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THE RISE OF ILLIBERAL PEACEBUILDING AND AUTHORITARIAN MODES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

HAROLD CHEUNG¹

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the world has witnessed the regression of the liberal model in post-conflict resolution. Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management (ACM) is the existing conceptual challenger to the liberal model; however, ACM has not fully captured the realities of authoritarian post-conflict governance. This paper aims to contribute to the ACM framework by addressing some of its major shortcomings. Through several historical and contemporary case studies, this paper suggests that weak authoritarian actors can obtain both material and discursive support from a strong international partner, thereby bolstering their capacity to govern and legitimizing their ruling status and controversial policies.

The liberal model of post-conflict resolution has fallen short of its architects' expectations. Cases of internationally brokered peace rose markedly in the 1990s, but has dropped quite significantly since the early 2000s, from eight cases in 2001 to one in 2010.² This number is particularly worrisome because it implies that parties involved in conflict are losing confidence in liberal institutions (e.g. peace treaties, international organizations). Despite these developments, international relations (IR) scholarship has not caught up with fluctuating political reality.

Peace and conflict studies tend to focus on the theorization of

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² Mimmi Kovacs and Isak Svensson, "The Return of Victories? The Growing Trend of Militancy in Ending Armed Conflicts" (paper prepared for the 7th General Conference of the European Consortium for Political Research, Sciences Po Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France, September 4-7, 2013), 4.

international liberal peacebuilding, which often describes the vertical intervention of international organizations like the United Nations in turbulent regions. Paris contends that “there seems to be no viable alternative to some version of liberal peacebuilding.”³ Though there is currently an academic consensus that international liberal peacebuilding is not operating effectively, there are no well-established academic frameworks that recognize authoritarian peacebuilding as a legitimate alternative.⁴ Oftentimes, hard cases of illiberal peacebuilding, such as those seen in Sri Lanka or Chechnya, are understood through simplistic frameworks that consider the cases through the lens of military victories. Present-day scholarship has not yet recognized the political reality that authoritarian peacebuilding cases around the world have sustained themselves long enough to qualify as post-conflict governance.

For instance, while Sri Lanka and Chechnya may be cases of military victories, understanding these two cases solely through this lens inherently obscures the reality that violence was only one of the many tools used by authoritarian actors in post-conflict peacebuilding. One key difference between authoritarian peacebuilding and state repression is that the former embodies more soft tactics, including discursive practices such as changing politically sensitive labels, and incentive-based economic policies that pacify aggrieved populations.⁵

Recognizing the aforementioned gap in scholarship, Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran developed a new conceptual framework called ACM.⁶ The framework not only considers the commonly-known hard authoritarian tactics of post-conflict management (e.g. torture, surveillance and mass arrests), but also emphasizes a range of soft tactics used by authoritarian actors in post-conflict management.⁷ The purpose of the framework is to provide a more holistic understanding of

³ Roland Paris, “Saving Liberal Peacebuilding,” *Review of International Studies* 36.2 (2010): 357, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510000057>.

⁴ David Lewis, John Heathershaw, and Nick Megoran, “Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 53.4 (2018): 487, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836718765902>.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 493, 497.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 486-87.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 487. One point to note is that the conceptual framework was initially derived from Central Eurasia, a region where many post-Soviet states are employing authoritarian practices to manage their own inter-ethnic conflicts and dissident voices. See Catherine Owen et al., eds., *Interrogating Illiberal Peace in Eurasia* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018), 1-3.

authoritarian post-conflict governance.

The primary aim of this paper is to further contribute to this new conceptual framework by addressing the existing research gaps of ACM. This paper contends that ACM (1) fails to differentiate illiberal domestic peacebuilding from illiberal international peacebuilding, and (2) fails to consider that not all authoritarian states possess sufficient state capacity to employ the three strategies of control outlined in the ACM framework (i.e., discursive practices, spatial practices, and political economy). This paper seeks to address these shortcomings through analyzing the case of Cuban intervention in Angola, which represents a historical example of international illiberal peacebuilding, as well as a few brief contemporary cases. Through proposing two new mechanisms of international peacebuilding, this paper seeks to show how the three strategies of ACM can be deployed at both an international level and by a weak authoritarian actor with the help of a strong international partner. Building off these insights, the secondary aim of this research is to provide policy implications for liberal actors in this difficult era of democratic backsliding.

LIBERAL PEACEBUILDING AND ILLIBERAL PEACEBUILDING

There are two dimensions of liberal peacebuilding: domestic liberal peacebuilding and international liberal peacebuilding. In the theoretical sense, liberal peacebuilding is fundamentally anchored by liberal ideas which are clearly outlined in the charter of the United Nations—one of the world's foremost liberal international institutions. The UN Charter states that it “[reaffirms] faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women of nations large and small.”⁸ The founders of the UN also emphasized the importance of adhering to international law by stating that it is essential for states “to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained.”⁹ Furthermore, liberal peacebuilding ultimately seeks to end discord by addressing the grievances of parties in conflict and implementing market reforms considered to effectively promote economic equality.¹⁰

⁸ United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, Preamble, ¶1, June 26, 1945, <https://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations>.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran, “Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian Modes of Conflict

The UN Charter summarizes the liberal ideals that underpin international liberal peacebuilding missions. In accordance with these principles, liberal actors often intervene in unstable regions through international institutions. However, such prescriptive vertical intervention is criticized for defying the principles of classical liberalism, as it rarely considers what solutions local populations desire. Instead, policymakers in these international institutions frequently and conveniently assume that the local populations in these regions desire international actors to impose structural reforms in their economic and political systems.¹¹

These presumptions, however, are not necessarily aligned with political reality. As noted by Séverine Autesserre, sometimes local populations do not prefer foreign intervention. For example, interviews conducted by Autesserre in the DRC show that “Congolese youth activists...would prefer outsiders to leave, because international peacebuilders get in the way of local people trying to hold their government accountable.”¹² Autesserre’s first-hand research reflects the problematic underside of the seemingly liberal mission that characterizes many international organizations. Such strategies struggle to solve any structural problems, as the vertical gestures of international organizations in conflicted regions seldom align with real-life situations in those regions, and might engender discontent among the local population. Moreover, vertically imposing democratic elections in regions where civic education and rule of law are lacking means that these elections would likely become fertile grounds for corruption. For example, the democratically elected governments of Afghanistan and post-2001 Iraq, two countries facing chronic corruption and bad governance, have not only failed to improve people’s livelihoods but may have worsened them.

Illiberal peacebuilding, on the other hand, defies many aspects of liberal peacebuilding. For instance, while actors involved in liberal peacebuilding concern themselves with the establishment of social justice and economic progress in post-conflict regions, actors in illiberal peacebuilding mostly concern themselves with an illiberal version of peace.¹³ This version of peace disregards principles of social justice and the rule of law. For instance, Chinese policymakers involved in the

Management,” 498.

¹¹ Owen et al., *Interrogating Illiberal Peace in Eurasia*, 5-7.

¹² Séverine Autesserre, “International Peacebuilding and Local Success: Assumptions and Effectiveness,” *International Studies Review* 19.1 (2017): 124.

¹³ Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran, “Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management,” 492.

Xinjiang re-education camps have actively disregarded issues like human rights or *habeas corpus*, but have successfully maintained order nonetheless. In establishing this type of stability, authoritarian actors practice peacebuilding through top-down coercive methods in both violent and non-violent forms, ranging from torture and surveillance to the erasure of politically sensitive symbols (e.g. the Russian government's "No Trace of War" program).¹⁴ In short, instead of addressing the structural grievances that lead to social tensions, authoritarian actors aggressively suppress opposing parties and, in turn, prevent grievances from materializing into sustained social movements and rebellions.

The non-violent methods of authoritarian actors deserve further introduction. Johan Galtung, for instance, defines psychological violence as "violence that works on the soul... [which] would include lies, brainwashing, indoctrination of various kinds, threats, etc."¹⁵ Almost all of these categories of "psychological violence" can be found in ACM.

One of the most recent and vivid examples of psychological violence is the imposition of the social credit system in China. Fear is essential to the social credit system: it is believed that by placing individuals under the threat of being ranked down in the system, the population will behave in accordance with the state's desires.¹⁶ However, whether one is in compliance is unclear, due to the undisclosed criteria of the social credit system.¹⁷ For instance, the experience of a politically active interviewee shows how it is possible for one to be banned from traveling due to trivial reasons, such as making a complaint to the railway authority.¹⁸ The fear instilled under the social credit system falls neatly into Galtung's definition of "psychological violence," as it is essentially a "threat" that compels citizens to behave in accordance with ways that the state deems right.¹⁹ The opaque criteria of the social credit system engenders fear among the population—one can still dodge the law if the law is written in black and white,

¹⁴ Ibid., 497.

¹⁵ Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6.3 (1969): 169.

¹⁶ "Hēijìng rénshēng: lúnluò shīxìn rén [Life in the Black Mirror: Becoming a Discredited Person]," 黑镜人生: 沦落失信人, *RTHK Channel 31*, April 30, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srcGtNTMWvs>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Galtung, "Violence, Peace and Peace Research," 169.

but what if the law is no longer visible? Obscurity, uncertainty, and fear are the characteristics that best describe the fundamentals of the social credit system.

At the international level, the diffusion of illiberal peacebuilding is dependent upon the “growing multipolarity in the international system wrought by the decline of the West.”²⁰ The diminishing capacity of the West to sustain liberal models around the world creates a vacuum that allows for the emergence of alternative models, including ACM. Furthermore, the emergence of illiberal peacebuilding as an increasingly popular mode of post-conflict governance coincides with the rising international influence of authoritarian powers like Russia and China. With these powers heading international organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Collective Security Treaty Organization, the illiberal mode of post-conflict management could eventually become strong enough to contend against its liberal counterpart.

WHAT IS AUTHORITARIAN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT (ACM)?

ACM involves the “prevention, de-escalation or termination” of authoritarian actors’ own internal turmoil, ranging from rebellion to widespread social violence.²¹ Contrary to liberal peacebuilding, which often emphasizes negotiations, ACM rests on “state coercion and hierarchical structures of power.”²² While violence is central to the type of post-war order that ACM actors attempt to build, Lewis et al. recognize that violence alone is not enough for authoritarian countries to produce and sustain a long-term wartime or post-conflict order. Lewis et al. identify three strategies employed by authoritarian states in post-conflict governance: discursive practices, spatial practices, and political economy.

Discursive Practices

Though discursive practices are used by both liberal and non-liberal actors, these two camps employ and comprehend them quite differently. Liberal actors are often criticized for disregarding local situations by vertically promoting their

²⁰ Owen et al., *Interrogating Illiberal Peace in Eurasia*, 2. See also Andrew Hurrell, “Hegemony, Liberalism and Global Order: What Space for Would-Be Great Powers?” *International Affairs* 82.1 (2006): 1-19.

²¹ Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran, “Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management,” 491.

²² Ibid.

hegemonic discourse on the meanings of peace and conflict.²³ Autesserre, for example, argues that when liberal actors conduct reconciliations in conflict-prone areas, they “misidentified parties in conflict and consequently organized reconciliation workshops between friends, and they used traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms in a way that made no sense in the given situation.”²⁴

Authoritarian actors, by contrast, consider such liberal practices dangerous because they view rebels and opponents as opportunists who might use the window of negotiation to mobilize internal and external support. For instance, in the Sri Lankan Civil War, the government displayed a reluctant willingness to initiate genuine peace talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and quickly moved to isolate the LTTE.²⁵ Authoritarian actors are more inclined to promote their own hegemonic discourse in order to constrain dissenting voices and delegitimize political dissidents.²⁶ These discursive practices, as laid out by Lewis et al., can be deconstructed into a range of measures.

One of the initial measures involves the absolute control of information dissemination through state repression. Although traditional modes of censorship (e.g. state control of newspapers and publications) have become increasingly difficult to enforce due to technological advancement, states still possess the power to seal off certain areas, restricting the access of journalists and researchers.²⁷ Accordingly, given limited access to first-hand information, interested parties often have to rely solely on states for information, allowing states to control the interpretation of the news. This strategy was seen in Myanmar in 2016, when the military forbade aid workers, researchers, and journalists from entering most of Maungdaw, a destabilized region with many reports of rape, torture, and murder.²⁸ State repression can further escalate into physical violence when

²³ Ibid., 9-11.

²⁴ Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 155.

²⁵ David Lewis, “A Successful Model of Counterinsurgency? The Sri Lankan Government’s War Against the LTTE,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counter Insurgency*, Paul Rich and Isabelle Duyvesteyn, eds. (London: Routledge, 2011), 315-16.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran, “Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management,” 493-94.

²⁸ “A Peace Prize, but No Peace: Aung San Suu Kyi Fails to Calm Myanmar’s Ethnic Violence,” *The Economist*, December 24, 2016, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2016/12/24/aung-san-suu-kyi-fails-to-calm-myanmars-ethnic-violence>.

governments feel threatened by the spread of potentially damaging information. In Sri Lanka, for instance, nineteen journalists were murdered between 1999 and 2009.²⁹

Along with the use of state violence to control the diffusion of information, authoritarian actors also seek to control and redefine the terms of both international and domestic discourse. A modern example—China’s “re-education camps” in Xinjiang—illustrates these tactics. Initially, the Chinese government denied the existence of the camps, but as the issue garnered increasing international attention, Beijing sought to control the discourse by admitting the facilities’ existence. Beijing labeled the facilities “re-education camps” that were established to de-extremize the Uighur population.³⁰ Beijing also allowed foreign news outlets, such as the BBC and Hong Kong’s RTHK, to conduct interviews in selected re-education camps, where journalists were presented with a tailored version of the system.³¹ However, with journalists remaining critical, these measures were unable to wholly convince the international community of Beijing’s innocence. Nonetheless, Beijing’s attempts to control the interpretation of the event changed the terms of discourse, balancing against the overwhelming criticism of its policy in Xinjiang. The tactic of influencing interpretation is not contained to authoritarian states, but can also be observed in more democratic states, where leaders attempt to delegitimize certain political segments. During the most recent controversy over the extradition bill in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong government initially labeled the protesters as rioters in an attempt to delegitimize the protests and justify police actions.³²

Finally, by influencing the interpretation of events, authoritarian states usually desire to impose a “hegemonic discourse” in society.³³ In these cases, their

²⁹ “19 Journalists Killed in Sri Lanka,” *Committee to Protect Journalists*, https://cpj.org/data/killed/asia/sri-lanka/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&cc_fips%5B%5D=CE&start_year=1992&end_year=2019&group_by=location.

³⁰ John Sudworth, “China’s Hidden Camps,” *BBC News*, October 24, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idx-sh/China_hidden_camps

³¹ Ibid.; “Uighur Children in Xinjiang,” *Newswrap*, produced by RTHK *Podcast One*, podcast, 6:22, July 5, 2019, <https://podcasts.rthk.hk/podcast/item.php?pid=876&eid=139981&lang=en-US>.

³² Tony Cheung, Victor Ting, and Jeffie Lam, “Hong Kong Police Chief Stephen Lo Steps Back From Riot Label as Carrie Lam Keeps Low Profile,” *South China Morning Post*, June 18, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3014932/hong-kong-police-chief-stephen-lo-steps-back-riot-label>.

³³ Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran, “Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management,” 494-95.

citizens are presumably convinced by the official narrative. Normally, authoritarian states hope to employ the already installed hegemonic discourse to legitimize their actions. In Sri Lanka, for example, David Rampton argues that the government's "discourses and apparatuses of nationalism have become articulated into an enduring social formation where they have attained a hegemonic depth beyond mere elite instrumentality."³⁴ The key point of Rampton's argument is the "hegemonic depth" that Sinhala nationalism has attained, which refers to "the extent and depth to which such discourses become hegemonic and generative of the social and political representations that they seek to effect."³⁵ Very often, discursive control is viewed merely as an instrument of government; however, if sustained, it can eventually be incorporated into the common sense of common people.

Spatial Practices

Beginning in the late 1960s, Henry Lefebvre's spatial theory created a new framework for social sciences research.³⁶ During the last five decades, academics—including those in peace and conflict studies—have begun to attribute more importance to spatial practices. This spatial framework has informed many theoretical models within international relations, including ACM. Space matters to both liberal and non-liberal actors, though they often comprehend it in different ways. For liberal actors engaged in liberal peacebuilding, space is often seen as a public arena where actors with conflicting interests are brought together to settle disputes. Accordingly, space should not be controlled in favor of certain parties—rather, it should be arranged in a way that allows for free deliberation. Although often considered relatively unattainable, liberal conceptions of space allow for transparent negotiations and reconciliation.³⁷

ACM, in contrast, considers space as a contested resource. Authoritarian states consider opposing actors to be opportunists that exploit space to recruit,

³⁴ David Rampton, "'Deeper Hegemony': The Politics of Sinhala Nationalist Authenticity and the Failures of Power-Sharing in Sri Lanka," *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 49.2 (2011): 268.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Lukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), vii-viii.

³⁷ Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran, "Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management," 495.

organize, and produce “counter-productive” discourse.³⁸ As such, authoritarian actors generally “seek to penetrate, close or dominate space through military patrols, encampment and occupation...and also through major infrastructure projects and urban reconstruction.”³⁹ For example, in Xinjiang, Uighurs have been subjected to a series of coercive measures by the Chinese government. Checkpoints have been set up to exclusively search Uighur travelers and check their IDs, and “home visits” that aim to uncover religious material and practices are spontaneously carried out by police in Uighur homes.⁴⁰

Authoritarian states recognize that common sense is constructed and manipulated within public spaces. As such, the transformation of public symbols, such as architecture and street names, is key to the spatial practices of authoritarian regimes.⁴¹ In the post-conflict region of Osh, the Kyrgyzstani government strove to remove signs of conflict to eventually achieve manufactured cohesion.⁴² In an attempt to build national identity, Kyrgyz authorities “[constructed] statues to ethnic Kyrgyz national heroes,” albeit unsuccessfully.⁴³ Beijing’s policy in Xinjiang replicates similar spatial practices. Along with installing loudspeakers that play pro-Communist Party narratives in the streets of Xinjiang’s major cities, the provincial government also ordered signs written in Arabic to be removed in order to visually and semantically standardize cities across the country.⁴⁴ Although the effectiveness of authoritarian spatial practices have yet to be conclusively evaluated, it is clear that authoritarian regimes are manipulating and exploiting the vital resource of space.

Political Economy

In the context of ACM, political economy refers to “economic interventions

³⁸ Ibid., 493, 495.

³⁹ Ibid., 495.

⁴⁰ Adam Jones, “China’s Approach to Countering Religious Extremism Among Uyghurs in Xinjiang,” in *Interrogating Illiberal Peace in Eurasia*, eds. Catherine Owen, Shairbek Juraev, David Lewis, Nick Megoran, and John Heathershaw (London: Rowman, and Littlefield, 2018), 60.

⁴¹ Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space*, 118.

⁴² Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran, “Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management,” 497.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “Màibó zhōngwén tèjì: Yísilánjiào ‘zhōngguóhuà’ jìhuà [RTHK Pulse Chinese-Language Special: The Sinization of Islam],” 脉搏中文特辑：伊斯兰教「中国化」计划, *RTHK*, July 11, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wigyJmXJ9B8>.

[that] are conducted with the aim of political stabilization, with overall economic growth an important, but secondary, concern.”⁴⁵ ACM’s political economy seeks to attain two goals: first, the denial of “[rebels’] access to economic and financial resources,” and second, the assurance that “loyal clientelist groups are the main beneficiaries of financial flows.”⁴⁶ With loyal patrons controlling vital resources at the local levels, ACM argues that rebel groups would find it more difficult to organize.⁴⁷ Present-day Xinjiang reflects this hypothesis. Ever since Beijing launched the Belt and Road Initiative, Xinjiang has become China’s new economic front. However, despite this trend of economic growth, the “economic benefits of resource extraction and development are often disproportionately enjoyed by Han Chinese, and Uighur people are increasingly marginalized.”⁴⁸ In a report by the Human Rights Watch, investigators remarked that Beijing is diminishing Uighur economic significance in the region by moving Han Chinese—who now account for 36 percent of Xinjiang’s population—into the region.⁴⁹ Throughout history, aggrieved populations have used their economic significance to impact political changes. With local economic opportunities being taken up by Han Chinese, it is logical to contend that the Uighur population lacks the necessary economic resources to impact regional governance. However, by taking away the economic power of the Uighur population, Beijing has essentially erased their ability to mobilize politically. With the disappearance of lucrative economic opportunities in conjunction with the implementation of increasingly severe coercive measures, the Uighur population in Xinjiang lacks all the necessary conditions to resist.

One key difference between ACM’s economic practices and liberal states’ use of resources for political ends is that authoritarian actors often possess far more control over economic resources, thereby granting increased political

⁴⁵ Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran, “Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management,” 498.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Lindsay Maizland, “China’s Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 9, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-repression-uighurs-xinjiang>.

⁴⁹ “Eradicating Ideological Viruses: China’s Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang’s Muslims,” *Human Rights Watch*, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs>.

influence over their own population. For instance, in Western states that endorse a *laissez-faire* economic policy, small states coexist with proprietors and corporations, which control most of the economic means and resources. In times of economic crisis, “small” states may even have to seek help from private corporations. By contrast, authoritarian states often possess a wide array of economic means and resources that serve as powerful tools to attain political ends. For example, in China, technological improvements are spurring a move towards cashless payments. As a result, the power of electronic payment platforms, such as Alipay, is increasing—currently, 40% of the population utilizes cashless payment services to conduct financial transactions.⁵⁰ While these tools increase convenience, they also serve as a platform for government surveillance, enhancing the state’s capacity to monitor and intervene in the lives of ordinary Chinese citizens. Recently, the Central Bank tightened its grip on Alipay by taking over the platform’s financial deposits.⁵¹ Though this move might appear to be a purely regulatory action, it signifies that the government is aware of the formidable political power of such a widely used financial tool.

More recently, Sesame Credit’s Social Credit System has been incorporated into the Alipay system.⁵² The Alibaba-owned Sesame Credit System even has access to Alipay’s database, meaning that the social credit system can access records of citizens’ spending habits.⁵³ The connection between the widely-used Alipay and the social credit system sheds light on the monitoring capacity of the Chinese state. There is still a lack of empirical evidence on how information obtained through the Alipay system is used by the Chinese state, so one can only speculate as to how such information will be employed. For example, the question of whether the state will leverage one’s consumption habits deserves further scholarly investigation.

