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Daniele Conversi and Mark Friis Hau

ABSTRACT
Climate change is arguably the single most important political issue in the world today. As yet, however, there has been little research on the relationship between climate change and nationalism. In this contribution we investigate the possible existence of a ‘green nationalism’ among progressive and social democratic sub-state nationalist parties in minority nations. We identify an uncharted rhetorical and ideological continuity between how climate issues are perceived and championed among minority nations across time. This is a clear instance of ‘frame bridging’, where seemingly disparate policy elements are combined and reinforce one another. We show how sub-state political actors actively seek to use this link with climate-related environmental issues to bridge policy issues. We conclude by cautioning that it is unclear whether this sub-state ‘green nationalism’ might survive an ascent to statehood, in which state-building and other forms of realpolitik might trump and eclipse environmental concerns.

KEYWORDS Climate change; frame analysis; green nationalism; regionalism; ethnopolitics; political parties

Introduction
Now seen as the greatest threat ever faced by humankind, climate change has become one of the driving issues in contemporary politics. In political science, a rapidly expanding body of literature has emerged on the ‘green state’ (Hildingsson et al. 2019), the ‘environmental state’ (Duit 2016, Duit et al. 2016, Sommerer et al. 2016, Van Tatenhove 2016, Hausknost 2020) and ‘environmental governance’ (Jahn 2014), alongside extensive research on both global (Chasek et al. 2018) and local (Rootes 2007, Pellizzoni 2011) environmental politics and policy.

However, scholars of environmental politics have paid less attention to how the ideology and practice of modern nationalism has shaped and informed the nation state. Nationalism has been identified as the dominant ideology and political movement of the modern era and, as such, it has
deeply shaped governmental policies (Conversi 2012, 2014, Malešević 2019). Ernest Gellner (1983) argued that nationalism is a direct consequence of – and unthinkable without – industrialization, while Liah Greenfeld (2001) goes so far as arguing that capitalist modernity itself is inseparable from nationalism. Nationalism’s impact is, accordingly, all-pervasive in contemporary politics – hence it also affects the politics of, and attitudes towards, climate change. The relationship between climate change and nationalism therefore deserves urgent consideration.

We deal here with a specific form of nationalism, namely sub-state nationalism, that is not attached to, or embodied in, a nation-state recognized as a sovereign entity by the international system. Sub-state nationalist movements and parties define themselves as representing ‘nations without a state’ (Guibernau 2013a), ‘stateless nations’ (Keating 2001, Friend 2012) or simply ‘minority nations’ (Keating 2001). Ideologically, they span the political spectrum from the far left to the far right, but the most significant grouping in the European Union (EU) is the left-leaning, social-democratic European Free Alliance (EFA) to which the parties mentioned here belong. The selected cases are limited to member parties of EFA, which is part of the European Parliament Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA), a left-leaning environmentalist group. At the EU level, these parties already combine social and ecological issues within green platforms, are strongly ‘Europhile’ (Jolly 2007) and define themselves as left or centre-left.1

Recently, a wealth of research has been published on the relationship between various shades of the right (including neoconservatism, populism and the far right) and multiple environmental issues. This relationship has been studied in various guises and combinations: neo-conservatism and climate change (Dunlap and Jacques 2013, Turner and Isenberg 2018, Hess and Renner 2019, Krange et al. 2019), the far right and climate change (Forchtner 2019) and populism and climate change (Forchtner and Kolvraa 2015) – with specific studies devoted to the Tea Party and white nationalism’s links with the US fossil fuels industry and the financing of massive denial campaigns (Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016, Hertel-Fernandez et al. 2018, Taylor and Bernstein 2019). Many of the above studies focus on the well-known problem of climate denial within the right (Collomb 2014, Hultman et al. 2019, Taylor and Bernstein 2019, Cook 2020, Czarneck et al. 2021).

