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**CHILD’S PLAY: TEMPORAL DISCOURSE,
COUNTERPOWER AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS**

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Introduction

A United Nations (UN) 2007 report on climate change forecasted “a turbulent twenty-first century of rising seas, spreading drought and disease, weather extremes, and damage to farming, forests, fisheries and other economic areas” while reminding global leaders that the “challenge of halting climate change is one to which civilization must rise” (Associated Press 2007). Similarly, in the UN Environment Programme’s 2011 Annual Report (2012: 2 emphasis added), Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon insisted that “[a]ddressing inequalities, overcoming poverty, maintaining peace and building prosperity for the entire *human family* depend on rejecting the old economics of heedless pollution and the excessive exploitation of the world’s natural capital. ... Environmental,

economic and social indicators tell us that our current *model of progress* is unsustainable”. Such seemingly straightforward exhortations, directed from an international organization to its member states, are emblematic of a discursive modality regarding development and its impact on the environment. But this language also invokes a particular vision of time important to global economic and environmental ethics issues by virtue of its historical implication in the constitution of the “West” and the “rest”.

This paper examines discourses about common but differentiated responsibilities related to environmental equity and capacity as instantiations of temporality in international politics. Temporality serves as a legitimating and Othering device, quarantining the “underdeveloped” in unique and powerful ways. However, the temporality we identify is also one of the multiple sites of struggle that informs this volume. It provides an opportunity to challenge Western hegemony via environmental issues – what we title, following Brent Steele’s work on aesthetics and security, a form of “counter-power” - a challenge of the temporal discourse which demonstrates its “reversibility” (Steele 2010, 46).

We first discuss how three temporal aspects in a particular narrative about the unilinear-progressive march of history toward Western modernity comprised an Othering device. Unified history, the temporal locations of Self and Other, and a human development metaphor served to associate industrialization and development with “progress” and marginalized indigenous and agricultural societies as “primitive” or “savage”. Next, we read environmental policy debates as a challenge to the hegemony of Western modernity

from within its own temporalized discourse. In pointing out that developed countries are historically responsible for a disproportionate amount of the world's environmental problems (equity) and that other issues such as human poverty compete with environmental hazards for scarce national resources (capacity), developing countries mobilize the very temporal device that compelled their development as a rationale against their responsibility to do so in environmentally sustainable ways as well as against their duty to assist in environmental clean-up. We conclude by discussing the implications of this discourse for current thinking about time and global politics. In particular, we view temporalized environmental discourse as demonstrating the *fragility* of attempts to promulgate a unified vision of global political time.

Temporal Othering

Self and Other issues are no strangers to IR. They were central to the post-WWII realism of Reinhold Niebuhr (2001) and Hans Morgenthau (1948), and enjoyed renewed attention after the Cold War, when ethnic strife and national independence movements returned to the main stage of international affairs and social constructivist and identity research made inroads in IR (e.g. Lapid and Kratochwil 1996; McSweeney 1999; Wendt 1999). In most of these works, the delineation between Self and Other proceeded along primarily spatial lines. In essence, the Self encounters the Other at the boundaries of territorial sovereignty, between national cultures, or along the edges of ideological spheres of influence.

In this section, we suggest how the temporal vision of Western modernity has been crucial to industrial modernization on a global scale. Such “progress” is largely

responsible for the environmental issues confronting the twenty-first century, and has been the impetus for dissident manoeuvres from less-developed, less-prosperous members of the international system. Understanding how those members have experienced a lengthy, temporalized disciplining at the hands of Western metropolises sets the stage for our subsequent discussion of environmental dissents.

Universalizing history from fragmented experience

A key concern of early modern European historians was to slip traditional forms of Papal and Imperial authority. They did so by narrating a decisive break between the Enlightenment and its past (see Hindess 2007; Inayatullah and Blaney 2004), but could not jettison so easily theology's seductive promise of deliverance from human finitude. Although they successfully inoculated the Western European present against appeals to a dominant heritage, for many Enlightenment thinkers the future remained a repository of progressive promise. This resulted in early modern historical narratives utilizing cosmopolitical ontologies to proffer a secular gloss on Christian history's path to the Rapture. To summarise, Enlightenment thinkers pursued the idea that *cosmos* and *polis* emanate from a single source, and drew inspiration from the increasingly successful mechanical depiction of the physical world. Taken together, this allowed them to understand the human *polis* as developing toward a singular and holistic endpoint located on a homogenized horizon (Toulmin 1990: 107).³

