

*Đorđe Stojanović**
Institute For Political Studies, Belgrade

POLITICS OF CARBON/HYDROCARBON DEMOCRACIES: OIL AS A POLITICAL (META-)NARRATIVE

Resume

This paper discusses the metanarrative importance of carbon/hydrocarbon energy resources, fossil fuels, for the theory of democracy, on the one hand, and, on the other, their metanarrative position within the major security theories in international/inter-state relations. The paper is a study of how facts in the form of certain theories generate carbon/hydrocarbon narratives of democracy and international relations. When we refer to carbon/hydrocarbon democracies, we actually analyze the various democratic structures that emerged from the prevalence of the political discourse on coal or oil. While the former energy resource gave rise to an emphasis on egalitarianism, the latter exposed democracy to technocratic and plutocratic tendencies. Simultaneously, the paper also addresses the undemocratic potentials of potentials of rentier states. At the international system level, from a realist approach, the struggle for carbon resources, carbon/energy dependence and resource/carbon nationalism are essential issues for a state's power and welfare. The liberal notion of international energy policies implies market-driven and cooperative designing of energy relations by various state and non-state institutions and organizations. From a constructivist perspective, the focus is on petro-securitization and a whole range of distinct public, as

* Email adress: georgikus@gmail.com; ORCID: 0000-0002-6417-0346.

well as private, cultural, economic and political perceptions that give oil multiple contextual and symbolic meanings.

Keywords: carbon/hydrocarbon democracies, rentier states, petro-securitization, petro-imperialism, energy security, petro-wars, petro-civilization.

INTRODUCTION

Our civilization is completely dependent on energy. Ever since the prehistoric use/control of fire by the *Homo erectus* millions of years ago, who was also skilled at making stone tools and weapons, energy has been an essential element of human existence and a relevant topic of various cultural narratives. Issues related to energy security, i.e. issues concerning energy culture, energy/ecology/environmental philosophies, political theories on the relationship between energy resources and mass democracies, energy geopolitics, political ecology, climate change policies or individual energy policies, have, for quite a long time and rather paradoxically, been marginalized in the sense of their default interpretation through idealistic or realistic, cooperative or conflictual conceptual nature. They were treated as axiomatized, or even “theologized”, as problem constants (like water or air), primarily associated with differently framed external and internal power policies.

The existence of limited energy resources, of larger or smaller fossil fuel reserves, could not be resolved once and for all without a revolutionary change of the entire energy infrastructure of humankind: the invention of unlimited, easily and universally available energy sources. That is why these issues were permanently and fatalistically sidelined. However, fossil fuels can be treated as ontologized elements in the creation of possibilities and limits of what we know as (petro-) modern, mass democracy. In that sense, I would define all energy policies of this kind as (petro-cosmogonic policies because they concern both the survival and development of civilization and the survival and development of a specific democratic political mode: carbon/hydrocarbon democracy (cf. Mitchell 2009; 2011). Of course, this does not mean that totalitarian, authoritarian or hybrid political systems can exist without reference to energy issues, nor that an abundance of energy

necessarily increases democracy (the case of petro-monarchies, such as Saudi Arabia or petro-authoritarian regimes, such as Kazakhstan).

The basic feature of conventional energy sources (coal, oil or natural gas/LPG) is that “energy” is extracted through their combustion. That process is not renewable. Their combustion results in an emission of CO₂, among other things, and limited and rare fossil fuel supplies are essentially “captured solar energy”: concentrated reservoirs of ancient solar radiation transformed into chemical energy and stored in organic matter over geological timescales. Through photosynthesis, prehistoric organisms converted solar energy into biomass, which was subsequently buried and, under conditions of high pressure, temperature, and oxygen deprivation, transformed into coal, oil, or natural gas/LPG. Unlike renewable energy flows, which are replenished within human timescales, fossil fuels represent finite geological stocks that cannot be rapidly regenerated. Once certain supplies are exhausted, new deposits must be discovered, developed, and exploited.

Despite the accelerated expansion of natural gas, biofuels, electricity-based systems, and renewable technologies such as wind and solar power, crude oil remains the central energy source of contemporary civilization, not merely because of its quantitative share in global primary energy consumption, but because of the extensive infrastructures, transport systems, and industrial arrangements built around petroleum dependence (U.S. Energy Information Administration 2023/2024; Energy Institute 2024). Renewable, inexhaustible energy sources are recreated/replenished naturally and relatively fast, but their flow is limited (Elliott 1997). Unlike fossil fuels, which constitute finite energy stocks accumulated over geological timescales, renewable sources represent continuously regenerated energy flows whose availability is constrained by natural conversion rates and spatial-temporal conditions (Smil 2022). Sustainable energy sources are defined as renewable energy sources with lower environmental burdens compared to conventional energy sources. They meet the needs of the current population without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In any event, since the beginning of the 20th century, the world we live in is, in fact, an “oil/petro-civilization” (Yergin 1991; Heinberg 2003; Mitchell 2011; Bridge and Le Billion 2017). There are indications that we are entering a “post-oil” era, but that is still a rather confusing and elusive theoretical claim. The first part of the paper analyses how petro-assemblages define democratic attributes. The second part analyzes

how fossil fuels influence the creation of international relations with implications for energy security.