However, despite the proliferation of studies on far-right nationalism, scholars working within the broader area of nationalism studies have devoted little research to the link between other forms of nationalism and climate change. As of the end of 2019, we could not identify a single article touching on the complex relationship between nationalism and climate change in top-ranking nationalism studies journals.2 As the study of nationalism encompasses a much broader field than far-right, conservative or populist nationalism, we begin by underscoring the scarcity of studies linking nationalist actors
(governments, parties and social movements) with climate change awareness and policies. Nationalism remains a crucial area of study because it pervades the political sphere as well as everyday life (Goode et al. 2020).

Nationalism is essentially a process of boundary building (Conversi 1995, Wimmer 2008). As such, we can presume that it is ill-equipped to address a vital challenge like climate change, which knows no boundaries. This makes this global phenomenon difficult to tackle from within this Weltanschauung (Conversi 2020).

Here we focus on a specific variety of nationalism: we identify a form of ‘green nationalism’ as a largely understudied variety of mobilization, based on coherent and persistent environmental action. It springs from pre-existing attitudes of environmental protection of the national territory.

Emerging research on ‘national sustainabilities’ (Jones and Ross 2016) largely refers to the regional dimension of nationhood. This research nevertheless has not sufficiently connected with the broader dimensions of either nationalism or climate change. More long-standing research on regionally-based environmental policies has sporadically related non-state nationalism with climate change awareness and pro-climate action, either theoretically, comparatively or locally as case studies (Elliott and Breslin 2011, Galarraga et al. 2011, Van Den Brande et al. 2011).

We argue that there is an unexplored continuity in how environmental issues are perceived and championed among minority nations across time. In their contemporary emphasis on climate-friendly policies and initiatives, sub-state nationalist parties build on earlier ideas of national territory and landscape conservation. This ‘green nationalism’ constitutes a particularly successful instance of frame bridging (Snow et al. 1986), where political actors seek to discursively link ideology-congruent but structurally unconnected issues, in this case self-determination and environmentalism.

**Methodology: environmental frame bridging in sub-state nationalist parties**

We examine the claims, positions and policies of selected minority nationalist parties that combine issues of autonomy and nationalism with environmentalism. We focus our analysis on the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), the two most salient examples of left-leaning minority nationalism in contemporary Europe – pro-independence governing parties with a high degree of autonomy capable of enacting specific environmental policies.

We have drawn on a variety of data sources: first, this includes a systematic literature review of academic writings on climate policy in minority nations to explore when and how minority nationalist parties use strategies that combine nationalism and green policies. Second, we also rely
on primary data, including a selection of campaign material such as manifestos, posters, policy briefs, and flyers collected during ethnographic fieldwork in Scotland and Catalonia between 2011–2018 (more extensively available in Hau 2019). For earlier sources, we examined both parliamentary archives such as the Butlletí de la Generalitat de Catalunya and the parties’ own archives, looking specifically at green policies over the past 40 years (in the case of Catalonia, dating back to 1932). We also utilized party manifestos drawn from the Manifesto Project Database (1979 and 2004–2019 for ERC and 1992–2019 for the SNP), and assessed relevant parliamentary bill proposals surrounding environmental, climate, and green policies, retrieved through the official websites of devolved parliaments and assemblies. We further rely on external figures, policy documents, OECD reports and newspaper articles to politically contextualize the analysis.

We restrict our analysis to ‘progressive’ minority nationalist parties, that is, those gravitating around the left and centre-left of the political spectrum that control or share power within sub-state territories and regions. These are substantially different from right-wing nationalist movements, whose conflictive links with environmental politics are best analysed elsewhere. The Europhile EFA alliance is distinguished from the far-right Eurosceptic and populist Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group (EFDD or EFD, 2014–2019) or the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF, 2015–2019), in which right-wing nationalist parties sat, including two right-wing minority nationalist and regionalist parties, the Vlaams Belang and the Lega Nord. Because of the differences between majority and minority nationalism and left-wing and right-wing nationalism, it is prudent to focus our attention on this particular EFA brand of ‘progressive’ minority nationalism (regionalism) in Europe.