The Chinese state’s ability to penetrate into its citizens’ lives can also be observed through punishments imposed by the state on ordinary citizens. Citizens with unsatisfactory social scores are placed in the “List of Untrustworthy Persons”

⁵⁰ Lerong Lu, “Decoding Alipay: Mobile Payments, a Cashless Society and Regulatory Challenges,” *Butterworths Journal of International Banking and Financial Law* 33.1 (2018): 40, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3103751>.

⁵¹ Christopher Balding, “China is Strangling Its Private Champions,” *Bloomberg Opinion*, March 10, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-03-10/pboc-s-move-to-control-alipay-wechat-pay-deposits-is-power-grab>.

⁵² Charlie Campbell, “How China Is Using ‘Social Credit Scores’ to Reward and Punish Its Citizens,” *Time*, <https://time.com/collection/davos-2019/5502592/china-social-credit-score/>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

and will be prohibited from buying high-end consumer products like high-speed railway tickets; currently there are around 17 million people who the policy bans from traveling on flights.⁵⁴

EXISTING GAPS IN THE ACM CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Since ACM is still a nascent conceptual framework, there are many gaps, ranging from theoretical to operational, that remain unaddressed by the academic community. Addressing these oversights is important, because ACM was initially designed to help academics and policymakers better understand illiberal peacemaking. Though Lewis et al. proclaimed that the conceptual framework adopts no political stance or normative judgment on either liberal peace or illiberal peace, ACM, nonetheless, will generally be used by actors in the liberal world to understand the illiberal world. This paper hopes that the following critiques will allow academics and policymakers who consult the ACM conceptual framework to have a clearer sense of how illiberal peacebuilding is conducted at the international level.

Conceptual Clarity

Though Lewis et al.'s ACM framework has clearly described how authoritarian regimes manage their own domestic conflicts, the conceptual clarity of the framework remains hazy. This issue deserves further scholarly attention, as ACM does not discuss the dimension of international illiberal peacebuilding.

Lewis et al. initially began their examination of international illiberal peacebuilding by recognizing that the latter has become a legitimate post-conflict mode of governance. The purpose of doing so is to put forward the argument that liberal peacebuilding norms at the international level (e.g. intervention through international institutions, adherence to principles of human rights, and the rule of law) are constantly being challenged by illiberal ones.

Following this logic, Lewis et al. should have utilized examples to explain how international illiberal peacebuilding is becoming a serious alternative to international liberal peacebuilding. For instance, in what ways are authoritarian states cooperating among themselves to create international institutions that allow them to settle either international or domestic disputes with illiberal

⁵⁴ Ibid.

practices? Though some cases of cooperation between authoritarian states (e.g. between Russia and Uzbekistan) are analyzed in individual papers, the practices of international illiberal peacebuilding are never fully theorized into the framework.

Lewis et al. have overlooked this aspect of the conceptual framework, as the examples that they have used to illustrate ACM are predominantly domestic (e.g. individual Central Asian states, Russia in Chechnya, China in Xinjiang, Rwanda). This approach necessarily undermines the conceptual sophistication of ACM, as one cannot compare international liberal examples with illiberal domestic examples. If Lewis et al. are examining illiberal domestic examples, then they should have employed domestic examples such as Israel or the American Civil Rights Movement. But, now that they are trying to contribute knowledge to the understanding of international peacebuilding on both sides of the spectrum, it is imperative for them to introduce examples of international illiberal peacebuilding into their conceptual framework. With the current dearth of international illiberal examples, it is hardly possible for academics and policymakers who use ACM to derive any meaningful understanding of how illiberal norms are challenging liberal ones in the international order.

Individual states such as Kyrgyzstan are using illiberal tactics to manage their own conflicts, which raises questions about how such practices affect the diffusion of liberal peacebuilding ideas at the international level. Are authoritarian states resisting international liberal peacebuilding norms as a collective entity? What are the mechanisms for diffusion of illiberal peacebuilding norms at the international level? Furthermore, what if authoritarian states do not possess adequate state capacity to carry out the three practices outlined in ACM? Can weak state capacity be resolved through material and discursive support from a strong international partner?

By performing a case study of Cuban intervention in Angola in the 1970s, this paper aims to further contribute to the ACM framework by constructing mechanisms of international illiberal peacebuilding. This essentially covers how the three strategies in Lewis et al.'s paper, namely discursive practice, spatial practice, and political economy, operate within an international context. To be concrete, the first mechanism proposed in this paper demonstrates how international peacebuilding can be conducted at the international level; the second mechanism, in turn, illustrates how the issue of weak state capacity can be remedied through international illiberal peacebuilding.

Lack of State Capacity

Though Lewis et al.'s thesis on ACM is quite compelling at first glance, the framework lacks the capacity to consider that not all authoritarian states possess sufficient state capacity to carry out the three practices outlined in ACM.

The three practices outlined in ACM focus predominantly on the vertical and hierarchical imposition of state violence over a given territory; spatial practices pertain to how a state manipulates citizens and space within its own territory, while discursive practices, refer to how states manipulate discourse within their own borders. While ACM successfully illustrates how authoritarian states manage their internal conflicts through the aforementioned three practices, it fails to consider that authoritarian states do not always possess the state capacity to project sufficient influence over some or all of their territories. Kyrgyzstan, for example, is more or less able to keep its capital, Bishkek, and surrounding areas under control. However, Kyrzyk policies in response to violence in the southern province of Jalal-Abad in June 2010 showed that Bishkek is not able to sufficiently extend its influence outside of its immediate region, as Bishkek was not able to protect its Uzbek citizens from inter-ethnic violence.⁵⁵ Although Bishkek did reach out to Moscow through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CTSO) to ask for assistance, Bishkek's request was turned down by the CSTO on the grounds that there were "restrictions in the mandate of the organization."⁵⁶

Although the inter-ethnic conflict was eventually contained by the Kyrgyz security apparatus, Bishkek still has a hard time projecting hegemonic control over the southern part of the country. However, Khamidov et al.'s paper on bottom-up peacebuilding in the town of Aravan in June 2010 revealed that local peacebuilding efforts initiated by local Kyrgyz elites substantially assisted the weak central government.⁵⁷ Though Megoran and Heathershaw are among the coauthors, they have not theorized bottom-up peacebuilding efforts into the ACM conceptual framework. The effects of a central government's inability to project extensive influence remain overlooked and unresolved.

⁵⁵ Alisher Khamidov, Nick Megoran, and John Heathershaw, "Bottom-up Peacebuilding in Southern Kyrgyzstan: How Local Actors Managed to Prevent the Spread of Violence From Osh/Jalal-Abad to Aravan, June 2010," *Nationalities Papers* 45.6 (2017): 1118-1119.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1119.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1120.

Hence, this research paper aims to fill this gap by considering a case of international illiberal peacebuilding. Through a case study of Cuban intervention in Angola, this research paper aims to show that relatively weak authoritarian states can still project sufficient state influence within their territories if they are aided by a strong authoritarian partner at the international level.

METHODOLOGY

In the context of this paper, Cuban intervention in Angola has been picked from a wide range of historical examples because the case reflects how authoritarian states cooperate to create and sustain illiberal peace. A historical case is preferable to a present-day case due to the availability of primary and secondary sources. Though current examples of illiberal peacebuilding include policies in present-day Xinjiang, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, political sensitivity has made primary sources inaccessible to many. Historical cases like the Cuban intervention, by contrast, are backed by rich archival resources, as time has diminished the political sensitivity of relevant policies.

CUBAN INTERVENTION IN THE ANGOLAN CIVIL WAR

Why Cuba in Angola?

Cuban intervention in Angola is an international example that can be used to illustrate how illiberal peacebuilding is carried out at the international level. Not only were Cuba and Angola authoritarian states in the 1970s, but the way that Cuba assisted Angola's MPLA to fight against the US-backed UNITA and FNLA for political dominance in Angola matches the discursive, economic, and spatial practices outlined by Lewis et al. In the following sections, this paper first introduces the historical context of Cuban intervention in Angola. Then, it moves on by formulating the mechanism of international illiberal peacebuilding. While one of the aims of this paper is to illustrate how ACM's three practices are carried out at the international level, this paper does not divide the following sections into those three categories. Rather, this paper seeks to incorporate the mechanisms into the process of international illiberal peacebuilding that this paper proposes.

Cuban Intervention in the Angolan Civil War, 1975-1991

The relationship between Cuba and the MPLA is rooted in the late 1950s and 1960s. One notable event is Che Guevara's meeting with MPLA's Agostinho Neto in January 1965 in Brazzaville, during which Guevara and Neto came to

an agreement that would offer substantial help to the MPLA in the form of military instructors and a “large military mission for Brazzaville.”⁵⁸ Prior to the Portuguese Carnation Revolution in 1974, the Soviets only provided “lukewarm support to Angola’s liberation movements” and Soviet support to the MPLA was, at best, tenuous, given the “embarrassing collapse of several prominent African allies” in the 1960s.⁵⁹

The 1974 Carnation Revolution in Portugal caught the world and its African colonies by surprise, and altered Portugal’s policy on its colonies.⁶⁰ Prior to 1974, counterinsurgency operations within the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique “had taken a severe toll on the Portuguese population.”⁶¹ By 1973, Portugal had five times the troops in Angola that America had in Vietnam, totaling around 150,000 men. Such devoted engagement had “the Portuguese armed forces...stretched to the limit,” especially with the high number of casualties—more than 35,000 by 1974.⁶²

Determined to improve the internal economic conditions of Portugal, the newly-installed government sped up the decolonization process in Africa. Mozambique was granted independence in 1975 after a series of negotiations, and Angola also gained its independence with the signing of the 1975 Alvor Agreement. The pact was affirmed by Portugal and the three major Angolan independence movements: the MPLA, UNITA, and FNLA. According to the agreement, a transitional government consisting of these three independence organizations was established to oversee the transitional process.⁶³ The Alvor agreement, however, failed to establish peace in Angola and instead, pushed it into a decades-long civil war.⁶⁴ Portugal’s sudden exit from Africa also “[opened] the door to foreign intervention,” making the situation even more chaotic.⁶⁵

In July 1975, around six months after the signing of the Alvor agreement,

⁵⁸ Edward George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965-1991: From Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale* (London and New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 22-23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-12, 22-23.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 50-53.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶³ United Nations. “Text of the Alvor Agreement Between the FLNA, MPLA, and UNITA.” *Decolonization* 2.4 (1975): 17-32.

⁶⁴ George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola*, 49.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

the MPLA militarily expelled the FNLA from the capital, Luanda, to the coastal municipality of Ambriz.⁶⁶ This marked the escalation from armed conflict to full-fledged civil war. Fearing that the war would affect its various investments in Angola, South Africa decided to stage a military intervention. In response to the increasing level of international involvement in Angola, Havana also decided to escalate matériel support to the MPLA. According to a declassified CIA memorandum, though the number of Cuban military personnel in Angola prior to 1975 was limited to only a few hundred, the troop count rose significantly after 1975, and “remained fairly constant at an estimated level of 10,000 to 14,500” between September 1976 and May 1977.⁶⁷

The Angolan Civil War is often viewed as a proxy battlefield between the United States and the Soviet Union, with other players, such as South Africa and Cuba, serving as pawns of the two superpowers.⁶⁸ Such a binary representation, however, is far from what actually took place in Angola. In fact, the Soviet Union was reluctant to involve itself in the civil war because Angola—strategically speaking—did not deserve significant attention or resources. As noted by George, prior to the Carnation Revolution in 1974, the Soviets initially provided only “lukewarm support to Angola’s liberation movements.”⁶⁹

The Soviets only began to offer increasing levels of support to the MPLA in the 1970s for two reasons. The first was the exit of Portugal from Africa that “[revived] Soviet interest in the region.”⁷⁰ The second was that Cuba’s demonstrated commitment in Angola pushed the Kremlin to be more involved in Angola, as the Kremlin could not abandon Cuba and the MPLA—doing so would undermine the demonstrated solidarity of the Eastern Bloc. However, in the context of Angola, rather than functioning as a puppet of the USSR, Havana made its own decision to intervene in Angola. This is reflected in Guevara’s 1965 visit to Brazzaville where

⁶⁶ Ibid., 59–60.

⁶⁷ Memorandum on Cuban Involvement in Angola from the Acting NIO for Latin America, Central Intelligence Agency, to Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Advisor to President Carter, CIA-RDP79R00603A002700040001-1 (June 23, 1977) (on file with the Central Intelligence Agency), 1.

⁶⁸ As noted by Gerald Bender during the Angolan Civil War, Henry Kissinger and some U.S. officials saw the Cuban troops as playing the part of surrogates in the war. See Gerald Bender, “Kissinger in Angola: Anatomy of Failure,” in *American Policy in Southern Africa: The Stakes and the Stance*, ed. Rene Lemarchand (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1978): 95.

⁶⁹ George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola*, 11.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

he met the MPLA leadership, as given Guevara's negative views of the USSR, it makes little sense to consider him as a proxy of the Soviets.⁷¹ It would be incorrect to apply simplistic Cold War bipolarity to the Angolan Civil War, as doing so significantly understates the autonomy of actors like Havana and the MPLA. As such, based on this historical reality, this paper considers Cuba a highly autonomous actor and infers mechanisms of international illiberal peacebuilding from the tactics employed by Havana.

Given that this is a political science paper that aims to infer theories from a historical case, this paper will not structure events chronologically. Rather, events will be arranged to help illustrate the proposed mechanisms of international illiberal peacebuilding. Within each respective section, after inferring mechanisms, this paper tests these mechanisms by examining how they are still relevant to the present-day tactics of authoritarian actors.

MECHANISMS OF INTERNATIONAL ILLIBERAL PEACEBUILDING

As mentioned previously, the primary concern of this paper is to address ACM's failure to (1) differentiate international and domestic illiberal peacebuilding and (2) consider certain authoritarian actors' lack of state capacity. As such, this paper proposes two mechanisms to address these shortcomings. The first mechanism will show how material support from a strong international partner can help an authoritarian regime gain the necessary capacity to carry out the three strategies of ACM, while the second mechanism will demonstrate how discursive support from an established international partner can help a regime improve its legitimacy either at home or abroad. The illustration of these two mechanisms will begin with a probe into the case of Cuban intervention in Angola, before moving on to a few contemporary cases of international illiberal peacebuilding.

Proposed Mechanism 1: Maintaining Domestic Peace with Material Support From a Strong International Partner(s)

One of the major weaknesses of the current ACM framework is its failure to consider the implications of weak authoritarian actors which do not possess sufficient state capacity to exert control within their territory. The current version

⁷¹ Ibid., 19.

of ACM naturally assumes that all authoritarian actors possess sufficient capacity to carry out discursive, spatial, and economic practices to maintain domestic peace. This fails to account for scenarios in which the authoritarian actors are simply too weak. Usually when an authoritarian state is too weak, it tends to seek support from international partners that share similar ideologies and values. For instance, in the 2010 South Kyrgyzstan ethnic clashes, the Kyrgyz government sought help from Russia through the CSTO.

In a similar vein, Cuban intervention in Angola provides insights into the role played by a strong authoritarian partner in illiberal peacebuilding. Cuba's material support to the MPLA was multifaceted, ranging from financial to military. Charting financial transactions in Angola is difficult; Havana did not directly support the MPLA with capital, as Angola's oil exports provided sufficient funds to the MPLA.⁷² Thus, Cuba decided instead to provide the MPLA with free humanitarian aid until 1977, when Havana decided to charge the MPLA \$20 million per year for the aid provided. The humanitarian aid, according to a declassified CIA memo, included the deployment of advisers such as "agricultural and livestock technicians, medical personnel, advisers to help restore sugar and coffee production... and teams of construction personnel to assist in the construction of public buildings, roads, [and] airfields."⁷³ The purpose of such aid was to "fill at least part of the vacuum created by the departure of the managerial, supervisory, and technical personnel of the colonial era."⁷⁴

The charge was waived again in 1984, when Havana agreed to continue providing free humanitarian aid to the MPLA after the Angolan economy imploded in the early 1980s.⁷⁵ In this particular case, though Havana did not provide any direct financial support to the MPLA, it did at least alleviate some of the MPLA's financial responsibilities. The aid provided for public services (e.g. medical service and basic food supply) within the MPLA's controlled territories, allowing it to direct more resources to fight rival powers.

Havana also provided the MPLA with more substantial military support. Cuban garrisons were stationed in major cities like Luanda, Benguela, and Lubango, while remote outposts were set up in rural areas, such as Huila, Cuando Cubango, and Moxico. Cuban civilian internationalists also assisted the military campaign

⁷² George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola*, 150.

⁷³ Memorandum on Cuban Involvement in Angola, 5.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola*, 150.

through “medical, [educational], and technical” support.⁷⁶ The presence of Cuban soldiers in the aforementioned areas was significant, as their presence allowed the MPLA more flexibility in troop deployment.

In addition, Cuban soldiers, alongside MPLA troops, launched a few large-scale military campaigns to help the MPLA seize territories. One notable campaign was Operation Carlota. Recognizing the necessity to intervene militarily after the MPLA was overwhelmed by South African troops at Catengue, Havana launched a massive military campaign. Operation Carlota was a success. By the end of March 1976, almost all South African troops had retreated onto the South African border, while the US-supported FNLA troops retreated into the Zairian border. Alongside the retreat of South Africa, the MPLA continued to vanquish the remaining insurgent forces and by the end of 1976, had successfully secured the oil fields near Cabinda.⁷⁷ These victories created the material base for the MPLA to be recognized by the international community as the legitimate government in later years.

After the military campaigns in 1976, Cuban troops did not completely pull out from Angola; instead, the Cubans remained to assist the MPLA in maintaining post-conflict stability. Cuban garrisons were still stationed at their outposts, and civilian internationalists who assisted the larger military missions were also scattered across major cities to provide logistical support to both Cuban and MPLA personnel.⁷⁸ The presence of Cuban soldiers contributed significantly to post-conflict peace in Angola. Most road patrolling and internal security missions were handled by Cuban military personnel, allowing the MPLA more latitude in confronting the remaining hostile forces within Angola.

Contemporary Examples

By placing the historical case of Cuban intervention in Angola into a contemporary context, one can see it is not uncommon for a strong international partner to help a relatively weak authoritarian actor maintain domestic peace. Material support still plays an essential role in international illiberal peacebuilding. Nonetheless, in the past two decades, international illiberal peacebuilding has often been carried out under the cover of equal international cooperation

⁷⁶ Ibid., 158.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 117-119.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 58-60, 150.

between sovereign states. Present day non-liberal actors, unlike Cuba, are reluctant to overtly support their illiberal partners, as these actors fear potential international criticism, especially from the United States. One core reason is that in the present-day international order, the liberal camp faces almost no serious competitive paradigms. Almost all international organizations that are familiar to the public, including the United Nations, European Union, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank, are founded upon liberal ideas. For authoritarian actors, openly defying liberal norms risks attracting international criticism and undermines their international image. Beijing's use of the pretext of 're-education camps' to justify its oppression of the Uighur population is evidence of the underlying implication that liberal norms are—so far—the only legitimate set of norms in the international community.

However, this situation might change in the future if illiberal actors become stronger, and are able to diffuse illiberal peacebuilding norms through alternative international organizations. After all, the legitimacy of any international practice draws from political narratives that have gained wide recognition. So, if those illiberal norms sustain themselves long enough, and become strong enough, to develop into a popular practice, it is entirely possible for them to contest liberal ideology. One contemporary example is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), founded in 2001. Headed by China, the SCO is one of the rising international organizations that are considered "conflict management actors."⁷⁹ As of November 2019, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, and Pakistan are the member states of the SCO. Countries such as Afghanistan, Belarus, and Iran are observer states, but are not yet formal members. Notably, though Western powers have sought to develop ties with the SCO, the organization has systemically excluded them. For instance, the United States, applied for an observer status, but was rejected.⁸⁰

Despite this, the US has still attempted to bond with regional organizations. As noted by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in September 2010, the US wished to "build a network of alliances and partnerships, regional organizations, and global institutions."⁸¹ Earlier that year, Clinton also remarked that "the failure of

⁷⁹ Owen et al., *Interrogating Illiberal Peace in Eurasia*, 13.

⁸⁰ Dilip Hiro, "Shanghai Surprise," *The Guardian*, June 16, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/jun/16/shanghaisurprise>.

⁸¹ Daniel W. Drezner, "The Good, The Bad, and the BS," *Foreign Policy*, September 8, 2010, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/09/08/the-good-the-bad-and-the-bs/>.

the United States not to participate [in regional organizations] demonstrates a lack of respect and a willingness to engage.”⁸² In that particular speech, Clinton highlighted the importance of cooperation between the United States and various regional institutions in the Asia-Pacific region. The speech demonstrated American eagerness to reach out to Asian regional organizations, with Clinton saying that “as we’ve also seen new organizations, including the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN+3, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, we hope that we will be able to participate actively in many of those.”⁸³ Clinton’s mention of the SCO indicated that the organization continued to play a significant role in American policy in East Asia. This behavior is unusual, as during the Cold War era, the US only agreed to cooperate with Asian nations on a bilateral basis—multilateral engagement would have been unthinkable.⁸⁴

The SCO’s unwillingness to include the US only further confirms the suspicion that the SCO is being used by major powers like China to diffuse and sustain authoritarian practices. The SCO’s official statement outlines the following organizational goals:

strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture, as well as in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, and other areas; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.⁸⁵

⁸² U.S. Department of State, “Remarks on Regional Architecture in Asia: Principles and Priorities” (speech given by Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, Imin Center-Jefferson Hall, Honolulu, Hawaii, January 12, 2010), <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/01/135090.htm>

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Christopher Hemmer and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Why is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism,” *International Organization* 56.3 (2002): 575-76.

⁸⁵ “About SCO,” Shanghai Cooperation Organization, January 9, 2017, http://eng.sectsco.org/about_sco/.

Within the mission statement, there are two key goals that allude to the SCO's intentions, the first being the maintenance of "peace, security, and stability," and the second being the establishment of "a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order."⁸⁶ The adjective "new" is of particular interest, as it pertains to the SCO's desire to create an alternative to the existing American-centered liberal order. This paper argues that these two elements are mutually reinforcing—while member states are promoting their own definitions of peace, security, and stability, they are also installing and sustaining a new world order that can be roughly understood as illiberal. Although this paper does not seek to examine the definitions and normative judgments around peace, security, and stability, it is still evident that actors involved in illiberal peacebuilding merely seek to achieve the absence of violence rather than imposing liberal principles.

