating Dörre's (2019) *demobilised class society,* where they lack effective representation of their economic, social, and political interests, resulting in increased competition, the accentuation of distinctions, and social devaluation. These findings reveal that, despite some populist supporters expressing caution towards the FPÖ, it is the only party that consistently places the concerns of the people, specifically farmers in this context, at the centre of its framing of climate change and environmental policy. Enabling the FPÖ to portray itself as politically outflanking the establishment and governing bodies positions, that their Freedom Party is the sole entity genuinely committed to addressing climate change.

Exploring the actual existing politics in the context of populism in Upper Austria, how populists prioritise environmental issues around agriculture, energy and forestry. Furthermore, focusing on how access to the state is perceived by the focus group may be specific to the region but still offers insights for a wider context.

The frequent mention of engaging with a deliberately ambiguous bureaucratic system that privileges powerful actors illustrates the previously discussed concept of uneven development (Smith 2010). Furthermore the explicit statements of farmers states that only the officials in charge of policing these policies, AMA, are able to understand or interpret these regulation confirms that economic activities are produced and shaped by the logic of capital and the interests of powerful actors (Smith 2010). While there was a genuine will from all of the farmers to make changes to help assist with climate mitigation, all of the farmers spoke of the very little time they had already just to attempt to keep inline with current subsidies and regulations. This results in environmental concerns being subordinated to a profit-driven neoliberal framework, compelling farmers to prioritise practices that ensure their financial viability. However, these solutions fail to adequately address the underlying issues, perpetuating the cycle of uneven development and capital accumulation (Smith 2010).

How farmers viewed their access to, and the role of, the sate also demonstrated how the current operation and governance of the EU and Austrian state fosters a fertile ground for populist sentiment. With the EU being an organisation specifically constructed to give power to unelected institutions and therefore insulated from popular pressure (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). An unelected body that dictates the majority of policies that directly affects their daily lives, leaving them feeling disenfranchised. The existing political dynamics in Upper Austria contribute to a self-reinforcing cycle, whereby the implementation of technocratic environmental policies fuels the growth of populist sentiments. This further exacerbates the challenges posed by the current climate crisis, undermining the very objectives of climate mitigation policies (Wainright & Mann 2018). Without a concerted effort to develop solutions that actively involve local communities in decision-making processes and move beyond a focus solely on capital accumulation, the populist sentiments fuelled by these existing political dynamics are likely to persist and intensify (Smith 2010, Ferris et al 2011, Büscher & Fletcher 2020).

One of the main aims of this thesis was to critically engage in how populism is framed in academia, media and by establishment actors. To go beyond the normative framings that dismiss populist concerns and struggles as authoritarian, racist and anti-establishment. Indeed the most prevalent ethos of all of the farmers and workers interviewed was the desire for more political autonomy. For more democratic involvement in the policies that affect their region and their daily lives. While some aspects of populism could be interpreted as anti-establishment, much of what these results bore out was a dissatisfaction with, in their views, the corruption of many establishment bodies and lack of access to the state, rather than outright being against institutions. Though the most vehement reasoning given for the basis to reject populist all together, is the charge that the are explicitly racist, that “ethnonationalism is the primary standpoint that subsumes all others” (Malm 2021). While our results indicate there is definitely a desire to prioritise agricultural and environmental issues on a local scale, moving from the regional outward, to then force these aspirations and challenges into a narrative of nativism or racism not only lacks integrity but also contradicts the approach taken by Western academia and geography when examining analogous situations in the Global South. Iterating once again, that this does not mean there are not populist sentiments that can be exploited in nativist or authoritarian manners by bad faith political actors, it only further demonstrates the need to genuinely engage with the concerns raised by populism, rather than dismissing them outright.

Finally this thesis has drawn from the excellent work done in the field of geography around the globe, particularly in the Global South (Ferris et al 2011, Robbins 2012, Neimark et al 2019, Büscher & Fletcher 2020, Sultana 2020), to hold a mirror to how we view similar issues in our own backyard. We seem very adept at pointing out the dangers of unelected bodies, transnational corporations, unaccountable NGOs, large corporations and corrupted governing bodies when looking at the plight of farmers and labourers in nations like Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Kenya or Colombia. Our field of geography, rightly so, is determined to point out how much of the policies and practices affecting the daily lives of the peasantry and workers is dictated by elites and the importance of challenging the profit based system of capital accumulation while empowering local and indigenous communities (Smith 2010, McCarthy 2012, Silva-Castañeda 2012, Cheyns 2014, Khöne 2014, Lawrence & Dixon 2015, Büscher & Fletcher 2020). Yet when we reverse the gaze to our communities back home, we very quickly fall into anti-populist framings that dismiss the very same grievances of power imbalances and uneven development as anti-establishment, anti-democratic and nativist (Bugaric & Kuhelj 2018, Rydgren 2018, Lockwood 2018, Tosun & Debus 2020 Turner & Bailey 2021, Malm 2021).