However, this unifying view conflicted with the contemporaneous discovery of the 'New World' by European explorers. How could a single linear-progressive view account for

such astounding differences? The modern relationship to time and its concomitant vision of science provided the solution. Privileging the “here and now” allowed historical data to be ‘formally’ compared and fitted together without regard to chronological order so as to produce ‘general categories’ of social knowledge (Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 131). Importantly, the fashionable insistence on a general or universal criterion of evaluation provided a rationale for assessing a multitude of power positions using a single rubric, and the temporal break accomplished by early modern historians demanded that this rubric be based on the present of early modern Western Europe – its “here and now” enjoyed priority by exemplifying “everywhere and forever”.

Making a standard of their particular temporal and spatial locale allowed Western Europeans, and especially Scottish Enlightenment philosophers, to manage diversity through a new scientific method (Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 135). This method was normative inasmuch as a “moral science” must make practical suggestions about how and where (when) “human society must *necessarily* and *appropriately* go” (Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 136–37). Taken together with the idea of a universal human nature, this moral method made possible a “conjectural history” of human kind that held clear cosmopolitical links to the unified, mechanistic solar system, which contained within its present all the necessary clues as to its future development (Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 137; see also Hindess 2007). Conjectural history is based on three conceptual moves: the method of systematic comparison; the assimilation of ancient peoples and contemporary indigenous cultures in a “single coeval category”; and the equation of human infancy

with savagery (Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 139). As may be clear, the first principle makes possible the final two, which in turn facilitate a universal interpretation.

The key claim of this “general evolutionary history of mankind” (Hindess 2007: 328), is that all “human cultures” can be explained in terms of development – “the workings out in time of certain known and stable characteristics of the human mind” (Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 133). Lent an air of scientific precision by early modern encounters with indigenous peoples (Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 127), this “monogenist” historical view featured heavily in the thinking of early modern Western philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, and G.F.W. Hegel (Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 128; Hindess 2007: 325–28).⁵ It subsumed a plethora of differences under the umbrella of temporalized Difference – in this case backwardness, primitiveness, or degeneration, all of which were tied to the Judeo-Christian account of the fall from grace. Inayatullah and Blaney (2004: 49) sum up the Othering implications of this move quite well:

The dominant *aspiration* ... was to grasp the social world as emerging from a single point of origin (the Creation) and, even if currently fallen or divided, guided by God’s purposes and plan toward an ultimate redemption and unification. The commitment to a single organization and a unified teleology constructs difference not as an intrinsic and ubiquitous part of life, but as a fall from God’s grace ...

The Time(s) of the Self and the Other

Under a conjectural history, *present* indigenous cultures and the Western European *past* are conflated as monogenistically “primitive”, a category claimed to have causally preceded Western, modern, civilization and thus to demarcate the line between ancient and modern epochs (Hindess 2007: 332). This produces two relations of temporal Othering. First, the current Self is distinguished from contemporaneous Others. Second, the current Self is distinguished from the prior, antiquated Self, which is more akin to contemporaneous Others in its primitive, pre-modern character—a practice that contains whispers of Foucault’s focus on the Self’s ‘work on the Self’.

Hindess (2007: 333) argues that these are ways of understanding difference in terms of the Self in that difference is associated with geographic (spatial) distance as well as historical (temporal) distance. Inayatullah and Blaney (2004: 64, 56) concur: “the constructed temporal backwardness of the savages is equated with the imagined temporal origins of the European Self in antiquity and the spatially distinct Other is thereby converted into a temporally prior Self”. This practice buttressed colonial governance techniques by assigning “conquered populations” to “a *different* Time”, which effectively “submerged” their histories “under the historical constructions of the Enlightenment scientist” (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004: 58; Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 142). The relationship between time and space in temporal Othering is important not only because it assigns a different development stage to spatial Others, but also because it explains temporal distance through spatial dispersion: geographic Others are understood as temporally primitive by their distribution away from the Western European core – the

further from the core they are found, the more “backwards” they are assumed to be (Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 129).