In order to achieve peace, security and stability, the SCO vows to fight "terrorism, separatism and extremism."⁸⁷ Unlike in the liberal world, where there are strict legal definitions for these terms, here, they are used interchangeably to satisfy the political ends of authoritarian regimes. These include governments' use of discursive power to delegitimize political dissidents. The Chinese government, for instance, has labeled political dissidents as separatists who intend to destabilize the country, and it is not uncommon for dissidents to be charged with "inciting subversion of state power."⁸⁸ In the name of combating extremism, Beijing has also been gradually erasing the public symbols that remind the Uighur population of their cultural heritage.⁸⁹ Within Xinjiang Province, the national government has also endeavored to disseminate the CCP's values through mass lectures that are based on three themes: "[1] the dangers from the three evil forces...[2] the five kinds of identification that Uighur citizens are supposed to cultivate...[and 3] increased awareness of and gratitude for the CCP's *huìmin* policy."⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ "Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism," in *International Instruments Related to the Prevention and Suppression of International Terrorism* (New York: United Nations Publications, 2008), 232.

⁸⁸ "Human Rights in China Submission to the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders," *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner*, June 15, 2012, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Answers/NGOs/Asia/China_HRIC.pdf, 4.

⁸⁹ "Màibó zhōngwén tèjì: Yísilánjiào 'zhōngguóhuà' jihuà [RTHK Pulse Chinese-Language Special: The Sinization of Islam]," 脉搏中文特辑: 伊斯兰教「中国化」计划, *RTHK*, July 11, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wigyJmXJ9B8>.

⁹⁰ Adam Jones, "China's Approach to Countering Religious Extremism," in Owen et al.,

In an international context, it is evident that Beijing is attempting to diffuse authoritarian methods of managing conflicts at the international level through the SCO. Located in Beijing, the Secretariat of the SCO functions both as an executive body that oversees the daily operations of the organization and as a platform for information exchange and dissemination.⁹¹ The Secretariat is a means of communication between the high-level decision-making bodies of its member states, a mechanism that provides member states with a foundation for further cooperation. The SCO has held several “Peace Missions” (which are essentially military exercises) between 2005 and 2016, during which member states demonstrate their commitment to carrying out peacebuilding missions.⁹² Though strong powers like China and Russia have yet to militarily assist weaker states in managing domestic peace, in the future, the SCO may increasingly begin to serve as a vehicle for peacebuilding military intervention.

Strong states can also provide informational support to weaker authoritarian partners. As noted by Stein Ringen, information is critical to a state’s ruling tactics. For instance, the Chinese state is experienced in alternately curtailing and disseminating censored information, especially through state organs like the Chinese State Internet Information Office.⁹³ However, Beijing also uses private corporations and organizations to accomplish its ends. For example, Huawei—one of China’s largest telecommunications firms—has helped Ugandan and Zambian ruling parties intercept encrypted correspondence and track the movements of political opponents.⁹⁴ On a broader scale, Huawei has helped fourteen African national governments establish surveillance systems, and

Interrogating Illiberal Peace in Eurasia, 65.

⁹¹ “General Information About the SCO Secretariat,” *Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, January 10, 2017, <http://eng.sectsc.org/secretariat/>.

⁹² “SCO to Hold Joint Anti-Terrorism Exercise in 2019,” *Xinhua Online*, March 3, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/16/c_137900065.htm; “Flexibility by Design: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Future of Eurasian Cooperation,” *Center for Security Studies*, Zurich, 2018, 12.

⁹³ Stein Ringen, *The Perfect Dictatorship: China in the 21st Century* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), 108, 112.

⁹⁴ Joe Parkinson, Nicholas Bariyo, and Josh Chin, “Huawei Technicians Helped African Governments Spy on Political Opponents,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 15, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/huawei-technicians-helped-african-governments-spy-on-political-opponents-11565793017>.

with Huawei's rapid expansion in Africa, this number is likely to grow.⁹⁵ This case is not an isolated one, and it is quite common for strong states that have sophisticated information capacity to share intelligence with their authoritarian partners through various means. Russia, for instance, has mechanisms of "surveillance, detention, interrogation, and forced returns" that have assisted Uzbekistan in suppressing its political dissidents.⁹⁶

In conclusion, one mechanism of international illiberal peacebuilding is strong authoritarian states offering help to relatively weak authoritarian states. This proposed mechanism has tentatively addressed one of ACM's weaknesses, and this paper hopes that this proposed new mechanism can open new directions for scholarly research in the future.

Proposed Mechanism 2: Maintaining Domestic Peace with Discursive Support from Strong Authoritarian Partners

Legitimizing discursive support from a strong international partner, though not as visible as material support, is just as vital. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, countries that have not endorsed the liberal norms of governance have been criticized or condemned by the international community (e.g., the EU and UN). In effect, the international community has adopted a hegemonic liberal discourse. Within this international order, it is difficult for actors who refuse to endorse the liberal agenda of the West to be accepted by the international community. China, for instance, was refused membership in the World Trade Organization until 2001, as its economic policies conflicted with liberal economic principles. If even a major power like China faces resistance when it comes to being accepted by the Western-led international community, one can only imagine the hardship experienced by peripheral actors who do not fully endorse the liberal way of governance.

However, peripheral actors are not permanently relegated to the fringes of the international community. By examining the case of Cuban intervention in Angola, we can identify how strong actors provide discursive support to weaker authoritarian allies, thereby helping that ally gain stature in the international community. By late 1976, the MPLA had become the *de facto* government of

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ David Lewis, "'Illiberal Spaces': Uzbekistan's Extraterritorial Security Practices and the Spatial Politics of Contemporary Authoritarianism," *Nationalities Papers* 43.1 (2015): 140-41.

Angola, and the final step for it to become the legitimate government was formal recognition from the international community. Accordingly, the MPLA sought recognition from both the Organization of African Unity and admission into the UN General Assembly. However, these two processes could not have been accomplished without significant diplomatic and discursive support from Cuba. For example, the MPLA faced little resistance in securing approval from the OAU, most likely due to Cuba's positive relationships with OAU states. Ever since the establishment of the OAU, Cuba had shown a considerable level of respect for the organization, and such respect was reflected through Cuba's declared support for African unity and "[Africa's] anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and anti-apartheid struggles."⁹⁷ Given Cuba's amicable relationship with the OAU, it is logical to deduce that the MPLA benefited from such connections. By February 1976, the OAU had recognized the MPLA as the legitimate government of Angola.⁹⁸

At the international level, the MPLA managed to circumvent US diplomatic isolation by deploying diplomatic missions to Jamaica, Venezuela, Guyana, and Panama.⁹⁹ Playing off of Castro's popularity throughout South America, the MPLA quickly gained international recognition. In December 1976, Angola was admitted as the 146th member of UN General Assembly despite US abstention. Eventually, in 1994, the US formally established diplomatic relations with Angola by deploying Ambassador Edmund T. De Jarnette.¹⁰⁰ The case of Cuban intervention in Angola shows the importance of discursive support from a strong international ally. In a broader sense, the legitimacy of an international action depends upon the actor's ability to secure recognition and approval from an established international power.

The lessons from Angola's entrance into the international community can be applied to Hong Kong today. Recent political turmoil concerning Hong Kong's extradition bill illustrates how discursive support from strong states and

⁹⁷ Analúcia Danilevicz Pereira, "Cuba's Foreign Policy Towards Africa: Idealism or Pragmatism," *Brazilian Journal of African Studies* 1.2 (2016): 113.

⁹⁸ Eugene Keefe, *Area Handbook for Portugal*, 1st ed. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), 275.

⁹⁹ *Angola Country Study Guide: Strategic Information and Development*, vol 1. (Washington DC: International Business Publication, 2013): 80.

¹⁰⁰ "A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country Since 1776: Angola," *United States Department of State*, <https://history.state.gov/countries/angola>.

international organizations legitimize extradition practices. Currently, extradition practices on the international stage are predominantly regulated by international law. According to Jeremy Bentham's classical definition, international law refers to "a collection of rules governing relations between states."¹⁰¹ However, as pointed out by Malcolm Shaw, international law should be viewed as "a rapidly developing complex of rules and influential—though not directly binding—principles, practices, and assertions coupled with increasingly sophisticated structures and processes."¹⁰²

Concerning extradition practices between different jurisdictions, present-day international law places a strong emphasis on protecting human rights, minimizing the possibility of cruel torture and inhumane treatment, and maintaining the "non-refoulement principles" outlined in the 1951 Geneva Convention.¹⁰³ As such, the possibility of being subjected to capital punishment is frequently brought up whenever an extradition case stirs up public controversy. While human rights lawyers and social activists often act as fervent defenders of human rights in extradition cases, very seldom do they, or any other members of the public, bother to trace back the roots of these normative standards and practices.

Why does extradition have to be carried out in accordance with liberal principles under international law? Antony Anghie argues that "the universalization of international law was principally a consequence of imperial expansion."¹⁰⁴ The "imperial expansion" that Anghie refers to is the process of colonization carried out by various Western powers, meaning that international law was exported from the West to the rest through coercion.¹⁰⁵ The proclaimed universality of international law is a construction. Even the liberal outlook of current international law is—in and of itself—a political story that was conceived less than a century ago. Institutions that govern international political life, such as the International Court of Justice, were constructed and sustained after the Second World War, at a time

¹⁰¹ Malcolm Shaw, "International Law," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 7, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/international-law>. See also Vaughan Lowe, *International Law: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Lewis, "Illiberal Spaces," 151.

¹⁰⁴ Antony Anghie, "Finding the Peripheries: Sovereignty and Colonialism in Nineteenth-Century International Law," *Harvard International Law Journal* 40.1 (1999): 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

when the US was gaining international importance and influence. International law, as an institution, is not static and can be substantially affected by external forces.

After considering the liberal narrative of international law, we should ask: is it possible for an alternative version of international law to emerge? If so, under what conditions?

With strong international institutions and powers endorsing a less liberal version of extradition practices, it is entirely possible for such practices to be gradually accepted by the international community as appropriate or—at the very least—an alternative. In his 2015 paper, David Lewis explores how Uzbekistan employs extraterritorial practices to sustain contemporary authoritarianism and examines how Russia and former Soviet Central Asian states are sustaining an alternative version of extradition.¹⁰⁶ Russian authorities very often ignore the set of standards (e.g. fair trial, torture) laid out in international law by directly extraditing Uzbek activists, who would likely face torture, back to Uzbekistan.¹⁰⁷ Some may consider such policies as ad hoc, but the practices have been written into the 1993 CIS Convention on Legal Assistance and Legal Relations in Civil, Family, and Criminal Matters. Under this convention, signatories agree to “[simplify] extradition practices and offer no protection for refugees and asylum seekers,” which are normally granted in Western states.¹⁰⁸ Similar arrangements have been made between SCO member states, where signatories agree to unconditionally extradite personnel involved in terrorism and extremism.¹⁰⁹ As noted by Lewis, though the sustainability of such policies remains arguable, the practices of the SCO and the CIS “do reflect a tendency...[that challenges] the non-refoulement principle [of the West].”¹¹⁰ Accordingly, it is entirely possible for a set of new international practices to emerge, so long as there is enough discursive support in the international community. Hence, it becomes evident that illiberal peacebuilding can be accomplished through authoritarian actors obtaining discursive support from stronger international actors or international institutions.

¹⁰⁶ Lewis, “Illiberal Spaces,” 140-42.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR LIBERAL ACTORS

To conclude, this paper hopes to provide policy implications for liberal actors in these turbulent times. Liberal actors who seek to continuously promote and sustain the liberal mode of conflict management should no longer moralize their opposition to authoritarian modes of conflict management, as doing so undermines the prospects of a mutual understanding between liberal actors and their counterparts and disincentivizes strategic cooperation. As asserted in the introduction, it is rare for liberal peacebuilding missions to succeed when democratic elections are vertically imposed in regions not ready for democratization. Should this underlying mindset of liberal actors persist, there will be few options for liberal actors to counteract the growing influence of ACM. It is important to recognize the reality that the validity of ACM is intertwined with power dynamics in international politics; with the rise of major authoritarian states like China and the formation of non-liberal international organizations like the SCO and CSTO, it is entirely possible for the authoritarian mode of post-conflict governance to become strong enough to contend against liberal modes of peacebuilding. Accordingly, for strategic reasons, liberal actors must begin to view ACM neutrally rather than emotionally.

Post-conflict peacebuilding, for instance, is inextricably linked with the pressing issue of terrorism. As noted by James Piazza, states that are “[experiencing] high degrees of state failure are indeed more susceptible to transnational terrorist attacks.”¹¹¹ Building upon Piazza’s logic and applying it to peacebuilding, if a state fails to govern a post-conflict space with an effective mode of governance, that area risks becoming a hotbed for extremism.

Devising solutions for these crises is no easy job, and it requires joint international effort. But, before that, a mutual understanding must be forged between liberal and illiberal actors, especially when they both have very different interpretations of peace and security, as well as ideologically different approaches for managing post-conflict spaces. Although the mission statements of liberal and illiberal organizations share similar language on the issues of peace and security, the difference in their implicit meanings foreshadow tensions for when liberal and illiberal actors attempt international cooperation.

¹¹¹ James Piazza, “Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism?” *International Studies Quarterly* 52.3 (2008): 483, www.jstor.org/stable/29734247.

Dividing international peacebuilding into liberal and illiberal peacebuilding problematically implies that our world is becoming bipolar again. However, this paper hopes that the proposed mechanisms of international peacebuilding can contribute to the nascent ACM framework, thus offering the liberal policy world a conceptual tool to comprehend authoritarian modes of conflict management.

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PUTTING THEIR MONEY WHERE THEIR MOUTH IS:

THE WE MEAN BUSINESS COALITION AND THE ROLE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE REGIME

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ABSTRACT

The business community has played an increasingly prominent role in international climate governance since the signing of the Paris Agreement. However, recent corporate scandals, such as those of ExxonMobil and Volkswagen, have cast doubt on the credibility of corporate climate action. This paper thus examines the role of corporate climate governance in the post-Paris climate regime. Primarily, this paper focuses on the We Mean Business coalition, which brings together the leading business groups on climate action. Through exploration of the coalition's organizational structure, its flagship initiative of RE100, and the mechanisms in which firms internalize climate commitments, the case of We Mean Business demonstrates that there is a credible corporate governance regime which plays a critical role in global efforts to combat climate change.

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INTRODUCTION

Following the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015 at the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21), the business community has offered unprecedented support to counter climate change. As governments committed to more ambitious CO₂ reduction targets, a groundswell of support for climate action similarly arose from international non-state actors, such as businesses, cities, and NGOs.²

The extent to which the private sector should intersect with climate governance is controversial. More businesses than ever are becoming involved in the efforts to combat climate change, but critics remain skeptical of big business and its commitment to climate action. Even those who were previously optimistic for green business have pivoted. During COP21, Naomi Oreskes and Auden Schendler published an article in the *Harvard Business Review* titled “Corporations Will Never Solve Climate Change.”³ Having emerged within the green-business movement believing that corporations would occupy an important coalition alongside governments, NGOs, and civil society in the fight against climate change, the authors have since grown pessimistic about the potential for such a reality. Citing the Volkswagen emissions scandal, ExxonMobil’s public deceit, and British Petroleum’s greenwashing, the authors argue that these revelations “spell the end of the old notion of green business, the idea that a big piece of the environmental fix might come voluntarily from the corporate world.”⁴ The authors conclude that “the reality is that voluntary corporate greening measures don’t achieve scale, and therefore aren’t climate solutions...Our new message for executives is this: Empower policy makers to do their job. You do your job and let them do theirs.”⁵ While the violation of public trust by corporations merits critique, Oreskes and Schendler should not abandon the potential of corporate climate action in the face of a few bad actors. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), companies in the commercial and industrial sectors alone account for 67 percent of the world’s electricity usage.⁶ The private sector is simply too important

² UNFCCC, “Historic Paris Agreement on Climate Change: 195 Nations Set Path to Keep Temperature Rise Well Below 2 Degrees Celsius,” *UNFCCC Press*, December 13, 2015, <https://unfccc.int/news/finale-cop21>.

³ Naomi Oreskes and Auden Schendler, “Corporations Will Never Solve Climate Change,” *Harvard Business Review*, December 4, 2015, <https://hbr.org/2015/12/corporations-will-never-solve-climate-change>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Emma Åberg, and Stephanie Weckend, “Corporate Sourcing of Renewables: Market and

to take a passive role in global climate governance if the international community is to transition to a more sustainable world.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the climate action of the business community, which has been under-appreciated by scholars like Oreskes and Schendler and which remains to be thoroughly discussed within international governance literature.⁷ The question guiding this investigation is as follows: are corporate climate initiatives able to establish a credible governance regime within international climate politics, and if so, how? To answer this question, this paper employs a case study approach that examines the leading corporate climate coalition, We Mean Business, which brings together seven leading private initiatives under a single entity to unify and advance the voice, scope, and impact of the business community. Although technically non-profits, many of the founding organizations of We Mean Business are often comprised of leadership with backgrounds in business, receive funding from businesses, and serve businesses as their target audience.⁸ Thus, categorically speaking, We Mean Business can be considered a corporate entity. Moreover, according to Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal's governance triangle that separates states, NGOs, and firms into different types of regulatory schemes, organizations such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), a subsidiary of We Mean Business, may be classified as firm schemes rather than NGOs because of their business and industry self-regulation.⁹ Therefore, We Mean Business and its initiatives represent firm-based governance schemes instead of civil society NGOs due to their significant corporate involvement.

This paper analyzes in detail the organizational structure of We Mean Business, how its governance mechanisms establish credibility in climate affairs, and how firms internalize those governance mechanisms within their

Industry Trends," eds. Stefanie Durbin and Steven Kennedy, *REmade Index*, 2018.

⁷ See Milan Babic, Jan Fichtner, and Eelke Heemskerk, "States Versus Corporations: Rethinking the Power of Business in International Politics," *The International Spectator* 52.4 (2017): 21.

⁸ "Our Partners," *We Mean Business Coalition*, <https://www.wemeanbusinesscoalition.org/partners/>.

⁹ Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal, "The Governance Triangle: Regulatory Standard Institutions and the Shadow of the State," in *The Politics of Global Regulation*, eds. Walter Mattli and Ngaire Woods (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 51-52.

operations. The case of We Mean Business sheds light on the complex role of the business community in international climate governance and the considerable agency of corporations in climate change. Although Oreskes and Schendler have called for business to take a backseat to policymakers, this paper concludes that the case of We Mean Business demonstrates that there is a credible corporate governance regime advancing climate action within the business community that plays a crucial role in the transition to a more sustainable future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Furio Cerutti, “only nuclear weapons and climate change deserve the name of global challenges, in as much as they can hit everybody on earth and can be addressed only by universal cooperation.”¹⁰ The global scale of the climate change issue raises serious questions for international politics and global governance. As such, there is extensive literature within International Relations (IR) and International Political Economy (IPE) that explores the implications of climate change for interstate relations as well as the policy responses with regard to climate governance. The literature reflects how international climate governance both influences state relations and has evolved in tandem with other global trends that have contributed to the complexity of IR and IPE literature. One trend, the rise of corporate power, has challenged the predominance of states in the global economy. Another trend is the development of global regime complexes that see a myriad of non-state actors (e.g. NGOs, businesses, media, and civil society) assuming greater roles in international policy and decision making. Consequently, the topic of international climate governance sits at the intersection of these trends and, therefore, warrants further study within IR and IPE literature. To situate this analysis within the relevant literature, the following review will discuss the relationship between states and corporations in international politics, the climate change regime complex, and corporate authority in climate affairs.

States and Corporations in International Politics

Since the late 20th century, multinational corporations (MNCs) have reshaped international politics and challenged the state as the primary actor in

¹⁰ Furio Cerutti, “Two Global Challenges to Global Governance,” *Global Policy* 3.3 (2012): 314, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-5899.2011.00155.x>.

the global economy. Joseph S. Nye Jr., an early scholar of the role of MNCs in international relations, recognized this shift in global power distribution in his landmark 1974 *Foreign Affairs* article titled, “Multinational Corporations in World Politics.” Nye argues that “multinationals are undoubtedly a large force to be reckoned with,” citing that “the three billion dollars of value added annually by each of the top ten multinationals is already greater than the gross national product of some 80 member-states of the United Nations.”¹¹ He demonstrates that MNCs influence world affairs both directly and indirectly. Directly, MNCs engage sovereign states outside traditional interstate relations through direct bargains for favorable policies, alliances with poorer states to influence international negotiations, and economic means such as offering new investments or threatening to withdraw. Nye also argues that multinationals play an “unintended” direct role by serving as instruments of influence in interstate relations, such as the U.S. using MNCs to strategically advance its political agenda.¹² Indirectly, multinationals set the global political agenda through lobbying, guiding the flow of trade and money, and stimulating other actors (e.g. banks, labor organizations, NGOs, etc.) to become more engaged in the decision making process.¹³ Nye’s work was a harbinger for scholarly investigation into the MNC’s role within international relations. In 1996, Susan Strange published *The Retreat of the State*, which explores how state authority has diminished amid global economic integration. As a result, other actors have increased their share of economic power, particularly multinationals that may operate across national boundaries.¹⁴ Strange’s argument that states have conceded a share of their economic power to MNCs reinforces Nye’s claims that multinationals have increased their influence within global politics.

Given the tighter integration of the global economy since the late 1990s, the concerns of Nye and Strange have only become more salient and complex. According to Parag Khanna’s 2016 article, the top twenty-five corporations have more financial power than many countries.¹⁵ Khanna

¹¹ Joseph S. Nye Jr., “Multinational Corporations in World Politics,” *Foreign Affairs* 53.1 (1974): 153, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20039497>.

¹² *Ibid.*, 155-57.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 160-61.

¹⁴ Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 46.