We use the concept of ‘frame’ and ‘frame bridging’ to analyse the continuities and changes in the environmentalism of progressive minority nationalist parties. A frame identifies a social or political problem and a solution to be followed (Johnston and Noakes 2005, p. 5). There are therefore diagnostic, prognostic and motivational tasks involved in establishing frames, which act as interpretative structures (Reber and Berger 2005, p. 186). Here, we refer to the frames that minority nationalist parties use in order to communicate their policy platform and state their claims. For example, the SNP has recommended that the Scottish Highlands should be conserved and rewilded, and that further autonomy is needed in order to achieve this while the UK government in Westminster is unable or unwilling to address environmental issues in a comprehensive way. The SNP frames the political solution to the problem of preserving the Scottish environment as a further devolution of competences, attempting to link autonomy and environmentalism (see Nash 2021 for a recent example). This particular frame is characterized by a high degree of frame bridging: the linking of ‘ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding
a particular issue or problem’ (Snow et al. 1986, p. 467). Frame bridging is useful for parties that seek to link two or more frames that were previously unconnected, such as nationalism and environmentalism, in order to form a new frame, which we identify as ‘green nationalism’.

This bridging highlights a deliberate and strategic effort to link interests, ideas and policy issues in order to effect public policy shifts and bears some relation with climate change ‘bandwagoning’ (Jinnah 2011).

**Sub-state nationalism and climate action**

First, we highlight an important conceptual distinction: environmentalism is usually distinguished from ecologism (Devall 1991, Dobson 2012). As Andrew Dobson taught us, *environmentalism* and *ecologism* are two very different political animals and ideologies. While the first does not necessarily demand a new economic system, the second unquestionably does (Dobson 2012). The first can easily be appropriated by conservatives, while the latter demands more radical changes and establishes itself as a wholesale social alternative. The question is whether any movement which defines itself as nationalist can aspire to represent the growing spectrum of public opinion that finds itself closer to ecologist ideas and, at a time of devastating long-term environmental decline, considers conservationism or environmentalism as little more than a patina of ‘green sheen’ similar to the business practice of ‘greenwashing’ (Parguel et al. 2011, Bowen 2014).

Although there is a huge area of research that is beyond the scope covered here, it is useful to stress that a certain continuity exists between early twentieth-century conservationism, environmentalism, ecologism and contemporary climate action – all of which have different historical relationships with the territory, the concept of land and nationalism itself.

Despite a substantial shift from the conservationist or preservationist schemes of the 1970s to the full-spectrum policies needed to combat climate change in the 2020s, the underpinning rhetoric rests on continuity, fusing traditional nationalist tropes such as territory, soil and belonging with the progressive political stance of most contemporary autonomist and pro-independence movements.

Discontinuity is certainly also present: sub-state nationalist parties have widely changed since the last century. Thus, Scottish nationalism was initially concerned with exerting control over North Sea oil (Esman 1977), aligning itself with resource nationalism and *extractivism*, but later shifted its priorities. The same discontinuity is present, albeit in the opposite direction, within late twentieth-century Sardinian nationalism where concern with economic growth seems to have replaced the environment as a key issue (Pala 2016).
Overall, however, a common pattern has emerged in recent years vis-à-vis climate change. We explore principally Scotland and Catalonia with reference to other minority nationalist parties where climate change action appears in a sub-state nationalist context in various ways and through differing channels.

