

Capture or Empowerment: Governing Citizens and the Environment in the European Renewable Energy Transition

KELLAN ANFINSON *Eindhoven University of Technology, Netherlands*

The European renewable energy transition is a leading model for responding to the urgent threat of climate change, which it does by empowering citizens. Drawing on Foucault's analysis of German neoliberalism, this article argues that despite some measure of empowerment, the economic constraints structuring the transition ultimately disempower citizens, undermining the attainment of environmental goals. Specifically, the transition gives citizens control of their energy while burdening them with entrepreneurial tasks to do so, substitutes economic activity for political citizenship, and shifts the epistemological terrain they take for granted when determining what environmental crises society faces and how best to respond. Understanding the transition as composed of theories for sustainability governance, policies, and practices of implementation, this article analyzes the "energetic society" governance theory, the Clean Energy for all Europeans Package, and the renewable energy organization REScoop.eu.


INTRODUCTION

Given the growing effects of climate change, the task of decarbonization is urgent, with renewable energy being the primary approach. The European renewable energy transition is perhaps the most expansive program in the Global North to decarbonize society, and as a model its success or failure is critical. The European Union seeks to carry out the transition by "empowering citizens and giving them ownership of the energy transition" (European Commission 2019a, 12). But what is the nature of that empowerment, and what response to climate change does it enable?

To analyze the connections between citizen empowerment, environmental policy, and the European energy market, I draw on Michel Foucault's analysis of the German variant of neoliberalism, also called ordoliberalism.¹ Foucault argues that the German neoliberals made the economy a site of truth production for

directing government policies. In the European renewable energy transition, this function is extended to the environment such that market mechanisms play a determining role in what counts as effective environmental policy. Citizens thereby lose some collective capacity to enact environmental policies based on political goals or scientific information while gaining the economic "empowerment" of individual and local enterprises that supposedly better achieves such objectives. I argue that the European renewable energy transition gives citizens control of their energy while burdening them with entrepreneurial tasks to do so, substitutes economic activity for political citizenship, and shifts the epistemological terrain they take for granted when determining what environmental crises society faces and how best to respond. This is critical given studies suggesting that growth-driven markets are incompatible with averting catastrophic climate change (Klein 2015; Luke 2011; Malm 2021; Moore 2015). Although I show this with respect to the European renewable energy transition, it can be understood as a broader development in environmental politics.

Neoliberalism is a broad term that covers a variety of political arrangements. This variety justifies a degree of fluidity but has also led to criticism of the term as meaningless. Therefore, after demonstrating the importance of a Foucauldian approach to the European renewable energy transition, I will identify the characteristics of German neoliberalism. Following a Foucauldian approach, I understand the energy transition as constituted by a combination of knowledge, government policies, and concrete practices (1990, 3–13; 2010, 1–42). This article will show that the characteristics of German neoliberalism are manifest in these three areas. First, I will examine Maarten Hajer's theory of governance for sustainability. Then, I will turn to the Clean Energy for all Europeans Package. Finally, I will analyze REScoop.eu, the European

Kellan Anfinson , Postdoctoral Researcher, Philosophy and Ethics, Eindhoven University of Technology, Netherlands, kan-fi2040@gmail.com.

Received: September 07, 2021; revised: March 11, 2022; accepted: September 13, 2022. First published online: October 11, 2022.

¹ Foucault refers to both "ordoliberalism" and "German neoliberalism." I use the latter to emphasize connections to other developments in neoliberalism. Foucault traces three different variants of neoliberalism: German, American, and French. These have evolved over time and others exist. Most attention has been given to the Anglo-American variant exemplified by the Chicago School, Reagan, and Thatcher. But the different variants should not be reduced to this one, as significant differences exist including around major issues such as Brexit (Jacotine 2017). This article uses the main characteristics from Foucault's outline of German neoliberalism while indicating a transformation in it as it becomes applied to energy policy in particular and environmental politics more broadly.

federation of renewable energy cooperatives, which plays an essential role in implementing renewable energy in Europe.

ENERGY AND POLITICAL POWER

The relevance of energy for questions of political power is well established. Gaventa showed how coal companies exercised power over miners through shaping their wants and desires, mobilizing potential issues out of the political arena, and direct coercion (1980). The role coal played in providing energy to America and supporting economic growth proved critical to the exercise of that power. Mitchell argues that the transition from coal to oil gave energy companies a more consolidated form of power as laborers were replaced by technicians operating complex machinery and railroad lines by ships (2013). Additionally, oil tied citizens—particularly in America—to an energy-intensive form of consumer democracy in which “the future was a limitless horizon of growth” (422). This entailed various forms of control over oil-producing nations, undermining democratic prospects there. As oil drives destabilizing crises including climate change, neoliberalism has been critical to maintaining relations between political domination and energy supply (Huber 2013). Thus, the shift to renewable energy raises critical questions concerning the configurations of political power behind the production of that energy and the democratic possibilities and limits of the regimes supplied by it. This shift requires a new form of empowerment because, as Mitchell notes in reference to climate change, “the political machinery that emerged to govern the age of fossil fuels may be incapable of addressing the events that will end it” (2009, 400–1). Will renewable energy enable a more democratic politics that can overcome the power exercised by the fossil fuel industries and market imperatives toward growth to avert catastrophic climate change?

Although renewables offer some possibilities for empowerment, issues such as locked-in political systems, underlying political-economic effects, and elite power undermine any large-scale change (Brisbois 2019; Haas 2019; Schwarz 2020). One study identified neoliberalism as a prominent energy policy discourse, but it neglected how power shapes this approach to renewable energy (Bryant, Straker, and Wrigley 2019). Bues and Gailing demonstrate the relevance of Foucault for analyzing configurations of political power in energy transitions but reject the “overarching logic” of neoliberalism as hindering the examination of specific projects (2016, 89–90). However, Isailović (2021) shows how the European Green Deal reinforces the existing neoliberal system because its investment tools and justice goals fail to overcome existing power asymmetries in the European governance regime. Additionally, Lennon et al. (2020) have demonstrated how neoliberalism has infiltrated the notion of energy citizenship in European policy discourse, leading to a loss of agency even as citizens are made responsible for the energy

transition through a consumer model of citizenship. They call for reworking the notion of energy citizenship to develop a more collective and empowering approach to renewable energy. This is critical, given Platform’s (2015) argument that if done through public institutions rather than markets, the transition to renewable energy presents an opportunity to break away from the neoliberal energy system. Such efforts are important but insufficient. I argue that disempowerment goes beyond notions of citizenship to how the market has become the site for determining which truths to follow with respect to renewable energy and environmental policy more broadly. Having taken on an ecological veneer, markets have become accepted as a source of empowerment even by environmental academics and activists. This suggests a political capture that undermines climate goals by subordinating them to the maintenance of growth.

Though Foucault has been used to analyze environmental issues from a variety of perspectives (Luke 2011; Rutherford 2007), the critical approach taken by Luke is particularly relevant (1995; 1999). Largely with reference to the United States, Luke has shown how the environment has become a site through which capitalism—including neoliberalism—and the state expand control over populations (1999; 2005). With respect to climate change, Luke argues that this becomes the “24 × 7 management of Nature and Society through combating greenhouse gas emissions” (2011, 97). He identifies possibilities for resistance at the individual and local level in that “the consumer is never a docile or inattentive target. He/she is an active, volatile capacitor for every unsustainably developed circuit of corporate globalism’s power effects ... who must be captured and convinced” (2005, 235). Thus, Luke finds local movements such as transition towns, ecovillages, and permaculture settlements to be important “localist direct action strategies ... taking the challenges of dealing with climate change into their own hands” (2011, 106). I argue that the German variant of neoliberalism attempts to capture the critical potential of such local movements. It does so through a decentralized market logic that siphons energy away from collective political action and redirects it into local entrepreneurial activity. Thus, Luke’s “volatile capacitor” loses some of its potential as energy consumers become prosumers, both consuming and producing energy for the market. Furthermore, Luke has noted the importance of questioning established truths for critical ecological politics (106). However, German neoliberalism challenges that process of questioning, as the underlying assumption that pairs the critique of state power with a discourse of local economic empowerment is that the market is the primary site for determining the correct path of action on environmental issues. What is labeled local citizen empowerment is actually the governance of citizens and the environment according to market imperatives.

