Stuck between the modern and the terrestrial: the indignation of the youth for climate movement

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The dramatic impacts of climate change have pushed thousands of young activists to shout out their indignation. These mobilizations have become the symbol of our ‘tipping era’: a clash of worlds between attachments to modernity and attempts to become ‘terrestrial’ (Latour, 2018) to stay within ecological boundaries. In this field, there has been an increasing body of theoretical work but empirical research is still in its infancy, providing little evidence of this ongoing struggle and what we can learn from the young activists’ indignation. This article responds to this gap by exploring the case of Youth for Climate (YfC), the Belgian branch of the Fridays for Future movement. In particular, I show how their indignation, expressed in a narrative form, is pivotal to understand the competition between the modern and the terrestrial imaginary within the movement. Based on survey data, participant observations and focus groups, I conduct a two-level analysis. First, I find that the YfC indignation produces three inter-related stories: of unworthy politics, economic abuse and human survival. Second, I reveal how the affectivity of these stories articulates the competition between the modern and the terrestrial imaginary: from hope in the existing political institutions which anchors them in the modern imaginary, to compassion and fear which open a more terrestrial imaginary of collapse. Together, rather than mere competition, these stories reveal an ongoing oscillation and intersection between the modern and the terrestrial.

Introduction

Mélodie: “I have the sense that our way of seeing the world and our place in the world is totally wrong, it’s completely detached from the essence of our existence on Earth… as if we were disconnected” (YfC activist, Focus group, 26/04/2019).

Climate change is rapidly changing the world as we know it: not only in terms of melting ice and disappearing biodiversity, but also in the loss of a common world to imagine collectively. For some scholars, we are experiencing a ‘tipping era’ (un basculement d’époque) (Citton and Rasmi 2020, 10), a ‘clash of worlds’ where Greta Thunberg and US President Donald Trump ‘are inhabiting different planets: Trump’s is without limits, and Greta’s is
trembling and terribly finite’ (Latour 2020). This clash of worlds echoes a broader battle currently unfolding in society: between those attached to the modern ideals of infinite growth and progress, and others who see the latter’s material impossibility. This opens critical questions for our collective imagination, including the need for a bifurcation: away from the modern imaginary, which has caused the climate crisis in the first place (Chakrabarty 2018), and towards the terrestrial (Latour 2018) in order to live within the Earth’s boundaries.

It is within this bifurcation, this ‘clash of worlds’, that the recent youth mobilizations for the climate (Fridays for Future and its Belgian equivalent Youth for Climate (YfC)) should be situated. Youngsters from all the over the world have taken the streets in unprecedented numbers to denounce political inaction on climate change and blame the old defenders of modernity: ‘you, who knew, but did nothing!’ and keep ‘stealing out future’! They have reminded us, week in and week out, that ‘there is no planet B!’ pointing directly at the unsustainable model of modern development. For doing so, these movements have been seen as ‘lights of hope’ in the emergence of a more terrestrial imagination (Latour 2019; Citton and Rasmi 2020), offering an invitation to tackle a critical question of our times: are we moderns or terrestrials? (Latour 2018, 55).

This question has been at the heart of recent scholarly work (e.g. Latour 2018; Chakrabarty 2018; Citton and Rasmi 2020; Charbonnier 2020). However, most attention has been directed to the theoretical level, unveiling for example the historical roots of the modern vs terrestrial competition and proposing conceptual pathways for reflection. So far, little empirical research has been carried out to document the modern vs terrestrial struggle in its most contemporary expressions.

In this article, I respond to this gap by focusing on the YfC movement in Belgium. I analyse how the competition between the modern and the terrestrial is articulated in this context, by looking in particular at the interplay between affect and imaginaries. Drawing on participant observations, survey data and focus groups discussions (January 2019–March 2020), my analysis reveals that, rather than embodying the terrestrial only, the YfC movement is itself caught in our societal predicament: a struggle between a remaining attachment to modernity and a desire to ‘land’ on Earth. To capture the heart of this competition, I have chosen to focus on the indignation of YfC which, as I explain below, is both the main affective repertoire of YfC and an important affect for the study of imaginaries. Hence, the specific question I seek to answer in this article is: how does the YfC indignation articulate the ongoing competition between the modern and the terrestrial imaginary?

The choice to focus on indignation and imaginaries in this context has followed both an inductive and a deductive logic. On the one hand, indignation, in its most basic form as ‘moral anger’, is very explicit in the way the movement articulates its worldviews. One can think here of the now famous slogans of Greta Thunberg: ‘If you are not angry, you are not paying attention!’ or her ‘How dare you?’, targeting the older generations and elites of our ‘modern’ world. Indignation is also the affect that the leaders of YfC designate, explicitly, as the heart of their mobilization (e.g. YfC FB page, 04/02/2019). On the other hand, the explicit indignation of YfC resonates with theoretical predictions. Here, scholars see the politics of climate change as a highly affective battle (Albrecht 2020), whilst others situate indignation as the hegemonic affect of our times (de Sutter 2019). More broadly, scholars emphasize the important role played by affects in the articulation of
political outlooks and worldviews (e.g. Marcus 2002; Williams 2007; Ruddick 2010; Ahmed 2004). In particular, the concept of ‘imaginaries’ (Taylor 2002) has gained increasing attention for being the site where affects and stories come to life and shed light on the broader struggles underpinning society (Van Wessel 2010; Levy and Spicer 2013). In this field, indignation is seen as an affective marker of struggle. (Lordon 2016). By being a distinctively talkative affect (Kaufmann 2019; Plantin 2012; Boltanski 1993), indignation explicitly draws lines between the tolerable and the intolerable; it produces stories which in turn, inform us on the competition between different imaginaries (Taylor 2002).

In answering the research question of this article, I thus proceed in two steps. First, I analyse the indignation of YfC, focusing in particular on the stories it brings to life. Second, I analyse how these indignation stories help us understand the ongoing competition between the modern and the terrestrial imaginary. I find that the indignation of YfC produces three stories: of (un)worthy politics, of economic abuse and of human survival. I reveal how these stories harbour a complex affectivity which articulates the oscillation of YfC between the modern and the terrestrial: from their persistent hope in the institutions of modernity, to their compassion for the Earth and fear for their ‘grand-children’ which open a more terrestrial imaginary.

In the first section of this article, I outline the theoretical framework of my analysis. I first situate the case of YfC against the ongoing struggle between the modern imaginary and the terrestrial (Latour 2018; Chakrabarty 2018; Charbonnier 2020; Citton and Rasmi 2020). I then explain the constitutive role played by affect in imaginaries and imagination (Wetherell 2012; Williams 2007; Ruddick 2010), reviewing in particular how this applies to the specific competition between the modern and the terrestrial. After that, I detail how indignation is ideally located to understand the articulation between affect and imagination, focusing specifically on its role as a talkative affect that intervenes in moments of bifurcation. In the second section, I describe the data and methodology. In the third section, I present the findings of my analysis, before wrapping up, in the last section, with some concluding remarks.

**Theory**

*Imaginaries: the competition between the modern and the terrestrial*

Moments of bifurcation have always heavily drawn on shifts in the way we imagine ourselves and our place in the world: our human relations with one another and the other beings around us, new forms of belonging and attachments that underpin society. These shifts cannot be solely understood through the language of interests, laws or regulations; they rely on understanding imaginaries and processes of collective imagination (Ezrahi 2012).