**Scotland**

A powerful example of sub-state climate action is the pioneering and trend-setting ‘Climate Change Strategy’ in both Wales and Scotland (Royles and McEwen 2015). In March 2012 the Scottish Parliament passed a unanimous motion strongly endorsing ‘the opportunity for Scotland to champion climate justice’ (Aitken et al. 2016). Moreover, in 2019, in a world-first, the SNP government declared a ‘climate emergency’ and passed the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 (more radical and substantial than the earlier UK government Climate Change Act 2008), praised by the UN as ‘an inspiring example of the level of ambition we need globally to achieve the Paris Agreement’ (Stando 2019a, 2019b). Surprisingly, a month earlier the party had voted against a proposal from the Scottish Green Party to declare a similar emergency (BBC 2019). While the SNP government may use climate change as a political tool, this does not preclude it from also enacting concrete steps. For instance, the Scottish Government has set a target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045 (see Figures 1 and 2), and, in 2012, established a Climate Justice Fund (Tokar 2014). Its investments in offshore wind farms meant that 90% of gross electricity consumption in Scotland came from renewable sources in 2019 (Scottish Renewables 2019).

When did this change occur? Was it a radical departure from previous attitudes and positions? The SNP appear to be reviving a Scottish tradition of Romantic enchantment with the countryside through popular and eco-friendly initiatives such as highland ‘rewilding’ (Brown et al. 2011). A recently published article in *Nature* recognized rewilding as a crucial solution in ecosystem restoration, hence in the promotion of biodiversity and the fight against climate change (Strassburg et al. 2020). We might say that the SNP’s previous focus on the protection of local landscapes and its romantic emphasis on the rural Highlands has turned from a concern with environmental conservation to that of broad-ranging climate action. The SNP’s proposal to ‘rewild’ the Scottish Highlands and its planting of 22 million trees combines traditional nationalist concerns for the homeland’s rivers, forests and mountains with more contemporary, climate-focused environmental policies (BtE 2019, Campsie 2019). In contrast, England missed its tree plantation target by more than 3,000 hectares (Weston 2019). The Scottish policies were indissociable from the devolution of powers that began in 1997: the executive agency Scottish Forestry (SF or *Coilltearachd na h-Alba*) was established by the Scottish Government on
Figure 1. Projected Scottish greenhouse gas emissions 2013–2027. Source: Scottish Government 2012, Statista 2018

Figure 2. Projected greenhouse gas emissions OECD 2010–2050. Source: OECD Environmental Outlook Baseline 2011
1 April 2019, after the devolution of forestry following the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018 (Scottish Parliament 2018, Van Der Jagt and Lawrence 2019).

Essentially, the emphasis has changed with substantial effects due to the shifts in frames that emphasize climate action over landscape protectionism: from protecting our environment to protecting our environment. The historic passage of the Climate Change Bill through the Scottish Parliament (23 May 2018) also testifies to this evolution. As Nash (2021) points out, the SNP framed this legislation not only as necessary in the face of climate change, but as an opportunity for Scotland. This is a clear case of sub-state actors tying environmental issues to self-determination through frame bridging, making climate action an element of nation building and ‘green nationalism’.

**Catalonia**

In Catalonia, the pro-independence ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, Catalan Republican Left) has proposed significant environmental laws in the past decade. Efforts include a bill recently approved by the Catalan Parliament, Llei 16/2017, del canvi climatic (DOGC 2017). Although the Catalán ‘Climate Emergency Bill’ was similar to the aforementioned Scottish legislation, it went further, banning fracking and planning a closure of all nuclear facilities by 2027 and a reduction in CO₂ emissions of 27% at a minimum by 2030. However, while the neo-conservative PP (Partido Popular) was still in power in Madrid, the Supreme Court (SC, Tribunal Supremo), the highest court in Spain, vetoed these legal reforms. The Court ruled that such measures were ‘unconstitutional’ as they exceeded the competences normally held by Autonomous Communities according to the 1978 Spanish Constitution.

In this way, global environmental concerns have become linked to territorial politics, with the Catalan pro-independence parties’ green agenda being contested by the Spanish judiciary on territorial grounds with little regard for the actual guarantees of environmental and health protection. Despite this, or perhaps precisely because of its territorial importance, the ERC has been at the forefront of climate action with some prescience on ecological issues. Recently, it has also supported ‘Fridays for Future’ (Divendres pel futur) in a session of the Catalan Parliament (as Vaga Escolar pel Clima) (TV3 2019).