Recent work suggests moving beyond Foucault to analyze energy and power. In Burke and Stephens’s comprehensive review of the literature on political power and renewable energy they argue that

“energopower and energopolitics extend to energy Foucault’s notions of biopower ... and biopolitics” (2018, 80). They take these notions from Dominic Boyer. However, a closer examination shows that he does not extend Foucault’s work but rejects it. For Boyer, the problem with Foucauldian analysis is “an inattentiveness to the ergo-material contributions of fuel and electricity to political power” (2019, 5). “Energopower” is supposed to correct this. Though Foucault did not deal directly with ecology, it falls well within the purview of his thought (Luke 1999). Even Boyer’s coeditor’s conclusion to their special collection belies Boyer’s argument with a quote from Foucault buried in the footnotes: “In other words ... we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc.” (Szeman 2014, 463). Burke and Stephens are thus incorrect in reading Boyer’s approach as providing an alternative to a Foucauldian analysis. Neoliberal governmentality remains absent from their analysis, underscoring its importance for understanding how the renewable energy transition is transforming political power.

The neoliberalization of sites of political critique to consolidate market power is not new. Catherine Rottenberg (2014; 2018) has documented the development in the American context of a neoliberal feminist subject whose ostensible empowerment is just the individualized assumption of responsibility for overcoming social and economic inequality through taking on an entrepreneurial character. This feminism has no capacity to critique the socially organized inequalities of liberal democracy but supports it as a supposed system of liberation even in its imperial endeavors. Elisabeth Prügl (2015; 2017) gives a more ambiguous evaluation of the “neoliberalization of feminism” by drawing on a more global set of developments in the World Bank and corporate social responsibility. Similar to Rottenberg, Prügl shows how multinational corporations “use the feminist language of women’s empowerment, empty it of elements of collective struggle, and reformulate it as entrepreneurship” (2015, 626). Although she is generally critical of these developments, she also suggests that “empowerment may take on a different meaning in this context ... [becoming] a way to strengthen women’s ability to define their interests and act in concert to advance them” (627). Prügl takes this further in analyzing the World Bank to argue that though neoliberalism has been “discredited,” there is a “new neoliberalism” that, through “constructing gender equality as an engine of economic growth,” “from a feminist perspective ... produces substantial openings” (2017, 30, 47–8).² It is important to attend to such possibilities for empowerment when they are present. Although I will suggest some possibilities for empowerment in the European energy transition, I follow Rottenberg in seeing neoliberalism as a largely

confining program. Indeed, the extension of neoliberalism to the environmentalism of renewable energy is another instantiation of its tendency, noted by Rottenberg with respect to feminism, “to colonize more and more domains” (2014, 431). Thus, it is time to turn to the variant of neoliberalism shaping the European renewable energy transition.

THE GERMAN NEOLIBERAL MODEL

In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault outlines liberalism as a philosophy of governance and details how it further developed in the twentieth century to become neoliberalism.³ For him, the main innovation of liberalism was to make the market a site of truth production. If markets, which had long been an important site of government intervention, become a site where truth is produced, then the truths produced there become regulations on government. “In other words, it is the natural mechanism of the market and the formation of a natural price that enables us to falsify and verify governmental practice when, on the basis of these elements, we examine what government does, the measures it takes, and the rules it imposes” (Foucault 2008, 32). Liberalism enables the prescription of correct government policy on the basis of the market. Having given this foundation, Foucault details various ways this approach to government has been developed in the twentieth century. Here I focus on the German variant of neoliberalism both because Foucault finds it the most theoretically important and because it has historically been influential in European governance (79, 141).

Foucault identifies five of characteristics of German neoliberalism that are useful for analyzing the European renewable energy transition. First, not only should the market limit state power, but it also has the function of founding and legitimating it (Foucault 2008, 102). “[T]he economy, economic development and economic growth, produces sovereignty; it produces political sovereignty through the institution and institutional game that, precisely, makes this economy work... . All these economic partners produce a consensus, which is a political consensus, inasmuch as they accept this economic game of freedom ... the production of well-being

² For studies examining the possibilities of such empowerment in an economic context, though without reference to neoliberalism, see Kabeer (1999; 2005; 2020) and Goetz (2001; 2008).

³ A literature has emerged examining Foucault’s lectures on neoliberalism through historical context, events in Foucault’s personal life, political debates in the French academic left at the time, and Foucault’s shorter writings and personal correspondence (Audier and Behrent 2015; Behrent and Zamora 2016; Dean and Zamora 2021). This literature suggests that Foucault’s own political relationship to neoliberalism was more ambiguous than critical, if not generally positive. In doing so, it poses critical questions concerning some directions that leftist politics has taken as well as the potential of using Foucault’s late work for critical purposes. The argument of this article does not rely on Foucault’s own political orientation or a critical orientation in his work. Indeed, part of the point is to show how, to what extent, and with what consequences the environmental framing of these policies has made neoliberalism acceptable to figures and institutions that might generally be characterized as leftist.

by economic growth will produce a circuit going from the economic institution to the population's overall adherence to its regime and system" (84–5). The economy sustains sovereignty in two ways. First, by participating in the economy, citizens agree to the political system that structures that economy. Second, insofar as growth is achieved, a feedback loop is produced, supplying greater legitimacy and support.

Second, German neoliberalism intensified its attack on state economic interventionism by using Nazism as a political enemy. First, the German neoliberals argued that various kinds of interventionism such as "a protected economy, state socialism, economic planning, and Keynesian interventionism" were all elements of the Nazi policy and that they are all "economically linked to each other and if you adopt one of them you will not escape the other three" (Foucault 2008, 109–10). Then, they defined Nazism as "unlimited growth of state power" (111). Third, they argued that the result was the destruction of "the tissue of the social community" (115). What is important is the conclusion they draw from these three steps. "[S]ince Nazism shows that the defects and destructive effects traditionally attributed to the market economy should instead be attributed to the state and its intrinsic defects and specific rationality, then the analyses must be completely overturned ... let's ask the market economy itself to be the principle, not of the state's limitation, but of its internal regulation from start to finish of its existence and action" (116). So, instead of simply limiting state action, the market in neoliberalism takes on the role of supervising the state.

Third, despite the fact that the state should be put under the supervision of the market, state action is now essential. This is because the neoliberals no longer hold to the "naïve naturalism" that the market is a natural institution as the liberals did. "The beneficial effects of competition are not due to a pre-existing nature, to a natural given that it brings with it ... competition as an essential economic logic will only appear and produce its effects under certain conditions which have to be carefully and artificially constructed" (Foucault 2008, 120). The state has the task of constructing these conditions. The role of the state becomes one of "vigilance, activity, and intervention" (132). But the actions it engages in are not planning-style policies that adjust the effects of competition and that the neoliberals identified with Nazism. Instead, government should enact "conformable actions," the goal of which is "not to intervene on the mechanisms of the market economy, but on the conditions of the market" (138). Government action on this level establishes what the German neoliberals call the "framework" of the market. Analyzing their approach to agricultural policy, for example, Foucault shows that their goal is to set up the "conditions for agriculture to be able to function as a market" (141). So, the role of the active neoliberal state is to constantly attend to market conditions and boundaries, expanding them to make new sites into objects of the market.

The fourth characteristic is the way the German neoliberals rework the logic of competition. If early liberal

theory was based on the exchange of equal value among equals, they drew upon and intensified a developing strand of liberalism that focused on the market as the space of competition among unequals (Foucault 2008, 118–9). This manifests in neoliberal governmentality in a number of ways. One is that the German neoliberals hold that monopolies are not the result of competition but of external influences on the market (136). Regulations are necessary not to intervene in the economy and break up monopolies but to keep external influences from intervening while increasing competition. Another example is social policy, which has to be transformed because the model that works toward equalization distorts the "game of differentiations" through which competition works. "Social policy cannot have equality as its objective. On the contrary, it must let inequality function" (142–3). Social policy should be guided by the market and become a policy of individualization and privatization so that it can become subject to competition. The collective dimension of government is dismantled and replaced by a policy of growth through competition, as only growth can provide the protection that social policy guaranteed.