Imaginaries are the socio-semiotic systems that are used, by individuals, collective actors and society at large, to navigate the social and political reality (Taylor 2002; Levy and Spicer 2013). They are composed of the images, stories and legends which construct shared understandings over complex issues and draw a moral order to abide by; there are

the ways in which people imagine their social existence, what their relations with others are like, the practices that are part of that, the expectations that people have of each other, and the deeper notions and images that ground these. (Van Wessel 2010, 440)
Nowhere is this concept more important than in the ‘new climatic regime’ (Latour 2018): our contemporary political times marked by the catastrophic impacts of climate change and its denial by political elites. A situation which is not only transforming geo-politics on the global scale but also our very own perception of human existence in the world, our social relations, and the relations we nurture with the nonhumans around us (Chakrabarty 2018). Amongst others, climate change fundamentally challenges deep-rooted beliefs in the power of ‘progress’, ‘unlimited growth’ and ‘the market economy’ to bring prosperity to all humans in society: features of our Western modern imaginary (Taylor 2002) that have directly contributed to the ongoing ecological mutation (Charbonnier 2020). Climate change, and our entry in the Anthropocene, also have ontological implications. In particular, by making planetary boundaries very tangible, these events invite us to ‘re-situate ourselves in the space–time-matter of the Earth’ (Pratt 2017, 171). As the Earth starts reacting to what humans have done it (Latour 2018), the modern distinction between humans and nonhumans becomes increasingly questionable.

In this article, I define the modern imaginary by borrowing Peter Sloterdijk’s metaphor of the modern ‘take-off’ (2003) (see also Citton 2012). Based on this metaphor, the modern imaginary evokes, first and foremost, images of progress and novelty, of rising upwards and beyond. It can be symbolized by ‘rising charts and graphs’; arrows which symbolize the modern linear conception of time and an improvement of the human condition beyond basic material needs (Citton and Rasmi 2020, 68). But the modern imaginary is not just about charts and symbolic images. It translates into the material environment of our societies; the institutions and infrastructure that organize our co-existence (Levy and Spicer 2013) and which, in the modern imaginary, are characterized by novelty, elevation, and a chronic denial of ecological boundaries. This image of a ‘take-off’ also extends into more classic definitions of the modern imaginary (e.g. Taylor 2002), as the ‘unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization) of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality), but also new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, etc.)’ (2002, 91, emphasis added). It has translated in the very material expression of these ‘new’ institutions: the elevation of a self-governing people through representation; that ‘the people’ delegates its power to a ‘higher’ level of decision-making (i.e. political representatives). At the level of the economic organization of society, the modern imaginary is embodied in the market economy (Taylor 2002) with the ‘capitalist imaginary’ (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005) acting as hegemonic operator: its infinite projections of growth and technological progress, and its limitless capital and material accumulation. On the individual level, this has translated into an individualized notion of autonomy; the tales of the self-made man for whom ‘the sky is the limit’. Crucially, the modern imaginary includes a distinctive way of relating to the natural world: one where man dominates nature from ‘above’ (Latour 2018; Swyngedouw 2018), and scientific truths are valued for their objectivity and views from ‘outside’. Ontological distinctions which have laid the ground for the project of global modernization, based on ‘resource extraction’ and global competition.

Against this, and against the increasing perception that the modern imaginary is responsible for both the ecological mutation itself (through hegemonic capitalism) and our inability to respond to it (Chakrabarty 2018), scholars have started developing alternative ‘ecological imaginations’ (e.g. Fesmire 2005; de Jong 2016). Indeed, new imaginaries
emerge in the event of ‘contradictions between an existing imaginary and the material dimension’ of economic, social and human life (Levy and Spicer 2013, 662, emphasis added). A contradiction which has become increasingly acute with climate change there is no material, physical world that can sustain modernity’s infinite development.

An influential attempt, which directly speaks of this contradiction, can be found in Bruno Latour’s latest work ‘Down to Earth’ (2018). Here, contrasting with the metaphor of the modern ‘take-off’, Latour develops a terrestrial imaginary, through the image of a ‘landing’ on earth.

The terrestrial imaginary, as defined by Latour, evokes images that are directly opposed to the rising charts and views from above characteristic of the modern imaginary. The terrestrial implies a ‘zooming-in’: a perspective from inside, and up-close, looking at ‘the heated activity of the Earth, from within; (…) internal to the collectivities and sensitive to human actions’ (Latour 2018, 74, 67). It evokes images of intricate relations, of closeness and proximity. With regards to specific institutions, unlike the modern imaginary that relies on existing political and economic institutions, the terrestrial imaginary has no institutions yet. It does, however, materialize in a specific political, ideological, position: one that is diametrically opposed to climate-sceptic political actors (e.g. US President Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and other related political movements).

Rather than disconnection, the terrestrial evokes a political cosmology of proximity and closeness (see for example Rosanvallon 2011) that departs from the distant institutions and ‘higher’ levels of governance. From an economic and social organization point of view, the terrestrial involves a move from a logic of production and endless accumulation, towards a logic of interdependence, cooperation and reciprocity (Citton and Rasmi 2020), where humans and nonhumans act in symbiosis (Albrecht 2020). Ontologically, it brings an end to the modern distinction between humans and nonhumans, and redefines the concept of ‘materiality’. In contrast with the modern definition of materiality that focuses on economic considerations only, the terrestrial materiality extends the list of objects and movements usually taken up by political life, by expanding the vision of the social world to the natural world in a networked fashion (Latour 2018, 87). Finally, in opposition to the modern linear conception of time, the terrestrial imaginary embraces the conflicting spatio-temporal scales of our existence in times of climate change: it embraces the ‘very large and small scales at once, including scales that defy the usual measures of time that inform human affairs’ and engages with the contradictory stories of ‘our divided human lives and the story of our collective life as a species’ (Chakrabarty 2014, 3).

In summary, the relationship between the modern ‘take-off’ and the terrestrial ‘landing’ can be seen as embodying two fundamentally diverging movements. Amongst the most explicit conflicts between the modern and the terrestrial lie the competing engagements with ‘nature’ and materiality: the paradigm of nature as a ‘resource’ of production (modern) which clashes with the language of interdependence and symbiosis (terrestrial). Whilst in the modern imaginary, there are no limits to human development, in the terrestrial imaginary, the impossibility of infinite growth on a finite planet is embraced explicitly: ‘there is no planet B’. On other issues, however, the relationship between the modern and the terrestrial is less explicitly antagonistic. Indeed, as Latour explains, the emergence of the terrestrial imaginary implies a ‘move side-ways’, away from the modern, a ‘re-
orientation of the site of politics’; something which evokes the image of a deviation, rather than frontal confrontation. A good illustration lies with the role of sciences in the modern and terrestrial imaginary: the hailing of sciences is both a typically modern feature, and is now also explicitly invoked by those who seek to land. In this regard, Latour warns against a neat opposition between a sciences, made of objectivity and rationality (modern) and one that would rely on the realm of subjectivity and proximity only: ‘we need to be able to count on the full power of the sciences, but without the ideology of ‘nature’ that has been attached to that power’ (2018, 65).

Hence depending on the issue at stake, the conflict between the modern and the terrestrial may take multiple forms: sometimes antagonistic, other times, a combination of remaining attachments and new directions. In this complex journey, affects play a decisive role.