Three other points are worth lodging here. First, such a clean ontological distinction never actually obtained in world political experience, even in the domains of dominant temporal Selves. By way of support for this, and second, Hindess, and Inayatullah and Blaney note the many internal Others – nominally included populations differentiated by their primitiveness and attachment to a set of practices from the past – that attended modern, Western states and informed their colonial encounters. However, a corollary to the spatial aspect of temporal Othering is the question of how Western European and later North American metropolises *created* internal spaces in which to (re)locate their temporal Others. To minimize civic dissonance, modern Selves must be as homogenous as possible. This entails protecting the gates from the “barbarians” of the hinterland, but it also requires inoculating the Self time after time by placing internal Others in ancillary and invisible spaces within the territorial state. Examples include the Native American Trail of Tears, the Scottish Highlanders, Irish peasants, and Northern European pagans, and the institution of slavery (Hindess 2007: 334; Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 147; Agathangelou 2009).

Second, and more important for the arguments to follow, is the metaphor of mirrors manifested in Othering practices, and what they present in terms of the possibilities for counterpower resistance. Hindess (2007: 332) describes a dialogic mirror, through which the Old World and current indigenous populations and practices are used to explicate

each other. Blaney and Inayatullah (2006: 134) turn these mirrors on the modern Self through “time-shifting”, when the critique of now and here shifts first to now and there, and subsequently to then and there. Such reflections are typically self-congratulatory. They tautologically demonstrate how far the Self has advanced to the apex of human history and thus serve “to shield modern society from external critique” and establish a “chronocratic elite” (Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 144–45).

Postcolonial theorists are concerned to deconstruct this way of thinking about difference but we argue that, since temporal Othering brings both contemporaneous indigenous and historical practices *within* a unified historical framework, no external critique need be necessary if the Other can effectively mobilize the mirror against the Self. By unifying practices within one framework, the practice of temporal Othering “contains built-in quandaries” (Steele 2010: 13). We propose in the next section that this is precisely what the environmental equity and capacity debates of the 1990s and 2000s demonstrate – the use of the Self’s temporal discourse as a mechanism of internal critique by an assimilating Other. But before highlighting this mechanism, one more step – also a metaphor – in the discourse of temporal Othering requires elaboration.

Human development as metaphor

Modern temporal discourse, which privileges the present as distinct from the past, adopts a unified historical interpretation, and employs Othering moves predicated on both, produces a vivid metaphor of civilizational development as human development. In this image, childhood provides the temporalized metaphor for Other – whether that is the

contemporaneous indigenous practices and social relations or the historically prior versions of the Self. The metaphor relies heavily on Adam Smith's "stage theory" of human history, which explains human progress as moving from hunting and gathering, to shepherding, to agriculture, and ultimately to commerce, to produce a "stadial" temporal register of development through which all difference is understood (Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 125, 137).

Hindess (2007: 325, also 334-35) epitomizes the metaphor of human development using a quote from Friedrich von Schiller, who referred to the various levels of historical development in Europe's periphery as an arrangement akin to "an adult . . . surrounded by children of different ages."¹⁰ Likewise, Smith referred to the "infancy" of the American Indians and compared this to the "maturity" of his own industrialized, commercial society (Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 141). This metaphor comports with universal history in that it contains an aura of inclusivity, for all children have the innate potential to grow into adults (Hindess 2007: 326; Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 132). However, equating temporal Others with children subscribes them to the entire continuum of the development metaphor, whose inclusivity also houses its disciplinary potential – children not only *can* mature, they *should* "grow up". What does this development look like? Commerce, read through Whig morality, is understood as the height of civilization, and "civility" serves as a standard by which "all the peoples of the world [can] be graded" (Pagden, quoted in Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 128).

Globalization, especially in its industrial form, is unimaginable without economic development. And economic development was achieved in part by the mobilization of the human development metaphor to compel indigenous and agricultural societies to transform themselves into approximations of Western industrialized states. However, both the prior development of the West and the ongoing development of the “rest” have produced significant environmental degradation. As we discuss in the next section, debates about how best to address these hazards globally demonstrate ways in which developing nations are turning the temporalized developmental discourse of modernity back against its champions.