This thesis has attempted to use the plight of farmers in Upper Austria, and their will for political autonomy and being at the whim of technocratic and unelected governing bodies, transnational corporations and NGO's, to demonstrate that, just like climate change, their struggle is a global one. A struggle that needs solutions that address the causes of these issues, not the symptoms. Solutions that critically engage with the uneven development of extractivist capitalism that works solely on a for-profit model. One that empowers local communities to democratically draft and implement environmental change and work collaboratively with other groups, communities and nations abroad. Should our approach to devising mitigation strategies fail to genuinely challenge the entrenched power structures in a democratic fashion, thereby empowering the primary stakeholders most impacted, the consequences extend beyond environmental shortcomings. They include the exacerbation of political divisions and the perpetuation of fossil fuelled capitalism's detrimental expansion (Smith 2010, Malm 2016, Büscher & Fletcher 2020). While this thesis represents a limited ethnographic exploration in a specific Austrian region, it underscores the significance of involving the affected population in the formulation and execution of environmental initiatives. Should we persist in allowing solutions to this seemingly existential threat to be determined by those holding positions of power within the very system driving climate change, we must anticipate widespread social resistance and heightened support for populist parties.

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9. PERSONAL DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the submitted Thesis is the result of my own, independent work. All external sources are explicitly acknowledged in the Thesis



Eranthos Beretta

Appendix A

Practitioners email

Sehr geehrter Herr/Sehr geehrte Frau XXXX,

mein Name ist Eranthos Beretta, ich bin Student am Geographischen Institut der Universität Zürich. Darüber hinaus bin ich außerdem gelernter Gärtner und habe auch Erfahrungen auf Alpbetrieben mit Milchkühen und beim Käseherstellen gesammelt. Zurzeit schreibe ich gerade an meiner Masterarbeit zum Verhältnis zwischen Politik und Land- und Forstwirtschaft in Oberösterreich. In meiner Abschlussarbeit werde ich mich kritisch mit der Art und Weise auseinandersetzen, wie der Begriff "Populismus" oft dazu benutzt wird, Kritik von Arbeitern, Landwirten und Bürgern, die sich mit land- und forstwirtschaftlichen Fragen in ihrer Region befassen, abzuwiegeln. Ich möchte im Rahmen meiner Arbeit deshalb gerne mit Landwirtinnen und Landwirten direkt sprechen, um ihre Anliegen und Sichtweisen bestmöglich verstehen zu lernen.

Da ich denke, dass Verstehen auch immer mit Tun zusammenhängt, würde ich gerne für einen kurzen Zeitraum bei Ihnen auf Ihrem Hof mitarbeiten. Ich hoffe dadurch mehr über Ihren Alltag zu lernen und aus nächster Nähe zu erfahren, welche Auswirkungen aktuelle Politik darauf hat. Insbesondere würden mich auch Ihre Ansichten zum "Green Deal" der EU interessieren, sowie zu den jüngsten Änderungsplänen der Forstwirtschaftspolitik.

Ich werde von ca. 7. Bis 17. November und dann erneut etwa Mitte Dezember in Oberösterreich sein und würde mich freuen, wenn Sie mir eine Mitarbeit auf Ihrem Hof ermöglichen könnten. Falls ein Mitarbeiten nicht möglich ist, würde ich mich auch sehr über ein Gespräch zu den oben erwähnten Themen freuen. Falls Sie andere Landwirte oder Landwirtinnen kennen, die Interesse an diesen Themen haben würde ich mich freuen wenn Sie ihnen meine Kontaktdaten weiterleiten.

Sollten Sie Fragen haben kontaktieren Sie mich bitte gerne jederzeit.

Ich würde mich freuen von Ihnen zu hören!