CARBON/HYDROCARBON DEMOCRACY AND RENTIER STATES: CONCEPTUAL ASSUMPTIONS

Up until the mid-18th century, as already suggested, existential human needs were almost entirely met through renewable energy sources of solar origin (Sieferle 2001). Sun energy was converted into grain and other crops that provided for people's organic survival. The emergence of agriculture, also known as the Neolithic Revolution, took place 8,000 – 10,000 years ago. Pastures provided domestic animals that had nutritional (their breeding also dates from the same period) and transport (carriage, cart and riding animals appeared 5,000-6,000 years ago) functions. Forests provided much-needed firewood. Wind and water were used to power pre-industrial machinery and long-distance mobility. Things radically changed with the First Industrial Revolution (1760–1830), the Second Industrial Revolution (1870–1914) and the Third and Fourth Industrial Revolutions (from late 20th century to the present).

The idea of mankind-controlled or “civilized man”-controlled era of the Earth's natural history first appeared in the form of classification into the geosphere, inanimate matter, transferred by the biosphere, biological life and the noosphere, whose transformative power is the human mind/knowledge, so we can also call it the anthroposphere (Will et al. 2011, 843–844). The noosphere includes the Technosphere and the so-called “industrial metabolism” characteristic of recent times. However, that classification has been abandoned. Namely, the Holocene is the post-glacial era in which we have been living for the last 10,000 – 12,000, during which, accelerated by industrial revolutions, human activity has become an extremely important geological and morphological force (Will, Crutzen and McNeill 2007, 615).

Today, according to the adopted classification, we live in the Anthropocene era, distinct from the Holocene, in which human activity has become so comprehensive and intense that it competes with natural forces in shaping and defining the environmental qualities of the planet Earth. Anthropocene can be said to have started with the widespread global use of fossil fuels, and the current phase can be defined as the Petrocene. The level of total world consumption of primary energy from

non-renewable sources is 85%. Subsidies for oil, coal and natural gas rose to a record 7 trillion dollars (Black, Parry and Vernon 2023). This is 7.1% of the global gross domestic product and more than governments spend annually on education (4.3%) and is about two-thirds of their spending on health care (10.9%). In other words, this petro-dependence is not just a factual, but also a social, political and economic creation/construct.

Initially, from an epistemological point of view, the concept of energy is associated with Aristotle's philosophy (Heurtebise 2020, 102–103). He distinguishes between the potentiality or *dunamis* (δύναμις), which refers to potential energy and the actuality or *energeia* (ἐνέργεια), which refers to kinetic energy. Our running *dunamis*, for instance, also exists when we sit, or even when we sleep, while our running energy is manifested when we run, is expressed by running. Consistent with Aristotle's teleological understanding of nature, matter has a natural tendency towards materialization, while effectiveness represents its goal and perfection. In modern physics, energy is the ability to do work. Potential energy is a consequence of a relative position of an object in relation to other objects, while kinetic energy is a consequence of the body or particle motion. Energy can change its form, but in a closed system, the total amount of energy cannot change. Our understanding of energy is based on the idea of transformation of material potentials of natural resources into a socio-economically active and productive work.

According to Timothy Mitchell, coal, as the pivotal energy factor of industrialized countries in the period from 1880 to the First World War, served as a socio-economic catalyst of the process of democratization and general progress (Mitchell 2011, 26–27). Namely, through the control of the energy system workers acquired and expanded their right to vote, right to political organizing, creation of workers' trade unions and strikes, i.e. the possibility of sabotaging the energy infrastructure. This enabled the initiation and relative development of the welfare state: the eight-hour working day and social insurance programs, including coverage of occupational accidents, illness and unemployment, as well as public pensions. It also covered women's movements against the exclusion of women from public political life. Mitchell calls this political constellation welfare democracy (Mitchell 2009, 406, 422).

The possibility of obstructing the energy flows of an economy which is primarily coal-based by an organized labor force has become an effective way of, if not appreciating, then of asserting their demands.