(Counter)powerful possibilities: The environmental retorts of the temporal Other

Steele’s *Defacing Power* (2010) engages the aesthetic bases of power – and how such bases can be securitized. He puts forth the concept of “counterpower” as “a micropressure, an unlimited event that can happen at any time and from any direction” that works to manipulate or problematize what he titles “centralized bodies of power” (Steele 2010: 28). The limited form of resistance embedded in counterpower, and the discursive material it uses, is as follows:

counter-power understood in a micro-sense is displayed as moments, styles, words, or images. These manifestations are infinitely small and light – they do not contain the material or strategic force necessary to maintain influence over a body, nation, group or organization over time. Counter-power cannot itself distribute resources, taxonomize actors and actions, synthesize, coordinate or routinize. Such displays

derive their influence, alternatively, from the power which they engage (Steele 2010: 20 emphasis added).

Following from Foucault's "aesthetics of the Self", Steele suggests that one of the mechanisms for self-creation – the working of the Self *on* the Self – is a Temporal Othering of "past" Selves. For instance, Steele (2010) shows how the crafting of US self-identity in the 2000s was deeply imbricated with a negative identification with a *past* US self of the Vietnam era. This Temporal Othering *of* and through the Self demonstrates the existence of fissures that can be utilized and exploited by a variety of actors. Forms of counterpower, including "reflexive discourse" and parrhesia (truth-telling) bring forth critiques internal to – *within* – the practices of the Self of a targeted actor.

A similar potential for resistance inheres to the universalizing discourses of temporal progress. While such resistance is, like countepower's potential, somewhat modest, it still marks an overlooked possibility in existing work on temporality and development. For instance, most of the accounts of temporal Othering on which we build view this process as disempowering to those being Othered. But current international environmental affairs offer an alternate picture of Others, not as "temporally superseded" (Blaney and Inayatullah 2006: 151) so much as politically enabled by these very discursive constraints to claim for themselves different levels of participation, commitment, and responsibility in confronting environmental problems. We examine two interrelated environmental debates falling under the umbrella principle of "common but differentiated responsibility", which tries to balance the idea that "we are all in the same boat with

respect to many large-scale environmental problems, on the one hand, with an acknowledgement that the circumstances of individual countries differ markedly, on the other” (Young 2001: 168–69). The first debate, regarding environmental equity, concerns the different historical contributions made by developed and developing countries to environmental degradation. The second, regarding capacity, has to do with the different technological and economic capabilities with which countries can contribute to environmental solutions. We illustrate how developing countries’ elites and public commentators have re-appropriated artefacts from temporal Othering discourses to contest Western attempts to compel the developing world’s participation in international environmental regimes.¹¹

Environmental equity

The idea of environmental equity arises from the belief of “developing countries . . . that it is improper for them to be asked to pitch in to solve a problem arising from the behavior of others” (Young 2001: 168). For example, negotiations in 1988 to reduce long-range transboundary air pollution failed to mandate flat-rate reductions in nitrogen emissions due to conflicts over equity. Although the “mandate that all countries will achieve an equal percentage reduction of emissions” had a first blush of equality, questions arose whether it was just “to expect states that historically have relatively low emission rates to achieve the same percentage reduction as those that have high ones” (Soroos 1993: 200).

The influence of environmental equity concerns was further demonstrated at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro. Principle Seven of the resultant Rio Declaration states: “In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities” (UN 1992). By attaching historical contributions to environmental problems to the reasoning behind expectations of response, the Rio Declaration acknowledged that developed nations bore a greater responsibility for the existing state of environmental affairs than their developing neighbours. In this way, developing countries attached to the discourse of development a correlation between historical development and environmental culpability.

This sense of equity was reflected in the absence of any agreement in the Rio declaration on a timeframe for greenhouse emissions reductions. Five years after UNCED, the United States was still campaigning for an emissions timeframe, angering its developing counterparts and leading to public reminders about common but differentiated responsibility (Yue 1997). In 2002, a Malaysian editorial criticizing the poor performance of developed countries in the decade following Rio reminded European and North American parties that the Declaration was based on the “principle of atoning for past wrongs by developed countries who brought the state of the world’s environment to current degraded levels through their earlier damaging industrial practices” (Loh 2002).