Vielen Dank im Voraus,

mit freundlichen Grüßen

Eranthos Beretta

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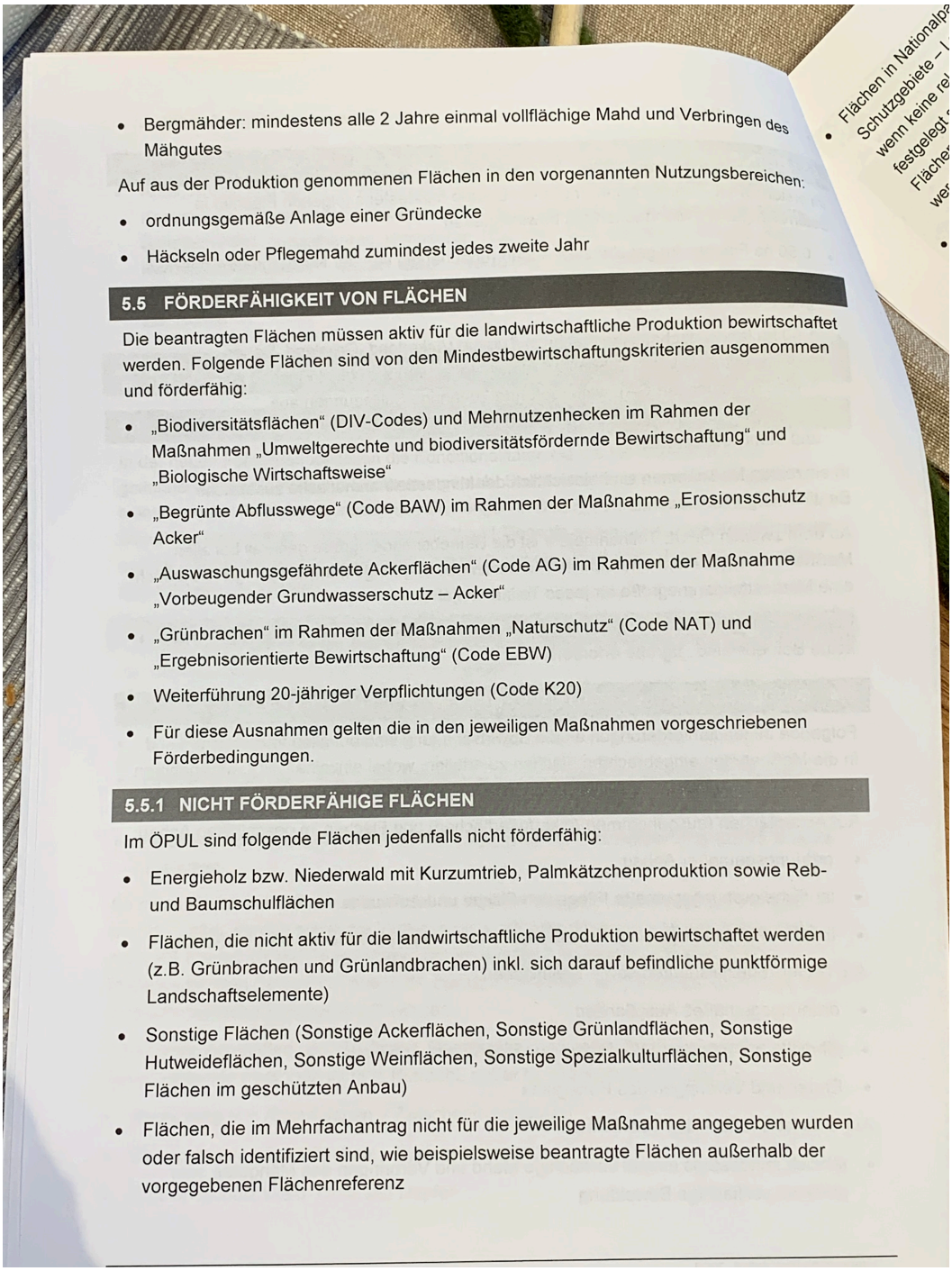
Appendix B

Subsidy example - two pages from over 150 relating to Lisa's farm from ÖPUL



- Bergmähder: mindestens alle 2 Jahre einmal vollflächige Mahd und Verbringen des Mähgutes

Auf aus der Produktion genommenen Flächen in den vorgenannten Nutzungsbereichen:

- ordnungsgemäße Anlage einer Gründecke
- Häckseln oder Pflegemahd zumindest jedes zweite Jahr