¹⁵ Parag Khanna, “These 25 Companies are More Powerful than Many Countries,” *Foreign*

highlights the “statelessness” of multinationals, who trade in their national roots for better tax environments and optimized supply chains. American companies, such as GE, ExxonMobil, and IBM, hold trillions of dollars tax-free in offshore accounts and overseas markets.¹⁶ Despite the continuous rise of multinationals as global powerhouses, Babic et al. note that Strange’s challenge to IR scholars has nevertheless had little impact on the discipline, stating “the corporation has yet to emerge as a broadly accepted and systematically analyzed object of research in international politics.”¹⁷ While other frameworks, such as constructivism, may recognize the role of corporations, Babic et al. suggest that firms, in general, remain secondary actors within current IR literature. The authors conclude that corporations should receive attention equivalent to that accorded to states within IR and IPE, noting that major events in the global economy, such as the 2008 financial crisis, cannot be explained through a state-centric approach.¹⁸ Moreover, they argue that “only a proper analytical focus on corporations as actors, embedded in global power relations, can pave the way for a systematic understanding of their (structural) power in the global system.”¹⁹ Consequently, this analysis of corporations within international climate politics aims to diverge from the state-centric literature and further the understanding of the complex role business plays in global governance.

A recent paper by Tim Bartley propounds corporations as meaningful actors through the lens of political sociology. Bartley argues that corporations play three key roles within global governance: sponsor, inhibitor, and provider. MNCs may sponsor favorable neoliberal trade rules, inhibit regulation in areas such as labor rights and climate change, and directly provide governance in issues like finance, food safety, and environmental justice.²⁰ For example, Bartley cites that U.S. companies may act as inhibitors through funding climate denialist campaigns to hobble climate change regulation. On the other hand, he cites IKEA’s promotion of the Forest Stewardship Council as an example of

Policy, March 15, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/15/these-25-companies-are-more-powerful-than-many-countries-multinational-corporate-wealth-power/>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Babic et al., “States Versus Corporations,” 21.

¹⁸ Ibid., 39.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Tim Bartley, “Transnational Corporations and Global Governance,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 44 (2018): 159.

corporations providing governance in environmental justice.²¹ The ability for MNCs to be simultaneously inhibitors and providers within a given policy arena illustrates the significant variation in how corporations participate in global politics.

Furthermore, John Ruggie presents a framework for classifying three primary ways in which multinationals exert power in international relations: instrumental, structural, and discursive.²² Instrumental refers to deploying resources to achieve one's aims (e.g. campaign contributions) whereas structural refers to affecting an outcome without expending resources to achieve it (e.g. threatening to relocate to receive more favorable tax breaks). Lastly, discursive refers to influencing outcomes through shaping public discourse and establishing favorable social norms (e.g. denying climate change to avoid transitioning to greener technologies).²³ Both Bartley and Ruggie show that corporations have far-reaching influence in international affairs through the various roles they perform across many issue areas. Therefore, this paper closely examines how effectively corporations can exert such influence within the climate governance regime.

The International Climate Regime

Despite widespread reference to the international climate regime by media outlets, policymakers, and scholars, global climate governance is neither a coordinated effort nor limited only to state governance. Farhana Yamin and Joanna Depledge first introduced the concept of an "international climate regime" in their discussion of the participation of non-state actors in climate governance. While Yamin and Depledge recognized multiple non-state actors, including corporations, they focused primarily on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the outcomes of the COP up to 2003.²⁴ However, in recent years, scholars have called the efficacy of the international climate regime into question, as inter-

²¹ Ibid., 157.

²² John Gerard Ruggie, "Multinationals as Global Institution: Power, Authority and Relative Autonomy," *Regulation and Governance* 12.3 (2018): 321.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Farhana Yamin and Joanna Depledge, *The International Climate Regime: A Guide to Rules, Institutions, and Procedures* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

state cooperation and state institutions have been impeded by the conflicting interests of the parties involved. According to Thomas Hickman in his book, *Rethinking Authority in Global Climate Governance*, relying exclusively on state-centric regimes for global challenges like climate change limits the potential for alternative regimes to provide meaningful governance solutions.²⁵ As such, scholars have reconsidered the role of non-state actors as both receivers and providers of governance within the international climate regime.

Particularly, Elinor Ostrom has made progress toward rethinking the state-based approach to global governance. Ostrom relies upon the notion of polycentricity: the existence of multiple centers, or governance units, that wield power within a regime. In Ostrom's report to the World Bank, she argues:

Single policies adopted only at a global scale are unlikely to generate sufficient trust among citizens and firms so that collective action can take place in a comprehensive and transparent manner that will effectively reduce global warming...A polycentric approach has the main advantage of encouraging experimental efforts at multiple levels...and having others also take responsibility can be more effectively undertaken in small- to medium-scale governance units that are linked together through information networks and monitoring at all levels.²⁶

Polycentrism inherently requires collective action because non-state actors form their own coalitions and construct solutions that are better tailored to their specific set of needs. For business, Ostrom's argument suggests that an autonomous governance unit will increase trust between policymakers and executives, stimulate sustainable innovation through experimentation, and foster more collaboration with other actors through information networks. Similarly, Robert Keohane and David Victor uphold Ostrom's polycentric approach to climate change through their concept of a "regime complex." They argue that climate governance does not occur within a single unified regime, but within a "regime complex: a loosely-coupled set of specific regimes."²⁷ This distinction

²⁵ Thomas Hickmann, *Rethinking Authority in Global Climate Governance: How Transnational Climate Initiatives Relate to the International Climate Regime* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 5.

²⁶ Elinor Ostrom, *A Polycentric Approach for Coping with Climate Change*, (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2009), 1.

²⁷ Robert Keohane and David Victor, "The Regime Complex for Climate Change," *Perspective*

of regime and regime complex proves useful, as it suggests that the scope of climate governance extends beyond the UNFCCC. Instead, there are cohorts of actors who establish rules and regulations that vary by country, region, and interest group. Keohane and Victor contend that the climate change regime complex has two advantages over the traditional monocentric regime. First, regime complexes facilitate adaptability of rules to varying conditions, issues, and groups of actors. Second, regime complexes allow for flexibility over time, as they account for various rates of change across countries and political structures (e.g. developing vs. developed).²⁸ Affirming Ostrom's polycentric approach to climate change, Keohane and Victor's concept of a regime complex, consisting of smaller-scale governance units, facilitates cooperation among actors and encourages experimental efforts at multiple levels.

Building on the work of Ostrom, Daniel Cole explores the advantages of a polycentric approach to climate change policy while advocating for the "Bloomington School" of political economy. Cole posits that "a polycentric approach to climate governance might provide the best chance we have of accelerating progress toward global climate stabilization by providing more frequent and varied opportunities for major emitting parties to engage in face-to-face communications in bilateral and multilateral fora."²⁹ More frequent positive interactions lead to progress by building mutual trust, which increases cooperation and collective action between the various actors within international climate governance. According to Cole, the WBCSD, representing the CEOs of over 200 companies globally, has collaborated with experts from the Stockholm Resilience Centre and the World Resources Institute (WRI) on its "ACTION2020" plan to combat climate change through business solutions.³⁰ Having also worked with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and the Earthwatch Institute, Cole argues that "the WBCSD's activities should not be dismissed blithely as 'greenwash,' but should be understood as [Adil] Najam has argued, as a serious offer from the private sector to participate in

on *Politics* 9.1 (2011): 7-23.

²⁸ Ibid., 15.

²⁹ Daniel Cole, "Advantages of a Polycentric Approach to Climate Change Policy," *Nature Climate Change* 5 (2015): 117.

³⁰ Ibid., 116.

finding effective solutions to problems such as climate change.”³¹ Therefore, the work of Ostrom and Cole, among others, demonstrates that further research is needed on the role of private actors within the polycentric climate regime. By analyzing how the We Mean Business coalition establishes a credible governance unit, this paper will contribute to the discussion on polycentric approaches to global policymaking and illuminate the dynamics at play within private climate governance.

Corporate Power and Authority in International Climate Governance

As the environmental movement coalesced in the latter half of the 20th century, corporations became further engaged in policy-making processes, notably in regards to the Montreal Protocol, signed in 1987, and during the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Additionally, in more recent years, alternative forms of climate governance have emerged beyond the state-based system of international politics. For instance, businesses, environmental NGOs, and international organizations cooperate to develop environmentally friendly norms, rules, and mechanisms of corporate action.³² Robert Falkner argues that corporations play four roles in environmental politics. First, corporations lobby in international negotiations to prevent regulations harmful to profits, encourage more business-friendly policies, and shape regulation to create new markets and encourage innovation. Second, corporations carry out implementation of new regulatory requirements and drive mechanisms forward through technological innovation. Third, corporations shape public discourse by advocating for a more business-friendly perspective that enhances the public legitimacy of private actors. Finally, corporations self-govern through private norm-building and rule-setting, which involves corporate social responsibility (CSR) mechanisms and partnerships with NGOs and international organizations.³³ While corporations partake in each of these four roles, it is the latter form of private norm and rule-setting that enables corporations to transition from rule-taker to rule-maker.

In analyzing the shift from public to private environmental governance, Arild Vatn looks at two ways in which corporations set their own rules. One way is through certification in which businesses adopt certain standards to

³¹ Ibid., 116-17.

³² Robert Falkner, *Business Power and Conflict in International Environmental Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 7-8.

³³ Ibid., 9-10.

signal to consumers that their products and operations are environmentally and socially responsible. Another way is through CSR, which leverages the need for corporations to maintain a positive reputation and brand presence.³⁴ While Vatn concludes that certification and CSR are only marginal phenomena due to the conflict between public and private interests, some argue that they fill necessary governance gaps where interstate relations fall short. José Célio Silveira Andrade and José Antônio Puppim de Oliveira point out that private actors view “market-oriented and industry-based self-regulation instruments... [as] the only environmental regulation mechanisms able to respond to the shortcomings of traditional command-and-control state-based regulations.”³⁵ In fact, Silveira Andrade and Puppim de Oliveira argue that voluntary certification and CSR initiatives are at the forefront of emerging private and hybrid governance regimes, as they tend to evolve into legitimate regulation mechanisms backed by NGOs, cities, governments, and international organizations. The authors use the CDP standards as an example, stating, “While initially designed as a voluntary set of standards, [they] are now recognized as legitimate standards by some governments and IOs (international organizations).”³⁶ Founded by 22 investors in the United Kingdom, CDP now has more than 530 investors under its purview, accounting for over \$57 trillion.³⁷ The emergence of private initiatives as valid governance mechanisms exemplifies the critical role played by corporations, raising further questions about the diffusion of authority within the international climate regime.

The rise of private initiatives has prompted some scholars to explore how the agency of corporate actors relates to the international climate regime and state governance. Notably, Jessica Green argues that there are two types of private authority at play in international environmental governance: delegated and entrepreneurial. Delegated authority involves states assigning control to private actors through formal governance mechanisms.³⁸ By contrast,

³⁴ Arild Vatn, “Environmental Governance—From Public to Private?” *Ecological Economics* 148 (2018): 174-175.

³⁵ José Célio Silveira Andrade and José Antônio Puppim de Oliveira, “The Role of the Private Sector in Global Climate and Energy Governance,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 130.2 (2015): 377.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 378.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Jessica Green, *Rethinking Private Authority: Agents and Entrepreneurs in International*

entrepreneurial authority does not involve the delegation of power. Instead, private actors create their own rules and it is left to the discretion of other actors to determine whether to adopt them.³⁹ Through Green's case studies on the Clean Development Mechanism (delegated) and the Greenhouse Gas Protocol (entrepreneurial), she argues that the state is not retreating, as some IR scholars have warned. Rather, "the way that states are governing appears to be changing: they are enlisting more actors (including international organizations and private actors) to undertake the same task."⁴⁰ Thus, according to Green, as opposed to authority resting solely with the state, there are multiple pockets of authority working in unison.⁴¹ Hickman furthers this claim by arguing that the emergence of private climate governance is a "reconfiguration of authority that only reinforces the importance of the intergovernmental level."⁴² Hickman explains that "while sub-national, non-profit, and business actors have acquired various authoritative functions in global climate governance over the past few decades, the international climate regime remains the center around which these actors revolve and upon which their initiatives are built."⁴³ In maintaining that the state remains a key player among other centers of authority, Green and Hickman's insight reinforces the work of Ostrom and Cole, as well as that of Keohane and Victor in regards to the polycentric nature of the international climate regime. The examination of how private initiatives, such as the We Mean Business coalition, establish alternative forms of climate governance will advance the current literature by furnishing analysis of more recent cases that have emerged since the Paris Agreement in 2015.

CASE STUDY

Founded in 2014, the We Mean Business coalition sought to unify the world's leading business initiatives on climate change and has since overseen the launch of multiple governance mechanisms to accelerate corporate climate action. Specifically, this paper will discuss one mechanism, the 100% Renewable Energy initiative (RE100), in further detail below. Given that this initiative

Environmental Governance (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 7.

³⁹ Ibid..

⁴⁰ Ibid., 175.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Hickmann, *Rethinking Authority in International Climate Governance*, 12.

⁴³ Ibid.

was launched in 2015, it is representative of the current efforts of We Mean Business and the role of private actors in the post-Paris climate regime. While other initiatives exist within the business community, We Mean Business is led by the most prominent leaders in corporate sustainability and has just over 1,000 companies within its network.⁴⁴ To demonstrate how We Mean Business establishes authority and develops credible governance mechanisms, the following section will explore its functional organizational structure, the development, progress, and impact of RE100, and how businesses, in turn, implement climate action within their business model. This section will conclude with an analysis of emerging trends supporting the theoretical foundations discussed in the literature review.

The Functional Structure of We Mean Business

In its most basic form, We Mean Business is a coalition of coalitions that aims to consolidate the work of the world's leading corporate climate initiatives. The coalition began to take form in 2013 over the course of a series of climate events and conferences during which several corporate climate leaders convened to discuss ways to heighten the collective action of the business community. With COP21 in Paris on the horizon, these business leaders considered the potential for a new international agreement as a pivotal moment for business to increase its influence in policy creation and scale up corporate climate action.⁴⁵ Those involved in these early discussions included Aron Cramer, President of Business for Social Responsibility (BSR); Mindy Lubber, President of Ceres; Mark Kenber, CEO of The Climate Group; Nigel Topping, current CEO of We Mean Business; Paul Dickinson, Executive Chair and founder of CDP; and Peter Bakker, President of WBCSD. Accompanying the leaders of the various initiatives were Hannah Jones, then Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO) of Nike, and Steve Howard, then CSO of IKEA and current co-Chair of We Mean Business.⁴⁶ From these discussions, three

⁴⁴ "Companies," *We Mean Business*, 2019, <https://www.wemeanbusinesscoalition.org/companies/>.

⁴⁵ Joel Makower, "Two Steps Forward: A Powerhouse Corporate Climate Coalition Says, 'We Mean Business,'" *GreenBiz*, June 9, 2014, <https://www.greenbiz.com/blog/2014/06/09/powerhouse-climate-coalition-we-mean-business>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

objectives of We Mean Business emerged: coordinate efforts to avoid duplicating activities, encourage collaboration among the initiatives to increase the quantity and quality of carbon reporting, and develop a common set of principles to advocate for during the policymaking process.⁴⁷

The collaboration between these leaders of corporate climate groups enabled the business community to increase its role in the policymaking process and counter the voice of businesses opposed to climate action. According to Howard, “there are a lot of good and credible NGOs and business groups working on climate change for more than 10 years, but we were still politically stuck. The proactive, progressive business voice wasn’t breaking through. Meanwhile, the business voice that wants to maintain the status quo has been well-organized, well-funded.”⁴⁸ In other words, the consolidation of the most influential corporate climate initiatives served to combat the negative image of business among climate activists and show policymakers that corporations are prepared to meaningfully participate in shaping a more sustainable world. The unique structure of We Mean Business as a coalition of corporate climate initiatives that maintain their operational autonomy allows the organization to increase the role of the private sector within the international climate regime and achieve greater authority through the collective influence of the myriad actors under its purview.

While We Mean Business brings together hundreds of actors, its organizational structure is designed to facilitate cooperation and mitigate tension between the differing interests of the many players involved. One concern with We Mean Business from the outset has been the difficulty of prompting hundreds of businesses, executives, and corporate climate groups to work together collaboratively. In his review of We Mean Business at the time of its founding, Joel Makower, Chairman and Executive Editor at the GreenBiz Group, posited the question: “Is it even possible for all these groups—and the 500 or so mostly large companies they represent—to have a unified view on anything, let alone climate policy?”⁴⁹ The concern that a large number of actors may hinder cooperation is a common critique in IR literature. As Keohane and Ostrom acknowledge, “In international relations, it has almost become conventional wisdom that increasing the number of players magnifies the

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

difficulty of cooperation.”⁵⁰ However, Ostrom and Duncan Snidal explain that “an important aspect of institutional design...has to do with partitioning relatively large numbers of actors into smaller subsets, which may be able to meet frequently face to face...or to negotiate on issues that particularly concern them, before returning to negotiate with the larger set of participants.”⁵¹ This structure facilitates the meaningful engagement of actors in the process and allows subgroups to focus on their respective objectives without interference from the larger set. This polycentric configuration is reflected by We Mean Business, for the various initiatives may pursue their own agendas, maintain their respective organizational structures, and manage their unique relationships with stakeholders. The business groups may collaborate on similar projects and align on policy recommendations without forcing the disparate players to forfeit their autonomy. Thus, We Mean Business functions to enhance cooperation within the business community despite the substantial rise in the number of actors at play.

In addition to its polycentric design, We Mean Business further builds cooperation amid a greater number of participants by facilitating knowledge sharing. Decreased information barriers and increased transparency promote cooperation between large sets of actors in international relations. Keohane and Ostrom, citing Hackett et al. and Libecap, explain that “extensive common knowledge and ease of information provision facilitate cooperation, while private information and barriers to communication make it much more difficult.”⁵² For the We Mean Business coalition, the creation of a platform through which the leaders of the various initiatives routinely meet, encourages them to share best practices, brainstorm ideas, and improve overall awareness of what their counterparts are working on. For example, the GreenBiz 2019 conference hosted by WBCSD brought together 100 company executives and industry experts, providing a forum for discussion of recent business solutions to drive long-term value creation and improve environmental governance practices.⁵³ One reason the progressive business community was politically

⁵⁰ Robert Keohane and Elinor Ostrom, eds., *Local Commons and Global Interdependence: Heterogeneity and Cooperation in Two Domains* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁵³ See “Join Us at GreenBiz,” WBCSD, <http://promo.wbcd.org/greenbiz-2019/>.

stuck, as Howard explained, was because each initiative was being pulled in a different direction without full awareness of the others' activities.⁵⁴ In effect, the reduction in information asymmetries increases cooperation among the initiatives that would have otherwise been operating independently of one another.

Moreover, the common knowledge and transparency provided by We Mean Business allow individual firms to more strategically engage in corporate climate action. Through the We Mean Business website, the climate action commitments of each initiative, such as RE100, are all consolidated in one place.⁵⁵ This gives businesses the ability to see the full range of options available to them, enabling them to strategically select the initiatives to which they commit. In the past, the lack of information sharing limited a firm's involvement with climate initiatives. However, through We Mean Business, firms are more easily able to diversify their climate action portfolio, interact with multiple initiatives at once, and receive credible information from a single authoritative body. For example, since 2016, the H&M Group has made seven different climate action commitments through We Mean Business: RE100, Science-based Targets initiative (SBTi), carbon pricing, removal of deforestation in the supply chain, doubling energy productivity through EP100, public reporting of climate change information, and responsible engagement in climate policy.⁵⁶ In 2018, the firm reached the highest possible score in the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI) in the areas of Quality and Recall Management, Social Reporting, Environmental Reporting, as well as the highest industry score in Supply Chain Management.⁵⁷ As more firms increase their engagement in this way, they provide We Mean Business and its subsidiaries with more information on firm activities,

⁵⁴ Makower, "Two Steps Forward."

⁵⁵ See <https://www.wemeanbusinesscoalition.org/take-action/>.

⁵⁶ "Companies: H&M Hennes and Mauritz," *We Mean Business*, 2019, <https://www.wemeanbusinesscoalition.org/companies/#pageNum=8>.

⁵⁷ The Dow Jones Sustainability Index invites approximately 4,500 companies from the S&P Global BMI and reviews all companies that have been analyzed through the SAM Corporate Sustainability Assessment. Based on sustainability scores, the DJSI conducts a rules-based selection process of the top 10 percent most sustainable companies in each industry to be included in the final index. According to research from Sarah Elena Windolph, DJSI was the highest ranked index among sustainability experts despite the fact that only 48 percent classified it as "highly trusted." Sarah Elena Windolph, "Assessing Corporate Sustainability Through Ratings: Challenges and Their Causes," *Journal of Environmental Sustainability* 1.1 (2011): 73; H&M Group, "Sustainability Reporting: Indexes and Rankings," *H&M Group*, <https://sustainability.hm.com/en/sustainability/about/what-others-say/indexes-rankings.html>.

which can be used to cooperate further with businesses and refine the structure of their climate action commitments. Therefore, We Mean Business effectively facilitates cooperation among many actors within the private climate governance regime in such a way that was not possible prior to its formation.

To further illustrate the role of We Mean Business within private climate governance, the following section explores the RE100 initiative. The analysis below explains how the initiative establishes credibility within corporate climate governance and how We Mean Business has enabled its rise to prominence.

RE100

RE100 is an initiative founded by The Climate Group in partnership with CDP—both subsidiaries of We Mean Business—to “engage, support, and showcase large, influential businesses committed to 100% renewable electricity.”⁵⁸ The initiative was launched at Climate Week NYC 2014, a week-long climate change conference organized by The Climate Group and sponsored by the United Nations and the City of New York. Bringing together business leaders, policymakers, and government officials, the conference celebrated current climate action and prompted collaborative discussion on how to scale impact and accomplish more. Founded by IKEA Group and Swiss Re, RE100 was comprised of 11 other committed companies such as H&M, Nestlé, Unilever, and Mars (the only U.S. firm). Since 2014, RE100 has expanded to include over 200 companies, including Apple, Facebook, General Motors, Google, JP Morgan Chase, Nike, Walmart, and many other Global 500 firms and industry leaders. Companies from China, India, Mexico, the Middle East, and Africa have also joined the initiative.⁵⁹ The rapid adoption of RE100 has seen the initiative surpass its original target of 100 companies by 2020 three years early, demonstrating its widespread influence within the business world.⁶⁰

Firms need to satisfy a number of criteria for membership within

⁵⁸ “World First as 100 Multinationals Target 100% Renewable Electricity,” *RE100*, July 10, 2017, <http://there100.org/news/14257837>.

⁵⁹ “Companies,” *RE100*, 2019, <http://there100.org/companies>.