At a recent UN Climate Change Working Group, developing states were similarly pointed. Bolivia (2008, 106–07) observed that developed countries were largely

responsible for environmental degradation from “before 1750” and that they therefore “owe[d] the world an ecological debt” that should be paid literally in the form of compensation to developing countries for “lost opportunities to Live Well” and figuratively by accepting greater “responsibility for addressing the crisis and its consequences”. Algeria (2008: 7) likewise criticized an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change assessment report for “forgiving a major environmental debt” by omitting any reference to developed states’ historical responsibility. Around both the UN Climate Summit in Copenhagen and the UN Climate Change Conference in Cancun, Chinese officials similarly contended that fully industrialized states owed a “carbon debt” to developing states. Chinese climate change experts provided a complementary recommendation that any agreement should allocate “emissions rights” that “ensure [China’s] right to develop” (Buckley 2010). Another rising country, India, remained outwardly “chary of explicit emission-reduction commitments” because “mature economies don’t seem to have made much headway on emission reductions” (Mishra 2009). In Copenhagen, developing delegates employed procedural tactics to obstruct negotiations in part because of their suspicions that developed states would attempt to secure lower commitments and lower penalties for themselves despite their historical responsibility for degradation.¹⁶

By finding an opportunity in the otherwise constraining and disciplinary framework of development, these countries have adapted a discourse to their current engagements with global environmental regimes. This adaptation has subsequently been accepted for the most part in environmental discourse by more developed states and other powerful

international actors as well.¹⁷ By internalizing the idea that certain European state histories prefigure developing states' present, such reflexive reconfiguring of the discourse re-attaches those metropolises' early "blooming" to a lengthy and unprecedented record of environmental wrongs. This counterpower practice takes *as its basis* the material of developing states' presents,¹⁸ to render the human development metaphor Janus-faced. Such re-figuring exposes a development antithetical to the Enlightenment discourse of unilinear-progressivism.

Environmental capacity

Debates about the capacity of countries to contribute to environmental clean-up usually revolve around the argument that "poor countries, which are preoccupied with domestic problems like providing for the basic needs of their own citizens, are not in a position to make large contributions to efforts to solve transboundary or global environmental problems" (Young 2001: 169). The capacity gap was perhaps best epitomized in a trenchant remark by a Pakistani delegate at Rio that, contrary to a developed country's delegate's hope that the Declaration would be a document that "hung in every child's bedroom" (Revill 1992), "in my country, most children don't have bedrooms" (Fainaru 1992). Likewise, the wording and ordering of principles of the Rio Declaration speak to the tension existing in developing countries between basic subsistence and environmental sustainability. It emphasises human welfare, a global "right to development", the eradication of poverty rather than environmental protection, and state-by-state variations in environmental standards (UN 1992). Since Rio, capacity rhetoric has become fairly commonplace, as when Costa Rica (2008: 5) judged proposals for assisting developing

countries in adapting to climate change using funds drawn solely from those same countries as “morally unacceptable”.

In addition to the economic disparities, capacity also relates to the technological gap between developed and developing states. Some developed countries have acknowledged their responsibility, directly related to their substantial “economic, technological, and political resources”, to participate to a greater degree in environmental protection and to assist poorer but willing countries who lack the material capabilities.¹⁹ This assistance may come in the form of investment, trade, or technological exchange, and is widely regarded as crucial to any chance for improving the environmental record of development in the twenty-first century. But many of these mechanisms, processes, and technologies are relatively new and conclusive results still forthcoming. Thus, there has emerged an interesting discursive agreement across states and capacities that both developed and developing countries’ market-based and technological proposals remain in their “infancy”.²⁰ This suggests that in terms of their appetite for embracing more comprehensive solutions, temporal Selves and Others alike are more comfortable dining at the kids’ table.

Internalization and reconstruction of temporal discourse

A crucial feature of the above debates concerns the internalization of the basic developmental language, its acceptance into the everyday parlance of those who previously had been identified, categorised, and governed by it. By definition, internalization indicates a ‘taking in’ of some idea, identity, or narrative; but since those

who are internalizing possess creative and tactical capabilities of their own, a noteworthy facet of internalization is that what gets ‘taken in’ may very well not be the same when it comes ‘back out’ in ongoing discourse. As we will see on the question of temporal visions, internalization is a process both crucial to becoming a legitimate interlocutor in a given community and a source of contestation of that community’s working narratives. This might suggest that the temporal discourse of development is a merely tactical tool and that it is never actually internalized with any sincerity, and if complete acceptance were the criterion for internalization then we would agree. However, discourse also possesses a power of its own that constrains and enables those who use it regardless of their sincerity. In this way, ‘internalization’ refers to movement in both directions—agents ‘take in’ the narrative of development but in doing so are ‘taken in’ to the world that it propounds, where they then can create, contest, and manoeuvre.²² While frustration persists about the tension between development, environmental responsibility, and the markers of both,²³ the story of development and its embedded human development metaphor have now been largely internalized by all countries, signalling both the normative power of these ideas but also their eligibility for use in ways more transversal and subversive.