5.5 FÖRDERFÄHIGKEIT VON FLÄCHEN

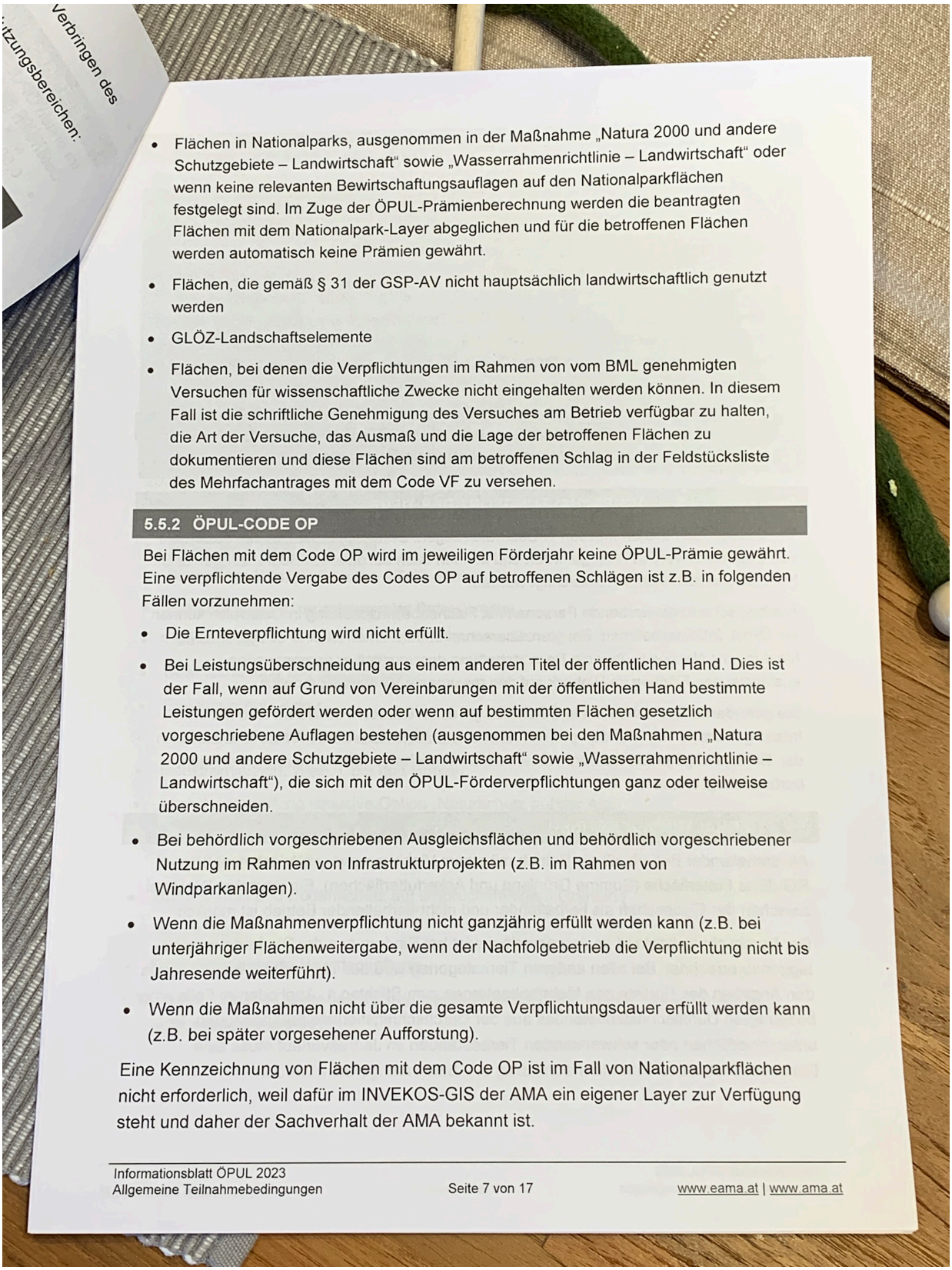
Die beantragten Flächen müssen aktiv für die landwirtschaftliche Produktion bewirtschaftet werden. Folgende Flächen sind von den Mindestbewirtschaftungskriterien ausgenommen und förderfähig:

- „Biodiversitätsflächen" (DIV-Codes) und Mehrnutzenhecken im Rahmen der Maßnahmen „Umweltgerechte und biodiversitätsfördernde Bewirtschaftung" und „Biologische Wirtschaftsweise"
- „Begrünte Abflusswege" (Code BAW) im Rahmen der Maßnahme „Erosionsschutz Acker"
- „Auswaschungsgefährdete Ackerflächen" (Code AG) im Rahmen der Maßnahme „Vorbeugender Grundwasserschutz – Acker"
- „Grünbrachen" im Rahmen der Maßnahmen „Naturschutz" (Code NAT) und „Ergebnisorientierte Bewirtschaftung" (Code EBW)
- Weiterführung 20-jähriger Verpflichtungen (Code K20)
- Für diese Ausnahmen gelten die in den jeweiligen Maßnahmen vorgeschriebenen Förderbedingungen.