**Affects in the modern and the terrestrial imaginaries**

The particular struggle in which we find ourselves – caught between modernity and attempts to land – creates what Pratt calls a chronotope: a ‘particular configuration of time and space that generates stories through which society can examine itself (...); the human in the present imagines a subject who, long after humans are gone, reconstructs an era through what it will have left behind’ (Pratt 2017, 170). It is here that the important role of affects in imaginaries can be seized most explicitly. Indeed, as Ahmed explains (2004), affect is highly performative, it ‘does something’: it allows us to travel temporal scales and bind stories together. One can think here of the nostalgia and longing for the past, the hope that projects us in the future; the fear that fixates imaginaries of collapse or stick to the present (Ahmed 2004, 126). Looking at the modern and the terrestrial imaginary outlined above, one can sense how distinctive affects have pushed us towards the modern ‘take-off’: the ambition, the glory, the euphoria. It is also with distinctive affects that we will re-orient ourselves to the terrestrial in a lasting way, by fundamentally redistributing our attitudes, passions and positions (Latour 2018, 55, emphasis added). It is our *libido scienti* that will determine the attraction of the terrestrial as a collective imaginary, and thus also our ability to deviate from the modern imaginary (Latour 2018, 67). Taking stock of the importance of affects in the fixing of imaginaries, scholars have described our contemporary struggle as a ‘war of emotions that will determine the faith of humans on Earth’ (Albrecht 2020, 9).

In this article, I use a definition of affect that encompasses indivdually-felt emotions and all other affective expressions that intervene decisively in the construction of imaginaries. This understanding of affect is rooted in a specific interpretation of Spinoza’s theory of affects that emphasizes the centrality of affect in human relations, and its constitutive role in meaning-making and imagination (e.g. Williams 2007; Ruddick 2010). In our societies marked by increasing affective explicitness and polarization (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019), affect is seen as the missing link to better understand the construction of beliefs, outlooks (Connolly 2005; Williams 2007; Wetherell 2012) and new subjectivities (Ruddick 2010, 29). It provides the glue and underlying reasons for why certain stories ‘stick’ (Ahmed 2004) together to construct the broader imaginaries underpinning society. The constitutive role played by affect in bringing about imaginaries comes strikingly to life when observing the affective language that pervades contemporary climate
activism: the ‘love of rage’ of Extinction Rebellion reveals both the presence a ‘climate apocalypse imaginary’ (Levy and Spicer 2013) and a culture of care (Westwell and Bunting 2020). Similarly, the affectively-loaded slogans of Greta Thunberg – e.g. ‘if you are not angry, you are not paying attention’, ‘I don’t want you to be hopeful, I want you to panic!’ – evoke images of emergency, catastrophe and doom; narratives which some scholars have associated with the modern imaginary (e.g. Swyngedouw 2011; Citton and Rasmi 2020).

So far, however, little research has investigated the specific articulation between affects in climate change activism and the corresponding imaginaries it evokes. For instance, in their study of competing climate imaginaries, Levy and Spicer (2013) set out to explore ‘the widely shared, highly emotive, and conflicting understandings of this complex issue’ (2013, 660, emphasis added), but they do not explain what this emotive dimension looks like nor how it is articulated with the imaginaries they describe. Similarly, in their argument over the ‘whatever action’ imaginaries on climate change, Barguès-Pedreny and Schmidt (2019) speak directly to the ongoing modern vs terrestrial competition: between human hubris that denotes a postmodern consciousness and ‘human self-hate’ (2019, 55) that betrays the modern impetus of ‘fixing things’. Yet they do not articulate precisely how this self-hate enables the modern imaginary or competes with the postmodern one. Elsewhere, when studies do pay attention to the affects that underlie climate change politics, they fail to engage with the imaginaries afforded by these affective relations. In their analysis of the fear, hope, anger and guilt in climate activism, Kleres and Wettergren (2017) situate their comprehensive study against other studies that treat fear as a reinforcer of the existing neo-liberal consensus over climate change, but they do not articulate how other affects may challenge this consensus.

Nevertheless, the theoretical literature does point in certain directions to examine which affects bind together either the modern, or the terrestrial, or sometimes both. For example, the modern imaginary is characterized by the optimistic affects of happiness, hope and enthusiasm for the future (e.g. Ahmed 2010); ‘a distinctively modern affect made of uncertainty and promises’ (Chatonsky 2018, cited in Citton and Rasmi 2020, 109), a sense of ‘weightlessness’ (Latour 2018, 81). All affects that fit with Sloterdijk’s metaphor of the ‘take-off’ described above. In contrast, the terrestrial imaginary is pervaded with the affects of compassion and care (Citton and Rasmi 2020) which have, historically, been tied to deep-ecological approaches (de Jong 2016). It is also linked to humility, which, etymologically, belongs to the semantic field of *humus*. As well summarized by Citton and Rasmi:

> being terrestrial is remaining skeptical of the arrogance of looking at things from above, afforded by the GPS, the planes, the sky-rises and towers. It is thinking in terms of attachment to the soil by exploring horizontality, before dreaming of “take-off” and suffering from the dizziness of collapse. (2020, 75)

For some affects, the distinction is less clear. This is the case of fear for example. The fear of apocalyptic imaginaries is often accused of reinforcing the modern image of ‘Nature’ as politically mute and socially neutral; it produces a homogenous account that glosses over the deep inequalities and complexity of climate change by turning ‘nature’ into a victim that needs to be saved (e.g. Kaika and Swyngedouw 2012). At the same time, fear has also recently been associated with a more terrestrial imagination. As remarked
by Citton and Rasmi (2020, 17): we may be terrestrial in the sense of being terrified; horrified by our attachment to an Earth which most of our behaviour is making uninhabitable. The same is true for anger, and other anger-based affects, which sit uneasily across the modern vs terrestrial distinction. According to Peter Sloterdijk (2006), the so-called thymotic affects form the very cradle of Western modernity. Yet, it also with thymotic affects that people are reacting to the devastating impacts of global modernization: rage (Latour 2018), terrafurie (the ‘Earth anger’ that emerges at the sight of Earth distress (Albrecht 2020, 15)), or indignation (Le Breton 2019).

The ambiguous nature of anger-affects in relation to the modern vs terrestrial competition is particular true for indignation. Indeed, whilst Laurent de Sutter describes indignation as ‘the modern affect par excellence (2019)’ for evoking righteousness and moral elevation, other authors look at indignation as a collective extension of political compassion (Boltanski 1993; Cordell 2017) which may open a more terrestrial imagination.

**Indignation stories as foundation of imaginaries**

Indignation is an affect through which dominant imaginaries can be effectively contested. It is an affect that pervades moments of uprising and revolution; moments in which collective actors denounce injustices, inequalities or oppression (Hardt and Negri 2009). As such, by continuously re-defining the tolerable and intolerable (Lordon 2016), indignation may also produce a bifurcation towards new, counter-hegemonic imaginaries. This was the case, for example, with the 15 M-Indignados movement in Spain (2011), where the indignation of thousands of activists contributed to the development of ‘alter-democratic’ imaginaries (Calleja-Lopez 2017) as alternative to the hegemonic model of representative democracy. In the current context of climate change, the rise of movements such as YFC, Fridays for Future or Extinction Rebellion may signal the beginning of such a bifurcation: what was tolerated yesterday, i.e. inaction in the face of climate change, has become intolerable for increasing parts of the population. But whether or not this is opening alternative imaginations is precisely what should be a matter of investigation.

The location of indignation as a possible place of alter-imagination is facilitated at the conceptual level, by one of its core features: its narrative form. Indeed, unlike other affects that are not ‘talkative’ (e.g. shame which people keep for themselves), indignation has a strong propensity to be spoken and told (Plantin 2012; Kaufmann 2019; Boltanski 1993). This is a crucial feature given the constitutive role of telling, speaking and sharing stories in the construction of broader imaginaries (Taylor 2002; Wan Wessel 2010).