The internalization of developmental discourse initially seems to constrain developing countries by limiting the agenda of debate, as exemplified by South African President Thabo Mbeki’s 1998 remarks to the Non-Aligned Movement in Durban. He first commented that the “vocabulary” of international discourse revolved around terms such as “globalization, liberalization, deregulation, and the information society”, and that “all

these processes originate from the developed countries of the North, reflect the imperatives of the economies and the levels of development of these countries and therefore, naturally, serve the purposes of our rich global neighbors”.²⁴ Yet he subsequently averred that the best hope for increased agency for developing countries in international affairs was the “development of our economies such that we *outgrow* our designations both as developing countries and emerging economies”.²⁵

Mbeki’s statements suggest that he accepted and internalized the unilinear-progressive promise of development transmitted through the human development metaphor. He later insisted that the Organization of African Unity not engage in protectionism or command economy models because those would be no better than “King Canute wishing the waves away” (Laufer 1999). This somewhat curious reference to a medieval Norseman during a speech about the African Renaissance indicates that Mbeki was familiar with the general distinction between pre-modern European history and superstition on the one hand and modernity and rationality on the other. Mbeki thus mobilized the European internal Other to exhort his African colleagues to pursue Western developmental benchmarks would lead to the “beneficial integration of the African economy into the global economy” (Laufer 1999).

Examples of internalization can also be found in *pro forma* prefatory remarks in elites’ speeches about the environment and development. For instance, after Nelson Mandela inaugurated South Africa’s independence with a poem about a child growing up in Africa who could now travel the world freely,²⁷ Mbeki referred to South Africa as a “newborn

child” (Mbeki 2004) and to its first decade of independence as the “dawn of a new life” (Mbeki 1999) or a period of “infancy” (Mbeki 2001). This set the stage for later remarks characterizing the maturation process as a success, so that by 2006 South Africa was no longer a child but a “giant” who “treks on through all Africa and the whole world, without a pass!” (Mbeki 2006). Chinese President Jiang Zemin thought more inclusively, telling the Second Assembly of the Global Environment in 2002 that all of “mankind” remains a “child of Mother Nature”.²⁸

Environmental documents suggest the internalization of the idea that development is an integral aspect of a universal human history. For example, the Adaptation Fund, launched in 2007 at the Conference on Climate Change in Bali, facilitates contributions from developed countries to developing nations to fight climate change. Expected contributions are tied directly to countries’ levels of development which are assessed as falling into one of four stages – least developed, medium developing, advanced developing, and developed – only superficially removed from Smith’s four stages of civilization (Ling 2007). However, such stadial evaluations facilitate capacity-based assistance. Recent UN environmental reports regularly acknowledge both the capacity gap and the imperative of development by highlighting various programs providing support to developing countries seeking “to integrate climate change responses into national development processes” (United Nations Environment Programme 2012: 22).

While all of these examples demonstrate the constraining power of a hegemonic developmental discourse, challenges to this discourse – discussed earlier as correlations

between extant levels of development and environmental responsibility – have explicitly mobilized the primitive-modern dichotomy as well as the child-adult metaphor to contest the dominant environmental regime. By way of criticizing the increasing wealth gap between the “North” and the “South” since the Rio Declaration, Mbeki remarked: “It is as though we are determined to regress to the most primitive condition of existence in the animal world, of the survival of the fittest”.³⁰ He also referenced Acosta’s barbaric categories, denying that “human society should be constructed on the basis” of such a “savage principle”.³¹ More recently a Malaysian editorial criticized progress since the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 as a result of “the worst polluters . . . playing a children’s game of who should go first’ with regard to emissions reductions”.³²

Dissident invocations of primitivity and childhood turn the temporal vision of modernity and its developmental metaphor back upon Western progenitors by calling such visions into question. An additional flanking manoeuvre complementing this can be found in emerging contestation over the normative implications of “traditional” and “primitive” practices and concepts in indigenous societies. Such practices are increasingly characterized as *intrinsically* sustainable – as ancient wisdom rather than ignorant anachronisms (UN 1992, Prin. 22). This challenge insists that “[i]ndigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices” (UN 1992).