Mitchell's approach to democracy is based on the approach of Jacques Rancière, who defines it either as a tendency towards egalitarianism or as control of that tendency (2009). With this in mind, it seems that the situation with the oil regime is quite different than with coal. It is an energy resource whose exploitation requires fewer workers with a higher percentage of highly qualified engineers and managers. In addition, its distribution logistics is significantly smaller, given that it is in a liquid, rather than solid, state. These changes have resulted in the energy grid being less sensitive to political demands of those who enable and maintain it (Mitchell 2011, 38–39). However, this apparent logistical simplicity should not obscure the extraordinary technological complexity of the oil industry, which depends on highly specialized extraction technologies, sophisticated transportation systems, complex infrastructures, and a skilled workforce required for its continuous operation. The exercise of political power has become much more limited, while ordinary people are more exposed to technocratic and plutocratic interests. Therefore, different types of energy, in keeping with their primary features, can be used differently in a competitive political process. The Middle East oil fields became the main instrument of British imperialists for manipulating the domestic coal policies. In the Navy, Winston Churchill, establishing the Royal Commission on Fuel and Engines in the Admiralty, intentionally and consciously replaced steam engines with internal combustion engines, for fear of possible strikes (Mitchell 2011, 63). The UK politicians have ever since had a phobia of oil supplies being cut off, like an energy “petro-castration” syndrome (Maugeri 2006, 259).

Mitchell argues that economy is a discursive act that saw its materialist reinterpretation on the eve of the Second World War according to the above-mentioned energy inversion. It became a sphere governed by expert calculations and therefore immune to egalitarian principles. It became an expression of “petroknowledge/petroepistemology” (cf. Mitchell 2011, 139). As such, defined by cheap and ample oil supplies, it enabled the post-war Keynesian economics. Understanding economy as a process of monetary circulation meant that it could expand without physically increasing. Earlier physical components of wealth and growth of an economy (industrial expansion, conquest of new colonies, gold reserves, exploitation of new ore reserves, etc.) were replaced by calculation of national income, gross domestic product, which had no clear limits. It was no longer a measure of accumulation of physical

wealth, but a measure of the frequency and speed of exchange of paper money regardless of any physical and territorial limits. Oil played a significant part there, on two levels (Mitchell 2011, 139–140): (1) its price was constantly declining, despite significant fluctuations and temporary increases caused by geopolitical crises, supply disruptions, and market instability; and (2) because of its relative abundance and low transportation costs, its price neglected the depletion of natural resources. An impression was constructed that oil-based wealth and production can last forever.

According to Karl Polanyi, embeddedness/rootedness of economy means that it is impregnated with social relations, that it is not a separate sphere, a contrast to society as a whole (Machado 2011). Modern economy is socially uninstalled/uprooted by the automatism of market regulation/price creation, so market societies are self-destructive. However, the dynamics of modern market societies is marked by the dialectic of “two-way/double movement” (Polanyi 2001 [1944], 136). One direction is its orientation towards social marketization, the other – orientation towards social protectionism. This also applies to carbon/hydrocarbon democracy through the premise of society’s control over distortive market processes. Western democracies’ oil dependence is marked by the coexistence with its undemocratic opposite in the Middle East countries. At the same time, the influence of oil on democracy is generated by neo-colonial elites and not by actions of satellite states of the “imperial hinterland/periphery”.

The use of oil embargo as an instrument of Arab nationalism in the pursuit of political concessions and privileges never actually materialized (Mitchell 2011, 174–175). Rather than being explained exclusively by Arab nationalism, the political economy of oil emerged from the intersection of nationalist ambitions, global capitalist imperatives, great-power rivalry, and domestic regime interests. Thus, the famous embargo from 1973–1974 was pure delusion/fabrication. While Saudi Arabia and Kuwait reduced their production, other countries increased it (Iran, Libya, Iraq and Algeria). The oil supply chain of highly developed capitalist carbon/hydrocarbon democracies was unbroken. Moreover, that artificial/manipulative energy crisis served as an ideological framework for the defense of neoliberalism and the nullification of insistence on Keynesian welfare. Combining McDonaldization, as the global power of modern capitalism and jihad, as different tribal particularisms that resist capitalist uniformity and homogenization, Mitchell introduced

the neologism “McJihad” (2011, 203–204). It is an era where, in certain critical situations, the complex capitalist machinery can be operational only through the recognition and adoption of the social force and moral vertical of the Islamic or other types of conservatism. It is a confirmation of the existing imperial model and the power of capital which, in order to exist, must rely on external social forces that are characterized by divergent types of motivations, energies, methods and goals.