Furthermore, according to the NGO Climate Action Network (CAN 2019), ERC representatives in the European Parliament have overtaken Spain’s Green Party, Equo, in terms of pro-climate legislation votes, based on 21 voting plenaries on ecological, green or CO₂ reducing proposals between 2014 and 2019 (see Figure 3).
Frame bridging has been one of ERC’s crucial strategies for expanding its popular appeal. In this way, ERC has incorporated some of the key contemporary single issue movements: feminism, animal rights, gay rights, LGBT and, indeed, ecologism.

![Figure 3. Raking of Spanish political parties in the European parliament according to eco-friendly votes. Source: Climate Action Network 2019 and Ara.cat. Equo is the local Green Party and comes second after ERC (in coalition with other pro-independence parties). At the bottom of the list lies the neoconservative Popular Party.](image-url)
In many areas, ERC’s policies and discourses gravitate toward the left, with more radical environmental proposals than most other parties, including the regional section of the Green Party. Does this mean that Scottish and Catalan nationalists are ‘greener than Greens’? One should not forget that the ERC is first and foremost a pro-independence party, so that statehood remains its ultimate goal.

However, the party’s internal statutes cement the ERC’s eco-friendly stance: Article 2 states that the party is ‘a republican, democratic, feminist and non-dogmatic left-wing party whose references are the defence of human rights, citizenship rights, the rights of national communities and the environment’ (ERC 2020). Minority nationalist parties such as ERC link concern for the (national) environment with supranational values, such as human rights.

**Continuity and change in the environmentalism of stateless nations**

In the mid-nineteenth century, landscape and rural imagery were important elements of European nationalisms, including sub-state nationalism. This period marks the origin of the landscape archetypes and Romantic tropes that are still a feature of nationalism today (Nogué and Wilbrand 2018, p. 445). ‘Pride’ in the Catalan (rural) landscape was an important facet of the vindication of a cultural, social and political Catalan identity in constant confrontation with the majoritarian Spanish identity. By the 1930s, minority nationalism had become a leading political force in Catalonia. The ERC gained an absolute majority in the Catalan regional parliament in 1932. One of the first points of order for ERC’s pro-independence government was, perhaps surprisingly, the establishment of a Catalan forestry service, *el Servei Forestal de la Generalitat de Catalunya*, in 1932 (BGC 1932). The purpose was ‘to conserve and improve Catalonia’s forest wealth, the creation of natural parks, and the conservation and service of hunting grounds and fishing lots’ (Nogué and Wilbrand 2018, p. 445). In this narrative, natural resources such as forests, rivers and parks are a *national* concern, pertaining to all inhabitants of the (national) territory, rather than merely the concern of local landlords and homeowners. A similar process of ‘scenic nationalism’ occurred in the US with the establishment of National Parks (rather than natural parks) as a way to foster popular appreciation of the magnificence and splendour of the nation’s scenery (Runte 2010, Mitchell 2017).

Catalonia’s first minority nationalist government also intensified the (de) construction of the rural landscape by building up a system of irrigation canals (*regadius*) and wells (*pous*), which radically transformed both the landscape and the rural economy. ‘Reclaiming’ the land, seemingly at odds with a supposed ecological defence of the territory, was a recurrent practice
In Catalonia, this ‘landscape morphology’, or material formation and continuous shaping of the Catalan landscape, responded to a dual logic of two parallel initiatives: landscape alteration to improve the economy and landscape conservation in order to uphold national self-respect and gratification. This particular form of ‘green nation building’ appears to have remained a hallmark of Catalan nationalism, more so than its Spanish equivalent. In fact, it reached its height during the ERC’s tenure in government and was discontinued under the Francoist dictatorship following the Spanish Civil War (Paül I Carril 2004, p. 42) – particularly when policies of desarrollismo (‘developmentalism’ or ‘growthism’) prevailed after 1959 (Conversi 1997, p. 219).