As remarked earlier, the temporal discourse of modernity often acts as a mirror against which the primitive Other and the modern Self are understood through rigged categories that preclude critique of modern society. However, contestations over the benefits of traditional economic and developmental practices – especially those with an environmental dimension – disturb these supposedly settled dialogic categories and thus pose a challenge to modernity’s chronocratic elite. Such contestations occur in ways which ‘refract’ the power of the “modern” Self (Steele 2010, 35), rearranging its perceived legitimacy and calling the integrity of its formative narratives into question. Extant accounts of temporal Othering convincingly explicate its historical lineage and dynamics, but in doing so they fail to grasp adequately the potential for *contestation* embedded within the dominant discourse. The chronocratic elite of the Enlightenment may have insulated itself against external critique, but opportunities for dissent were *intrinsic* to the discourse of temporal Othering. Practitioners of international politics have discovered this opportunity, and continue to find ways to refashion the constrictive ligatures of development into lines of dissent.

Conclusion: What Child is This?

By highlighting developing countries’ challenges from *within* a hegemonic temporal discourse, we have sought in this chapter to bring forth the fluid nature of discourse in its ability to both constrain and enable *all* speakers, albeit asymmetrically. Thus, like many cases considered in this volume, recent environmental debates pose intriguing links and questions to several literatures in IR theory. The largely successful counterpowerful retorts of those often understood as temporal Others speaks directly to the emerging

literature on time in IR, and suggests at least one way to augment its burgeoning analytical power. At its best, this literature proceeds as the works reviewed in the first section do, by carefully unpacking the many temporal approaches and strategies embedded in political theory, such as a tendency to construct world political time as ‘unitary’ to the exclusion of any and all alternative viewpoints (Hutchings 2008). Less convincingly, scholars uncritically oppose a plethora of phenomena imprecisely subsumed under the generic phrase “linear time” (Dörre 2011, 201; Edkins 2003; Gallagher 2012, 76, 84; Lundborg 2011, 3; Manning 2004, 72 n17; cf. Adam 1990).

In either case, scholars risk overplaying the enduring power of unified and/or ‘linear’ temporality. Kimberly Hutchings’ (2008) excellent critique of various political theories concludes with a call for “heterotemporality” or an acknowledgement of the “plurality” of temporalities in international politics. We believe this call has great merit, yet the case discussed above suggests that world political time in the modern era has been tenuously unified at best and that these partial and particular efforts serve (again following Steele) as an “aesthetic”, as one way (but by no means the only way) to smooth over political and historical “bumps” in the road. Thus, just as individuals use aesthetics to ‘appear’ to be something more composed or certain or in control, international actors use images and discourses for the same purpose – and those discourses, as the previous section demonstrates, can be exploited for strategic and tangential purposes. Thus, “regardless of how certain or assured” these discourses when deployed “seem to us, no matter what type of facade—or ‘face’—they advance, they do so to cover up a particular form of vulnerability” (Steele 2010, 5). Thus, in environmental temporal discourses, the source of

contestation may be found *within* the unification effort itself inasmuch as locating *all* human groups and practices along a single linear axis allows some groups to claim that their subordinated ‘place’ on that axis is not the time to address purportedly current and global problems, which presume a single moment and place in which all groups are located. Facile assaults on the multitudinous dimensions of ‘linear time’ tend to ignore this possibility altogether, treating whatever ‘linear time’ refers to as a monolithic given that neither matches the historical record nor acknowledges the monumental sociopolitical efforts required to affect such a contingent unification.