5.5.1 NICHT FÖRDERFÄHIGE FLÄCHEN

Im ÖPUL sind folgende Flächen jedenfalls nicht förderfähig:

- Energieholz bzw. Niederwald mit Kurzumtrieb, Palmkätzchenproduktion sowie Reb- und Baumschulflächen
- Flächen, die nicht aktiv für die landwirtschaftliche Produktion bewirtschaftet werden (z.B. Grünbrachen und Grünlandbrachen) inkl. sich darauf befindliche punktförmige Landschaftselemente)
- Sonstige Flächen (Sonstige Ackerflächen, Sonstige Grünlandflächen, Sonstige Hutweideflächen, Sonstige Weinflächen, Sonstige Spezialkulturflächen, Sonstige Flächen im geschützten Anbau)
- Flächen, die im Mehrfachantrag nicht für die jeweilige Maßnahme angegeben wurden oder falsch identifiziert sind, wie beispielsweise beantragte Flächen außerhalb der vorgegebenen Flächenreferenz



- Flächen in Nationalparks, ausgenommen in der Maßnahme „Natura 2000 und andere Schutzgebiete – Landwirtschaft“ sowie „Wasserrahmenrichtlinie – Landwirtschaft“ oder wenn keine relevanten Bewirtschaftungsauflagen auf den Nationalparkflächen festgelegt sind. Im Zuge der ÖPUL-Prämienberechnung werden die beantragten Flächen mit dem Nationalpark-Layer abgeglichen und für die betroffenen Flächen werden automatisch keine Prämien gewährt.
- Flächen, die gemäß § 31 der GSP-AV nicht hauptsächlich landwirtschaftlich genutzt werden
- GLÖZ-Landschaftselemente
- Flächen, bei denen die Verpflichtungen im Rahmen von vom BML genehmigten Versuchen für wissenschaftliche Zwecke nicht eingehalten werden können. In diesem Fall ist die schriftliche Genehmigung des Versuches am Betrieb verfügbar zu halten, die Art der Versuche, das Ausmaß und die Lage der betroffenen Flächen zu dokumentieren und diese Flächen sind am betroffenen Schlag in der Feldstücksliste des Mehrfachantrages mit dem Code VF zu versehen.

5.5.2 ÖPUL-CODE OP

Bei Flächen mit dem Code OP wird im jeweiligen Förderjahr keine ÖPUL-Prämie gewährt. Eine verpflichtende Vergabe des Codes OP auf betroffenen Schlägen ist z.B. in folgenden Fällen vorzunehmen:

- Die Ernteverpflichtung wird nicht erfüllt.
- Bei Leistungsüberschneidung aus einem anderen Titel der öffentlichen Hand. Dies ist der Fall, wenn auf Grund von Vereinbarungen mit der öffentlichen Hand bestimmte Leistungen gefördert werden oder wenn auf bestimmten Flächen gesetzlich vorgeschriebene Auflagen bestehen (ausgenommen bei den Maßnahmen „Natura 2000 und andere Schutzgebiete – Landwirtschaft“ sowie „Wasserrahmenrichtlinie – Landwirtschaft“), die sich mit den ÖPUL-Förderverpflichtungen ganz oder teilweise überschneiden.
- Bei behördlich vorgeschriebenen Ausgleichsflächen und behördlich vorgeschriebener Nutzung im Rahmen von Infrastrukturprojekten (z.B. im Rahmen von Windparkanlagen).
- Wenn die Maßnahmenverpflichtung nicht ganzjährig erfüllt werden kann (z.B. bei unterjähriger Flächenweitergabe, wenn der Nachfolgebetrieb die Verpflichtung nicht bis Jahresende weiterführt).
- Wenn die Maßnahmen nicht über die gesamte Verpflichtungsdauer erfüllt werden kann (z.B. bei später vorgesehener Aufforstung).

Eine Kennzeichnung von Flächen mit dem Code OP ist im Fall von Nationalparkflächen nicht erforderlich, weil dafür im INVEKOS-GIS der AMA ein eigener Layer zur Verfügung steht und daher der Sachverhalt der AMA bekannt ist.