The way indignation is told can indeed be conceived as following a narrative pattern, a story, that consists of: the denunciation of injustice (or a violation, discrimination, scandal), a blame-attribution and an identification with a victim (Boltanski 1993). Semantically, this story revolves around ‘dignity’ (Plantin 2012); where indignities are denounced, unworthy actors are blamed (indignes, in French), and an indignant identifies with a victim who is suffering. In this construction, the identification with a victim creates the first step of a collective identity, a ‘We’ in the background (Kaufmann 2019); ‘a socio-moral category over which [the indignant] claims a sense of belongness’ (Plantin 2012, 177). Together, these constitutive elements construct an indignation story.

Importantly, an indignation story cannot be solely defined as a form of moral anger, which is the most common emotion attributed to indignation (e.g. Jasper 2014;
Gamson 1992). Indeed, depending on where we are in the story – whether we look at the indignity, the victim or the unworthy – different affective textures emerge, and hence different imaginaries are brought to life. Spinoza’s own definition of indignation points in this direction. Spinoza defines indignation as ‘hate’ towards someone who has injured another’ (Spinoza 2002) and suggests that indignation grows with the love one feel towards this other (as explained by Stolze 2019). Hence, the indignation story implies a system of (at least) two incongruent affective relations: one of hate (between the indignant and the oppressor, in the blame part of the story) and of love (between the indignant and the victim of the story). Contemporary authors have built on this idea and demonstrated indignation’s affective complexity, showing its closeness with pity (Boltanski 1993) or compassion (Cordell 2017) when looking at the ‘other who has been injured’. These affective textures resonate with the proximity and care of the terrestrial imaginary, as outlined above. Crystal Cordell (2017) also finds strong evidence for rooting indignation in disgust, in particular when the indignity takes the form of offensive, repulsive objects (literally, or morally speaking). Here, different contexts may reveal the modern or the terrestrial potential of disgust. In their analysis of the 2011 cycle of protest, Benski and Langmann (2013) also show how indignation can be linked to hope as part of a broader affective constellation: hope for a better future and hope that mobilization will succeed. Affective textures that may resonate with the optimistic affects and the ‘take-off’ of modernity, but also with the terrestrial: the hope which animates activists to speak-up for invisible others, whether human or nonhuman. Lastly, indignation may also be related to incongruent affects, in a sequential, cumulative way. This is the case of fear which is both seen as antithetical to indignation (for inhibiting action, see Kaufmann 2019), but also as one of its possible foundations; indignation serving here as a boiling point where individual fears transform into a desire for rebellion (Stolze 2019, 144–155).

Hence, in this article I define indignation, not just as a form of moral anger, but as a talkative affect that articulates stories. These stories may display anger, but also hate and love, disgust and compassion. They may also be related to other affects, in particular hope and fear, as part of a broader affective constellation. To be sure, indignation stories may not always display all the affective textures mentioned here. Rather, these affects should be seen as indication for the affective complexity that lives in and around indignation – an affect often mistakenly reduced to anger. As I will show in my analysis, it is by diving into this affective complexity that we can grasp the competition between the modern and the terrestrial imaginary.

**Data and method**

The data collection and analysis was an iterative process that took place over two years: from capturing the first expressions of YfC indignation in the streets in January 2019 to investigating it in detail during focus groups discussions (April 2019), and finally analysing the collected data throughout the year 2020. In what follows, I detail how each part of the data collection and analysis responds to the research question of this article: how does the YfC indignation articulate the competition between the modern and the terrestrial imaginary?
Data collection

Indignation is an affect that is expressed in the context of protest (Jasper 2014; Gerbaudo 2017) but also in any other discursive form where it can be shared publicly: be it in conversation with others (Kaufmann 2019) or online (Castells 2015). I hence collected the indignation of YfC in its various sites of semantic and semiotic expression. The YfC movement appeared in Belgium in December 2018 and is still active today. It serves as the Belgian equivalent of the Fridays for Future movement which emerged in the footsteps of Swedish activist Greta Thunberg. In Belgium, the YfC activists are 17 years old on average, with a gender balance slightly tilted in favour of female participants (Wouters, De Vydt, and Knops 2019). From the early days of the movement, it soon became clear that indignation was at the heart of their mobilization. Indignation serving here as the decisive affect, the trigger for protest, as they themselves claim:

(...) The indignation that grew around our own kitchen tables, (...) to follow the actions of Greta Thunberg, the inspirer of all climate strikers across Europe. Around these tables, we decided to do something: it’s going bad for the climate, we are angry, and we want to express that. At the same time, we still hope, as climate-strikers, for a constructive and positive answer from politics, a collaboration that goes beyond all party-lines (...). (YfC, Facebook post, 04/02/2019)

Hence, during the first year of mobilization (between January 2019 and March 2020), I collected the YfC indignation from protests themselves, carrying out participant observations at eight protest actions in Brussels which resulted in field notes and pictures.

In parallel to these protest observations, I also analysed the way the YfC indignation might be expressed online. To this end, I extracted the content of the YfC public Facebook pages (YfC and YfC FR) using the Digital Methods Initiative tool Netvizz which resulted in a dataset of 176 public posts (29/12/2018–26/05/2019). In addition to this continuous presence in the field (at protest and online), and to get a more systematic overview of the movement’s indignation, I collected data from a larger number of participants. A 2-wave survey was distributed on the YfC Facebook page (on 24 January 2019 (N = 439) and 1st February 2019 (N = 213)) and included a number of open questions on which I focused my attention: ‘which situation do you seek to denounce?’, ‘who or what is to blame for this situation?’, ‘what do you mean by ‘system change not climate change?’ (see Wouters, De Vydt, and Knops 2019). These open questions provided a venue for YfC activists to freely express the roots of their indignation, but also revealed the broader imaginaries invoked by the movement, as my analysis will show.

Finally, to get a deeper understanding of the articulation between indignation and the specific competition between the modern and the terrestrial, I organized two focus group discussions (total N = 13) which took place on 23/04/2019 (FG1) and 26/04/2019 (FG2) in Brussels. Focus groups are a privileged method of data collection for the analysis of collective emotions that arise in interaction (Caillaud et al. 2016). They are also a recognized venue for people to share stories, personal experiences and the contradictory understandings they may have of their social and political surroundings (Gamson 1992), i.e. their imaginaries. Participants were recruited at protest actions on the basis of their participation in the YfC actions. Their age ranged from 17 to 20 and they were involved in various degrees in the movement (from highly committed activists to newcomers). In the presentation of the findings below, participants are referred to by use of pseudonyms to respect their anonymity.
Data analysis: indignation, stories and imaginaries

My method for analysis is structured in two steps. I first explain how indignation is observable in its narrative form – indignation stories – throughout the corpus. I detail the method to analyse the indignation stories, based on a qualitative coding scheme developed with the software NVIVO. Second, I explain the more interpretative stage of the analysis: the articulation between indignation stories and the modern vs terrestrial imaginaries. The central method used is discursive psychology (e.g. Edwards 1999; Edwards and Potter 2001; Wetherell and Edley 1999) which intervenes in both steps of the analysis: at the micro-level to identify indignation stories (here I use discursive psychology in combination with frame analysis), and at the macro level to understand the link between indignation stories and the competition between the modern and the terrestrial imaginary.