The connection between land and people is a common cliché in nationalist discourse and has been revived since at least the 1970s. The ERC has consistently supported green energy and opposed the expansion of nuclear power plants in Catalonia, often siding with the far-left and the Initiative for Catalonia Greens (Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds, ICV) on this issue (Gomà and Subirats 2001, p. 111). The frame bridging of green policies and pro-independence in Catalonia is perhaps a form of environmental nation building, where Catalan political actors seek to connect first issues of preservation and, later, more contemporary green policies, such as renewables, to national identity and emancipation. We find the reason for this successful frame bridging in the ERC’s understanding of itself as a progressive party (Hau 2019), but also in its efforts to distinguish its nationalist agenda from Spanish nationalism. For example, the Catalonia government became one of the first regions to implement the European Landscape Convention without a national directive in place, getting a head start on the Spanish government in this area (Nogué and Wilbrand 2018, p. 443).

Sometimes, the frame bridging between ecological and autonomy issues can be extended to include other topics, as was the case during the SNP’s ‘Remain’ campaign during the 2016 UK referendum to leave the EU, known colloquially as ‘Brexit’. Of the eight main themes chosen for the SNP’s official Remain flyer (SNP 2016), two were ecologically oriented: ‘Tackling Climate Change’ and ‘Supporting Scottish Farmers’. The first highlights the importance of the EU in helping Scotland to tackle climate change; the second emphasizes EU funding for building ‘sustainable rural communities’ in Scotland. During the campaign, the SNP likewise used images of the Scottish Highlands covered with wind turbines to evoke a link between (national) territory and climate-friendly policies.

The SNP Remain campaign attempted to use climate policies in an attempt to bolster support for the EU. This is another case of minority
nationalist frame bridging, but this time with three separate issues: autonomy/minority nationalism, green–ecological policies and support for the EU. The SNP’s apparently instrumental use of the EU is characteristic of the party’s Euro engagement (see Hau 2016), and here it is used in synergy with support for climate protection.

The SNP’s frame bridging also demonstrates the current stage in the evolution of the minority nationalist party family’s engagement with environmental issues. From a concern with the local environment linked to national industry and local jobs in the 1930s, to a deeper concern with conservation and protection of the local environment against large-scale national projects or external capital interests in the 1970s, minority nationalist campaigns and proclamations on the environment today deal with the issues of renewable energy, climate change and green policies more widely. In this way, we can see how the frame bridging has continued, but with a concern for the local environment giving way to a more modern, green policy position.

This frame bridging also appears in other European minority nationalisms. According to De La Calle and Fazi (2010, p. 419), the Corsican nationalist movement was the first to introduce ‘postmaterialist’ issues – including the protection of the environment – in the island’s political agenda, and this attracted many young voters to nationalism (See François Alfonsi’s biography: Alfonsi 2020).

Similarly, in Galicia, the BNG (Bloque Nacionalista Galego, Galician Nationalist Bloc) continues to promote environmentally friendly and climate conscious agendas. The BNG has proposed a Galician law against the climate crisis, including the protection of the landscape and ecosystems while addressing issues of mobility, waste, energy, mining and water management (Casal-Lodeiro 2019). The BNG has also called for the creation of a crisis cabinet at the regional level to act on the climate emergency (emerxencia climática) and to tackle the threat of invasive species as a problem of water management and loss of biodiversity (BNG 2019a, 2019b, Cidrás 2020).

Instead of simply promoting local conservationist concerns, EFA parties now campaign for sustainable energy production and climate-friendly policies in their regions and at the EU level. This contemporary frame bridging between autonomy/independence and environmental concerns has proven to be successful for many of these parties, providing a powerful instance of ‘green nationalism’.