Fifth, German neoliberalism tries to govern the population such that citizens' lives become economic enterprises. "The *homo aeconomicus* sought after is not the man of exchange or man the consumer; he is the man of enterprise and production" (Foucault 2008, 147). If on the one hand, the intensification of competition entails a critique of monopolistic enterprises, it also means an expansion of the number of small and individual enterprises or, in the words of the neoliberal Röpke, "shifting the center of gravity of governmental action downwards" (148). Here, Foucault's summary of Röpke's policy objectives is worth quoting at length for the connection it will have to the energy cooperatives discussed later in the article.

I will list the objectives he fixes: first, to enable as far as possible everyone to have access to private property; second, the reduction of huge urban sprawls and the replacement of large suburbs with a policy of medium-sized towns, the replacement of the policy and economics of large housing blocks with a policy of economics of private houses, the encouragement of small farms in the countryside, and the development of what he calls non-proletarian industries, that is to say, craft industries and small businesses; third, decentralization of places of residence, production, and management, correction of the effects of specialization and the division of labor, and the organic reconstruction of society on the basis of natural communities, families, and neighborhoods. (147–8)

There may be a lot in this program that sounds appealing, but Foucault is clear about what is happening in this process of decentralization. "It is not a matter of constructing a social fabric in which the individual would be in direct contact with nature, but of constructing a social fabric in which precisely the basic units would have the form of the enterprise, for what is private property if not an enterprise? What is a house if not an enterprise? What is the management of these small neighborhood communities ... if not other forms

of enterprise?” (148). So, increasing the number of enterprises is a critical component of how the neoliberal program seeks to make society conform to the model of a competitive market.

These five characteristics—the market serving as a foundation for sovereign power, a reduction of state power for intervening in market mechanisms, an increase in state policies to found and expand market boundaries, an intensified logic of competition that increasingly replaces the collective functions of society, and the multiplication of enterprises—are helpful for analyzing the European renewable energy transition at three levels: governmental philosophy, policy, and on-the-ground practices.

A NEOLIBERAL GOVERNANCE PHILOSOPHY FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Before examining Maarten Hajer’s *The Energetic Society*, it is worth noting why this report merits examination. First, Hajer is an academic whose career runs from England to Germany and the Netherlands. But from 2008 to 2015, he was the director of the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, during which time he published *The Energetic Society* as an official government report. Hajer is thus significant from a Foucauldian perspective because he sits at the intersection of knowledge production and policy development based on that knowledge. Second, Hajer began his academic career with a Foucauldian analysis of environmental politics (1995). Although there he argued for a “strong public domain” that would accommodate a variety of discursive positions (7), I will show that in *The Energetic Society* the ecological limits such a public might impose are presumptively delegitimized in the name of consumers and businesses and, at the same time, the market becomes the space in which alternative discourses compete. But Hajer did not explicitly change his position, nor do I argue that he contradicts himself. Rather, he is symptomatic of a larger trend in which environmentalists have come to accept the market as a site of truth production. Third, although many government reports simply gather dust, *The Energetic Society* has been quite influential. Google Scholar lists almost 300 combined citations for the Dutch and English versions of the report, 17 of which were made in 2021, a decade after the report’s publication. It has been used to argue for better ways for the United Nations to realize its sustainable development goals (Hajer et al. 2015), taken as a positive model for climate governance (Dryzek, Norgaard, and Schlosberg 2013, 141), taken as a significant sign of a shift “from government to governance” in environmental policy (Dryzek 2022, 97–8), and referred to in various contexts with respect to sustainable energy and sustainable urban transitions. *The Energetic Society* is thus a significant text and particularly interesting for a Foucauldian analysis of developments in neoliberalism and environmental governance.⁴

The Energetic Society is a “governance philosophy for a clean society” (Hajer 2011, 1). The report is written primarily for the Netherlands, but is meant to be applicable to other countries as well as international governance. Hajer notes that the report deviates from the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency’s usual policy analyses. Although it might normally analyze “the options available for feeding nine billion people, while controlling biodiversity loss and climate change,” this report orients itself around “sustainability, the question of how our system of prosperity can be maintained” (5–6). This switch from viewing environmental issues as a question of health and survival to one of prosperity is the basis for the governing principles that Hajer prescribes. These principles update the German neoliberal approach for the age of environmental crises. In so doing, the report captures environmental politics in an economic frame.

Perhaps the clearest example of the substitution of economic issues for environmental ones comes in Hajer’s focus on decoupling. Decoupling makes a discussion of the ecological dimensions of social life unnecessary, as the goal is to separate the economy and society from such constraints. “[S]ocieties are faced with the challenge of achieving the full decoupling of economic growth and natural resource use within a few decades... . Sustainable development is not a luxury, but necessary to economic survival... . Care for ‘planet’ is therefore directly related to our strategy for ‘people’ and ‘profit’” (8). Turning ecological survival into a problem of growth and profit is possible only on the assumption that the economy can be decoupled from the environment. This is never demonstrated but assumed based on models, which Hajer mentions but does not cite (61). But to point to the lack of evidence is to miss the point. Hajer uses decoupling as a principle, a goal, of government policy. A government directing society toward decoupling is not a society making environmental policy but a society making economic policy. This is how the environment becomes not just an object of economic management but also an object whose environmental characteristics no longer exist because they have been substituted with economic ones.

This market approach to sustainability serves as a foundation on which governments can support their sovereignty and legitimacy. Hajer argues that although there are citizens who are skeptical of the need for environmental change, “[t]his skepticism often focuses not so much on the need for change itself, but stems from a lack of trust in government initiatives that aim for this change” (2011, 9). Here, he turns the problem that there are people who do not think environmental issues are significant into a problem of sovereignty. Indeed, throughout the report Hajer insists that business and industry are supportive of environmental responsiveness. This lack of sovereignty, or “legitimacy

and The Breakthrough Institute. The Centre for European Policy, with institutes in Paris, Berlin, Freiburg, and Rome, is the largest organization producing self-identified ordoliberal analyses of European policy.

⁴ Hajer’s report is not unique. For example, neoliberal analysis of environmental issues is put forward by The Copenhagen Consensus

deficit,” forms one of the three shortcomings of the current model of environmental governance that Hajer criticizes (25). Hajer’s “energetic society” alternative—essentially a euphemism for market forces that will be examined further in a moment—is put forward to solve this problem. “By approaching the issue from the perspective of the energetic society, the government can gain effectiveness and legitimacy” (62). Although interventionist environmental policy lacks legitimacy, if the environment is economized then it can become a source of political trust, legitimacy, and sovereignty.

This increase in legitimacy is tied to a restriction of state power when it comes to intervening in market mechanisms. Hajer rejects the model in which ecological limits based on scientific knowledge structure government intervention. Rather, we should make “a step up from the mindset of conventional environmental policy—of there being limits to growth” (Hajer 2011, 14). The problem for governments pursuing such policies is not that they do not work—Hajer repeatedly says that previous environmental policies have been successful—but that they are undemocratic. Here, he points to two other deficits of the current governing model in addition to the aforementioned legitimacy deficit—an implementation deficit and a learning deficit—all of which are symptomatic of a state that is problematically strong. For example, regarding the legitimacy deficit, even though “citizens lack sufficient insight into the problem, the objective and the solution strategy,” any government that does not discuss these issues with them undermines representative democracy and makes citizens into “political objects” (25). This argument is intensified in the implementation deficit, where the implementation of environmental policies that meet local objection are labeled as government ruling “single-handedly” (25). In the learning deficit, the problem is a “strong governmental orientation,” whose strength is seen as a single-minded inflexibility incapable of learning and being creative (26). What is objected to is neither a particular set of environmental goals nor way of achieving them but an interventionist state that risks becoming undemocratic.