Analysing indignation stories: frame analysis and discursive psychology

As explained above, in this article, I approach indignation as a talkative affect that produces stories. Empirically, indignation appears as a discursive construction made of three main parts: a denunciation of injustice, a blame attribution and the evocation of a ‘victim’ (implicitly or explicitly) which creates the first step of a collective identity. Together these produce an ‘indignation story’ pervaded by multiple affective textures (see supra). Both the affective textures and constitutive parts of indignation stories were revealed through an iterative process of qualitative coding. I started by reading the entire corpus, to identify themes, patterns and affective textures in the empirical material. I developed a coding scheme inspired directly from my conceptualization of indignation (Figure 1). The coding scheme was thus divided in two main branches: a

Figure 1. The basic form of an indignation story.
‘What’ (to capture the constitutive elements of the story) and a ‘How’ (to capture the different affective textures articulating the story). Most of the empirical material was coded in multiple categories falling under both ‘What’ and ‘How’. I used frame analysis to capture the denunciation, the blame and the creation of a collective identity; and I took inspiration from discursive psychology to analyse how these objects and subjects were tied by distinctive affective textures. I detail both of these steps below.

To identify the denunciation, the blame, the evocation of a victim and a ‘We’, I borrow Gamson’s injustice frame (1992) and Benford and Snow’s adversarial frames (2000). The denunciation part of indignation includes injustices but it also extends to the worlds of scandal, abuse or violation; any denunciation that evokes a moral transgression. These can be specific or generic (Plantin 2012; Cordell 2017); they may belong to the semantic field of dignity although indignation can also be empirically observable without explicit reference to dignity. Similarly, the actors to blame may range from diffuse actors (e.g. ‘capitalism’, ‘politicians’, ‘the rich’) to very specific ones. The victims include all ‘others’ who are suffering and with whom an indignant actor identifies. Importantly, they may extend beyond the human realm; encompassing nature in its entirety or a range of non-human things and bodies (Ruddick 2010, 26), which may provide the first steps towards a more ecological imagination.

To identify the different affective textures that pervade these indignation stories, I borrow tools from discursive psychology (Edwards 1999) focusing my attention on the indignant-emotions identified above: anger, disgust, hate, love, compassion, but also hope and fear for their relation to indignation in its broader affective environment. Here, following the discursive-psychology approach developed by Edwards (1999), I take into account both emotions-words (angry, sad, disgusted, scared) and the narrative form in which affective expressions reveal themselves (1999, 279). For example, sequences of the material coded under anger were identified when participants displayed feelings of irritation, annoyance, frustration, with various degrees of intensity; these were observable either directly (during the focus group discussion or participant observations) or indirectly, in survey responses, through the use of capital letters and punctuation in the survey responses (e.g. ‘NOW!’). Similarly, codes under fear, include both explicit mentions of emotion-words and sequences of the material where fear-narratives emerge (e.g. evoking death or other fear-inducing events). When other affective textures emerge, e.g. disdain, guilt, shame, nostalgia, I rely on Johnson-Laird and Oatley’s dictionary of emotions (1989) to establish possible relations between those and indignation’s affective textures, as derived from the theoretical framework. I then examined the intersections between affective textures and frames (using the matrix-coding function of NVIVO) to articulate the indignation stories.

Table 1 presents a short overview of this qualitative coding, and its results.

**From indignation stories to imaginaries**

Based on this qualitative coding, I move to a more interpretative stage of the analysis to articulate the links between indignation stories and the modern vs terrestrial competition. Stories are, indeed, one of the discursive tools actors have at their disposal to mediate reality and construct political space (Polletta 1998); they are the building blocks of the imaginaries people deploy to make sense of the social and political reality (Taylor
creating meaning of themselves and of the world around them. This idea that the micro-level of conversation, i.e. the way we articulate stories, the words we use and the affects we express, is at the heart of broader societal struggles is also a key assumption of discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter 2001).

Hence, to analyse how the specific affective textures identified in the YfC indignation stories inform us on the modern vs terrestrial competition, I take inspiration from Wetherell and Edley’s psycho-discursive analysis of hegemonic masculinity (1999). This approach to discursive psychology emphasizes the need to move beyond a division between conversation analysis and post-structuralism and advocates a more fluid and eclectic perspective; one that looks at both the fine-grained discursive expressions (emotions in text) and their implications at the level of power structures and relations (see Wetherell 1998). Hence, for each indignation story, I analyse how the affective textures either reinforce the YfC attachment to the modern imaginary or reveal their attempts to develop a terrestrial one. To systematize this part of the analysis, I paid particular attention to the subjectivities and affective textures that brought to life, symbolically, the ‘take-off’ of modernity or the ‘landing’ of the terrestrial. For each affective texture, I seek to determine whether it rather belongs with the optimistic outlooks of progress, the weightlessness of hope, or with affective relations that bring us ‘down to Earth’, through a process of ‘plowing in’ (Latour 2018, 81). Importantly, this part of the analysis follows an interpretative logic based on the specific case of YfC: it should thus not be seen as an attempt to essentialize affective categories as either ‘modern’ or ‘terrestrial’. A single affect or affective texture may confirm our modern attachments, or attraction to the terrestrial, depending on its situation and arrangement (for a definition of ‘affective arrangement’ see Slaby and Von Scheve, 2019). Table 2 provides an overview of how I operationalized the modern and the terrestrial for the analysis.

Table 1. Qualitative coding of indignation stories.

| Constitutive dimensions of indignation stories | Affective textures of indignation stories |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Frame analysis, injustice frames, adversarial frames | Discursive psychology: Main affective textures coded from the empirical material |
| The denunciation: | Anger (90); |
| Politics: diagnostic frames that point to an injustice resulting from the failing political institutions, actors, policies (416). | Disgust (+related moral emotions, such as guilt and shame) (90); |
| Economy: diagnostic frames that point to the unfairness of the economy, inequalities, over-consumption, industrial farming, economic destruction (253). | Hope (73); |
| Environmental crises: diagnostic frames that point to the consequences of climate change, the state of environmental destruction, pollution, human extinction (230) | Fear (65); |
| The blame: politicians, the rich, older generations, big companies, media, the polluters, “everyone”, humans | Impatience (52); |
| The victims and collective identities include: “all of us”, the youth, humans as species, future generations, nonhumans, precarious populations, the Earth, abused consumers | Compassion (43); |
| Related to one or several of the constitutive dimensions: the blame, the denunciation, the victims and collective identities | Feelings of shock (39) |

The figures draw from the coding of the focus groups discussion, survey data, and online data. The other participants observations were used as contextual material.
Findings

The empirical data was replete with features of indignation in its narrative form: a growing anger that needs to be expressed (be it on cardboard signs or banners, or in Facebook posts), injustices that need to be denounced (‘stop stealing our future!’), and blame attributions (‘you will die of old age, we will die of climate change!’). There were also multiple subjects: sometimes in an explicitly collective form (‘we are angry’, ‘we are the last generation with a real opportunity to change’; ‘we are the climate’), other times in a more individualized forms (‘I want to have children’; ‘my Earth is hurting’; ‘I am sure Dinosaurs thought they had time to!’). In the course of my analysis, these multiple stories coalesced around three central ones, which I present below. These stories were selected based on their frequency in the empirical material – the amount of coded references for the constitutive elements of each story – and for their role as master narrative, among other smaller ones. As I explain, the multiple, overlapping affective textures in each indignation story brings to life the competition between the modern and the terrestrial imaginary. Together, they inform us on YfC’s constant movement of oscillation and intersection between the modern and the terrestrial.