⁶⁰ “World First as 100 Multinationals Target 100% Renewable Electricity.”

RE100.⁶¹ To join, companies must:

1. Be “influential,” in that they are a recognized brand, member of the Fortune 1000, or have a significant power footprint that exceeds 100 GWh
2. Be willing to make a public commitment to sourcing 100% renewable energy across all operations as defined by the Greenhouse Gas Protocol
3. Have a renewable power strategy that has credible deadlines with a minimum of 30% by 2020, 60% by 2030, 90% by 2040, and 100% by 2050
4. Report their progress annually through the RE100 reporting spreadsheet, which outlines total electricity consumption and total renewable use data subject to third-party verification

Additionally, the RE100 Technical Criteria outline the options available to companies seeking to transition their energy consumption, such as the purchase of on-site installations, direct lines from off-site suppliers, direct procurement from off-site grid-connected generators, contracts with suppliers, and the purchase of unbundled energy attribute certificates.⁶² The membership standards and technical criteria are overseen by the RE100 Technical Advisory Group, which consists of third-party experts from the CDP, Center for Resource Solutions, RECS International, Rocky Mountain Institute, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the WRI.⁶³ As sustainability experts have criticized private indices and initiatives for lack of credible information, the formation of the Technical Advisory Board is an effort to validate the initiative in the eyes of external stakeholders.

As RE100 has gained traction among leading firms, the UN and other international organizations have recognized it as a leading initiative for driving corporate climate action. Upon hitting the 100-member milestone in 2017, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC Patricia Espinosa said, “This would not be happening without leadership—and not just at the level of a CEO or Company Board. It has been a huge collective effort of people at all levels...Moreover, this

⁶¹ “Joining Criteria,” *RE100*, January 2017, <http://media.virbcdn.com/files/45/db8335e1ef4b851c-RE100JoiningCriteria.pdf>, 1-2.

⁶² “RE100 Technical Criteria: Technical Note on Renewable Electricity Options,” *RE100*, January 2018, <http://media.virbcdn.com/files/73/4c55f6034585b02f-RE100TechnicalCriteria.pdf>, 2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 6.

‘100 moment’ is part of an alliance of inspiring actions flourishing across the globe by corporations.”⁶⁴ Echoing Espinosa’s sentiments, Dominic Waughray of the World Economic Forum stated, “RE100 shows the potential for business to lead, and collectively shift markets to a more sustainable future.”⁶⁵ It is significant that RE100 has gained recognition from the UNFCCC, the World Economic Forum, and other policymakers despite its independence from the traditional governance channels of the UN and state governments. It is important to note that the recognition of RE100 by Espinosa and Waughray may have been a result of the close relations between international governance institutions and private initiatives, such as The Climate Group and CDP, providing policymakers with unique insight into the work of RE100. In fact, gaining support from actors outside the business community is part and parcel of the strategy to establish RE100 as a credible governance mechanism within international climate politics.

Along with leveraging the voices of world leaders, The Climate Group and CDP also rely on leadership from the initiative’s member corporations to advance the business case for 100 percent renewable electricity. For some of the companies who join the initiative, RE100 publishes a case study on why the company decided to join, its specific goals and progress, and why it thinks RE100 is a worthwhile investment. By publishing the case studies, RE100 communicates the efforts of the specific company to the public, while also putting pressure on other companies to follow suit. As Steve Howard, CSO of IKEA, explains, “actions speak louder than words and well-known names can demonstrate the strong business case for going 100 percent renewable.”⁶⁶ In other words, showcasing the commitments of industry leaders signals to other companies that transitioning to more sustainable practices is a rising industry strategy that is necessary to remain competitive. Mike Power, COO for Technology and Operations at DBS Bank, explains that “companies need to ‘get with the program now’ or risk losing relevance to their customers.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ “100 Multinationals Commit to 100% Renewable Electricity,” *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, July 11, 2017, <https://unfccc.int/news/100-multinationals-commit-to-100-renewable-electricity>.

⁶⁵ “World First as 100 Multinationals Target 100% Renewable Electricity,” *RE100*, July 10, 2017, <http://there100.org/news/14257837>.

⁶⁶ “IKEA,” *RE100*, June 2016, <http://there100.org/ikea/>.

⁶⁷ Constant Alarcon, Sam Kimmins, Marie Reynolds, Eleanor Dinnadge, Shailesh Telang,

In addition, RE100 member companies cooperate with one another, sharing best practices and collaborating to find new, innovative approaches. Such collaboration establishes an exclusive network between RE100 member firms, creating business opportunities inaccessible to non-members. Altogether, the benefits to a firm's public image, establishment of industry norms, and access to a unique network of industry leaders encourage companies to buy in to RE100 and help explain the over two-fold increase in member companies since 2017.⁶⁸

Furthermore, RE100 shapes renewable energy policy at the national and international levels. According to results from CDP's Climate Change Questionnaire, policy was the most cited barrier to sourcing renewable electricity.⁶⁹ The initiative's 2018 annual report states, "RE100 is committed to helping members overcome those barriers by making the case to national governments for simplifying access; enabling markets where direct purchase of electricity is possible for companies—giving them control over their energy supply—and where traceability of renewable electricity is guaranteed."⁷⁰ Beyond assisting individual member companies in lobbying for more favorable policies, collectively, RE100 forms a unified voice for businesses committed to transitioning their electricity sources and opening up more energy markets to accelerate the transition. Speaking to the collaborative power of RE100, Michelle Patron, Director of Sustainability for Microsoft, said: "RE100 brings us all together, makes us a market power and our political power, our advocacy a lot stronger than any individual company alone."⁷¹ In effect, the collective influence of RE100 enabled its involvement in the negotiations of the EU Renewable Energy Directive, which ultimately resulted in securing a 2030 renewable energy target and a legal framework for PPAs (Power Purchase Agreements).⁷²

and Chiara Gilbert, "Approaching a Tipping Point: How Corporate Users are Redefining Global Electricity Markets," *RE100 Progress and Insights Report*, January 2018, <http://media.virbcdn.com/files/97/8b2d4ee2c961f080-RE100ProgressandInsightsReport2018.pdf>, 21.

⁶⁸ Marie Reynolds, Jessy Field, and Sam Kimmins, "Accelerating Change: How Corporate Users Are Transforming the Renewable Energy Market," ed. Will Brittlebank, *RE100 Annual Report 2017*, https://www.theclimategroup.org/sites/default/files/devel-generate/kes/re100_annual_report_2017.pdf, 3; "Companies," *RE100*, <http://there100.org/companies>.

⁶⁹ Alarcon et al., "Approaching a Tipping Point," 22.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Power Purchase Agreements are contracts established between privately-owned suppliers and purchasers of electricity for a specific project connected to the power grid. The purpose of a PPA is to finance a project by securing a revenue stream and outlining the contractual terms. PPAs

Member firms have also advocated on behalf of RE100, as Mars, Unilever, and Fujitsu promoted the economic benefits of corporate sourcing of renewables at the Australian Federal Parliament in October 2018.⁷³ Many member firms were also involved in the Talanoa Dialogue at COP24 in Katowice, Poland.⁷⁴ As RE100 has established a certain level of credibility with policymakers, this may be leveraged in the creation of governance mechanisms by states and intergovernmental bodies that subsequently impact renewable energy adoption on a broader scale.

By attracting more large companies to commit to 100 percent renewable electricity and influencing renewable energy policy, RE100 aspires to make renewables the default energy source for business. RE100 aims to increase demand for renewable energy, which will lower the market costs for such technology. In turn, lower costs will make renewable energy more accessible and attractive for businesses, cities, and governments to adopt. As mentioned above, companies in the commercial and industrial sectors alone account for about 67 percent of the world's electricity usage.⁷⁵ Moreover, in a Special Report on 1.5 °C, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) found that renewables will need to make up between 70 to 85 percent of electricity by 2050 to not exceed the 1.5 °C benchmark.⁷⁶ RE100 cites the

vary by country and region depending on local policies and regulations. See Emily Farnworth, "Briefing Report 2015," ed. Clare Saxon, *RE100*, January 2015, <http://media.virbcdn.com/files/d4/0d785368ea4e15c5-RE100briefing-reportre100websitev3.pdf>, 6.

⁷³ Elanor Dinnadge, Constant Alarcon, and Marie Reynolds, "Moving to Truly Global Impact: Influencing Renewable Electricity Markets," *RE100 Progress and Insights Report*, November 2018, <http://media.virbcdn.com/files/fd/868ace70d5d2f590-RE100ProgressandInsightsAnnualReportNovember2018.pdf>, 10.

⁷⁴ "COP24: Leading Companies Demonstrate Climate Action, Call for Policy Ambition," *We Mean Business*, December 12, 2018, <https://www.wemeanbusinesscoalition.org/blog/cop24-leading-companies-demonstrate-climate-action-call-for-policy-ambition>. The Talanoa Dialogue is an inclusive, participatory, and transparent forum for discussion on climate action that brings together leaders from government, civil society, business, religion, NGOs, Indigenous peoples, and other groups to share stories and experiences on climate action. See "What is Talanoa?" *Talanoa Dialogue Platform*, 2018, <https://talanoadialogue.com/background>.

⁷⁵ Åberg and Weckend, "Corporate Sourcing of Renewables," 3.

⁷⁶ Valérie Masson-Delmontte, Panmao Zhai, Hans-Otto Pörtner, Debra Roberts, Jim Skea, Priyadarshi Shukla, et al., eds., "Global Warming of 1.5°C: An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C Above Pre-Industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, In the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to

data provided by IRENA and the IPCC as motivation for its work and sees itself as a leader in the energy transition. Last year, RE100 earned recognition as the “Environmental Campaign of the Year” at the BusinessGreen Leaders Awards and as one of seven leaders on UN Sustainable Development Goal 7 at a Seven for 7 event hosted by Sustainable Energy for All.⁷⁷ These awards reveal the considerable acknowledgment that RE100 has gained within the proactive business community despite its relatively short existence.

Going forward, RE100 aims to continue engaging businesses in its current network and to expand into additional sectors and regions with untapped potential.⁷⁸ RE100 is further shifting its attention to supply chains which emit, on average, four times the amount of a firm’s direct operations. While RE100 has established itself as a credible governance mechanism within international climate affairs, it also is a key actor in the renewable energy transition through its representatives’ and member companies’ lobbying. Accordingly, the example of RE100 illustrates We Mean Business’ approach to climate action commitments and carries significant implications for the state of private climate governance post-Paris.

Within the context of the IR and IPE literature, RE100 supports the theories of private authority and global governance. Specifically, RE100 directly aligns with Falkner’s four roles of business in environmental politics. RE100 lobbies for more favorable renewable energy frameworks to create new markets, helps corporations implement new regulatory standards through its technical advisory board, shapes public discourse by advancing the business case for renewables through case studies and media features, and allows the corporate community to self-govern by adopting a mechanism that has been created outside the jurisdiction of government regulation. The lobbying of RE100 and its member firms also supports Hickman’s conclusion that, despite the emergence of private climate governance, the traditional partnership of governments and international organizations remains the central focus that the myriad other actors rely on. The companies who join RE100 do not seek abrogation of the Paris

the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty,” *IPCC Special Report*, 2018, 15.

⁷⁷ “RE100 Wins Environmental Awareness Campaign of the Year Award,” *RE100*, June 28, 2018, <http://there100.org/news/14279497>; “RE100 Leading the Way on Accessible and Sustainable Energy for All,” *RE100*, July 17, 2018, <http://there100.org/news/14280060>.

⁷⁸ Dinnadge et al., “Moving to Truly Global Impact,” 10.

Agreement. Rather, they aim to work in tandem with the UNFCCC and its counterparts to accelerate climate action. In fact, when U.S. President Donald Trump announced plans to withdraw from the Paris Agreement in 2016, over 2,000 businesses and investors signed on to the “We Are Still In” declaration, which was coordinated by We Mean Business, its subsidiaries, and a litany of other sustainability NGOs to reaffirm the U.S.’s continued commitment to combating climate change.⁷⁹

While RE100 reinforces the work of Falkner and Hickman, it also furthers Green’s theory of entrepreneurial authority in which private actors create their own rules, and it remains up to other actors whether they adopt them.⁸⁰ RE100 aligns with Green’s framework of entrepreneurial authority due to its formation by business groups and corporate NGOs without involvement of the state. While Green based her argument on the GHG Protocol established in the late 1990s, the current efforts of We Mean Business illuminate how the practice of entrepreneurial authority has gained greater prominence in the past two decades as private actors increase engagement within global climate governance. Finally, RE100 substantiates Ostrom’s polycentric approach to climate change. Given that We Mean Business is its own governance unit, RE100 demonstrates how mechanisms created outside the state-based system may encourage cooperation and trust within the business community because the rules are written by business leaders, for business leaders. Put simply, RE100 is the type of initiative Ostrom advocates for in her polycentric approach: it is tailored to its specific subset of actors (corporations) and encourages them to assume greater responsibility for their actions than they otherwise would have under restrictive regulation at the global level.

Although RE100 supports multiple theories of private authority in global governance, it is not without its shortcomings. One notable critique is that RE100 targets only “influential” and large companies. On the surface, this decision appears to be positive since industry leaders usually have the largest market cap and their business decisions affect the strategies of their industry counterparts. However, according to research from Sarah Elena Windolph on the challenges of assessing corporate sustainability, selecting only the largest

⁷⁹ “About,” *We Are Still In*, <https://www.wearestillin.com/about>.

⁸⁰ Green, *Rethinking Private Authority*, 7.

companies ultimately leads to bias.⁸¹ Windolph explains that focusing solely on the “best in class” companies means that the target audience is investors and that their primary motivation is whether sustainability can turn a profit. Moreover, Windolph argues that because small- to medium-sized firms are left out, “sustainability leaders may not be identified by this procedure, since the raters possibly do not even include them in the sample or they do not take part in the rating.”⁸² What this means for RE100 and We Mean Business more generally is that the work of the initiative is inherently tethered to and contingent upon stakeholder interests as opposed to being representative of independent climate action. Whether profit maximization and meaningful climate action may sustainably coincide in the future, however, is what will determine the long-term viability of We Mean Business as a credible governance regime within international climate politics.

Internalizing Climate Action

As RE100 has grown in prominence within private climate governance, the concern that these voluntary corporate governance mechanisms are merely symbolic begs the question: how do these initiatives become embedded in a firm’s operations and affect its profit margins and overall competitiveness? While scholars and critics have argued that sustainability efforts are no more than corporate “greenwashing,” there is in fact a structured approach to analyzing how climate commitments influence a company’s internal operations.⁸³ According to Philip Mirvis and Bradley K. Googins, who adopt Jean Piaget’s developmental theory, there are five stages in the development of corporate citizenship: elementary, engaged, innovative, integrated, and transforming.⁸⁴ The authors define corporate citizenship as “balancing the expectations of stakeholders – such

⁸¹ Windolph, “Assessing Corporate Sustainability Through Ratings,” 66.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Michelle Rodrigue, Michel Magnan, and Charles Cho, “Is Environmental Governance Substantive or Symbolic?: An Empirical Investigation,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 114.1 (2013): 107. Greenwashing refers to the practice of corporations appearing to be environmental stewards as a way to divert attention away from their unsustainable practices. See Bruce Watson, “The Troubling Evolution of Corporate Greenwashing,” *The Guardian*, August 20, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/aug/20/greenwashing-environmentalism-lies-companies>.

⁸⁴ Philip Mirvis and Bradley K. Googins, *Stages of Corporate Citizenship: A Developmental Framework* (Chestnut Hill: The Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College, 2007), 3.

as shareholders, employees, communities, governments, and activists – with the management of a successful business.”⁸⁵ Other scholars simplify this framework to just three stages: compliance, efficiency, and innovation.⁸⁶ Mirvis and Googins argue that the initial stages of corporate citizenship are rudimentary in that they focus only on complying with laws and industry standards as a way to defend the firm’s reputation. In subsequent stages, firms tend to “wake up” to the expectations of society by implementing internal policies that go beyond the law, active public relations, and philanthropic activities, while still remaining reactive to social and environmental trends.⁸⁷ In the later stages of development, companies transition from being reactive to proactive. They broaden their agenda by launching an array of sustainability and social impact programs and become leading innovators in the stewardship of social and environmental issues. In fact, the authors explain that corporate leaders in the advanced stages of sustainability “partner extensively with other businesses, community groups, and NGOs to address problems, reach new markets, and develop local economies.”⁸⁸ Mirvis and Googins’ framework provides insights into We Mean Business and the influence of its initiatives on internal operations because the companies who commit are often in these latter stages of development.

Further, the rise of the Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO) is another important trend that contextualizes the framework of Mirvis and Googins. Although companies had sustainability positions as early as the 1980s, Dupont was the first company in the U.S. to establish the CSO position, appointing Linda Fisher as its CSO in 2004.⁸⁹ Since then, the number of CSO positions within U.S. publicly traded companies has risen to 44, with more than half being created after 2014.⁹⁰ Companies who have created the position tend

⁸⁵ Ibid., i.

⁸⁶ Kathleen Miller and George Serafeim, “Chief Sustainability Officers: Who Are They and What Do They Do?,” in *Leading Sustainable Change: An Organizational Perspective*, eds. Rebecca Henderson, Ranjay Gulati, and Michael Tushman (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 197.

⁸⁷ Mirvis and Googins, *Stages of Corporate Citizenship*, 6-7.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁹ “CSO Backstory: How Chief Sustainability Officers Reached the C-Suite,” *Weinreb Group*, September 2011, <https://weinrebgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/CSO-Back-Story-by-Weinreb-Group.pdf>, 6.

⁹⁰ “Updated CSO Research,” *Weinreb Group*, December 2018, <https://weinrebgroup.com/cso->

to be industry leaders with large social and environmental footprints, such as Nike, AT&T, Verizon, Coca-Cola, Walmart, and Dow. To shed light on this trend, Kathleen Miller, CEO of Miller Consultants, and George Serafeim, from Harvard Business School, investigated the role of CSO at different stages of corporate social development. They found that CSOs hold greater authority in more advanced stages of sustainability, often reporting directly to the CEO and integrating the strategic approach to social and environmental issues throughout the firm's entire operations.⁹¹ Moreover, companies with CSO positions were more likely to have a dedicated sustainability committee on the Board of Directors, providing the CSO with greater influence over the leadership's strategic decisions.⁹² Consequently, the rise of the CSO is an important trend because it reflects the leadership within the firm that drives internalization of climate action commitments within business operations.

The emergence of the CSO as a mainstay in the C-suite also hints at the way firms are adjusting their business models to align with the transition to more sustainable practices. Martin Wainstein and Adam Bumpus define a business model (BM) as “a ‘market device’ that outlines the rationale of how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value.”⁹³ Wainstein and Bumpus also explain that innovation of the business model can occur without changing the underlying product or service of the firm, as “an innovative BM redefines the relationship between a product and the customer by fundamentally shifting the value proposition of the existing business.”⁹⁴ Business model theory is central to the transition to sustainable energy because firms must combat what the authors call “lock-in,” which “is the metaphor to describe actors in a socio-technical regime that gain from perpetuating an existing technology at the expense of a new one, blocking incoming innovations.”⁹⁵ By breaking free from fossil fuels and incorporating sustainability into the value-creation process, new business models can be sustainable innovations themselves that may move the industry toward a new lock-in: renewable energy.⁹⁶

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⁹¹ Miller and Serafeim, “Chief Sustainability Officers,” 218.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Martin Wainstein and Adam Bumpus, “Business Models as Drivers of the Low Carbon Power System Transition: A Multi-Level Perspective,” *Journal of Cleaner Production* 126 (2016): 574.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 575.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Under the current pressures of global warming, proactive businesses have prioritized sustainability within their business models whereas others have remained steadfast in their use of fossil fuels. According to Wainstein and Bumpus, these businesses may be categorized as innovative BMs and incumbent BMs, respectively. Innovative BMs are incentivized to create a new value proposition through the potential for increased market share. This leads to new partnerships with investors, as well as reduced operational costs and avoidance of future industry disruptions given they themselves are the “disruptors.” Wainstein and Bumpus note the case of SolarCity, a 2006 venture capital startup offering solar energy projects through PPAs. Now the largest solar energy provider in the U.S., SolarCity owns 41 percent of the solar market and was acquired by Tesla in 2016.⁹⁷ The rise of SolarCity pressured incumbent U.S. utility companies to respond to this trend in the broader energy market. Ultimately, Wainstein and Bumpus conclude that “the more incumbents are forced to reconfigure their BM, the faster the power system undergoes a shift in its paradigm, further accelerating this process.”⁹⁸ The relationship of and distinction between innovative and incumbent BMs is foundational to understanding both how businesses implement greater climate action commitments and what the long-term aims of We Mean Business are.

We Mean Business: Hewlett Packard Enterprise and The BMW Group

The Hewlett Packard Enterprise Company (HPE) exemplifies how firms internalize the climate action commitments of We Mean Business. HPE is a multinational information technology (IT) company that separated from its counterpart HP Inc. in 2015 to focus on its technology and professional software services. Prior to the split, Hewlett Packard had appointed Nate Hurst as its first CSO in 2011, and he remains in the same role at HP Inc. today. Continuing the firm’s legacy of sustainability, HPE hired Lara Birkes as CSO in 2016.⁹⁹ Unlike Hurst, who was formerly a director of sustainability at Walmart

⁹⁷ Seth Shobhit, “SolarCity vs. First Solar: Fierce Competition in the Solar Power Market,” *Investopedia*, June 25, 2019, <https://www.investopedia.com/news/solarcity-versus-first-solar-tesla-fslr/>.

⁹⁸ Wainstein and Bumpus, “Business Models as Drivers of the Low Carbon Power System Transition,” 583.

⁹⁹ Mike Hower, “Hewlett Packard Enterprise’s CSO Lara Birkes on Sustainability,” *GreenBiz*, July 12, 2016, <https://www.greenbiz.com/article/lara-birkes-hpe-sustainability-compute>.

and had a predominantly business background, Birkes earned a Master's degree in international trade policy prior to holding leadership roles at the World Economic Forum, International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, and the We Mean Business subsidiary, WBCSD.¹⁰⁰ By hiring a sustainability expert with extensive experience leading international climate projects, HPE signaled its commitment to innovative and corporate-led social development. Under Birkes' leadership, HPE joined RE100 by setting a goal of 50 percent renewable energy consumption by 2025. Additionally, the firm claims to be "raising the bar by becoming the first company to establish a comprehensive supply chain management program that requires companies in their value chain to set science-based emissions reductions targets."¹⁰¹ The firm aims for 80 percent of its manufacturing suppliers to set science-based targets, which HPE will support through public tracking, independent third party verification, and capacity-building.¹⁰² Although HPE committed to the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) through We Mean Business, the supply chain emissions project reflects the efforts of HPE alone and is indicative of Birkes' leadership. HPE thus exemplifies a firm that has internalized the climate action commitments of We Mean Business and adopted an innovative BM that keeps it at the forefront of its industry when it comes to social and environmental stewardship.