Part of the problem of this mode of governance for Hajer is that it bases policy on science: if the government is acting on science that is true, then perhaps such top-down policies have some justification. This is why he makes the case that it should not be scientific knowledge that forms the governmental approach to the environment but rather the market. “Policies are therefore needed for a sustainable society. The Dutch Government justifies these policies in particular by indicating the enormous reductions needed in the future: 50%, 70% or 80%. This is a justification that, *although factually correct*, does not mobilise society... . Rather than setting limits, the aim should be to motivate citizens and industry to change their production and consumption patterns” (Hajer 2011, 12–3, emphasis added). Hajer argues that even when government bases its policy on correct facts about the environment, those are not the facts that should be used to judge policy. Rather than scientific truth, it should be the truth of the market as a social engine that guides

environmental policy. This is a governing philosophy in which the market becomes a site of truth production and the proper place of government is to take action in accord with those truths.

Thus, political governance of the environment is replaced by market-led governance in which the role of the state is to make it subject to market dynamics. Whereas “societal dynamics have until now been mainly seen as causing the problems,” Hajer argues that the task of government now should be “to create the right conditions” for the energetic society to take up sustainability (2011, 30). Specifically, the new model of environmental governance is “the stimulation of new markets” (45). “Let us also not forget that legislation creates market opportunities. Markets and legislation, therefore, are not incompatible” (64). One of the tools that Hajer puts forward to carry this out is “positioning,” through which governments set clear goals that “create a context in which investment in sustainable innovation becomes more attractive” (51). Another tool, which he draws from the OECD “green growth” strategy, is pricing, not in the sense of setting prices but of reinterpreting ecological limits as prices. “Such pricing may provide a significant impulse to the creativity of individuals and industry. Efficiency, thus, would become even more important and waste more costly” (27). Through pricing, the state subjects the environment to markets, whose dynamics become determinative of sustainability.

These market dynamics are worth closer attention. The expansion of competition is what Hajer means by the term “energetic society.” “The “energetic society” represents a society of articulate individuals and companies with fast learning curves, who *themselves* form a source of energy” by “interacting to create a chain of “creative competition” that turns out to be of great economic value” (Hajer 2011, 29, 33). The state no longer sets the agenda, but rather “the issues and the solutions are based on society—both individuals and innovative companies” (29). The job of the state is to “channel this societal energy” (33). This is the goal of Hajer’s “infrastructure” governance tool, which increases competition by, for example, introducing smart grids and smart meters to bring more players to the energy market (52–3). Another example is information sharing, in which the government shares its data with market actors, collects new data as social research to be shared, and enables interaction through cloud-based platforms and crowdsourcing. This enables the government to take on “a new role, based on cooperation, comparison and creative competition” (50). Competition is a foundational principle of the green growth approach, shifting how individuals and societies relate to each other and nature. Although in the previous environmental approach, “we had a sense of all being in the same boat, the motto for the green growth frame is ‘don’t miss the boat’” (27). Here, collective action is replaced with competition as the best system for solving environmental issues.

Increasing competition also entails increasing the number of entrepreneurs. The frames of green growth and the energetic society employed by the report

pursue “finding synergy with citizens and making use of the entrepreneurial spirit and learning capacity of society” (Hajer 2011, 61). Specific techniques and policies are put forward to implement this goal. With information sharing, already discussed above, “the government therefore acts primarily as a platform to stimulate action and to provide a basis for further development by entrepreneurs” (49). Or again, Hajer sees “monitoring and feedback” as a governance tool through which the government enables “the development of markets and communities prepared to act as ‘social entrepreneurs’” (59). Here the entrepreneurial function goes beyond just businesses to communities. In fact, throughout the essay, Hajer often refers to citizens and businesses interchangeably. This is because they function symmetrically through competition to achieve the goals of sustainability. So, businesses, but also government, community organizations, and individuals take on an entrepreneurial form. For example, he envisions how public schools can become enterprises by becoming renewable energy generators that “generate their own income and at the same time contribute to renewable energy” (50). The primary goal is to convert public space into a space of enterprise through the economization of the environment, in this case in terms of renewable energy.

Hajer argues that the energetic society is a model of empowerment. When it comes to responding to environmental crises, “the energetic society, not the government, is the main source of innovative power.” (Hajer 2011, 42). But the energetic society is really about market competition. This is why rather than models of collective empowerment, “the focus is on the mobilization and empowerment of individuals and businesses” (50). The role of the government shifts from placing environmental regulations on the market to making the environment a market space. Citizens are now free from “scientists’ call for change,” which is in any case “suspect,” as the truth of the market replaces scientific truth (50). But can this really be considered empowerment when even the power of the state is inadequate to shift the trajectory of the climate crisis? With the possibility of collective action minimized, democracy free from the state takes the form of market citizenship in which individuals are empowered to succeed or fail in the consumption of sustainable identities as businesses pursue corporate greenwashing. Whatever solution arises from these dynamics of private competition is presumed to be the correct one.

A NEOLIBERAL CLEAN ENERGY PACKAGE FOR SUSTAINABLE SUBJECTS

The Clean Energy for all Europeans Package (CEP), completed in 2019 and focused around eight pieces of legislation, is perhaps the most significant policy in the Global North to respond to climate change. Although it builds on three previous energy packages and has already been modified by the European Green Deal, it is nonetheless the policy backbone of the European renewable energy transition. Because it is so significant

and will likely serve as a model for future policy responses to climate change, it deserves critical examination. Crucially, the CEP seeks to achieve its environmental objectives by “empowering citizens and giving them ownership of the energy transition” (European Commission 2019a, 12). Given the neoliberal assumptions structuring that policy, however, the market forces it sets in motion are likely to undermine this empowerment along with its environmental goals.

The question of sovereignty is critical for the EU, in part because it is a novel experiment in sovereignty sharing between states. European Union sovereignty has always been questioned by Euroskeptics, but the issue has become more pronounced in the wake of Brexit. With respect to climate change, it becomes even more fraught because movements questioning the political legitimacy of the EU often overlap with movements that are skeptical of climate change (Haas 2019, 73). Thus, it is no surprise that the CEP directly takes up the question of sovereignty. There are two main ways that the CEP seeks to build European sovereignty and legitimacy, both of which rely on market mechanisms. The first is a series of infrastructure changes to diversify the energy supply by including more renewables, increasing efficiency, and providing greater interconnection between national grids. These infrastructure changes are paired with a set of rules to create a “new electricity market design” so that “electricity can be traded closer to real time” (European Commission 2019a, 8). In this way, the internal European electricity supply becomes more flexible to “improve our energy independence, and increase our resilience to external shocks or political pressure” (8). By creating a new market to increase its security, the EU links its internal legitimacy to the efficacy of the market.

The EU also seeks to increase its global sovereignty through the CEP, first, with respect to climate leadership because Europe is “the first major economy to translate its promises under the Paris Agreement into binding laws” (European Commission 2019a, 14). This not only makes it a model for other countries but also gives it a strategic position in international negotiations. On the one hand, that leadership requires that the decarbonization program is attended by growth, investment, and sustainable jobs and, on the other, that it is used to “create a level playing field for EU companies on global energy markets” (14). The legitimacy that comes from being a climate leader is both supplied by and supports the energy market. Additionally, energy sovereignty is expected to strengthen the role of the euro. The EU currently pays about €250 billion in U.S. dollars every year to import energy (15). The US has long bolstered its global sovereignty by selling energy to the world and forcing other countries to purchase it in U.S. dollars (Mitchell 2009, 413–5). The EU hopes to use energy sovereignty in this same way. “In order to increase access to reliable finance and strengthening sovereignty, the European Commission is seeking to increase the use of the euro in international agreements and non-binding instruments related to energy, as well as in energy-related transactions,

financial transactions and energy-related projects” (European Commission 2019a, 15). Thus, the internal energy market may enable a greater degree of external sovereignty and legitimacy.