In that regard, one of the core issues is the relationship between oil as a natural wealth and democratization processes in states of imperial periphery that are its major exporters. Namely, political science research shows a direct link between a country’s democracy and an increase in its income, so it would be logical to assume that oil is a democratically oriented propulsive social/political force (Ross 2001, 325). However, this proposition does not hold as straightforwardly in resource-dependent economies, where abundant resource rents reshape the political and institutional incentives that ordinarily connect democratization with economic growth. Although it would be helpful in scanning and predicting political problems of a wide range of states from Venezuela, Nigeria and Indonesia to the countries of Central Asia, most of the research deals with the Middle East. Anyway, the findings are usually negative: oil obstructs the democratic, liberal forms of governance/government and the overall economic development. In order to understand all that, it is necessary to elaborate, in its broad outlines, the rentier state theory, derived from the theory of modernization (Ross 2001; Beblawi and Luciani 1987; Walker 2023).

Simply put, rentier states/economies rely on compensation derived from their ownership of natural resources, on an external rent that cannot be equated with either profit or wages. In a rentier state/economy, the production of wealth is reduced to a small portion of society, while its larger part is involved in its distribution and consumption (Beblawi 1987, 51–52). However, there is no such thing as a pure rentier economy. The government is the main recipient of external rent through export and corporate taxes and state-owned enterprises. Its political power stems from that fact. Such a state/economy creates a specific rentier mentality. Its primary trait is that income, wages or wealth are not causally related to work or risk, but to chance, conjecture or situation. The countries of the Middle East are a perfect example of rentier states. During the 1980s, 90% of budget inflows were revenues from oil (Beblawi 1987, 53). Late rentier states differ from the early ones because they achieve

their stability outside the classic isolationist model of buying obedience and loyalty. They have opened up to foreign capital, as non-bureaucratic, transparent, safe and business-friendly states, in an attempt to attract direct investment, trade and tourism (Walker 2023, 2).

There are three important complementary consequences of political and economic oil ‘rentierism’ that sustain, stabilize and prolong undemocratic and authoritarian regimes in Middle East and all other states that derive their functioning from natural/mineral wealth: the “rentier effect”, “repression effect” and “modernization effect” (Ross 2001, 332–337). The rentier effect implies low or no taxation as a method of gaining political consent and tolerance. The repression effect manifests a state in which rentier wealth serves to consolidate the repressive state apparatus and institutions that prevent or weaken demands for democratization. The modernization effect is related to social and political stagnation and underdevelopment due to rents as obstacles to democratic impulses.

The Middle East economy of a late rentier state is no longer based solely and exclusively on oil and gas, but is led/driven by oil and gas (Gray 2011, 23–36). It is diversified and partially marketized. The companies that are being established are still owned by the state, but they were not created and organized by political, but by professional economic logic. The late rentier state strives for efficient development and economic policy, has a proactive approach to the fiscal and monetary policy, trade policy, post-industrial sector strategies, labor market policies, etc. It is still undemocratic but responds to basic social needs. Its foreign policy acknowledges globalization processes with certain protectionist elements. It exercises soft power, works towards regional stability and is not oriented exclusively towards the (neo-)colonial capitalist empires, like the UK and US, but also turned towards China and Russia.

It should be added that, as a rule, expansive colonialism was founded on extreme greed aimed at total control and ruthless exploitation of natural resources (Mukoyama 2024, 1–19). This refers in particular to colonial oil policies. The process of decolonization did not always proceed as a simple transformation of colonies into sovereign states. Frequently, it meant merging several territories into a federal political format suitable for manipulation by the colonial metropolis, which was particularly true for decolonizing strategies of the British Empire. However, some territories managed to avoid such political fate. Oil

production during the colonial period and the protectorate system, a proxy colonial administration through local rulers with internal sovereignty and protection from external and internal threats, led to the creation of states which would not have existed otherwise, and which extracted their statehood primarily from their petro-wealth (as was the case with Qatar, Brunei or Bahrain). Oil became the main instrument of opposing the imposed imperial and political fusion with neighboring areas, the propulsive element of separate statehood. It is thus possible, on the one hand, to talk about the amalgamating oil sovereignty – a prevalent expression of the intentions of colonial metropolises and regional powers and, on the other, about the separate oil sovereignty of smaller decolonized entities/territories.