Another key example of innovative corporate climate action is the BMW Group (BMW). While the automobile industry as a whole accounts for the largest share of fossil fuel consumption, BMW is regarded as one of the most sustainable firms in the world, ranked first on Corporate Knights' 2016 Global 100 most sustainable corporations index.¹⁰³ BMW's efforts began in 2009, with

¹⁰⁰ "Lara Birkes: Chief Sustainability Officer at HPE," *International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development*, <https://www.ictsd.org/about-us/lara-birkes>.

¹⁰¹ Cliff Henson, "HPE Targets 100 Million Tons of Supply Chain CO₂e Reductions," *Science Based Targets*, <https://sciencebasedtargets.org/2017/05/26/hpe-targets-100-million-tons-of-supply-chain-co2e-reductions/>.

¹⁰² "Living Progress Report: 2017," *Hewlett Packard Enterprise*, June 2018, <https://www.hpe.com/us/en/pdfViewer.html?docId=a00048490&parentPage=/us/en/living-progress/report&resourceTitle=HPE+Living+Progress+Report+2017>, 16.

¹⁰³ Corporate Knights is a sustainable business magazine that publishes a ranking of the top 100 most sustainable corporations based on a review of over 4,000 firms from across the world with a market capitalization over two billion dollars. Similar to DJSI, this index may be subject to bias given its focus on large firms. See "About Us," Corporate Knights, <https://www.corporateknights.com/us/about-us/>; Ryan Hewlett, "BMW the Most Sustainable Corporation in the World, According to Corporate Knights," *Salt*, January 26, 2016, <https://www.wearesalt.org/bmw-the->

its adoption of a company-wide sustainability strategy that aimed to “establish sustainability along the entire value chain and in all its basic processes, and thus create added value for the company, the environment, and society.”¹⁰⁴ BMW’s sustainability management statement highlights the company’s reasoning: “We also believe that the manufacturer with the most efficient and resource-friendly production processes will be the future industry leader, offering its customers state-of-the-art solutions for sustainable individual mobility.”¹⁰⁵ The move to an innovative, sustainable BM reflects BMW’s long-term effort to be the industry leader by decoupling from the current parameters of the fossil fuel lock-in. BMW’s foresight to remodel its operations around the impending transition to renewable energy have established it as an innovative firm set to disrupt competition and preserve its status as a leader in the industry.

Since 2009, BMW has labored to construct and implement its sustainable business model. BMW hired its first Head of Sustainability Strategy and Management in 2011, Alexander Nick, who still serves in the role today. Similar to Birkes at HPE, Nick has a background in sustainability, as a former research associate on corporate sustainability management at IMD Business School and former director at SustainAbility Ltd., a London-based global strategy consultancy and think tank advising businesses on sustainability issues.¹⁰⁶ Also in 2011, BMW founded its “i” series of plug-in electric vehicles, led by the flagship i3 and i8 models which began retail in 2013 and 2014, respectively, to compete with Tesla. Then, in 2016, BMW expanded the i series by introducing iPerformance, which started the transfer of BMW i technology to the BMW core brand through a fleet of plug-in hybrid variants of traditional models.¹⁰⁷ Through innovative manufacturing, BMW has reduced its per-vehicle energy consumption by 38 percent and CO2 emissions by 61.9 percent

most-sustainable-corporation-in-the-world-according-to-corporate-knights/.

¹⁰⁴ Erskin Blunck, “Germany BMW’s Sustainability Strategy of Evolution and Revolution towards a Circular Economy.” In *Towards a Circular Economy: Corporate Management and Policy Pathways*, eds. Venkatachalam Anbumozhi and Jootae Kim (Jakarta: Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, 2016), 76-77.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 76.

¹⁰⁶ “Alexander Nick,” *On-Purpose*, <https://onpurpose.org/en/our-community/en-alexander-nick/>.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

stage. This is important because while the focus on larger companies does create bias, larger companies—particularly industry leaders like BMW and HPE—tend to be in these later stages of corporate social development. This enables them to more easily transition from an industry incumbent to an innovator. Moreover, smaller firms that seek to follow their peers and join these initiatives must make a concerted effort to create the internal capacity (assuming it does not already exist), which forces sustainability to be a predominant component of their business model even if their intent is to just enhance their brand image.

Second, the initiatives of We Mean Business are not cut and dry standards: rather, they promote innovation and entrepreneurship. Because the targets are set by the firm itself and the initiative only provides a baseline criteria with longer term goals (e.g. 100% renewables by 2050), firms are encouraged to be ambitious in their targets and devise innovative ways of reaching them. Although some companies might do the bare minimum, the initiatives also foster competition between firms. For example, CDP's annual A-List recognizes the top two percent of firms taking action on climate change, water insecurity, and deforestation.¹¹¹ Other credible organizations publish similar awards and scoring systems,¹¹² which incentivize corporations to take bolder action and receive recognition among their peers, consumers, and host governments. In the case of HPE they set an aggressive emissions reduction target and designed a novel management system to monitor the emissions of their suppliers; they are proud to say they are the first company to do so. Likewise, HPE also was included on CDP's A-List and received the highest Supplier Engagement Rating—accomplishments the firm proudly displays on its website and in its annual report.¹¹³ BMW meanwhile was one of the first incumbent auto manufacturers to implement a full-fledged sustainability strategy and become an industry disruptor. Thus, We Mean Business initiatives can be seen as gateways to further climate action as long as firms allocate the necessary personnel and resources, provide free reign to innovate, are driven to outperform their peers, and are able to reap the financial rewards of

¹¹¹ "World's Top Green Businesses Revealed in the CDP A List," *CDP*, January 22, 2018, <https://www.cdp.net/en/articles/companies/worlds-top-green-businesses-revealed-in-the-cdp-a-list>.

¹¹² See Windolph, "Assessing Corporate Sustainability Through Ratings," 63.

¹¹³ "Living Progress Report," 15.

sustainability efforts.

Third, the agency of specific individuals matters in corporate climate governance. When discussing corporations, it is easy to lose sight of the single actors who comprise these organizations. For HPE, hiring Birkes, an industry outsider with expertise in sustainability, enabled the firm to put its money where its mouth is and give her the authority to advance their sustainability efforts. Her experience, entrepreneurial drive, and passion for the environment as CSO led HPE to join RE100, set an ambitious emissions reduction target, and develop an industry-first supply chain emissions management system. Birkes is not alone among CSOs who are drivers of corporate climate action. In reference to Steve Howard, former CSO of IKEA, Miller and Serafeim explain that when Howard was hired, “he did not think that their strategy was visionary enough and that it did not clearly connect back to the business. Howard moved IKEA into the innovation stage by pulling together the senior leadership at IKEA to discuss how the company could be prepared for long-term world changes.”¹¹⁴ Co-founder of RE100 and other climate initiatives, IKEA is now heralded as an industry leader in sustainability. In effect, CSOs and other sustainability professionals hold significant agency in advancing corporate sustainability and internalizing climate action in the business models of industry leading firms.

Fourth, innovative firms are in a unique position to drive change at the governmental level. One reason governments are hesitant to sign up for drastic emissions reductions targets simply comes down to economics. In a global economy, world leaders do all they can to maintain their country’s competitive advantage and avoid decisions that could cripple their economy. When it comes to climate change and the energy transition, governments tend to have strong ties with incumbent businesses that benefit from fossil fuels. For example, Poland, the most recent host of the COP, produces over 80 percent of its energy from coal. Ironically, COP24 was sponsored by three state-owned coal companies, and Poland’s pavilion at the conference was decorated in coal; they even gave away coal soap to visitors to support their clean coal agenda.¹¹⁵ For countries like Poland who are tethered to their national champions, innovative and sustainable businesses have the potential to disrupt incumbent fossil fuel conglomerates, as Wainstein and Bumpus demonstrate. When companies like HPE and BMW

¹¹⁴ Miller and Serafeim, “Chief Sustainability Officers,” 212.

¹¹⁵ Shannon Osaka, “This Year’s U.N. Climate Talks—Brought to You by Coal?” *Grist*, December 4, 2018, <https://grist.org/article/this-years-u-n-climate-talks-brought-to-you-by-coal/>.

make decisions to source their energy from renewables, it diverts market share away from incumbent energy companies and toward innovative providers of renewable energy such as SolarCity, which has already had a noticeable impact on U.S. utility companies. Building off the work of RE100, if enough companies source their energy from renewables, governments will eventually be forced to pivot away from the oil and gas giants, creating a new, sustainable lock-in.

Finally, profit maximization and combating climate change are not mutually exclusive. HPE and BMW show that a sustainable business model is the foundation of a successful firm in the post-Paris climate regime. Despite high overhead in the transition to a new energy source, the external benefits of a resource-friendly BM outweigh the upfront costs. In the case of BMW, the firm was driven by the need to stay at the forefront of the industry, especially with the emergence of Tesla in 2003. At the time, BMW was an incumbent firm, but it soon realized the innovative potential of the electric vehicle. As such, the firm announced its innovative sustainable business model in 2009 to stay ahead of competitors and new entrants into the market. Since 2011, BMW has recorded record sales for eight consecutive years while increasing their sales of electric and hybrid vehicles.¹¹⁶ Over the same time frame, BMW's dividend has grown from €2.30 in 2011 to €3.50 in 2019, which reflects the firm's ability to sustain profitability over time.¹¹⁷ In a similar vein, HPE's dividend has grown from \$0.055 in 2015 to \$0.12 in 2019 as the firm has focused on appealing to its environmentally-conscious customers.¹¹⁸ Since dividend growth reflects a firm's ability to sustain profits and reward investors, HPE's and BMW's significant growth shows the considerable value each firm has created. The fact that they have been able to invest strategically in their sustainable business models while increasing competitiveness demonstrates

¹¹⁶ "BMW Group Remains World's Leading Premium Automotive Company in 2018," *The BMW Group*, January 11, 2019, <https://www.press.bmwgroup.com/global/article/detail/T0289883EN/bmw-group-remains-world%E2%80%99s-leading-premium-automotive-company-in-2018>.

¹¹⁷ "BMW Shares," *The BMW Group*, <https://www.bmwgroup.com/en/investor-relations/bmw-%20shares.html#ace-428913679>; "Dividend Growth Rate," *Corporate Finance Institute*, <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/knowledge/finance/dividend-growth-rate/>.

¹¹⁸ "Dividend History," *Hewlett Packard Enterprise*, <https://investors.hpe.com/stock/dividend-history>.

that a successful corporation may nonetheless be sustainable. The coexistence of increased competitiveness and sustainable practices shows that We Mean Business, and corporate climate action more generally, comprise a viable governance regime within broader efforts to combat climate change.

CONCLUSION

As the international community moves forward following the signing of the Paris Agreement, We Mean Business demonstrates the prominence of the role of corporations in the pursuit of a more sustainable world. By bringing together the leading corporate climate initiatives, We Mean Business unifies the proactive business voice, scales the impact and scope of climate action commitments available to businesses, and facilitates the adoption and internalization of climate action in the strategy and operations of hundreds of the world's leading firms. While the long-run impact of these efforts on climate mitigation is a subject for further research, there is enough evidence to conclude that there is a credible corporate governance regime working to push the business case for climate action, accelerate adoption of renewables and science-based targets, advocate for greener policy frameworks, and establish sustainability as a core component of good business practice irrespective of industry.

The We Mean Business coalition qualifies as a credible governance regime by satisfying a number of criteria. First, We Mean Business influences firm behavior both through firms committing to climate action initiatives and cultivating innovative BMs that influence incumbent firms and the broader energy market. Climate action commitments such as RE100 support firms in transitioning to renewables and reducing CO₂ emissions in line with science as a way to enhance public image, increase competitiveness, and be at the forefront of the energy transition. For large companies, to make such commitments requires significant financial, human capital, and time investment that must be built into the firm's business model and strategy. Furthermore, these commitments aid firms in advancing their corporate stewardship by encouraging companies to innovate and lead their industries.

Second, other actors in the international community recognize We Mean Business as a key player in the collective effort to combat climate change. Not only have global leaders from the UN and World Bank recognized RE100 for its work, but governments and international organizations also respect the initiative in the policymaking arena. In the EU, Australian Parliament, and UNFCCC,

RE100 representatives and member firms were engaged with policymakers and influenced important decisions on renewable energy frameworks. Additionally, We Mean Business has partnered with major civil society NGOs and international organizations such as the WWF, WRI, and UN Global Compact, among others. Such partnerships with other credible organizations indicate that We Mean Business is one of the leading organizations for corporate climate governance and is working with leaders from other governance units in the international community to collectively combat climate change.

Finally, We Mean Business is composed of the leading actors in corporate climate governance who have been working on this issue for the past two decades. By uniting the top corporate NGOs, executives, and sustainability experts who each carry their own respective influence, We Mean Business is able to leverage the combined credibility of its members to continue advancing its agenda for years to come.

The credibility of We Mean Business as a governance regime has multiple implications for the study of international politics and global governance. Most importantly, the coalition bolsters support for the polycentric approach to climate change originally advocated for by Ostrom. While the structure of We Mean Business is conducive to collaboration at multiple levels and among a diverse range of actors, it is also illustrative of the agency of players outside the monocentric state-based system who are accomplishing real progress on climate. Furthermore, drawing on Keohane and Victor, We Mean Business and its stakeholders represent a specific regime among a loosely coupled set that constitutes the larger international regime complex. This suggests that the political will of entrepreneurs, business leaders, and sustainability experts is just as important as the effort put forth by policymakers. Therefore, Oreskes and Schendler's argument that businesses are not suited to solve climate change due to a few corrupt firms is akin to discounting all governments from climate solutions merely because some countries lack the appropriate political will. Moreover, their argument undercuts the polycentric approach needed to address climate change and disregards the writing on the wall that governments cannot go at it alone.

While the case of We Mean Business demonstrates the capacity of firms to undertake credible climate action, it also raises additional questions subject to further research. One unresolved issue surrounds the lasting

impact of these corporate climate commitments and whether they are making a significant difference in regards to emissions reductions and the transition to renewable energy. Additional quantitative analysis of initiatives like RE100 and the specific commitments of firms would provide more insight into whether they are achieving tangible results. Another important avenue for research is how the corporate governance regime under We Mean Business compares to similar coalitions from other actors within the international community. For example, C40 Cities is a network of the world's megacities committed to addressing climate change. In fact, CDP is listed as a network partner of the initiative, suggesting some level of collaboration between C40 and the We Mean Business partner.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, scholars and practitioners could examine collaboration between coalitions and the notion of co-produced governance: how does the work of We Mean Business integrate into policy development at the government level or even into the work of other actors in the international climate regime? RE100's lobbying to create more favorable renewable energy policies in the EU is early evidence of integration, but initiatives and policies created by other governance units at the global level tend to occur independent of one another. How firms, cities, states, and international organizations may collaborate to synchronize and organize their efforts in ways that produce the best outcome for all parties would be an intriguing subject of inquiry as international climate governance continues to evolve.

¹¹⁹ "Our Partners and Funders," *C40 Cities*, <https://www.c40.org/partners>.

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EXERCISING AGENCY: WOMEN, SPACE AND PLACE IN SAUDI ARABIA

PHOEBE O'HARA¹

ABSTRACT

Drawing on verbal interviews with twelve young Saudi women, Erving Goffman's conception of the "front and backstage," and Saba Mahmood's articulation of agency, this paper shows that in a changing authoritarian state, women must navigate spaces that are either controlled by the family or the state and that the behavior of young Saudi women differs depending on the space that they are in. I argue that even amidst changing state policies aimed at altering female behavior in public spaces, familial structures remain the key determinant of female behavior in Saudi Arabia. Despite the recent elimination of sex segregation from public spaces, certain new public behaviors are redefining traditional Saudi patriarchal systems of control within the context of these newly organized sites. Collectively, these arguments demonstrate that the experiences of Saudi women change from one space to another and cannot be reduced to a singular narrative or experience.

INTRODUCTION

The lives of young Saudi women are often exploited by the media to substantiate analyses of a grand geopolitical event or to provide an overview about the struggles of women in the Middle East. Headlines like "Saudi Teen Granted Asylum in Canada Makes the Most of Her New Life—Eating BACON for Breakfast and Grabbing a Starbucks Coffee with Her Legs Exposed" or "Women in Saudi Arabia; Unshackling Themselves" rarely

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contextualize the everyday lives of the women on whom they are commenting.² Instead, these stories objectify Saudi women by speaking for them rather than allowing them to exercise their own agency and verbalize their own experiences. This study seeks to contextualize these headlines by giving a voice to young Saudi women through primary research in the form of interviews. These conversations provide an insight into the myriad ways in which women are experiencing contemporary Saudi Arabia and show their everyday experience to be far more complex than a simple headline is able to capture. My research draws on twelve interviews with young Saudi women and the theories of Erving Goffman and Saba Mahmood to de-sensationalize Saudi society and explore it not as a nation that ought to be evaluated by its progression from “tradition” to “modernity,” but rather one in which multi-faceted and often contradictory forces interact to impact the lives of Saudi women in the context of a rapidly transforming state. At the heart of this dynamic is a constant tension between the power structures of the state and the family.

This paper focuses on the experiences of young Saudi women as they move between different physical spaces. I draw on a broader research project that analyzes three sites: the family home, the restaurant, and the Compound. My focus here will be on a Compound called Dhahran, a gated community owned by the Saudi based company Aramco (formerly Arabian-American Oil Company) that offers housing, support services, local clinics, and amenities for company employees and their families.³ Historically, Compounds have been established by foreign companies for their personnel and have long been dominated by Western social and cultural norms, many of which conflict with those that can be found in Saudi society, particularly those relating to women. I will also draw on research on the home and the restaurant in order to show how women inhabit different spaces in complex ways. I connect Goffman’s idea of performative space and Mahmood’s definition of agency—expanding the latter definition to include the concept of “inhabited norms”—to reveal how rules enforced by family authority

² Khaleda Raman, “Saudi Teen Granted Asylum in Canada Makes the Most of Her New Life—Eating Bacon for Breakfast and Grabbing a Starbucks Coffee with Her Legs Exposed,” *Daily Mail*, January 16, 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6597381/Saudi-teen-granted-asylum-Canada-eats-BACON-time-grabbing-Starbucks.html>; Peter Schrank, “Women in Saudi Arabia Unshackling Themselves,” *The Economist*, March 17, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2014/05/17/unshackling-themselves>.

³ Georg Glaze, “Segregation and Seclusion: The Case of Compounds for Western Expatriates in Saudi Arabia,” *Geo Journal* 66.1 (2006): 85, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-006-9018-z>.

figures create the incredibly insular, static, and impermeable organization of the home.⁴ The restaurant, by contrast, is a space in flux, where new dynamics are emerging as a result of the government's decision to relax strict rules that have for years defined how women can behave in public. Though in many cases these changing policies allow women to engage in new behaviors, this paper argues that family-imposed norms still prevail. Even so, the spaces in which women find themselves are a key determinant of their behavior. Regardless of which space women are in, their behavior should be thought of in distinctly active terms and not simply a passive reaction to the social structures of hierarchy and domination that surround them.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

As my goal was to understand how Saudi women lived their lives amidst changing but still restrictive social norms and state policies, I used a snowball method to interview 12 young women who were born and raised in Saudi Arabia. Since I was unable to travel to the country, I conducted my interviews over the phone which I then transcribed. The women's names and information have been altered in this piece in order to protect their identities. All of the women interviewed are between the ages of 19-24 and attend university either in Saudi Arabia or abroad in countries such as the United States, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Cyprus. All the women were able to speak to me in almost fluent English, which made up for my low proficiency in Arabic. This language barrier ultimately left out portions of the female population that did not speak English, as well as members of the non-English-speaking Saudi immigrant population.

While a large portion of the women I interviewed reside in the urban area of Riyadh, others live in more rural areas. Although the women who attend university abroad are away from Saudi Arabia during the semester, they do return home for the holidays and remain connected to friends and family, meaning they were still able to speak to a number of the issues I was looking to investigate. That the women travel and study abroad undoubtedly raises the question of whether they have increased exposure to the rights of women in other countries, particularly in comparison to their fellow Saudi women who

⁴ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 18.

do not have the opportunity to do so. While it is evident that they did have a greater awareness of how their lived experience differed from women abroad, all the women that I interviewed had access to technology and regularly used social media, indicating that they had at least a basic understanding of their lives as Saudi women relative to others around the globe.

This group of women is also part of a mid to high socio-economic stratum; because I was connected to interviewees via friends from Saudi Arabia, my ability to reach out to women of a lower socio-economic stratum was limited. My requests to interview immigrants working in the homes of interviewees were also declined because the workers were concerned that their interviews would place them at risk of identification and extradition from Saudi Arabia. The specific characteristics of this small group mean that they cannot speak for the entirety of women in Saudi Arabia. However, as many of them currently live away from home at university, their return home has stimulated a renewed awareness of their surroundings that has meant they are able to reflect in new and powerful ways on the changing dynamics of Saudi society, which is itself powerful and noteworthy.