In terms of environmental regulations of the type that Hajer identifies as “limits,” in which government constrains the market based on ecological boundaries, the CEP provides little. On the one hand, it moves further from a limits approach in continuing to eliminate interventions on market prices for electricity by member states (Meeus and Nouicer 2018, 3–8). On the other hand, the clearest way to evaluate EU intervention into the market is to look at the targets set. The CEP set three new targets for 2030: a 40% cut in greenhouse gas emissions compared with 1990 levels (increased to 55% under the 2020 Green Deal), a 32% increase in renewable energy, and a 32.5% increase in energy efficiency. The efficiency and renewable energy policies are expected to produce both growth and jobs (European Commission 2019a, 5). The EU argues for this strategy, claiming a 24% reduction in GHG emissions between 1990 and 2019 while experiencing 60% growth over that period (European Commission n.d.). Nonetheless, these strategies may be insufficient to continue producing such results given issues like an increasing demand for energy and the Jevons paradox by which efficiency does not translate into reduction. This leaves two other mechanisms for achieving the GHG reductions. The first is the Emissions Trading System, which follows a market-based cap-and-trade approach. So far, this system has been largely unable to dissuade the use of fossil fuels like coal (Appunn 2021). The second is the Effort Sharing System, which sets targets for reductions in some sectors for each country and allows for flexibility including the buying and selling of credits. Although the targets are binding, the enforcement measures in this system are mainly bureaucratic and of limited effectiveness (Appunn 2019). These mechanisms do not intervene to ensure that the reductions occur but rely on the agency of markets to produce the emissions cuts. Thus, the EU’s targets are characterized by a “shift from mandatory regulations towards guidelines, principles, and standards” with the effect of arranging environmental policy according to an economic logic and making markets responsible for the results (Soneryd and Ugglå 2017, 89–90).

Because responsibility for outcomes is shifted to markets, creating and expanding market conditions is one of the central roles of the CEP. This can be seen on a number of levels. In its most basic form, the regulations should produce a physically integrated electricity market. “Physical integration of energy infrastructure between the Member States is a precondition for the proper functioning of EU energy markets and the sharing of electricity across borders” (European Parliament 2019). This physical component is supported by the Agency for the Cooperation of the Energy Regulators, which helps unify the European energy market by issuing “best practice reports in a series of areas, helping to align the approaches of different states” (European Commission 2019a, 11). Thus, between

physical infrastructure and the standards regulating it, the EU is creating the conditions for a new energy market.⁵ Although these efforts began before the introduction of the CEP, that legislation incorporates and extends those projects to its environmental goals.

Beyond physical infrastructure, the CEP creates a new “energy market design” (European Commission 2021). The goals of this new market include allowing electricity to move more freely, increased flexibility in the sources of electricity, increased market-based investments, and increased ability to respond to electricity market crises (European Commission 2019b). To this can be added the fostering of new market actors (to be discussed below), large public investments to get market forces underway, and even greater levels of private investment for a total of “around €180 billion a year” over the next decade (European Commission 2019a, 6). On top of this, the carbon market discussed above reveals a new level of market-based governmentality. The targets set out in the CEP are binding at the union level but not at the member-state level (with the exception of non-ETS emissions targets, which are binding at the member-state level). This has raised serious concerns about the enforcement and ultimate efficacy of the targets (Nouicer et al. 2020). In lieu of enforcement, the legislation requires extensive monitoring and reporting on progress made and plans to achieve the targets. “The frequency of these requirements and the resulting ongoing dialogue between the Commission and the Member States may produce better results. And, crucially, the close monitoring and transparency of the reporting also gives clearer signals to investors, which in turn allows the market to take over and support the transition” (35). In this way, the reporting procedures establish a market framework between the member states that serves as the basis for directing investment and simultaneously functions as an enforcement mechanism that can inflict penalties on noncompliance. Thus, the CEP both establishes frameworks for the creation of markets and uses those markets to impose regulations on member states.

⁵ The material complexity of the renewable energy transition is immense, running from large-scale generation through transmission networks and distribution networks to the appliances and technologies with which individuals consume and produce energy. The critical question is what mix of social, political, and economic actions will best bring that new material infrastructure into being and enable it to achieve its ecological goals. The EU’s policy presumes that through government tools like investments, market mechanisms will be sufficient to complete the physical connections that make the new European market possible and to handle the rest of the local material transformation. Yet, even studies promoting transferring some governance role for energy and climate policy to markets identified “strong central government leadership” (Gillard et al. 2017) and “a central state ... purposefully manipulating markets to change technologies and behaviors” (Sovacool 2011) as critical factors in the success of such policies. Furthermore, such shifts toward market governance can be ultimately disempowering (Swyngedouw 2005). See footnote 7 for a discussion of the state as a more active player in the energy transition. For a discussion of how the material form of energy production influences political processes, see Burke and Stephens (2018, 81–2).

There are a number of ways in which the CEP expands entrepreneurship, the most significant of which is through consumers, who are “at the heart of the energy transition” (European Commission 2019a, 12). These consumers no longer simply buy a product, but now convert their energy consumption into an ongoing enterprise through constant monitoring, which is enabled by digitalization, smart grids, smart appliances, new appliance labeling systems, new storage systems, and the Internet of Things (13). This practice of constant monitoring and the construction of a home energy system “gives consumers more choice in their homes and more flexibility to reduce their energy use when it is expensive and consume or store energy when it is cheap” (13). Life and home become constant enterprises to use energy more efficiently and produce savings. Those savings are also the means for consumers to become investors in renewable energy, multiplying enterprises in the form of prosumers and energy communities. To this end, the CEP secures a new set of citizen rights to generate, self-consume, store, and sell renewable energy as well as participating in energy communities (SCORE et al. 2020, 4). Prosumers are consumers who have developed the capacity to produce energy as well as consume it and to profit by selling that energy. Energy communities are allowed to profit, as long as their primary purpose is to “provide environmental, economic or social community benefits for its members or the local areas where it operates rather than financial profits” (European Parliament and Council 2018). These new rights are expected to produce a large expansion in energy entrepreneurship to the point that “by 2030, energy communities could own some 17% of installed wind capacity and 21% of solar. By 2050, almost half of EU households are expected to be producing renewable energy” (European Commission 2019a, 13). In this way, the CEP seeks to engineer a massive influx of entrepreneurs to the energy market.

The CEP is programmed by and for market competition. The logic of competition can be seen in the previous discussion from increasing the competitiveness of the euro in global finance, to increasing competition in the energy market by adding a new class of entrepreneurs, to setting up reporting and evaluation mechanisms that put states in competition with each other for investment. Competitiveness politically functions as a danger, a tool, and a goal. It is a danger when the EU “is facing greater competition from other parts of the world and needs to accelerate its efforts in order to maintain its position” (European Commission 2019a, 6). It is a tool to create a more efficient energy supply when greater interconnection and devices like smart meters lead “to greater competition among suppliers and greater variety in the options on offer” (13). It is a goal when the EU seeks “to deliver a secure, sustainable and competitive energy system” (10). Although it is not clear what the benefit of competitiveness is in the same way as security and sustainability, here, security and sustainability are lesser goods that can only be achieved through competition, which ranks as the primary good toward which the entire system must strive to achieve any other goals. This

is the freedom of the market becoming domination in a form that requires submission to its rules in order to be free to achieve anything else, including responding to climate change.

The EU sees the CEP as a program for citizen empowerment. “The move to a more decentralized energy system where consumers play an active role means more democracy, and more opportunities for citizens to take their own decisions on which type of energy they want to use” (European Commission 2019a, 13). Here “more democracy” is defined as an increase in economic activity through a new class of entrepreneurs, an intensified dynamic of competition, a stronger euro, and a better negotiating role for Europe and European firms in international markets. The new energy rights for European citizens are significant, but the economic conditions placed on their exercise will likely make it difficult for citizens to achieve the environmental goals that incited their creation. Indeed, the pursuit of growth may drive higher emissions. Thus, the power these rights bring may be overcome by these larger economic constraints.