The new focus on renewables can easily combine with earlier concerns for the local environment and the anti-nuclear position of most EFA parties. For example, the SNP still campaigns against the Trident UK nuclear submarine depot based at Clyde on the west coast of Scotland, in addition to its more contemporary support for renewables, forming a kind of political parallelism (Vinthagen et al. 2012, Brown 2017). This frame bridging allows minority
nationalist parties to symbolically link contemporary environmental action with earlier efforts.

Similarly, minority nationalist parties within EFA are situated at the centre-left of the political spectrum and have allied with the European Greens. It was thus predictable that they would take up green, left-wing stances in addition, rather than in opposition, to their original territorial demands. This is largely connected to the social-democratic core of many sub-state nationalist parties, as they have built alliances with environmental movements, green parties and other social movements (Keating and McCrone 2013).

**Future statehood: continuity or change?**

The situational, Janus-faced essence of nationalism makes it a difficult ally for single-issue, post-materialist and other social movements. Nevertheless, once independence is achieved, statehood produces its own electoral dynamics, distinct from sub-state mobilizations. We look at these issues next.

Not all non-state nationalisms are ‘green’, and others shift situationally or opportunistically from green issues to productivism, and vice versa (for the Icelandic case, see Jóhannesson 2005). For instance, the Sardinian Party of Action (Partito Sardo d’Azione, PSdA) has traditionally been defined as a centre-left party, voicing both environmental concerns and a desire to safeguard Sardinia’s traditional agro-pastoral economy (Hepburn 2009). However, it slowly moved to the centre-right, then further to the right by allying with the far-right Lega Nord in 2018, leading to its expulsion from the EFA. The PSdA changed its position from environmentalism to an obsession with industrialization (Pala 2016), and from a vaguely defined emphasis on the island’s territory to developmentalism and ‘growthism’. Political opportunism and the need to attract voters often play a role in autonomist parties’ support for green policies.

Second, are movements aspiring to political independence likely to continue pursuing green policies once statehood has been achieved? Past experiences seem to suggest that this may not be the case. For example, the experience of the former Soviet Union seems to indicate that, once independence has been obtained, former stateless nations can be quick to join the ranks of environmental offenders, or at least the rhetoric around environmental issues changes (see Podoba 1998; Schwartz 1999 for the Slovak and Latvia cases respectively). Studies of pre-1990 eco-nationalist movements in the Baltic republics, Russia and Ukraine show that anti-nuclear activism was instantly dropped once independence had been gained, and attention became entirely focussed on consolidating the newly achieved institution of statehood (Dawson 1996, Malloy 2009).
As Michael Keating observes, European integration has allowed autonomist movements to abandon maximalist claims to statehood and adopt a ‘post-sovereignist’ political position (Keating 2004, p. 369) – even though this may be debatable after the rise of Catalan secessionism (See also Cirulli 2019). Again, the question is whether such a non-ethnic, civic and post-sovereignist negotiated nationalism can be maintained in the event of statehood (for a deeper discussion, see Hau 2019). If we apply the classical distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism (See Smith 1998 p. 125–127 and 210–212), civic values and goals are often assumable within those of contemporary green movements. According to Hamilton (2002), the goals of ethnic nationalism are ultimately ‘incompatible with those of Green political actors’. Given its strong placement on the left of the political spectrum, green politics is intrinsically nearer to civic nationalism and generally less compatible with ethnic nationalism – even though soil-rooted, territorial aspects of green thinking can in principle be appropriated by an ethnically oriented right, or even the far right (Forchtner 2019).

While renowned historians such as Eric Hobsbawm (1990) have highlighted the reactionary essence of nationalism and its incapacity to confront contemporary social and environmental challenges, others, like Anthony D Smith (Smith 1996, 1998), emphasized multiple varieties and nuances of nationalism, including left, moderate, liberal or pluralistic – besides the distinction between state and sub-state nationalism.