INTERNATIONAL CARBON/HYDROCARBON POLICIES: CONCEPTUAL ASSUMPTIONS

Classical, traditional realism represents the reflection of political life based on the premises of conservatively positioned human nature (Stojanović and Štrbac 2009). All individuals are treated as selfish and greedy, potentially aggressive and immoral/unethical when faced with limited resources of some kind. States' reaction is, if we disregard different regime ideologies or particular state reasons, always initiated by identical human motivation, so they are all in a "meta-situation" of permanent and inevitable struggle for power. Neo-realism abandons the notion of human nature as a dominant factor and bases its observations on the attributes of the international political system (Waltz 1979). It starts from the fact that states in an anarchic system owe their survival mainly to themselves, that they must rely on their own capacities. The key moment in the self-help system is the weighing or balancing of capacities/powers. That balance frames intentions, so imbalance results in opening the space for aggression. In order to reach a certain level of security, states accumulate resources and the achieved level of military and economic power profiles their mutual relations. While classical realism is an expression of the situation in which "Man is a wolf to man", neo-realism is an expression of the situation in which "State is a wolf to state". For neo-classical realists, the body of domestic political processes is manifested as a transmission mechanism that channels, transmits and directs political impacts in response to external forces (Rose 1998). Despite the fact that neo-classical realism recognizes the

value and priority of relative material power as a basic parameter of a state's foreign and security policy, it also underscores the historical contingency and relevance of the current foreign policy implementation.

For realists, on the whole, the attitude to fossil fuels, as extremely important energy sources, lies in the causal nexus with the national interests of states primarily focused on power and survival. Having or not having oil, coal and natural gas resources is what definitely makes a country more or less independent. They are of vital importance in terms of survival and economic welfare of states. The realist theoretical perspective imposes competition for carbon resources, carbon/energy dependence and resource/carbon nationalism as the main issues. Any country that has fossil fuel resources can turn them into "hydrocarbon/energy weapons" with a tendency to impose some kind of "petro-imperialism". Every state, especially a great power, that does not have adequate reserves, must fight for fossil fuels, especially oil, in order to sustain or secure further development of its economy. Their metanarrative is a world in a constant struggle over and for carbon resources. That usually amounts to the designing of balance/imbalance between carbon exporting states and carbon importing states, to a zero-sum game where one wins when another loses. We can identify the following key assumptions of realists regarding carbon/petro energy (cf. Dannreuther 2010): (1) the notion that the primary elements of national power are linked to access to and control of carbon/petro resources; (2) that these resources are limited; and (3) that an increasing number of different types of international conflicts arise from the possibility/impossibility of accessing and controlling them.

There are different ways of classifying the causal mechanisms linking the global petro-industry with international conflicts. Thus, according to one classification, there are eight specific mechanisms (Colgan 2013, 151–169): (1) wars for resources, where states attempt to seize oil reserves (UK invasion on Mesopotamia at the end of the First World War, the Iran-Iraq war, the 1932–1935 war between Bolivia and Paraguay, etc.); (2) conflicts over potential dominance in the oil market (US intervention in the 1990–1991 Iraq-Kuwait war, etc.); (3) conflicts initiated by the presence of foreign workers or companies, creating dissatisfaction of state or non-state actors (Iranian hostage crisis from 1980, etc.); (4) petro-aggressions, where oil facilitates domestic political control over aggressive leaders (the case of Saddam Hussein and Ayatollah Khomeini); (5) financing (petro-)insurgencies (US and

Saudi Arabia's assistance to the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, etc.); (7) control over transit sea routes and oil pipelines (deployment of UK and US navy, etc.); and (8) the absence of multilateral cooperation can be expanded, intensified or undermine efforts geared at preventing international conflicts (China's stance towards Sudan and Iran, etc.).

According to another classification, instead of the implementation of classic oil wars, we can distinguish four new types of military oil conflicts associated with states rich in fossil fuels (Meierding 2020, 61–81). These are: (1) oil spats; (2) “red herrings”; (3) oil campaigns; and (4) oil gambits. Oil spats are minor oil-related disputes that do not escalate into wider and more serious state confrontations (the 2014 disagreements between China and Vietnam over a drilling platform in the South China Sea, etc.). “Red Herrings” are conflicts that take place on or over territories rich in fossil fuels, but that are not motivated by the same but some other political, economic, strategic or symbolic motives (the Falklands War, war between Cameroon and Nigeria, etc.). Oil campaigns are large-scale conflicts aimed at the takeover of foreign oil reserves that take place within wars whose causes are unrelated to oil aspirations (Japanese and German attempts to seize oil fields during World War II, etc.). Under this classification, we can only find a single example for the oil gambit, a strictly oil war. It is Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. The formal reason for this was the acquisition of resources, but it was actually an attempt to achieve higher political goals.

In contrast to neo-realists “of all colors”, who take the existence of a certain level of security threats as a constant, which results in their preoccupation with the abilities to face them, (neo-)liberals focus on state intentions as the main factor of international security (Stojanović and Štrbac 2009). They firmly believe in the independent effects of state intentions: benevolent political aspirations will not push the state into upscaling its offensive capacities and, accordingly, state ambitions generate abilities. In addition to their trust in institutions, the market and international cooperation, the most important element of the (neo-) liberal concept of security is the fact that the indigenous nature and intentions of actors define their international behavior. Consistent with the liberal (democratic) theory of peace, liberal democracies do not wage war against each other, so an increase in peace and security can be perceived through the process of democratization. The point of the liberal understanding of security is that it is not nations that go to war, but governments.