RESCOOP.EU: THE PRACTICES OF RENEWABLE ENERGY ENTERPRISES

REScoop stands for Renewable Energy Source cooperative. REScoop.eu is the European federation of citizen energy cooperatives. It is a network of 1,900 cooperatives that includes over 1.25 million citizens. REScoop.eu represents citizens and cooperatives to European policy makers, supports the establishment of energy cooperatives, facilitates exchanges between cooperatives, and promotes cooperatives as an alternative business model in the energy sector. It frames itself as empowering citizens in order to achieve energy democracy. Thus, it plays a fundamental role in the implementation of the renewable energy transition in Europe.

It is worth noting that REScoop.eu tries to distance itself from neoliberalism. With reference to the United Kingdom under Thatcher, it argues that an aggressive form of privatization was pursued under which “cooperatives were suppressed” (Vansintjan 2015, 27).⁶ But beyond this particular policy of suppression, the model of neoliberalism it opposes remains undefined and indistinct from the crisis tendencies of capitalism and its bubbles (27–9). At the same time, it argues that the negative policies of neoliberalism are in crisis today and on the wane (31). I will show, however, that REScoop.eu develops and expands the German model of neoliberalism.

With respect to sovereignty, REScoop.eu makes arguments similar to those put forward by the

⁶ This section relies primarily on documents published by REScoop.eu and in particular its “book” *The Energy Transition to Energy Democracy* written by the president of REScoop.eu, Dirk Vansintjan. For an analysis of REScoop.eu members with a broader focus that aligns with this analysis insofar as entrepreneurial and economic factors are isolated as both primary potentials and limitations of its model, see Huybrechts and Mertens (2014).

EU. Four threats to European energy sovereignty are identified: crisis-prone economic systems that put citizens in precarious positions, Euroskepticism, geopolitical conflicts in areas that Europe is dependent on for energy, and economic insecurity brought about by sending money out of Europe to procure energy (Vansintjan 2015, 31–2). REScoops, it is argued, help solve these threats by producing energy locally, which keeps money local and makes Europe less subject to geopolitical conflicts that affect energy supply. Additionally, putting energy supply in the hands of citizen-led economic enterprises is supposed to increase confidence in government (66). REScoop.eu lobbies governments to help bring about a more decentralized energy economy, arguing that its benefits will bring legitimacy to those governments while also helping them achieve their policy goals, such as emissions reductions (REScoop.eu 2021a). Here, REScoop.eu plays a pivotal role, receiving grants from the EU to collect data, developing best practices, supporting the spread of new community energy projects, and generating public knowledge about and support for REScoops. So, it both actively works to promote the legitimacy of the EU and provides it with data and recommendations to shape new measures governing energy markets.

In REScoop.eu's vision of the energy market, active regulation is, on the one hand, necessary: "The government will need to act more strictly as a regulator of the tasks assigned to the market at European level such as the production and supply of electricity and gas. They also need to create more space for business forms such as REScoops that democratise energy production" (Vansintjan 2015, 66). The government's role is to reshape market boundaries to bring REScoops into the energy market. On the other hand, the government should not itself get involved in energy production. "It is not recommended that governments themselves (directly or indirectly) invest in commercial energy production. After all, public producers also have every reason to sell their electricity on the market at the highest possible prices... . When governments, even if it concerns different agencies, set themselves up as judge and jury, the danger of conflicts of interest is real. This can undermine the confidence of citizens in government" (66). For REScoop.eu, government is an object of public distrust rather than an agent of public will, and given this adversarial view it concludes that citizens will have more control and be better served by becoming market actors themselves.⁷ This is why REScoop.eu does not distinguish between the private

and public monopolies that came to dominate European energy supply after World War II (22). At the same time, REScoop.eu sees the increasing influence of REScoops as a result of market forces that have overcome the remaining forms of these monopolies. Although there were some tensions between the liberalization of the European energy market and REScoops, overall, "thanks to liberalization, citizens can take a large part of the renewable energy market" (54). This approach fits well with the neoliberal model of how government and markets should interact: government does not make energy supply a direct object of control but rather shapes a market that is responsible for producing the correct energy supply. REScoop.eu does not push for government policies that would actively limit fossil fuel energy. Rather, its case is that given cheaper new technologies and crises in existing forms of centralized fossil fuel and nuclear generation, market forces will favor REScoops as a more efficient and cheaper energy supply (23–36).

The neoliberal approach to state intervention can be seen in REScoop.eu's advocacy document for how governments operating in the European context should support energy communities. It emphasizes that state interventions need to be made "without unduly distorting competition" (REScoop.eu 2021b, 5). Rather, its vision of state intervention extends the boundaries of the market, even drawing on the same "framework" image as the German neoliberals. In this case, the goal is an enabling framework that will make REScoops competitive with established actors in the electricity market. The policy proposals take a number of forms, but they are centered on supporting REScoop access to the market by including them in the category of "community projects" (2). This entails both advantages and restrictions. For example, to qualify the project would have to be at least 51% owned by the REScoop and have at least 51% of the profits returned to it, which would limit some forms of investment and ownership. At the same time, these REScoops should have reduced bureaucratic burdens and receive small grants to get them off the ground (2–3). To ensure that such enterprises truly serve the community, they should also have size limitations and undergo additional evaluation procedures. In the end, the goal of this policy is to reshape the market such that more community-level renewable energy enterprises are included within it.

The main strategy of REScoop.eu is the expansion of the number of enterprises in the European energy market. Deploying the same model of empowerment as the EU, it argues for putting citizens at the center of the energy transition by moving from an energy market "characterized by centralized generation and ownership" to a decentralized "energy democracy" (Creupelandt et al. 2016, 1). This is achieved by, for example, expanding the market framework to establish a legal foundation for REScoops through codifying definitions like "energy prosumer." The importance of this term is of particular interest because it transforms passive consumption into an active form of enterprise in which citizens also produce energy to be sold, either on their own or through participation in an energy

⁷ The debate around public control of renewable energy is beyond the scope of this article. Even Naomi Klein who argues for a strong role for the state in the energy transition (2020) points to several problems (2015). Andreas Malm makes a more forceful case for the role of the state in this respect (2021). Though uniquely situated, Norway provides an interesting case, with 98% of electricity production coming from renewables and 90% of electricity production capacity under public ownership, according to the government's energy facts website. For an analysis of local public ownership as an alternative to the market in the energy sector, see Cumbers and Traill (2021). For a related discussion, see footnote 5.

community. These “communities” are defined by their entrepreneurial nature. “What differentiates REScoops from community groups is the entrepreneurial and economic dimension that involves raising capital, creating and managing an enterprise (typically a cooperative), and competing in the market” (Huybrechts, Creupelandt, and Vansintjan 2018, 847). In addition to expanding the number of small enterprises, REScoop.eu also seeks to expand competition. Overcoming subsidies and barriers in the market that favor large energy players enables “REScoops to compete on equal grounds” (851). Thus, there is an overall increase in competition between a greatly increased number of enterprises. REScoop.eu claims that this will facilitate the achievement of environmental goals and those of the European Green Deal in particular (REScoop.eu 2021a, 2). For REScoop.eu, the environment is an object to be mediated and regulated by the market.

Then there is the question of growth. Can REScoops be considered real market enterprises given that their primary goal cannot be profit? First, this does not mean that they do not produce profits, only that the profits are limited. This is not a problem because “the members expect only a moderate financial gain on their investment” (Vansintjan 2015, 67). More significantly, degrowth researchers who have investigated the potential of renewable energy communities to work toward sustainable degrowth have come up with mixed results from cases in Spain, Italy, Germany, and Wales (Capellán-Pérez, Celador, and Teres-Zubiaga 2016; Kunze and Becker 2015; Rommel et al. 2018). Indeed, “within a growth paradigm, REScoops may simply add new energy generation to the mix, without transforming it” (Capellán-Pérez, Celador, and Teres-Zubiaga 2016, 1). Although REScoops have some potential in their organizational form to break out of the growth model, currently they are organized to promote it.