In sum, there is no guarantee that ‘stateless nations’ qua aspiring ‘nation-states’ will remain permanent ‘allies’ in environmental transitional policies. Yet, at the same time, the overall record is one of increasing cooperation and collaboration, including participation in ‘inter-subnational’ networks, such as the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (nrg4SD) (Happaerts et al. 2010).

**Conclusions**

The threat of climate change is all-pervasive so that the lives of our children are necessarily going to be drastically different from ours. It is now clear that there is no global matrix capable of finding easy solutions to a problem so complex as to defy the universalizing basis of modernity as a global destiny.

Research on the relationship between climate-friendly initiatives in minority nations and regionalist parties is still in its gestational phase. No systematic study has been carried out linking climate change related green policies and sub-state nationalism (Conversi 2020). We have identified a particular linkage between earlier preservationist and more contemporary ecological positions and projects of autonomy or independence in Europe. This ‘green nationalism’ linkage appears to be relatively consistent over time, as nationalist actors construct rhetorical and ideological continuity between
sub-state nationalism’s long-standing focus on the protection of territory and contemporary climate-friendly policies. As we argue, some non-state nationalist parties, at least, particularly in Europe, seem not only to be immune from resource nationalism (Conversi 2020), but they also propose an environmentally focused agenda to advance social transformation and radically address the climate crisis.

Climate change mitigation can only progress if policies are multilaterally coordinated throughout all levels of governance. Sub-state governments are called upon to put into practice a wide range of policy measures, from expanding public transport infrastructure to limiting the use of private cars, or tackling multiple types of pollution (Hausknost 2014).

Looking at influential minority nationalist actors such as the ERC and the SNP showcases how these parties engage in frame bridging between green and other policies – for example, the SNP’s use of environmental concerns to argue against Brexit. Similarly, key minority nationalist actors are able to form coherence and continuity with earlier policy positions on their (local) environment, by using frame bridging to connect more typically nationalist preservationism and modern climate change policies. It is not clear whether this sub-state ‘green nationalism’ would survive an ascent to statehood where realpolitik concerns might eclipse an environmental perspective. For now, we have looked at existing evidence that several minority nationalist movements have combined environmentalism with pro-autonomy or pro-independence platforms.

Finally, the broader context of some shifting trends in climate change policy should be considered. First, both environmental scholars and practitioners have become aware that nationalism remains a powerful force that cannot be ignored in climate action and negotiations: while stressing the need to continue exploring the possibility (and persistence) of new (and older) forms of human communities not based on putative ethno-national descent, some forms of accommodation with nationalist politics seem unavoidable. Second, as research continues to build on the increasingly cataclysmic consequence of inaction, with bleaker and bleaker scenarios appearing to shatter our academic tranquility, the need to rapidly build global networks and alliances under the catch-all notion of ‘survival cosmopolitanism’ cannot exclude a priori all forms of nationalism. The climate emergency and related crises are so broad and all-encompassing that nothing should be excluded a priori as we search for a way out of the catastrophe.

Notes

2. There was only a small number of mostly circumstantial (casual) mentions of climate change, according to the following distribution: Nations and
Nationalism: eight mentions (including a roundtable, book reviews and an introductory piece); Ethnopolitics: three mentions (one political theory article, two case studies); Nationalism and Ethnic Politics: three mentions (all case studies); Ethnicities: two mentions (both theoretical articles); Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism: two mentions (including an article dating back to 2009). We found no mention of the geo-historical concept of the Anthropocene, nor any of its more controversial derivates such as Capitalocene (Moore 2017) or similar neologisms, despite the fact that these have been introduced and debated in nearly all the social sciences.

3. For a wider discussion of frames, see Johnston and Noakes 2005.
4. For a discussion of how different political actors frame similar issues with regard to nationalism and climate change, see Jóhannesson 2005.
5. For a description of the previous links between Catalanism and environmentalism, see Marshall 1996.

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