This paper begins with a review of the literature that has been central to this study. I will then provide information on the Dhahran Compound in Saudi Arabia, including its history and demographic makeup. This will serve as the background for the paper's research component, which features excerpts from interviews with women who live in the Compound about their experiences navigating its many spaces. This portion will feature the body of my argument, in which I contend that women adhere to separate norms in particular spaces in Saudi Arabia. As such, my argument complicates our understanding of what it is to be a Saudi woman at this moment in time, challenging the notion that women can only exercise agency through subverting norms, rather than adhering to them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As I conduct and evaluate this research, it is vital that I recognize my own standing as a British-educated, female scholar. I resonate strongly with the following statement made by Amelie Le Renard, a young French female academic who has also conducted extensive research on Saudi women:

I am not Saudi and I do not pretend to speak in the name of Saudi women

or Saudi feminists. Neither do I seek to participate in the Western discourse on women's oppression in Saudi Arabia, which I think does not help the cause, is imperialistic and selects its victims accordingly.⁵

Le Renard refers here to a history of Anglo-European scholarship on Saudi Arabia, and women in the Middle East on the whole, that for the last two centuries has been dominated by Orientalist and colonialist language. Early on in my research, I engaged with material by Middle Eastern feminist critics such as Mahmood and Leila Ahmed, something which made clear to me the importance of constant reflection on my position as a Western researcher, and the need to avoid stereotyping Saudi Arabia and its people. I hope these reflections come through in this piece, and that my analysis of the changing nature of the lives of young Saudi women—through an exploration of space, power dynamics, and the rules and relationships of Saudi society—highlights the flaws in the oversimplified Orientalist analysis of Saudi women that litters the media and certain streams of academia.

Mahmood's definition of agency is also a central component of this piece. In her book *Politics of Piety*, Mahmood presents a post-colonial analysis of human agency beyond simply the realms of resistance, power, or domination, defining it as a "capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination create and enable."⁶ This is in stark contrast to the poststructuralist definition of agency, which views it only as a form of resistance.⁷ Mahmood also argues that the agency of devout Muslim women should no longer be ignored. She states that their agency is manifested "not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms."⁸ In other words, Mahmood argues that women can simultaneously exercise their agency and adhere to expectations enforced by structures of domination; the very adherence to religious prescriptions is a particular form of agency that is consistently neglected by theorists. Mahmood's

⁵ Amelie Le Renard, *A Society of Young Women: Opportunities of Place, Power and Reform in Saudi Arabia* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), xi.

⁶ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 18.

⁷ See Alison Stone, Serene Khader, and Ann Garry, eds., "Introduction," in *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁸ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 15.

work is important to this piece as it provides a framework to recognize that even when some of the women interviewed are “inhabiting norms” they are still being active agents in their own lives.

I also rely on Le Renard’s ethnographic study of young Saudi women in Riyadh. Her 2011 book, *A Society of Young Women: Opportunities, of Place, Power and Reform in Saudi Arabia*, is the most recent ethnographic study of young Saudi women in Riyadh. Her methodology and analysis were immensely helpful as I conducted my own research. It is through Le Renard’s work that I found Goffman’s theory of space and other literature in this area that I will be referencing throughout this study. While I agree with many of Le Renard’s conclusions, I consider my research a progression of her work. While her study examines the experiences of Saudi women in relation to gender-segregated spaces, I seek to offer more up-to-date research that recontextualizes—in light of recent Saudi policies that ostensibly “eradicate” gender segregation—how these women relate to space and negotiate rules and expectations. Her book, therefore, serves as a foundation from which to theorize Saudi space and provides important context for how space was designed in the past.

As Le Renard does in her work, I too use Goffman’s theory of performative space in this paper.⁹ Goffman thinks of performance from a theatrical point of view, taking into account how individuals both respond to and formulate judgments of themselves and others. I apply Goffman’s ideas on performative behavior to the Saudi context to liken the Compound to a theatrical stage, where a woman’s behavior changes depending on where she is and who is observing her. The belief underpinning this method of analysis is that the smallest, most minute actions in a social setting are representative of larger cultural phenomena that warrant closer examination. In a given broader environment, Goffman defines behavior as occurring either on the “front stage”—behavior that typically occurs in public—or on the “back stage”—that which usually takes place in private alone, or in the home. “Front stage” actors know that they are being watched by a certain audience, meaning that their performance is highly routinized and follows a learned social script that is shaped by cultural norms. The “back stage” inverts this behavior: the actor no longer has to “act,” and can behave in a way that is truer to their own, real, personalities. There is still an audience in “the back stage,” such as the actor’s friends or family,

⁹ See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959).

but not one that motivates the actor to alter their manner or appearance in reaction to their presence. These definitions are a central role of this study, as I use this theory to deconstruct how the renegotiation of rules in the Compound is causing a reversal, or complication, of the “front” and “back” stages in this group of young Saudi women.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON COMPOUNDS IN SAUDI ARABIA

All the international schools were far removed from the country, most of them were in compounds. So if you grow up in a compound, it's not less valid of another Saudi experience, but it's very different.

Laila, October 9th, 2018

A “Compound” is a gated community owned by a Saudi-based company that offers housing, support services, local clinics, and amenities for company employees and their families.¹⁰ It was one of three spaces I analyzed as part of a larger research project, in addition to the family home and the restaurant. The Compound was chosen as a site of focus for two reasons. First, because it can be considered a space that is both private and public: private in that the homes themselves provide privacy for individuals, but also public, as much of the space outside the home is shared for common activities such as dining, watching movies, and exercising. Second, it was a location in which the majority of the young women interviewed had spent extended periods of time. They were able to provide me numerous anecdotes about the Compound and speak at length about how they navigated the spaces within it.

Within this context, I argue that the Compound is space characterized by secular and liberal norms inherited from the foreign companies and workers who established these spaces. The definition of private-public space that I utilize specific to the Compound is by Littlefield and Devereux, who emphasize that the dynamics of these spaces should be thought of in terms of who has access to them. It was “the private sector creating access to space that was not accessible to begin with” which led to the interactions we see unfold

¹⁰ Glaze, “Segregation and Seclusion,” 5.

in the Compound, whereby only Saudi nationals who worked for these private corporations could have access.¹¹ They conclude that “[t]he question becomes, therefore, not one of ownership, but access.”¹² This definition is helpful because it differentiates those Saudis who have access to the compound and those who do not purely on the basis of who they work for.

In particular relation to behavior in privatized public space, Matthew Carmona argues that “[u]ltimately, the rights and responsibilities associated with spaces... are far more important than who owns and manages them.”¹³ This is vital to consider given both that ownership of this space has been continuously changing since the nationalization of Saudi Aramco in the 1980s and the recent acceleration of “Saudization” by Prince Salman which has granted more control over this space to the state. In essence, though the individuals in charge of the Compound have changed over time, the culture and social norms of the space remain and, as this research shows, continue to impact women in the present day.

The Compound, however, is not uniform. While the space at large is liberal and secular, the individual homes within it hold their own private set of practices and norms of behavior enforced by the authority figures of the family. The differences in the rules that govern the home compared to the Compound at large create a clear division between the two spaces. An inherent tension has been created by placing the home—which has itself not undergone any fundamental transformation—into a more liberalized public space. The Compound, then, can be thought of as a site where the static, insular home is placed into a more fluid, open environment. This means that, for the Saudi women who live in the Compound, navigating these spaces is not only essential, but is the basis of their everyday lives. By extension, the Compound can also be seen as a metaphor for contemporary Saudi society, where Prince Salman’s liberalized public spaces are in constant tension with the traditional, private spaces that have long determined the traditions that dictate Saudi society. Moving forward, it will be interesting to use the Compound as a blueprint to attempt to understand how young women will negotiate these seemingly contradictory environments.

¹¹ Michael Devereux and David Littlefield, “A Literature Review on the Privatisation of Public Space,” *UWE Bristol Report*, 2017, <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/31529>, 26.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Matthew Carmona, “Re-Theorising Contemporary Public Space: A New Narrative and a New Normative,” *Journal of Urbanism* 8.4 (2015): 400, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2014.909518>.

Details about these facilities are not made public by the companies who own them. The most detailed insights into the space can be found on expat blogs, with one describing the space as an “suburban American community.”¹⁴ The Compound into which I gained most insight during the interviews was Dhahran, owned by the Saudi company Aramco (Arab American Oil Company).

The site features American restaurants like Tandoori and Olive Garden, alongside leisure and sport facilities such as a golf course, baseball and soccer pitches, bowling alleys, and riding stables.¹⁵ Homes are built using a tract housing design known as “cookie-cutter housing,” whereby multiple identical homes are divided into small lots along a road, a style typically associated with American suburban housing designs.

In the 1970s, companies such as Aramco created these private gated compounds in Saudi Arabia in order to house foreign employees and their families.¹⁶ Historically, the Saudi government has encouraged the creation of Compounds for foreign workers “in order to limit and control the cultural influences of foreigners in... Saudi society.”¹⁷ The Saudi expropriation of Aramco in 1980 from the Americans was a crucial moment because it led to the Saudis not only taking on a foreign system of oil procurement, but also the company’s Compound network. Timothy Mitchell studies the roots of the oil industry in Saudi Arabia. His argument, as summarized by Kohlbry, is that the creation of these companies by the West “was not some neutral march toward progress but rather bound up with Western domination.”¹⁸ In essence, the foreign oil companies that created these sites did so to establish secure oil reserves for the US and UK through the control of the oil industry in Saudi Arabia. This culminated in the creation of privatized public spaces like the Compound in order to house the British and American workers hired by these

¹⁴ Noor Shahid, “My Life as an Expatriate Girl in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,” *Dawn*, 19 September 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1358507>.

¹⁵ Dawn Jobe, “Walking Tour of Dhahran Camp,” *DawnJobe: Adventures in Arabia* (blog), November 8, 2013, <https://dawnjobe.wordpress.com/2013/11/08/120/>; Interview with young Saudi woman (B), phone interview, September 13, 2018.

¹⁶ Glaze, “Segregation and Seclusion,” 85.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Paul Kohlbry, “Review Essay: Rule of Experts (2002) and Carbon Democracy (2011),” *Dialectical Anthropology* 37.3-4 (2013): 478.

companies. Mitchell points out that the domination of these companies persisted even after the Saudi nationalization of the oil industry in the 1970s, as “oil its workers on the surface and distributes more of the expertise of production into the offices of managers and engineers.”¹⁹ As these positions had been filled with foreign workers from the US and UK, the only workers skilled enough to do the job for the state after nationalization were these same foreign workers. Mitchell also points out that although nationalization may have left the monarchy as the sole owners of the oil companies, it did not eliminate American influence over the industry at large. In Saudi Arabia, nationalization occurred as a “gradual transfer,” a steady exchange of the industry from the US companies to the state.²⁰ The conscientious nature of this exchange left many US workers in their positions due to their experience and expertise. Moreover, the closeness of the US and Saudi Arabia lead to Saudi nationalization, leaving many foreign workers and their families remaining in the country over a longer period of time. This explains how both foreign workers and their cultures have historically dominated the housing compounds, as their roles in Saudi Aramco and other oil companies have long been required and insured by the state.

In Saudi Arabia, the term “expatriates” is used only to label those from the West who work for large organizations, while those from the South or South East Asia are dubbed “migrants” by Saudi media or “unskilled workers” and “domestic servants” by the state.²¹ The term “expat” is rooted in the British colonial era of the 1960s, canonized by American business circles in the latter half of the 20th century when designating employees abroad to represent a multinational firm.²² While there are expatriates in Saudi Arabia from a wide array of countries, citizens from the US, the UK, Germany, and France have historically constituted the core group of expatriates in Saudi Arabia since the arrival of foreign oil companies in the late 1930s.²³ Although these spaces have been dominated by foreign expatriates and their families, a small number of

¹⁹ Timothy Mitchell, “Carbon Democracy,” *Economy and Society* 38.3 (2009): 420, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140903020598>.

²⁰ Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011), 169.

²¹ Glaze, “Segregation and Seclusion,” 85.

²² Nancy Green, “Expatriation, Expatriates, and Expats: The American Transformation of a Concept,” *The American Historical Review* 114.2 (2009): 310, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.114.2.307>.

²³ Glaze, “Segregation and Seclusion,” 85.

Saudi nationals employed by the same companies have also resided in these Compounds since their creation. This number remained small due to the high cost of living in these gated communities, which many Saudis could not afford as they did not hold positions that were as financially lucrative as the expatriates’.

This dynamic changed following the enforcement of Saudization, or the “Saudi nationalization scheme.”²⁴ Enacted in the Fourth Development Plan by the Saudi monarchy from 1985-89, this policy demanded that more companies in industries dominated by foreign workers hire Saudi nationals.²⁵ Since then, Compounds have been open to the small number of Saudi employees of these companies and their families. As a result, some of the parents of the women I interviewed moved into the Aramco Compound and were forced to contend with the dominant culture of this space that was greatly different from the one outside its gates.

RESEARCH ON THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN TODAY IN THE COMPOUND

Two of the women that I interviewed had lived in the Dhahran Compound in the past, and of those who did not, some had attended school in the Compound and/or visited the community to spend time with friends. The two women who had lived in Dhahran described the space for me in great detail, first telling me about the walls and gates used to control access to the space. They also told me how, within the Compound, there is a variety of house sizes: some residents live in single apartments while others, especially those who have larger families, live in semi-detached homes. One of my interviewees, Aesha, told me that the roads resemble boulevards, and explained that the Compound has its own bus system due to its large size. One of my other interviewees, Laila, who often visits the Compound to see friends, explained that, in the past, the Compound was only accessible to those who worked for Aramco and had a company permit. She also explained that the space is not open to the Saudi public, with the exception of Saudi women who can visit friends if they are placed on a guest list. Discussing what the rules for Saudi

²⁴ Chloe Domat, “Saudization Takes Priority,” *Global Finance Magazine*, February 1, 2019, <https://www.gfmag.com/magazine/february-2019/saudization-takes-priority>.

²⁵ James Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 2nd ed (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010), 252.

men were, however, she said “they’ve always been far more strict on Saudi guys.”²⁶ Laila also said that the roads that connect the plots mirror those in “suburban California.” Noura told me about the Compound’s leisure facilities, describing to me in detail the riding stables, gyms, baseball and soccer fields, and the golf course.

As in family homes outside the Compound, so too is gender segregation enforced in the homes of the Saudi women in the Compound. Le Renard, whose ethnographic research analyzes the experiences of young Saudi women in Riyadh, argues that cultural and social norms in Saudi Arabia are shaped through spatial interaction. Her research is based upon her time living and interviewing young women at universities in Saudi Arabia and concludes that gender segregation is at the heart of the disciplinary practices and power relations that dominate Saudi society.²⁷ My study builds upon Le Renard’s argument by examining moments at the level of individual experience when spatial organization and separation continue to impact the lives of young women.

In homes within the Compound, some interviewees explained to me that space is organized with the explicit aim of gender segregation. Unlike the dwellings of their expatriate neighbors, most Saudi homes feature *majlis*, or separate sitting rooms for each gender. These rooms are used when hosting guests to ensure privacy and comfort, as it ensures single men do not mix with single women. The women I interviewed explained that just as with homes outside of the Compound, their family ensured that their home had two *majlis* even though the original designs of the homes, crafted by the foreign company who built the Compound, did not include them. “This means that guests have to use the same entrance (one entrance not two leading to majlis) when we have them over,” Noura explained, as opposed to the two entrances used in the homes of those outside the Compound. This minute observation highlights how important gender segregation is to these Saudi families who go to great lengths to uphold societal gender norms in the home, even if it means changing the house’s fundamental design. Without the presence of an additional entrance, Noura’s family had to reconcile these norms and principles with the existing layout of the Compound. This fusion of domestic Saudi culture with that of the Compound demonstrates how the young women in this space have to live in a site that does

²⁶ Interview with young Saudi woman (E), phone interview, September 10, 2018.

²⁷ Le Renard, *A Society of Young Women*, 13-16.

not have a singular cultural landscape. For Noura's Saudi family, their home expresses principles and values that differ from those of other expatriates in the Compound. The rules and expectations with which Noura comes into contact differ based on where she is and with whom she is interacting.

The inherent differences between the family home and the Compound also produce tensions in women's social lives. Noura told me that her father forbids her from seeing boys, both in and out of the Compound, a norm that was enacted by the majority of young Saudi women that I spoke with due to the importance of gender segregation. Noura told me of her father's anger when she was speaking to her male neighbors in the garden one evening. She seemed to explain his anger by saying that, "People take culture way more seriously, they place it above religion, so with my dad and wearing the hijab it is about me wearing it and not bringing shame to him especially in society."²⁸ She emphasized, though, that expatriates in the Compound do not have to follow these rules, making her less inclined to do so when her father was not at home. Moreover, she explained that her home "does not have boundary walls or gates like [her] friends that live outside the Compound," meaning that comparatively, her family home is more connected to the neighborhood than those living in traditional Saudi homes outside the Compound.²⁹ Laila, who lives in a home outside the Compound, explained to me that the boundary wall and gates of her home ensured that "your community is your nuclear and distant family, not those around you...[y]ou don't hang out with kids or families in your neighborhood."³⁰ By contrast, the Compound does not have these design features, meaning Noura can interact with her neighbors relatively freely. This comparison demonstrates how the design of the Compound enables young women like Noura to have different experiences from the women who live elsewhere. Noura's admission that she is less inclined to embrace her father's rules as a result of living alongside people who do not follow these rules also highlights that this space and its design give Noura the choice to behave differently and break her family's rules.

These subtle protestations also manifest themselves in more overt displays of indifference towards the rules imposed by the family. Noura told

²⁸ Interview B.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Interview E.

me how she would sneak out of the house to hang out with boys behind her parents' backs, using her ability to drive in the compound to go to other people's houses and spend time with them there.³¹ She also told me how she would drive purely for pleasure. "My friends from school would come into the Compound and we would cruise," she said.³² Though this behavior may be considered normal outside of the context of Saudi Arabia, Noura's ability to do these things is incredibly unusual. Noura herself conceded that life in the Compound as a young girl afforded her benefits like driving and that her friends who lived outside of this environment would never be able to enjoy such freedom. Aesha, another interviewee, discussed similar freedoms growing up in the Compound. She would often go to friends' houses to meet male friends.³³ She told me that she thought it was "good to see boys... it made me less awkward being around them, and made me think about it as more of a normal interaction rather than something that is a big deal."³⁴

The accounts of both Noura and Aesha show that they are mindful of expectations but also contest them in their own way by embracing the freedoms afforded to them within the walls of the Compound. Le Renard labels actions such as Noura's "transgressions."³⁵ Le Renard argues that these practices have "a public aspect that make them transformative: [t]hey spread among young women and contribute to shifting the boundaries of behaviors acceptable in public for young women."³⁶ Yet she also argues that these actions should not be analyzed as "forms of resistance," adding that it is crucial to know the young women's justifications for their actions "in order to locate... their oppositional value."³⁷ Because the inhabitants of the Compound are the only individuals that have access to the space, this means that this site cannot be defined using Le Renard's notion of the public. In contrast with public areas, the wide-open spaces of the Compound do not have an audience to observe Noura and Aesha's transgressions. Le Renard's explanation, however, does illustrate that these

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Interview with young Saudi woman (I), phone interview, September 7, 2018.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Amelie Le Renard, "Young Urban Saudi Women's Transgressions of Official Rules and the Production of a New Social Group," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 9.3 (2013): 108.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 110.

women are not enacting forms of resistance because they are simply embracing the liberties that the Compound affords them: in fact, their actions cannot even be considered “transformative” because they are not seen by others outside the Compound and therefore cannot spread and become “acceptable” elsewhere.

Similarly, the work of Mahmood also complicates our understanding of Noura and Aesha’s actions. Mahmood argues against agency being interpreted solely as a form of resistance. She proposes that we understand agency from the position of the actor. Using this framework heightens our perception that Noura and Aesha’s ability to exercise their agency is not contingent upon them breaking rules. Mahmood proposes that their actions should not typify them as anarchic resisters; to do so would define agency as taking action out of the desire for change. In fact, Noura and Aesha show that they engage in these behaviors simply because they enjoy them and are not attempting to make a broader social statement by behaving as such.

Noura verbalized this to me through her critique of women’s rights activists who were demanding that women in Saudi Arabia be given the right to drive:

I don’t know why people are making a big deal out of it, I don’t know why people are surprised at them being imprisoned, they went against the law? I remember when they first came out driving, Loujain al-Hathloul for example... the way she was doing it, wasn’t the smartest way. She made it about defying the culture and saying how bad the government is—that’s not smart.³⁸

Noura makes plain that although she enjoys driving, she is strongly critical of women who would use this act to demand greater freedoms in Saudi society. In her exploration of transgressions in Saudi Arabia, Le Renard references women she interviewed who, like Noura, also criticize other Saudi women who express a desire to drive. In the past, women who publicly demanded greater rights for women were disparagingly labeled “liberal intellectuals” by those she interviewed. Noura explicitly does not break these rules because she wants her behavior to be accepted by society. This is in part due to the association of

³⁸ Interview B.

making such demands with being “Western.” Noura explained to me that the women advocating for driving rights were described as “Western” by the state and the media. This is a charged label in Saudi Arabia, stemming from a general disapproval of liberal European and American norms and the country’s fraught relationship with Britain and the United States following the discovery of oil on the Saudi Peninsula. Particularly during the Islamic Awakening in the 1980s, many Saudis viewed American assertions of Saudi women’s perceived need for “liberation” as an inappropriate and arrogant judgment of Saudi culture. Certain anti-colonial liberation movements in the country even viewed it as a form of colonial subjugation.³⁹ As such, when people use the term “Western,” they are typically implying that the subject is in some way either against or unreasonably critical of the Saudi nation.

This history explains why many Saudis see Noura’s enjoyment of driving as a pleasure born out of privilege; outside of the Compound—until June of 2018 when the ban was lifted—women attempting to drive would have been imprisoned or labeled as anti-Saudi, two damning repercussions that Noura never had to face. The Compound granted her the ability to enjoy greater freedoms while distancing herself from labels such as “Western” or “liberal,” evidence that the Compound permits women the freedom to break the rules enforced outside of its gates.

Noura’s longing for the reinstatement of rules that prevented women outside of the Compound from driving may strike us as odd, as though she is voluntarily submitting to rules that prevent her from fully exercising her agency. The work of Mahmood is important here to remind us that we must still recognize her agency within the framework of her society. Mahmood proposes that Noura can exercise agency while submitting to societal norms imposed by the state. This nuance is important to recognize; as Mahmood points out, too often actions like Noura’s are read as a desire to challenge authority figures. Instead, her transgressions are in this case simply a demonstration of agency; Mahmood argues this on the basis of an interpretation of agency that encompasses both resisting and complying with norms.⁴⁰ This captures Mahmood’s argument that Noura can theoretically retain her agency while both abiding by and transgressing society’s norms.

³⁹ Madawai al-Rasheed, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics and Religion in Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 9.

⁴⁰ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 15.