The empowerment of citizens is at the heart of REScoop.eu’s activities. Through ownership of the local power supply, citizens gain control over how energy is produced, the profits of that energy production, and the ability to keep money in the local economy. At the same time, the notions of citizenship and democracy promoted by REScoop.eu are economic in the sense that what counts as an empowered citizen democratically participating is really a form of enterprise management and market participation. These citizens have little use for politics or government once the enabling framework is set up that allows them to compete in the energy market. Thus, the empowerment produced needs to be understood in the context of the constraints of the market and the compulsions of entrepreneurship. Though REScoop.eu works toward increasing the supply of renewable energy, the empowerment offered in this model gives little control over actual environmental outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The European Union is complex, and approaches vary widely across it, from the EU to member states, academic analyses to bureaucratic implementation, and

local energy projects to activists. I have provided a cross section of this complex set of interactions by examining a few major sites across the knowledge, policies, and practices that are giving form to the European renewable energy transition. This has demonstrated the influence of neoliberalism on that transition, the citizen empowerment it seeks to create, and the environmental crises to which it responds. From this, some conclusions can be drawn.

First, the European renewable energy transition does provide some empowerment. For example, securing rights to produce and share renewable energy is critical when fossil fuel interests remain powerful, exemplified by several American states implementing restrictions on these activities. But in the form these rights take, European citizens become enterprises, energy democracy becomes market participation, and their collective political agency becomes market competition. This dynamic was highlighted by Foucault when he said that “liberal practice is an always different and mobile problematic relationship between the production of freedom and that which in the production of freedom risks limiting and destroying it” (2008, 63–4). The empowerment created is bounded by the conditions of the neoliberal framework structuring the transition, suggesting a degree of capture that surpasses the beneficial aspects.

Second, although it remains to be seen what the ultimate environmental effect will be, it does not look promising. The energy transition places new burdens on European citizens who must research, organize, fund, and build much of the local energy production infrastructure themselves from the ground up. They must become enterprises to power their homes, constantly monitoring new technologies, changing energy prices, and so on. The results could range from fatigue to a false sense of action on environmental crises like climate change. At the same time, in the dilution of citizenship they move further away from active control of government and toward the mediation of environmental politics by market mechanisms. Thus, it is not surprising that none of the actors examined here advocates more concrete government measures to ensure that greenhouse gas emissions reductions are achieved. This may be a critical failing given the scale and urgency of climate change.

Third, the European renewable energy transition exemplifies a shift in political control of the environment. Bruno Latour has analyzed the ways economics shapes affective life to produce a sense that the security of the market is more important and even more real than the security of the planet (2014). The European energy transition is turning that sense of the world into a matter of law. Science has played a critical role in politicizing ecology in the West (Guha 2000; Latour 2004). At the same time, it can also serve the projects of capitalism and the state in “totalizing” ways that “might erase discretionary space accorded to the lived, the local, and the living aspects of everyday life” (Luke 2011, 107). Nonetheless, the critical use of science remains significant for guiding political action, given that it still might have enough truth value to outweigh

the influence of growth imperatives. But this critical role is undermined as the neoliberalization of environmental policy turns the market into the site of truth production for environmental governance. Even leftist researchers working on environmentalism such as Hajer and environmentalists like REScoop.eu have adopted, seemingly without noticing, a market-based vision of what constitutes environmental action. The result is that making policies that reshape society and the economy based on environmental goals will be increasingly difficult and citizens will be obliged to make their case on economic foundations. Indeed, they will want to do so, believing both that the market is more powerful than politics and that it is a more accurate way of determining what society's relation to the environment should be. If market forces and the demands of growth are incompatible with averting catastrophic climate change, this form of capture critically disempowers citizens, as those likely to foment alternatives become adherents to the most dangerous social drivers of climate change. This, then, is the most significant dimension of capture, and its success with respect to the European renewable energy transition raises concern of its spread to other environmental issues as well.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The comments of the anonymous reviewers substantially improved the quality of this article.

FUNDING STATEMENT

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement N°95304.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

REFERENCES

- Appunn, Kerstine. 2019. "Germany's Climate Obligations under the EU Effort Sharing Scheme." *Clean Energy Wire*. May 6. <https://www.cleanenergywire.org/factsheets/germanys-climate-obligations-under-eu-effort-sharing-scheme>.
- Appunn, Kerstine. 2021. "Understanding the European Union's Energy Trading System." *Clean Energy Wire*. July 20. <https://www.cleanenergywire.org/factsheets/understanding-european-unions-emissions-trading-system>.
- Audier, Serge, and Michael C. Behrent. 2015. "Neoliberalism through Foucault's Eyes." *History and Theory* 54 (3): 404–18.
- Behrent, Michael C., and Daniel Zamora eds. 2016. *Foucault and Neoliberalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Boyer, Dominic. 2019. *Energopolitics: Wind and Power in the Anthropocene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Brisbois, Marie Claire. 2019. "Powershifts: A Framework for Assessing the Growing Impact of Decentralized Ownership of Energy Transitions on Political Decision-Making." *Energy Research & Social Science* 50 (April): 151–61.
- Bryant, Scott T., Karla Straker, and Cara Wrigley. 2019. "The Discourses of Power-Governmental Approaches to Business Models in the Renewable Energy Transition." *Energy Policy* 130 (July): 41–59.
- Bues, Andrea, and Ludger Gailing. 2016. "Energy Transitions and Power: Between Governmentality and Depoliticization." In *Conceptualizing Germany's Energy Transition*, eds. Ludger Gailing and Timothy Moss, 69–91. London: Palgrave Pivot.
- Burke, Matthew J., and Jennie C. Stephens. 2018. "Political Power and Renewable Energy Futures: A Critical Review." *Energy Research & Social Science* 35 (January): 78–93.
- Capellán-Pérez, Iñigo, Álvaro Celador, and Jon Teres-Zubiaga. 2016. "Assessment of the Potential of Renewable Energy Sources Cooperatives (REScoops) in Spain towards Sustainable Degrowth." Paper presented at the 5th International Degrowth Conference, Budapest, August 2016.
- Creupelandt, Daan, Dirk Vansintjan, Stan d'Herbemont, Albert Ferrari, Maëlle Guillou, Gijsbert Huijink, Andreas Wieg, and Mark Luntley. 2016. "Advocacy Document: Putting Citizens at the Core of the Energy Union." REScoop. July 18. <https://www.rescoop.eu/toolbox/putting-citizens-at-the-core-of-the-energy-union>.
- Cumbers, Andrew, and Helen Traill. 2021. "Public Ownership in the Pursuit of Economic Democracy in a Post-Neoliberal Order." In *Economic Policies for a Post-Neoliberal World*, eds. Philip Arestis and Malcolm Sawyer, 225–68. Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dean, Mitchell, and Daniel Zamora. 2021. *The Last Man Takes LSD: Foucault and the End of Revolution*. London: Verso.
- Dryzek, John S. 2022. *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*, 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dryzek, John S., Richard B. Norgaard, and David Schlosberg. 2013. *Climate-Challenged Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- European Commission. 2019a. "Clean Energy for all Europeans". Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2833/21366>.
- European Commission. 2019b. "New Rules for Europe's Electricity Market." Last updated April 16, 2019. https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/default/files/documents/electricity_market_factsheet.pdf.
- European Commission. 2021. "Electricity Market Design." Last modified May 20, 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/markets-and-consumers/market-legislation/electricity-market-design_en.
- European Commission. n.d. "Progress Made in Cutting Emissions." https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/progress_en#tab-0-0.
- European Parliament and Council. 2018. Directive 2018/2001, On the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources (recast). December 11, 2018. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018L2001>.
- European Parliament. 2019. "Communication on Achieving a 15% Electricity Interconnection Target." November 20. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-resilient-energy-union-with-a-climate-change-policy/file-communication-on-achieving-a-15-electricity-interconnection-target>.
- Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage.
- Foucault, Michel. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics*, trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Picador.
- Foucault, Michel. 2010. *The Government of Self and Others*, trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gaventa, John. 1980. *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gillard, Ross, Andrew Gouldson, Jouni Paavola, and James Van Alstine. 2017. "Can National Policy Blockages Accelerate the Development of Polycentric Governance? Evidence from Climate Change Policy in the United Kingdom." *Global Environmental Change* 45 (July): 174–82.