Each section starts with a short summary, followed by two analytical parts: the first part details the constitutive elements of the indignation story (the denunciations, the blame, the collective identities, the affective textures), and the second part discusses their significance for the terrestrial vs modern competition.

(Un)worthy politics: between disdain and hope

In terms of frequency, it is the indignation directed specifically at ‘politics’ that repeats itself the most across the corpus (here politics is understood as the set of political institutions organizing society). In terms of affective textures, the presence of disdain towards political actors and institutions, but also hope reveal YfC’s attachment to the modern imaginary. However, when expressing indignation at politics, YfC also invokes young and future generations as victims of political inaction. Here, the data is replete with care and compassion that open a more terrestrial imagination.

In 47% of survey responses and 31% of denunciations in the rest of the coded material, the number one source of indignation for YfC relates to politics and political institutions. It is
political procrastination more specifically that is denounced, i.e. the lack of action on climate change, the insufficient political action, the ‘too little too late’, coupled with a demand to act ‘now’.

Political inaction is a source of indignation because it is lived as an injustice: a source of inequality between the older and the younger generations. A form of betrayal, even: the ignoring of ‘scientific truths’ by political elites is experienced as a violation of ‘our’ trust, as youngsters, whose future is decided by existing political institutions. Indeed, the feeling of injustice is reinforced by the institutional context of representative democracy; short-term electoral cycles and a legal voting age (18 years old in Belgium, where voting is compulsory) which institutionalizes the exclusion of the youth and the interests of future generations. The blame for these denunciations is attributed to politicians who are criticized for their unworthy behaviour. They are blamed for their cowardice, selfishness, laziness; they are portrayed as self-centered actors, with no other interest than re-election.

‘Angry at incompetent ministers, who are blind and deaf!’ (picture taken at protest, Brussels, 24/01/2019)

And this is particularly unworthy, the story goes, given that inaction on climate change will affect us – the youth – more than ‘you’ – the political representatives, who also happen to be the ‘older generations’ who ‘knew but did nothing’. Indeed, in this indignation story, the YfC blames two unworthy figures that co-exist fluidly: the lazy politician and the neglectful ‘boomer’. As one protest slogan stated: ‘you will die of old age, we will die of climate change’ (24/01/2019). Accordingly, the victims range from ‘citizen-to-be’, to ‘the youth’, and ‘future generations’. These unworthy actors and victims co-exist and overlap each other in the corpus, as the sequence below shows.
Politicians don’t do enough to protect our future. This is fundamentally unjust. Older people literally decide over the future of youngsters, who can’t vote themselves. Normally, youngsters should be able to trust the older generations will protect the young ones, but it is absolutely not the case here (Survey, 24/01/2019)

This story is pervaded with various affective textures: a diffuse sense of anger (in the face of injustice) and disgust (when targeting in particular politicians and their behaviour). But there is one specific affective texture that binds this story together: disdain. Disdain is a sense of moral disgust towards another, ‘a lack of respect for’ (Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1989) and ‘a feeling of contempt for someone or something regarded as unworthy or inferior (Merriam Webster Dictionary). Disdain produces a specific relation between the indignant, the victims and the unworthy actor; it elevates the YfC participants to a level of moral authority, where they ‘look down’ on politicians and older generations and speak for their entire indignant generation. It grants them the distinctive righteousness of indignation. The disdain that permeates this story comes through in the patronizing and infantilizing narratives used by YfC, where school-related metaphors are applied to political representatives themselves; ‘we have done our homework, they should do theirs!’.

They spend all day self-praising and navel-gazing and are playing “go fetch the ball” (like with a dog) with their public (the citizens), to distract us while they pretend to be deaf and mute over the real problem (survey, 24/1/2019)

Whilst YfC looks ‘down’ on all political representatives, some participants direct their disdain to one specifically: ‘Trump’ and the American Trump voter, as Loic explains below.

Loic: (…). and then in the States, they still manage to vote for Trump!..! I mean it’s so.. (is lost for words, disgusted) (…). So first they voted for Bush, instead of voting for Al Gore who was a scientist who demonstrated climate change years ago, and now that we are moving forward, proving more and more things and making more scientific progress, the Americans vote for Trump! I think this is a good trigger to start marching for the climate! (…) (FG 1)

However, next to this disdain, YfC also places significant hope in the same institutions they look down on. In the survey, 50% of respondents directed the blame towards politicians or the government, but almost 80% of them identified this same group as the bearer of solutions (Wouters, De Vydt, and Knops 2019). In the focus groups discussion and survey responses, very few participants expressed a desire to depart from the logic of representation and most participants located their demands for ‘solutions’ in the institutions of representative democracy (through improved policies or procedures for example). YfC participants showed a strong attachment to the institution of voting, even if they criticized some of its organizational aspects, e.g. the frequency of elections (too far apart). Only a few participants, at the time of the analysis, pointed to political institutions of a radically different kind (e.g. referenda, direct democracy, citizens’ assemblies).

The presence of both disdain and hope of this indignation story – two incongruent affective textures – echoes earlier findings on the complex affectivity of indignation (e.g. Benski and Langman 2013). They also reveal the multi-faceted attachment of YfC to the modern imaginary: symbolically and very concretely in their faith in the institutions of representative democracy. Indeed, the disdainful extension of their indignation and its related moralizing dimension is in line with the ‘elevation’, the ‘take-off’, of the modern imaginary. By denouncing the unworthiness of politicians,
they take the position of moral high-grounds; and they do so without fundamentally questioning the very logic of representation and delegation of power to ‘those above’. Similarly to what Sylvia Terpe (2016) finds on the ‘passive forms of hope’ that prevents forms of resistance to arise, it is here their hope in the existing political institutions that forecloses the emergence of an alternative imaginary. Although research has yet to show what ‘terrestrial politics’ looks like, and whether or not representative politics is part of this imaginary, the terrestrial ‘landing’ implies proximity (e.g. Rosanvallon 2011) and reconnection; features that sharply contrast with the distance and disconnection which characterize today’s representative democracy.

Having said that, by conflating their attacks on political representatives with a blame against ‘older generations’, their indignation also reveals attraction to the terrestrial. Indeed, their indignation draws a new generational conflict which shows care for overlooked constituencies (e.g. young and future generations). Something which, in turn, demonstrates awareness for both the political inequalities that pervade climate change politics, and the conflicting temporalities at play (Chakrabarty 2014).

**Stories of economic abuse: #shetoo and the abused consumer**

The second indignation story constructed by the YfC activists relates to our economic system and its destructive impacts on humans and nonhumans. The story takes place around the idea of abuse: the abused Earth under human (economic) activities, the abused ‘humans’ under a capitalist economy, and the humans-as-abusers of the natural world they depend on. Here, the anger and disgust towards the capitalist economy indicate an unmistakable departure from the modern imaginary. In addition, the compassion and care for the Earth expressed by YfC confirms their attraction to the terrestrial imaginary, despite the evocation of the Earth in a typically modern and anthropocentric fashion.

Across the entire corpus, participants denounce economic injustices and other economic problems, framed in highly moral terms: over-consumption, inequalities, ‘too much comfort’, the centrality of ‘money’ and growth, individualism, aggressive advertising, intensive agriculture, neoliberalism, the power of multinationals, globalization.