The privacy that the Compound affords these women also explains why they can break rules with greater ease than the women outside the Compound. This becomes clear by applying Goffman's theory that conceptualizes behavior as a performance. In particular, Goffman's theory is useful because of the different roles Saudi women must perform in different contexts. This aligns with Goffman's conceptualization of space as a stage with the front stage being where you perform in front of an audience and the "back stage" being where you are your "true" self, typically in the home. In the case of the compound, its high walls and open spaces mean that women cannot be seen by members of the public. As such, they do not need to adhere to certain rules, such as wearing the abaya outside of the home, because there is no audience present that expects them to do so. While outside of the Compound, the state and religious institutions mandate that the abaya must be worn during the "passage through mixed public space, between the different women's spaces and the private space," the fact that women in the Compound are not visible to the public means they can overlook these rules.⁴¹

Interviewees Noura and Aesha explained the practical consequences this had in day-to-day life. Noura discussed the complex role this societal norm played in her upbringing, saying that while she initially embraced not wearing the abaya in the Compound, "chilling in the park or playing sports without it on," she was "ridiculed" by some of her friends and argued strongly with her family for not wearing the abaya in public.⁴² She said that after a period of tension with her father who made clear that by the time she turned 16 she would be expected to abide by this norm, she chose to wear the abaya in public spaces more often. However, now that she is studying abroad for university, she never wears it, telling me that her enjoyment not wearing it as a child in the compound gave her the confidence to make this decision in college. Two other interviewees also decided not to wear the abaya while studying abroad, instead opting for a less-conspicuous hijab or in one case a beanie.

Viewed in the context of Goffman and Mahmood's theories, this extract highlights that the Compound is a space that both controls and enables women's ability to exercise their agency. This ability is largely dependent

⁴¹ Amelie Le Renard, "Only for Women: Women, the State, and Reform in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Journal* 62.4 (2008): 616.

⁴² Interview B.

upon the audience of the space. Goffman's theory reminds us that the people (audience) that surround a person influences how an individual behaves. Noura is able to avoid performing certain behaviors in the Compound due to the lack of an audience. Though her parents and certain friends may expect her to wear the abaya outside the home, the lack of an audience, and the open space in the Compound grants her the ability to sit in the park or play sports without it on. The reality that women outside of the Compound lack such a choice emphasizes that Noura's ability to negotiate norms is atypical.

Noura's excerpt demonstrates Mahmood's argument that women still have agency, even when they are complying with norms. Noura may abide by certain norms in the home and alter them when outside and in the presence of a different audience, but that does not change her innate ability to exercise her agency. Noura's awareness of her need to alter her behavior in different places demonstrates that the rights of young Saudi women cannot be viewed in a singularly: agency works differently in different spaces and at different moments.

This moment with Noura is also profound in that it embodies the switching of her, to use Goffman's terminology, front and "back stage." Goffman's conceptualizations of the front and "back stage" is that the former is where individuals act learned behaviors in public spaces for unknown audiences and the latter is where the individual acts of their own will, typically in the home, with familiar audience members like family and friends. What Goffman does not theorize, however, is the possibility of these stages switching. In Noura's case, this occurs because the home is not the "back stage" as she must comply with certain norms, such as wearing the abaya, due to the presence of certain audience members (her father) that expect her to do so. By comparison, the open space of the Compound, with no audience—which is theoretically the non-private "front stage"—allows her to negotiate these norms and behave as she typically would in the privacy of the home.

This switch appeared at other moments in my research, also appearing in my analysis of two other locations: the restaurant, and the family homes outside of the Compound. For one interviewee, Amaal, this switch occurred in the home. Amaal shared a story that demonstrated to me just how interconnected the rooms of the house were by vocalizing one rare moment of privacy that resulted in a powerful moment of self-discovery:

All of my sisters didn't listen to music, they listened to Islamic

recitations, and music was never played out loud in our home because my parents didn't allow it. I was the first out of my sisters to ever listen to music, but I did it under my hood (in bed). I started out with Hannah Montana, then the Jonas Brothers and then Justin Bieber. My younger sister always follows everything that I did, but when I became more religious I stopped listening to music and I felt bad, and said to her, 'I'm the one that got you into this music it isn't good, I took you down the wrong path' but I realized that this was silly. I remember one night that I decided that I was going to be a better Muslim and give up on music, but I started crying because music means so much to me and I couldn't go without it.⁴³

This image of Amaal attempting to muffle the sound of her music underneath a hood and a duvet is striking. Despite her listening to music in her own room, she is painfully conscious of her decision's wider implications and the challenge that this act poses to the rules imposed in the home. Her fear highlights the profound interconnectedness between family members that exists in the home; what one person does can easily be seen or heard by others.

Another striking aspect of Amaal's narration of this event is that it took place in her own bedroom, a space that in most households offers greater privacy than anywhere else in the dwelling. Amaal's intense awareness of how her actions would not be allowed outside of her bed makes clear that her behavior is dependent upon what area of the home she is occupying and at what time. The home is typically considered to be a "back stage" region in Goffman's theory, as it is typically where individuals can be their true selves. However, this extract from Amaal tells us a different story. It appears that even in her "back stage" region (the home) she, in fact, feels uncomfortable acting as she wishes; though she has some privacy in her bed, she is highly aware that even in this space, that behavior is not allowed.

Tying the insular and close-knit nature of the home and its structure into this equation, it becomes clear why some interviewees like Amaal felt that their behavior was confined to certain small spaces in which they could truly be themselves. This conclusion also presents the hypothesis that the "back stage"

⁴³ Interview with young Saudi woman (C), phone interview, August 29, 2018.

region has moved to a different location outside of the home enabling women like Amaal to engage in behaviors like listening to her music with greater ease. Amaal clearly recognizes that in this space, there are certain rules that she must be wary of, even if she does not agree with them.

My conversations with interviewee Laila on the space of the restaurant also brought to light that this switching of the “front stage” and “back stage” occurs in public spaces. Laila explained this in a conversation that she had with friends who attend Al-Faisal University in Riyadh. Her friends had recently told her about the emergence of new cafes “where people go on blind dates, which I found to be strange because they talked about it so casually, and that wasn’t something that you could talk about in a positive way in high school.”⁴⁴ Laila explained that the men and women were able to go on these dates because of the lack of religious police and the more relaxed attitudes on gender mixing in public spaces. Her friends also explained, however, that the bathrooms of these cafes, cars, or other semi-private spaces in public were being used by boys at the University to have sex with women. She further complicated the story however by saying that she found the situation:

...disturbing...because they explained how people conflate hymens with virginity, and they said that what is generally accepted as a good man or boyfriend is a guy who had not had vaginal sex with you, but they may have anal sex instead, which is weird. I find that strange and hadn’t heard about that until two weeks ago.⁴⁵

My initial shock at hearing this story was magnified once I asked other interviewees about whether they dated boys in Saudi Arabia. Many answered that when they were younger, they never mixed with boys unless they were family members or friends of their siblings. Some mixed with boys occasionally without their parents knowing, but this was rare. Aesha, an interviewee who is now a university student in the US, explained that she gave up on the idea of dating altogether from a young age because she saw it as useless:

Boys never want to marry the girl that they date because they want

⁴⁴ Interview E.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the woman they marry to be as virginal and pure as possible... they won't want to marry someone if they've gotten with you before, so there's no point in dating Saudi boys.⁴⁶

Aesha's statement demonstrates her belief that she has no control over how boys engage with her romantically; the relationship is defined by male expectations of women as either marriage material or as the source of a casual sexual relationship. Aesha's indifference to dating is significant in that it highlights a binary applied to women that is ingrained in the men with whom she interacts. Other women echoed similar sentiments in relation to boys and said that they too were not interested in dating. Instead, Aesha made clear that she expected families to dictate their daughters' relations with boys as they would ultimately decide which men they would be allowed to marry.

When I brought up the story that Laila told me, some of the women were also shocked, but many were not surprised. Aesha explained:

Just because we are segregated from a young age doesn't mean that the 'f—boy' trend doesn't exist in Saudi...there are lots of boys taking advantage of the ability to hook up with [women] more easily at the moment, whilst also making sure that they can marry someone who fits with the desired more traditional...image of a woman that their family will want them to marry.⁴⁷

The comparison between these stories demonstrates how the ongoing social liberalization being implemented by current political reforms is resulting in these "new" sexual interactions taking place. However, although these events may be "new" in the sense of their location, they are still reproducing traditional gender dynamics. The interactions separate women as those who engage in these public sexual acts, and those who do not as they remain adherent to the values of the home. This dynamic perpetuates the binary of women as either "saint/sinner" or "virgin/whore," a binary that strips them of their ability to define their sexual identity. As such, although these sexual interactions are new, they preserve long-established expectations of women.

⁴⁶ Interview I.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

It is also vital to recognize the family-imposed rules that these boys continue to adhere to. This is demonstrated both in the nature of the sexual encounters themselves, and in their explicit desire to have a virginal wife. Although Laila explained that these sexual encounters occurred in multiple locations, she emphasized the popularity of the bathrooms in these cafes or restaurants with private stalls as the main sites where these relations took place. Regarding spaces and sexual sociability, Green et al. argue that “space, far from being a passive backdrop to social and sexual relations, plays an active role in the constitution of those relations.”⁴⁸ Green et al. also promote a spatial analysis similar to the work done in this paper that argues for space to be understood as both reflective of sexualities but also as a factor that plays in the production of sexualities.⁴⁹ Their work theorizes the gay bathhouses, bathrooms, and other public spaces where sexual encounters became normalized during the 1970s in the US. Specifically, they argue that “the public toilet occupies a very specific place in cultural binaries that divide the social world into public and private, dangerous and safe and dirty and clean.”⁵⁰ This analysis leads them to explain why the relations that occur in this space are classified “as ‘nasty’ sex that does not invite romantic sentiments, the illusion of long-term commitment or the heteronormative construction of good, clean, and reproductive sex.” They conclude that “the unauthorized sexual space of the bathroom fosters a kind of incitement to the taboo... spaces where prohibited or otherwise unthinkable behavior becomes possible or even desirable.”⁵¹

The ways in which young Saudis are taking advantage of public spaces, such as restaurant bathrooms and car parks, to engage in these sexual acts rather than in the home suggests that the expectations imposed by the family remain a powerful counter-force to the increasing gender mixing occurring in public spaces. The sexual acts themselves can also be seen to encourage, as Aesha explained, a “hook-up” culture, rather than the pursuit of long term relationships. This is tied to the persistence of the cultural norms attached to marriage whereby families are typically the orchestrators of marriages. Moreover, the anal aspect of the encounter is important in that it too demonstrates how

⁴⁸ Isaiah Green, Mike Follert, and Jamie Paquin, “Space, Place and Sexual Sociality: Towards an “Atmospheric Analysis,” *Gender, Work and Organization* 17.1 (2010): 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

vaginal sex before marriage remains taboo. Therefore, although the emergence of these sexual encounters is a result of the newfound social liberalization related to gender mixing and segregated spaces, it is clear that the pre-existing socio-cultural norms, that forbid vaginal sex and sexual relations between men and women in the home, remain dominant. The ethos of this social liberalization and the changes it is making are also relocating the site of possibility from the subject to the space; whereas beforehand, men and women could decide to transgress rules on their own accord, the alteration of public space means that the space itself enables the act of intercourse, which is restricted or marginalized elsewhere. In essence, this space and the behavior that it facilitates is starkly contrasted with rules imposed in the home.

Comparing this moment with the excerpt from the previous chapter where Amaal could only listen to her music under her duvet in bed so that her family could not hear it is powerful. What is becoming gradually more apparent as we compare the home with the public space of the restaurant is a clear shift in the locations of the “front” and “back stage” as described by Goffman. Though the sexualization of public space differs from the case of Amaal listening to music, both events are moments where young women are behaving in public (front stage) how Goffman conceptualizes they would at home (“back stage”). These women can now perform certain taboo behaviors with greater ease in spaces like the restaurant or café than in the home, especially in the case of Amaal given the newly introduced feature of music playing in restaurants. It is the insular nature of the home with its dominant norms preventing these behaviors from occurring in the house itself. The newfound fluidity of possible behaviors being facilitated by places like the restaurant is sharply contrasted with the insular, static nature of the home as described in the previous section.

This collection of experiences from the three different spaces of the Compound, restaurant, and family home propose that young women engage in different behaviors dependent upon the location and the audience members present. Moreover, it also highlights that behavior typically associated with certain spaces like the home is blurring.

Similarly, the Compound also heavily influenced the lives of interviewees by allowing them to pursue hobbies that in some cases were not encouraged by family members. Noura spoke in depth about the leisure

facilities in the Aramco Compound such as the “game rooms, bowling alley, cinema, public library and several parks.”⁵² She prefaced this list by saying, “I know they all sound mundane but back then most of these were only available in Aramco.”⁵³ Noura told me about the wide array of sporting facilities such as “running tracks, soccer, cricket and baseball pitches... also public pools, gyms that are free for residents, horse stables and a golf course.”⁵⁴ Aesha, who did not live in a Compound but would visit friends and family there, told me how she used to visit the Compound to go horse riding with her uncle, but that her father made her stop when she turned 16 because riding was seen as unsuitable by older members of her family who disapproved of her “doing sports or exercising a lot.”⁵⁵ She explained why they thought this by saying, “once you start developing as a woman, these aren’t okay.”⁵⁶ Aesha speaks here of the threat of tearing the hymen while doing these activities. The vaginal membrane historically in Saudi Arabia, and many other countries, is linked to virginity and must be present for marriage.⁵⁷ Aesha’s excitement struck me when we discussed her love of being able to ride horses in the Compound, as it was something that she greatly enjoyed. She made it clear that friends from her school who did not live in the Compound were unable to do this activity, both due to the lack of accessible public facilities, but also that society reiterated opinions similar to those of her family members who strongly disapprove of young women engaging in sports.

While the Compound provides these leisure and sporting activities, the pushback from Aesha’s family members serves as a reminder that the culture of the home stands apart from the Compound. Aesha’s family, as the dominant voice that determines what rules she must abide by, desires for her to not be influenced by the site and to behave as expected by her family in the home. This suggests that the home, especially for Aesha, is the site that defines which rules women can and cannot abide by. The expectations held by the family in the home contrasts with the open space of the Compound that allows Aesha to negotiate which of the rules she abides by. Using Goffman’s binary of front

⁵² Interview B.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Interview I.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Sameena Rahman, “Female Sexual Dysfunction Among Muslim Women: Increasing Awareness to Improve Overall Evaluation and Treatment,” *Sexual Medicine Reviews* 6.4 (October 2018): 539.

stage and back stage once more, the Compound presents a site that has clear boundary lines within which different behaviors are acceptable. Although the home may control certain acts, the facilities of the Compound, in this case, encourage them.

This is a dynamic that is also currently being experienced in homes outside of the compound where it was made clear by the interviewees that the home is presently acting as a bulwark against the changing norms of public space. The compound, therefore, presents something of a blueprint for the landscape that young Saudi women are currently navigating.

The Compound is also becoming a blueprint for some of the social changes being made as part of Prince Salman's Vision 2030 plan. His legalization of cinemas and women driving, formerly features unique to the compound, are now present in everyday Saudi society. This means that women outside the Compound are navigating unfamiliar spaces and experiencing tensions similar to those of Noura and Aesha inside.

When I spoke with Noura about these new changes, however, she demanded that I recognize the importance of entrenched "Saudi culture and societal expectations." She argued that "[t]he Prince will tell us one thing but it is my Father that I answer to, not him."⁵⁸ This statement illustrates the disjunction that exists between political laws on women and the reality of everyday life; while the Compound enables women to exercise agency, their decisions to ultimately abide by their family's expectations shows the authority that the family maintains. This dynamic mirrors trends that I have seen in other spaces – for young Saudi women, agency works at different moments in different spaces, and there are certain spaces that control or encourage agency. Noura in this piece, along with others in this research, show that women recognize these differences and act accordingly. Collectively, the alterations in their behavior prove that identity as a Saudi woman is not static, but changes depending upon the environment.

CONCLUSION

As I compare my first interview with my last, it becomes apparent to me just how quickly change is occurring in Saudi Arabia. My first interview,

⁵⁸ Interview B.

eight months ago, largely consisted of Reema explaining to me what it meant to live in a society dominated by gender segregation. In my last interview, with a girl named Maha seven months later, she told me about a recent concert where men and women were able to mix and dance together publicly.

This research shows that ongoing reforms alter depending on the relationship between women and the venue in question. Analysis of the home demonstrates that the family remains of vital importance to the lives of these young women; it is a community that maintains its values through the design features of the house itself, preventing events occurring outside the gates from permeating inwards. The sexual encounters occurring in restaurant bathrooms, interactions that in themselves are new, are inscribed with patriarchal power dynamics that exist in the home. For some, like Amaal, the rapid nature of the changes has made the public spaces that allow genders to mix uncomfortable, highlighting that while the freedom to engage in certain behaviors may be appreciated by some, for others it has stripped them of their desire to occupy gendered space. At this moment in Saudi Arabia, behavior that theorists like Goffman consider typical for private and public spheres is blurring; the actions of these women are tangibly altering the narrative of Saudi space as one defined by separation and privacy.

The Compound serves as a microcosm of the changes that Saudi society is currently undergoing. Noura and Aesha explained how this site grants them the opportunity to behave in ways that are not allowed in the home, or in locations outside of the Compound. It appears that the lack of an audience allows them to act without considering the rules imposed on them by their family or wider society. Crucially, Noura and Aesha did not consider breaking the rules an act of rebellion and did not want to be thought of as agents demanding change. Instead, their explanations highlight that their experiences are in no way related to resistance.

Collectively, these different sites of analysis demonstrate that, at present, being a woman in Saudi Arabia changes from one space to another. Women are exercising agency differently depending on the space they are in and the authority figures that are present. The tensions that these policies create within the family show that these changes clash with their deeply held values. To pretend that these policies are entirely beneficial and easily embraceable by the female population of Saudi Arabia would be misguided.

Such a simplistic view reinforces harmful narratives. By using the voices

of Saudi women in this research, I hope to have shown that reading headlines about Saudi Arabia rarely gives one an insight into the realities of these women. I texted one interviewee to ask how her peers at her US university reacted to the news that Saudi women were allowed the right to drive. Her response surprised me: “I was told by an American friend that she had read about me being able to drive and was so excited that I now knew what freedom was. This is not my idea of freedom. Do not tell me what my idea of freedom is.”⁵⁹ This statement struck me to my core, and serves as a reminder that women in Saudi Arabia are rarely analyzed on their own terms or through their own voice. Instead, Saudi women are consistently analyzed through Western conceptions of progress that glorify the changes being made by Prince Salman as liberating to women. The perpetuation of such discourse is reductive and unspecific and it reinforces the idea that Saudi women should be viewed as objects to be spoken about, rather than agents who can speak for themselves. Instead, when we see how the Compound, home, and restaurant operate in relationship to the state, family, and faith, we understand that being a woman in Saudi Arabia today is neither static nor simple.

Understanding the multi-faceted and complex ways in which Saudi women are negotiating contemporary tensions is also vital given Prince Salman’s marketing of Saudi women as symbols of the nation. Salman’s reforms use women’s liberation as a symbolic strategy to incentivize foreign investment and, as such, strip women of their agency by speaking to the international community on their behalf. The most profound example of this is Salman’s arrest of leading women’s rights activists campaigning for the right to drive occurring on the same day the lifting of the ban on women driving was announced. If one required more proof of the self-interest embedded in Prince Salman’s decision to allow these rights, look no further than the announcement itself, occurring first in Washington DC with a female spokesperson hand-picked by Prince Salman before being shared with the population in Saudi Arabia. This event is one of many examples that prove how Prince Salman uses Saudi women as symbols to present his leadership and the Saudi state as modern and liberal to the international community.

This study shows how portraying Saudi women in a singular dimension

⁵⁹ Interview with young Saudi woman (K). WhatsApp interview, August 20, 2018.

ignores the stories and realities of other Saudi women. More powerful is Noura's assertion from earlier in this piece that stated "the Prince will tell us one thing but it is my Father that I answer to, not him."⁶⁰ This statement serves as a reminder that grand narratives and political strategies rarely provide a realistic insight into the lives of the people about whom they claim to speak. Moreover, it highlights that while Prince Salman's policies—in particular Vision 2030—attempt to reorient Saudi identities in order to secure his goal of "modernizing" the nation, statements like Noura's awaken us to the fact that society can, and is, pushing back against such rapid change; power remains within the home, regardless of whether Prince Salman's policy legislates as if the home is controlled directly by the state.

One limitation of this research is that it was not conducted within Saudi Arabia. Though the interviews gave me a glimpse into the lives of these 12 young women, experiencing the different sites and relations for myself would have nuanced my understanding. However, as I review the interviews, I realize that the separation forced me to engage deeply with the women I interviewed, to understand their stories fully, and to attempt to learn everything about them in a short span of time. The depth of these conversations and our sharing of struggles, life stories, and future prospects proved to me that beyond our cultural differences, our experiences as young adolescent female students are not glaringly different; we are all attempting to do well at university, negotiate our independence from our families, and think critically about our futures. The rich and powerful essence of these conversations is proof that scholarship must de-exceptionalize Saudi society and not study it as the "other." One area that requires this approach would be in the study of the 10 million foreign workers in Saudi Arabia, a group rarely discussed when analyzing contemporary issues within Saudi Arabia. The tensions surrounding this group, and their rights and citizenship in Saudi Arabia, deserves attention and further research. It is also a topic that shows Saudi Arabia to be a country experiencing societal pressures that a host of other nations are also currently going through.

Going forward, it will be interesting to see how the existing tensions between the authority figures of the family and the state analyzed in future research. As the social liberalization of Saudi public space continues and becomes more entrenched, the families of these women will be forced to decide what

⁶⁰ Interview B.

aspects of this new Saudi culture they will allow into their lives. The addition of the voices of older generations, such as parents or grandparents, would be vital to such a study. Including these voices would aid in mapping the trajectory of the past experiences of women up to the present day.

Despite the huge array of changes that occurred in between my first and last interviews, what remains constant is the powerful relationship that exists between women in Saudi Arabia and the space they are in. This relationship must be understood in order to map changing behaviors and recognize how women exercise their agency while navigating the myriad norms that currently exist in different sites. Spaces can both control and liberate, and each site contributes to the complex inter-workings of changing power structures. The crucial element to our understanding is the inclusion of women's voices and a commitment to scholarship that does not impose a single narrative on Saudi women's stories.

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