- Goetz, Anne Marie. 2001. *Women Development Workers: Implementing Rural Credit Programmes in Bangladesh*. London: Sage Publications.
- Goetz, Anne Marie. 2008. *Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability*. New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women.
- Guha, Ramachandra. 2000. *Environmentalism: A Global History*. New York City: Longman.
- Haas, Tobias. 2019. "Comparing Energy Transitions in Germany and Spain Using a Political Economy Perspective." *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* 31 (June): 200–10.
- Hajer, Maarten. 1995. *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hajer, Maarten A. 2011. *The Energetic Society: In Search of a Governance Philosophy for a Clean Economy*. The Hague: PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency.
- Hajer, Maarten, Måns Nilsson, Kate Raworth, Peter Bakker, Frans Berkhout, Yvo De Boer, Johan Rockström, Kathrin Ludwig, and Marcel Kok. 2015. "Beyond Cockpit-ISM: Four Insights to Enhance the Transformative Potential of the Sustainable Development Goals." *Sustainability* 7 (2): 1651–60.
- Huber, Matthew. 2013. *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Huybrechts, Benjamin, Daan Creupelandt, and Dirk Vansintjan. 2018. "Networking Renewable Energy Cooperatives—The Experience of the European Federation REScoop.eu." In *Handbuch Energiewende und Partizipation*, eds. Lars Holstenkamp and Jörg Radtke, 847–58. Wiesbaden, DE: Springer.
- Huybrechts, Benjamin, and Sybille Mertens. 2014. "The Relevance of the Cooperative Model in the Field of Renewable Energy." *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics* 85 (2): 193–212.
- Isailović, Ivana. 2021. "The European Green Deal: A Transformative Mirage?" *Law and Political Economy Project Blog* (blog). April 27. <https://lpeproject.org/blog/the-european-green-deal-a-transformative-mirage/>.
- Jacotine, Keshia. 2017. "The Split in Neoliberalism on Brexit and the EU." *SPEri Blog* (blog), Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute. June 21. <https://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2017/06/21/the-split-in-neoliberalism-on-brexit-and-the-eu/>.
- Kabeer, Naila. 1999. "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment." *Development and Change* 30 (3): 435–64.
- Kabeer, Naila. 2005. "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal." *Gender and Development* 13 (1): 13–24.
- Kabeer, Naila. 2020. "Three Faces of Agency in Feminist Economics: Capabilities, Empowerment and Citizenship." In *The Routledge Handbook of Feminist Economics*, eds. Günseli Berik and Ebru Kongar, 99–107. New York: Routledge.
- Klein, Naomi. 2015. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Klein, Naomi. 2020. *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal*. London: Penguin.
- Kunze, Conrad, and Sören Becker. 2015. "Collective Ownership in Renewable Energy and Opportunities for Sustainable Degrowth." *Sustainability Science* 10 (July): 425–37.
- Latour, Bruno. 2004. *The Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2014. "On Some of the Affects of Capitalism." Lecture given at the Royal Academy, Copenhagen, February 26, 2014. <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/136-AFFECTS-OF-K-COPENHAGUE.pdf>.
- Lennon, Breffní, Niall Dunphy, Christine Gaffney, Alexandra Revez, Gerard Mullally, and Paul O'Connor. 2020. "Citizen or Consumer? Reconsidering Energy Citizenship." *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning* 22 (2): 184–97.
- Luke, Timothy W. 1995. "On Environmentalism: Geo-Power and Eco-Knowledge in the Discourses of Contemporary Environmentalism." *Cultural Critique* 31 (Autumn): 57–81.
- Luke, Timothy W. 1999. "Environmentality as Green Governmentality." In *Discourses of the Environment*, ed. Eric Daurier, 121–51. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Luke, Timothy W. 2005. "Neither Sustainable nor Development: Reconsidering Sustainability in Development." *Sustainable Development* 13 (4): 228–38.
- Luke, Timothy W. 2011. "Environmentality." In *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, eds. John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Norgaard, and David Schlosberg, 96–109. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Malm, Andreas. 2021. *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Verso.
- Meeus, Leonardo, and Athir Nouicer. 2018. "The EU Clean Energy Package" Technical Report. Florence: European University Institute. <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/57264>.
- Mitchell, Timothy. 2009. "Carbon Democracy." *Economy and Society* 38 (3): 399–432.
- Mitchell, Timothy. 2013. *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*. New York: Verso.
- Nouicer, Athir, Anne-Marie Kehoe, Jana Nysten, Dörte Fouquet, Leigh Hancher, and Leonardo Meeus. 2020. "The EU Clean Energy Package". Technical Report. Florence: European University Institute. <https://hdl.handle.net/1814/68899>.
- Moore, Jason W. 2015. *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. New York: Verso.
- Platform. 2015. "Energy beyond Neoliberalism: A New Energy Settlement Will Be an Important Part of the Transition from Neoliberalism." *Soundings* 59: 96–114.
- Prügl, Elisabeth. 2015. "Neoliberalising Feminism." *New Political Economy* 20 (4): 614–31.
- Prügl, Elisabeth. 2017. "Neoliberalism with a Feminist Face: Crafting a new Hegemony at the World Bank." *Feminist Economics* 23 (1): 30–53.
- REScoop.eu. 2021a. "Renewable Energy Communities: Why They Deserve Support & How the CEEAG Can Help." July 14. <https://www.rescoop.eu/toolbox/renewable-energy-communities-why-they-deserve-support-how-the-guidelines-on-state-aid-for-climate-environmental-protection-and-energy-can-help>.
- REScoop.eu. 2021b. "What Member States Should Know When Designing Support Schemes for Energy Communities: The Example of Ireland." June 28. <https://www.rescoop.eu/toolbox/what-member-states-should-know-when-designing-support-schemes-for-energy-communities-the-example-of-ireland>.
- Rommel, Jens, Jörg Radtke, Gerrit von Jorck, Franziska Mey, and Özgür Yildiz. 2018. "Community Renewable Energy at a Crossroads: A Think Piece on Degrowth, Technology, and the Democratization of the German Energy System." *Journal of Cleaner Production* 197 (October): 1746–53.
- Rottenberg, Catherine. 2014. "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism." *Cultural Studies* 28 (3): 418–37.
- Rottenberg, Catherine. 2018. *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rutherford, Stephanie. 2007. "Green Governmentality: Insights and Opportunities in the Study of Nature's Rule." *Progress in Human Geography* 31 (3): 291–307.
- Schwarz, Lucas. 2020. "Empowered but Powerless? Reassessing the Citizens' Power Dynamics of the German Energy Transition." *Energy Research & Social Science* 63 (May): article 101405.
- SCORE, REScoop, PROSEU, Community Power, Renewable Networking Platform, and European Renewable Energies Federation. 2020. "Citizen Energy: Making It Real." November 17. https://www.score-h2020.eu/fileadmin/score/documents/Workshop_on_Citizen_Energy_and_CEP_Transposition_-_17_XI_2020.pdf.
- Soneryd, Linda, and Ylva Uggla. 2017. "Green Governmentality, Responsibilization, and Resistance: International Engos' Issue Framings of Future Energy Supply and Climate Change Mitigation." *Socijalna Ekologija* 26 (3): 87–104.
- Sovacool, Benjamin K. 2011. "An International Comparison of Four Polycentric Approaches to Climate and Energy Governance." *Energy Policy* 39 (6): 3832–44.
- Swyngedouw, Erik. 2005. "Governance Innovation and the Citizen: The Janus Face of Governance-beyond-the-State." *Urban Studies* 42 (11): 1991–2006.
- Szeman, Imre. 2014. "Conclusion: On Energopolitics." *Anthropological Quarterly* 87 (2): 453–64.
- Vansintjan, Dirk. 2015. *The Energy Transition to Energy Democracy*. Antwerp, BE: De Wrikket.