None of this is to champion unitary or ‘linear’ time. We only mean to point out that as foils they are not omnipotent and that critical IR can benefit from further reflection on the implications of treating *all* the varieties of the human relationship to time as creative, intersubjective, fragile and ever-contested projects – as instances of political power. So far, unitary and linear time escape this treatment, but doing so would make life easier for critical IR, since robbing unitary or ‘linear’ time of a sense of immutable hegemony demotes it to just one of many ways of relating to time – a point that the retorts of temporalized ‘Others’ make quite well.³⁵

And yet our point about the counterpower potential of putatively hegemonic discourse should not be conflated with any disavowal of the material dimension of international politics. Rather, we view discourse and material factors as interacting continua of change. We have detailed at length how the temporal Othering discourse changed, but its material context was also in flux. Temporal Othering was extremely effective in a context of

geographic diffusion and imperial efflorescence, but much less so as a resource for developing a systemic response to emerging transnational environmental problems. Even as the discourse of temporal hierarchy has achieved some hegemony, material contexts were shifting around and underneath it in ways that left it vulnerable to rhetoric-endogenous loopholes once a unified and egalitarian approach to environmental problems became necessary. Our analysis therefore lends support to a more materially sensitive and contingency-focused brand of social science that refuses any “sharp distinction between material and social realities” (Onuf 2012, 40). Instead, “the material and the social contaminate each other, but variably” in “recursive” interactions between agents and structures (Onuf 2012, 58).

One final point reminiscent of political realism is that wherever and however power goes tragic possibilities follow.³⁶ Despite empowering “child” states and hoisting “adult” states on their own rhetorical petard, the temporal retorts discussed here do not move us closer to a global solution to environmental degradation, as the recent litany of failed meetings, summits, and protocols makes clear. This is in no way to lay blame on developing states for international inaction. Rather there is the distinct possibility that discourses manifesting myriad dimensions of power and embracing a plurality of international political times may concatenate with (and within) enfeebled hegemonic constructs to increase the likelihood that the international community will find itself facing a time decisively unified by a dearth of inhabitable space.

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Endnotes

³ Essentially, modern time and universal history allowed Enlightenment thinkers to have their King Cake and eat it too—stifling legitimacy claims based on the past were jettisoned, while the alluring promise of a Divinely-written future remained.

⁵ This specific historical step exemplifies the overall development omitted in (Prozorov 2011).

¹⁰ Schiller portrayed distant peoples as "belonging to an earlier time . . . less than fully mature . . . their intellectual and moral capacities . . . relatively underdeveloped" (Hindess 2007: 326).

¹¹ The debates discussed in this section are drawn almost exclusively from public discourse. For academic treatments, consult (Goodin 1990; Jakobsen 1999; Shue 1999; Young 2001).

¹⁶ (Climate Talks Resume after Hours-Long Boycott 2009).

¹⁷ (Remarks by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in an Address to the High-Level Segment of the UN Climate Change Conference 2007).

¹⁸ Steele renders counterpower as ‘an unlimited event that can happen at any time and from any direction, it cannot be predicted and therefore preempted’ (Steele 2010: 30). It is a challenge to the aesthetic ‘layers’ of power, disturbing but not overcoming or comprehensively altering the power being challenged.

¹⁹ (Nations from Four Continents Call for Greenhouse Gas Reductions 1997).

²⁰ (Remarks by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in an Address to the High-Level Segment of the UN Climate Change Conference 2007; Wu and Wang 2010; Lovell 2012).

²² For further discussion of internalization, see (Steele 2008: 151); for a more submissive view related to Althusser’s interpellation, see (Debrix 1999: 121-22). For further discussion of narrative worlds, see (Hom 2013).

²³ For instance, ‘power plants, factories, and motor vehicles’ are both the “major sources of air pollution” and the “benchmark of how ‘advanced’ a country is” (Yue 1997).

²⁴ (South Africa’s Mbeki Addresses Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting 1998).

²⁵ (South Africa’s Mbeki Addresses Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting 1998 emphasis added).

²⁷ The poem by Ingrid Jonker, entitled “The child (who was shot dead by soldiers at Nyanga)”, is quoted in (Mandela 1994).

²⁸ (President Jiang Zemin Addresses Global Environmental Facility Meeting 2002).

³⁰ (Environment and Sustainable Development; Translating the Dream of Sustainable Development into Reality 2002).

³¹ (Environment and Sustainable Development; Translating the Dream of Sustainable Development into Reality 2002).

³² (What’s Next after Kyoto 2007).

³⁵ For example, see (Hom 2010).

³⁶ For an extended discussion of the temporal features of classical realism and its recent, reflexive incarnations, see (Hom and Steele 2010).