The liberal view of international energy policies implies the framing of energy relations by various institutions and organizations, which involves a wide range of both state and non-state entities. Strategies that transform energy and petro-relations are positive sum games, or win-win situations where everybody stands to gain something. In this regard, the concept of energy diplomacy is particularly interesting. We can define it as the use of foreign policy to ensure access to energy resources, i.e. oil, coal and natural gas abroad and to promote cooperation in the energy, i.e. carbon/hydrocarbon sector (Goldthau 2010, 28). It suggests that the main driving force behind the agreements on oil, coal and gas is not necessarily the maximization of business opportunities, but national security goals, and they do not reflect the pursuit of economic, but rather political, logic.

When we focus on the constructivist study of security, we can identify two approaches (Katzenstein 1996; Adler and Barnett 1998). First, it is the assumption that state actors view security as something that can be achieved through community rather than power. The community precedes the threat, it cannot be created by one. Therefore, security is something that can be constructed, so insecurity is not simply a given/pre-existing condition of the international system. Second, it is the assumption that national security interests are defined by actors who respond to authentic cultural factors. This, of course, does not mean that power, conventionally defined as the sum of material capacities, is a marginal factor for the analysis of national security, but that the linkage of the state and other actors with power and security helps us to understand and explain their behavior. The world is not seen through the ontological prism of givenness, but through the ontological prism of becoming.

Unlike conventional constructivists who see the international system as an objective social fact/given, the radical strand accepts the postmodernist pragmatism and is concerned with how the existence of the world is told through signs, discourses and narratives (Adler 2013, 122). Critical constructivists accept the post-structuralist non-essentialist understanding of threats by elucidating the constitution of domains: inside-outside, us-others and domestic-foreign through an authentic linguistic-symbolic elaboration of the dangers of a specific national community. From this angle, security is the first and foremost performative discourse for the establishment of a certain political order (Klein 1994, 10). Based on the aforesaid, we can define securitization

as the sum of mutually intertwined practices and processes and their generation, dissemination and reception in terms of threat creation (Balzacq 2010, XIII; Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998). In other words, marking something as a security issue/problem inevitably makes it one.

If we applied that to relations concerning fossil fuels or energy in general, securitization provides us with an analytical framework for understanding their deficit as a threat to national security or as a political issue *par excellence*. This also includes the possibility of detecting particular tactics and strategies related to the extraction, production, distribution and consumption of energy/fossil fuels. Simultaneously, at the level of prioritizing only type of political reaction over another, this also emphasizes the importance of identity within the formulation and implementation of international energy/fossil fuel policies. Acceptance of one or more identities of the actors of these policies suggests that energy relations are an expression of multidimensional and dynamic social contexts and processes.

For realists, carbon fuels are securitized as security issues *par excellence*, as strategic commodities whose deficit or surplus defines the position, power and influence of states. As such, realist and liberal approaches are metanarratives that marginalize social processes that enable them, through which they are constructed. The reality of production and consumption of fossil fuels are material characteristics whose meaning and valuation is prescribed by a particular type of energy (meta-) narrative, the logic of appropriation. Their important assumption is that carbon/hydrocarbon identities are based on the idea that fossil fuels cannot be taken as ordinary, but as extraordinary commodities, as a prerequisite for all other goods (Kuteleva 2022). A whole range of distinct public, as well as private cultural, economic and political perceptions give them multiple symbolic meanings. However, their competitiveness ends when one of them becomes socially and politically prevalent. It is then possible to talk about a particular energy/carbon paradigm.

CONCLUSION

The narrative should be treated as an epistemological category (Stojanović 2013, 15–16). Similarly to the concepts of time and space, a narrative can be understood as something that is not a feature of our

experience. It can be defined as something that is abstract, as “empty” coordinates of the cognitive field within which we discover the world, as a contentless form that our perception imposes on the “bare” flow of reality, providing it with an intelligible empirical order. The point is not that we ‘talk’ the world, that we tell stories about the world in order to understand it, but that the world shows itself to us in the form of stories: that the world ‘talks’ us. It is a kind of “epistemological finality”, not only in the sense that there is no narrator outside the narrative space (let’s say that the narrator can also be the Truth), but that it is impossible to conceive the world outside narrativity without this product or expression of imagination ending as a story, since the narrative itself is narrative in nature.