‘If the climate were a bank, it would have already been saved!’, pictures taken at protest, Brussels 24/01/2019; 06/03/2020
The actors to blame are described in generic, mostly diffuse, terms: the ‘rich capitalists’, the ‘big companies’, ‘the capitalist system’, ‘the banks’, ‘the industrials in power’. In this context, although all YfC participants do not share the same level of critique against capitalism (some attacking it vehemently, others more timidly, or not at all2), capitalism regularly emerges in the empirical material as a root source of indignation. It is blamed for creating different forms of injustices and abuse: mostly regarding its consequences on the natural world (such as pollution, destruction, extinction), but also with regards to North–South inequalities, inequalities within our Western society (between rich and poor). Here the victims range from precarious populations – precarious in the socio-economic sense but also in relation their vulnerability in the face of climate change – to more specific subjectivities that revolve around the idea of humans as ‘exploited workers’ or ‘abused consumers’.

Indeed, a recurring victim that emerges in the corpus is the figure of the ‘abused consumer’. Here, YfC participants portray themselves as victims of an abusive capitalist culture they grew-up in but didn’t choose; one that ‘force-feeds’ them and drowns them in advertising.

Grégory: All this is linked to what we are being fed with, what we see in the media, and most of all advertisements. The problem with advertising is that it’s the tool of all the biggest companies. We are swimming in a world where we are constantly drowning in images, all the time, everywhere, for what? For those guys to get more powerful and pull all the strings?! (...) (FG 2)

Léonard: I think all these adverts that are constantly attacking us … hum, well, I think the goal (is searching for words) … how to say it … this sentence: “I consume therefore I am” is really ingrained in us …. It’s a way of seeing society and seeing one’s place in society, as a consumer. And for me, that’s a big problem, it’s about mentalities (…) and personal mythologies. (FG 2)

The construction of the abused consumer also emerges in their critique of globalization and the globalized economy, but here in a more empowered form: where the abused consumer feels a sense of agency through the practice of boycott. In the sequence below, participants travel from the local bus stop to the palm-oil plantation and indignation returns as an explicit desire to rebel against a destructive chain of operations.

Valentin: Yeah, so when you take the bus, at the bus stop, there’s loads of adverts (…). You’re being bombarded … We’re being bombarded by millions of information.

(...).

Arthur: I was coming back from a holiday in France, I spent a lot of time in the car, and we were listening to the radio because there was the Notre-Dame thing, and out of 3 adverts, there were 3 adverts for Renault!

Loic: No way, that’s crazy!

Amelie: Yeah boycotting.. I am telling you, boycotting works; when you see what’s happening with Nutella.. They’re going downhill big time and now they’re paying massively in advertising campaigns.

Loic: Yeah … because of palm oil. Well, it’s good, at least it works [referring to boycott]. (FG 1)
The sequence above is illustrative of the multiple forms of abuse that co-exist in this indignation story. Indeed, YfC are aware of the connections between economic dysfunctions and environmental destructions; of, in their own words, ‘the abuse (misbruik) of our own environment and habitat for pure economic profits’ (survey, 24/01/2019).

In affective terms, this multiplicity is enabled through the presence of both disgust and compassion. There were, indeed, recurring expressions of disgust in this context, evoking the images of the ‘soup of plastic’ in the ocean (survey, 24/01/2019) or the disgusting consequences of European consumption on the shores of far-away beaches (FG1). There were simultaneous expressions of compassion and love towards the victims, where ‘the Earth’ (also used in the possessive, affective, form: our planet, our Earth) features prominently.

The exhaustion (verbruiken) of our planet; we use up everything the Earth has to offer and don’t take the future into account. The Earth is heating up, the climate is changing, oceans are full of plastic. Around 2050, there will be barely be any fish in the oceans. I do NOT want to live in such a world (survey, 24/01/2019).

At protest actions, these stories of abuse were brought to life with explicit reference to sexual abuse, which is, according to Kaufmann, a universal source of indignation across cultures and times (Kaufmann 2019, 329). Protest slogans such as ‘Stop fucking your Mother-Earth’, ‘Fuck the pussy not the world’ but also the parallel drawn by YfC activists with the campaign #MeToo are striking illustrations of this affective arrangement. Here, the compassion and love extension of the YfC indignation creates a distinctive human-nonhuman assemblage; the Earth is ‘the one like us’ who is suffering and on behalf of which one expresses indignation.
Finally, the YfC are also aware of their own position as ‘abuser’ in this story; as the very perpetrators of the economic and environmental abuses they denounce. Here, the story of abuse becomes a case of self-indignation, through guilt. Although guilt does not appear as a core emotion of indignation (see supra), guilt may be seen as an extension of disgust in evoking ‘a sense of moral transgression’ that is characteristic of indignation. As explained by Tangney et al., guilty individuals feel angry and disgusted with themselves (Tangney et al. 1996, 1266), which places guilt as a critical affective texture to understand the turn of indignation against the indignant themselves. In other words, in this story of abuse, guilt conflates the victims and the unworthy actor: we, as humans, are both the victims of ecological destruction and its perpetrator. In the words of YfC participants, ‘we are all guilty’, ‘we, the lazy humans, are the disease’ (survey, 24/01/2019).

Remarkably, whilst these moralizing and guilt-ridden narratives are often discredited as depoliticizing devices (e.g. Swyngedouw 2011), in the context of YfC, they do not gloss over the unequal responsibilities that lie with ‘us, the humans’. Indeed, whilst in the survey, YfC respondents often invoked ‘humans’ as homogenous category to blame (without distinguishing for example North and South, or without evoking socio-economic inequalities within the global North), in the focus groups discussions, participants were eager to express their awareness for their own positionality as privileged, European citizens, with some participants pointing at ‘European’ and ‘Western’ historical responsibility in ongoing environmental crises, and others showing solidarity with movements that denounce socio-economic inequalities (in particular the Yellow Vests movement unfolding at the same time).

Furthermore, the construction of ‘humans’ as perpetrators of abuse does not individualize the way YfC participants envisage political solutions, and their role in them. Indeed, rather than invoking individual responsibility only, most participants advocate strong political measures to curb individual freedoms (such as measures to limit consumption or transportation). YfC participants are fully aware that the current Western model of material abundance and accumulation is no longer tenable, that ‘there is no planet B’ (protest slogan) and that individual initiatives won’t be sufficient.

Grégory: The state needs to impose certain limitations. On the motorway, I am sure everyone would love to drive at 200 km/h. But we’ve set the limit at 120, saying, “this is for our entire society; it is safer for everyone if we drive below a certain limit, it’s for the common good”. You, as individual, accept a limitation of your own good, your own personal freedom, to
respect everyone’s else freedom and the common good. There needs to be a similar logic for ecology, for example, limitations on meat consumption, journeys and travels, things like that. The state needs to take unpopular measures and people need to agree with them and say “ok I agree to take on my own freedom because for the common interest”. (FG 2)

Mélodie: We’re saying that it’s time for things to move and that we, the upcoming generation, are ready to take the hit and bear those measures. (...) For me, there were 70,000 in the streets of Brussels, it was 70,000 saying, “we’re waiting, go on and do it” (FG 1)

We need to do more than just picking up garbage from the streets and turning the lights off. We should NOT be allowed to fly anymore; NOT allowed to drive our cars for short journeys. (survey, 24/01/2019)