With that in mind, this paper defines the fable of the way in which fossil fuels “talk” democracy and state. The carbon/hydrocarbon state narrative is not a theoretical democratic metanarrative. It is not coded in a way that allows it to explain democracy as such, but to profile the specific set of symbolic and non-symbolic relations designed between carbon/hydrocarbon fuels and a certain type of democratic and non-democratic policies. The point is that the modes of democracy that emerged around the middle of last century were made possible by the imperial/colonial monopoly over the exploitation of energy obtained from limited/scarcely global supplies of fossil fuels and complex socio-technological assemblages required for its production, distribution and consumption. Energy/carbon policies are of vital importance to the state survival and social welfare. It should be added that the concept of security can never be defined in a scientifically neutral way, in a value vacuum, because it must be detected in a broader and often antagonistic approach to the social reality and the crucial elements that constitute it.

This paper also generally suggests the importance and distinctiveness of the approach to the issues of fossil fuels from the perspective of carbon/hydrocarbon discursive/metanarrative policies. The emphasis is on the social logic of the construction of energy, i.e. carbon/hydrocarbon relations, on the attributes of socio-cultural-symbolical contexts. At the same time, regardless of the imperial or colonial history of particular states, it is not possible to talk about their common petro-identity. In that context, fossil fuels are instrumentalized as a relevant factor of their national development, sovereignty, legitimacy and power. Apart from focusing on the state, an analysis of energy

discourses/metanarratives should also encompass both intra-state and transnational actors.

LITERATURE/REFERENCES

- Adler, Emanuel, and Michael Barnett. 1998. „A framework for the study of security communities,” in Adler, Emanuel and Barnett, Michael (eds) *Security Communities*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 29–65.
- Adler, Emanuel. 2013. “Constructivism in international relations: sources, contributions, and debates,” in Carlsnaes, Walter, Risse, Thomas and Simmons, Beth A. (eds.) *Handbook of international relations*. London: SAGE, 112–145.
- Balzacq, Thierry. 2010. *Understanding securitisation theory: how security problems emerge and dissolve*. London: Routledge.
- Beblawi, Hazem and Luciani, Giacomo, eds. 1987. *The Rentier State*. Nes York: Croom Helm.
- Beblawi, Hazem. 1987. “The Rentier State in the Arab World,” in Beblawi, Hazem and Luciani, Giacomo, eds. 1987. *The Rentier State*. Nes York: Croom Helm, 49–63.
- Black, Simon, Parry, Ian and Vernon, Nate (2023, August 24) “Fossil Fuel Subsidies Surged to Record \$7 Trillion,” *International Monetary Fund Blog*. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2023/08/24/fossil-fuel-subsidies-surged-to-record-7-trillion#:~:text=Fossil-fuel%20subsidies%20surged%20to,economic%20recovery%20from%20the%20pandemic>.
- Bridge, Gavin, and Philippe Le Billion. 2017. *Oil*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Buzan, Barry, Wæver, Ole and de Wilde, Jaap. 1998. *Security: a new framework for analysis*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Colgan, Jeff D. 2013. “Fueling the Fire: Pathways from Oil to War,” *International Security* 38 (2):147–180. doi: 10.1162/ISEC_a_00135
- Dannreuther, Roland. 2010. “International Relations Theories: Energy, Minerals and Conflict,” *Polinares EU Policy on Natural Resources Working Paper* 8: 1–24. <https://studylib.net/doc/8824990/international-relations-theories--energy--minerals>.
- Elliott, David. 1997. *Energy, Society and Environment: Technology for a Sustainable Future*. London: Routledge.

- Energy Institute. 2024. *Statistical Review of World Energy 2024*. London: Energy Institute.
- Goldthau, Andreas. 2010. "Energy Diplomacy in Trade and Investment of Oil and Gas," in *Global Energy Governance: The New Rules of the Game*, eds. Goldthau, Andreas and Witte, Jan Martin. Berlin: Global Public Policy Institute, 25–49.
- Gray, Matthew. 2011. "A Theory of "Late Rentierism" in the Arab States of the Gulf," Center for International and Regional Studies Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, *Occasional Paper 7*: 1–44.
- Heinberg, Richard. 2003. *The Party's Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.
- Heurtebise, Jean-Yves. 2020. "Philosophy of energy and energy transition in the age of the petro-Anthropocene," *Journal of World Energy Law and Business* 13 (2): 100–113. doi: 10.1093/jwelb/jwaa012.
- Katzenstein, Peter. 1996. „Introduction: Alternative Perspectives on National Security.“ in Katzenstein, Peter (ed) *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1–32.
- Klein, Bradley S. 1994. *Strategic Studies and World Order: The Global Politics of Deterrence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kuteleva, Anna. 2022. *China's Energy Security and Relations with Petrostates: Oil as an Idea*. London: Routledge.
- Machado, Nuno Miguel Cardoso. 2011. "Karl Polanyi and the New Economic Sociology: Notes on the Concept of (Dis)embeddedness," *RCCS Annual Review* 3: 119–140. doi: 10.4000/rccsar.309.
- Maugeri, Leonardo. 2006. *The Age of Oil: The Mythology, History, and Future of the World's Most Controversial Resource*. Westport: Praeger.
- Meierding, Emily. 2020. *The Oil Wars Myth: Petroleum and the Causes of International Conflict*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Mitchell, Timothy. 2009. "Carbon Democracy," *Economy and Society* 38(3): 399–432. doi: 10.1080/03085140903020598
- Mitchell, Timothy. 2011. *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*. London: Verso.
- Mukoyama, Naosuke. 2024. *Fueling Sovereignty: Colonial Oil and the Creation of Unlikely States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Polanyi, Karl (2001 [1944]) *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Time*. Boston: Beacon Press Books.
- Rancière, Jacques (2009) *Hatred of democracy*. London: Verso.
- Rose, Gideon. 1998. „Neo-classical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy.“ *World Politics* 51(1): 144–172.
- Ross, Michael L. 2001. “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” *World Politics* 53(3): 325–361.
- Sieferle, Rolf Peter. 2001. *The Subterranean Forest: Energy Systems and the Industrial Revolution*. Cambridge: The White Horse Press.
- Smil, Vaclav. 2022. *How the World Really Works: The Science Behind How We Got Here and Where We’re Going*. New York: Viking.
- Steffen, Will, Grinevald, Jacques, Crutzen, Paul and McNeill, John. 2011. “The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* 369: 842–867. doi: 10.1098/rsta.2010.0327.
- Steffen, Will, Crutzen, Paul J. and McNeill, John R. 2007. “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?” *Ambio* 36 (8): 614–621.
- Stojanović, Đorđe and Štrbac, Katarina. 2009. Globalne bezbednosne transformacije: eksplanatorni potencijal savremenih pristupa međunarodnoj bezbednosti. *Srpska politička misao* 16(4): 201–226
- Stojanović, Đorđe. 2013. “Traktat o postmodernizmu, društvu i politici: Quaecumque ab x dicta essent, commentitia esse,” *Srpska politička misao* 41 (3): 11–56.
- U.S. Energy Information Administration. 2023/2024. *Renewable Energy Explained*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Energy.
- Waltz, Kenneth. 1979. *Theory of international politics*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Walker, Scott. 2023. “Rentier State Theory 50 years on: new developments.” *Frontiers in Political Science* 5: 1–6. doi: 10.3389/fpos.2023.1120439.
- Yergin, Daniel. 1991. *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Ђорђе Стојановић*

Институт за политичке студије, Београд

ПОЛИТИКЕ КАРБОНСКИХ/ УГЉОВОДОНИЧКИХ ДЕМОКРАТИЈА: НАФТА КАО ПОЛИТИЧКИ (МЕТА-)НАРАТИВ

Резиме

Овај рад се бави метанаративним значајем карбонских/угљоводоничних енергената, фосилних горива, за, са једне стране, теорију демократије и, са друге стране, њиховом метанаративном позицијом у оквиру најважнијих теорија безбедности међународних/међудржавних односа. Рад је студија о томе како чињенице у форми одређених теорија покрећу карбонске/угљеноводоничне наративе демократије и међународних односа. Када говоримо о карбонским/угљоводоничним демократијама ми заправо анализирамо различита демократска устројства произашла на преваленцији политичког дискурса угља или нафте. Док је први енергент омогућио форсирање егалитаризма, други је демократију изложио технократским и плутократским тенденцијама. Симултано, рад се бави и са недемократским потенцијалима рентијерских држава. На нивоу међународног система, из реалистичког ракурса, борба за карбонске ресурсе, карбонску/енергетску зависност и ресурсни/карбонски национализам је есецијално питање моћи и благостања једне државе. Либерално поимање међународних енергетских политика подразумева тржишно и кооперативно дизајнирање енергетских односа од стране различитих државних и недржавних институција и организација. Из конструктивистичког угла, у фокусу је петро-секуритизација и читав низ засебних како јавних тако и приватних културалних, економских и политичких перцепција које нафти дају вишесекторна контекстуално-симболичка значења.

* Имејл адреса: georgikus@gmail.com; ORCID:0000-0002-6417-0346.

Кључне речи: карбонске/угљоводоничне демократије, рентијерске државе, петро-секуритизација, петро-империјализам, енергетска безбедност, петро-ратови.

* Овај рад је примљен 26. фебруар 2026. године, а прихваћен на састанку Редакције 20. јула 2026. године.