The affective textures of this indignation story – from anger, disgust, compassion, love and guilt – articulate the competition between the modern and the terrestrial imaginary in the following ways. First, in contrast to its hegemonic position in the modern imaginary, the very centrality of ‘the economy’ (and capitalism more specifically) is here directly targeted: for the abuse it perpetrates on the natural world, and the inequalities and injustices it creates. The disgust and anger directed at the economic system create a figure that reveals, if not a terrestrial imaginary, at least a desire to depart from the modern imaginary: the ‘abused consumer’ who no longer finds solace in endless material accumulation. This does not mean, however, that all anti-capitalist narratives deployed the movement count as necessarily terrestrial. Nevertheless, if the central place occupied by capitalism in the modern imaginary is seen as a cause for our inability to ‘land’, then the YfC rejection of capitalism is a sign of terrestrial attraction. Secondly, although the Earth is represented in a highly anthropocentric manner, characteristic of the modern imaginary (i.e. the ‘blue planet’, the globe, which is sometimes given human features), the compassion that pervades the stories of Earthly abuse does open a more terrestrial imagination; one of care and cooperation, rather than domination and exploitation over the natural world. Finally, the conception of the individual and its relation to political institutions leans towards a more terrestrial imagination: one that places the common good before the modern individual and his demands for unlimited freedoms. Here, there is a tension between their location of solutions at the level of existing political institutions, and the disdain they show towards the same institutions, as outlined in the first story. However, rather than a contradiction, this finding illustrates two important characteristics of the ongoing terrestrial vs modern struggle: first, the lack of clarity on what counts as ‘terrestrial politics’, and second, the fact that the relationship between the two is not always antagonistic. Both imaginaries can overlap and intersect in complex and intricate ways.

**Human survival: fear and the intimacy of collapse**

The previous two stories are tied by a third, broader, story of indignation: of human survival, in catastrophic times. The main injustice that is constructed here is a sense of unfairness in relation to time: time that is passing by too quickly (the emergency of climate change) and too slowly (we are too young to be in charge, within the current representative democracy), the wasted years and a future which is being ‘stolen’. Here, affects of anger, fear and humility co-exist to produce a distinctively terrestrial imaginary of collapse: one built on the evocation of ‘grand-children’ and intimate confessions.
The injustice in the face of time is constructed within a repertoire of scandal: that the truth over climate change has been obfuscated and ignored. And this denial is particularly unjust because it jeopardizes our chances of ‘survival’. The actors to blame range here from political actors to all other ‘truth-deniers’ – be it older generations, economic actors or the media who are accused of not giving an accurate depiction of the climate emergency. Affectively speaking, the denunciation is here tinted with shock and outrage in reference to sciences; an affectivity that is well captured by Greta Thunberg’s famous slogan ‘if you are not angry, you are not paying attention!’.

In this context of survival, the victims comprise all victims evoked through the two first indignation stories: the youth, future generations, the Earth, and all its species. But it also brings to life the figure of ‘humanity, as a species’, at risk of extinction.
In invoking these victims, other affective textures are at play: there is compassion but also humility in considering the positionality of humans (as a species) vis-à-vis all other living beings. This was the case of Loic, for example, for whom ‘human’ life doesn’t matter; as long as the millions of ecosystems around us survive. It is also expressed visually through images of humans featuring amidst other terrestrials (see for example a picture posted on YfC Facebook page, 27/02/2020).

Loic: for me in a sustainable society, the social aspect is much less important. Of course, the social is important in our everyday lives, but this is still only on a human scale; the climate is on the scale of the entire planet (...). When I say this, I mean the millions of ecosystems which exist around us, and the climate, we can’t just destroy that. (...). If we destroy the economy, who gives a shit; the economy is only human. Even the social, that’s only human. But ecology, that’s something way above us. We can’t just give it up. (FG1)

In a similar vein, there is the recurring reminder, across the corpus, that ‘our future’ depends on the habitability of the Earth and the survival of species around us.

In my eyes, the world is getting destroyed. If politicians do nothing about it now, nothing will happen at all. This is my – and my generation’s – future, and there simply won’t be any future if we don’t do anything for the climate. (Survey, 24/01/2019)

Felix: I am not sure you quite realize what’s coming … I can see how bad it’s gonna get if we do nothing right now. I mean, 3 or 4 degrees, it’s not just a bit shit, it’s like really shit. It’s loads of species disappearing, problems with water, agriculture, massive immigration; not millions, but hundreds of millions coming to Europe, and we won’t be able to manage it in one go. I think we’re hearing alarm bells right now. Either we start dealing with the shit, or it will hit us in the face, and we will have to eat it. (FG2)

As affective background to the entire story, there is the classic affect of apocalyptic narratives: fear. Fear, traditionally, does not belong to the realm of indignation. But here, they are related in a very distinctive way. As Norman Ajari notes (2019), the perception of imminent danger or a threat (that typically provoke fear) raises questions of human value and dignity, and may hence, also trigger indignation. Therefore, in the continuous denunciation of climate-denial which threatens our very existence, it is fear that grounds the indignation of the YfC: fearing extinction becomes the indignity. In turn, it is this fear that creates the highly affective subject of the ‘children’ and ‘grand-children’. In this context, YfC denounce the injustice of leaving an uninhabitable future to their future children, or the unfairness of giving-up on the desire to have children.

The Earth’s temperature is rising. This brings natural disasters, the sea level will rise and because of that our children will have to live up a hill or a mountain! The air quality is also bad. (Survey, 24/01/2019)

The climate is deteriorating enormously. I find it unfair that we can’t even be bothered to do something to better deal with this. I don’t want to kill my desire to have children, but if it carries on like this, I might have to. (Survey, 24/01/2019)

Their fear of having children on an uninhabitable Earth hence brings a distinctively intimate character to this indignation story; from the broad narratives of collapse, all the way to the intimate confessions of family memories, pictures, and encounters with the children they might never have.
We also want a beautiful world; I want my children to see the beauties of nature in the world, not just on photos; I don’t want to have to explain to my children and grand-children what snow was or what kinds of animals existed here (Survey, 24/01/2019)

The repertoire of snow is a good example to illustrate the intimacy of collapse, as evoked by YfC. Snow is associated with snow-ball fights, wintery pleasures and family times. It reveals an intimate, affective relation connection to nature beyond the survivalist narratives of extinction and its emptied-out conceptions characteristic of the modern imaginary. This was performed on protest banners for example, but also came to life in the focus groups discussions, as the exchange below shows.

Arthur: About a year and half ago, it was like 17 or 20 degrees at Christmas. I was at my grandparents’ house and there were people sun-bathing in the parc … I mean this is Brussels! Sun-bathing at Christmas is just ..(scandalized, indignant)! Even at my age, I feel there was a difference compared to when I was little … There are school pictures that my Dad sometimes picks up and says “yeah, that’s when there was still snow”. (FG 1)

‘Allow our (grand-) children to enjoy snow-ball fights too’, picture taken at protest, Brussels, 24/01/2019

The affective textures of this third indignation story reveal the ambivalence of YfC: between attachment to the modern imaginary and attraction to the terrestrial. The first and most obvious sign of the YfC’s remaining attachment to the modern imaginary is their anger at the sciences that is ignored; it reveals a modern perception of ‘scientific truths’ made of objectivity and facts. However, the very evocation of modern scientific truths is used to demand a move towards the terrestrial: to put an end to the political denial of climate change and earthy boundaries. This, once again, highlights the complexity of the modern vs terrestrial struggle that cannot be solely seized in binary, antagonistic, terms.

Second, in the stories of survival, the YfC indignation inter-acts with fear which opens a more terrestrial imaginary. Their fear for the future makes them depart from ‘the optimistic anticipation’ characteristic of modernity (Charbonnier 2020, 319). As Citton and Rasmi explain, it is also what makes them intrinsically terrestrial: they are terrestrial in the sense...
of being terrified by the attachment to an Earth that is becoming increasingly uninhabitable (2020, 17). Here, the terrestrial attachment of YfC, but also the entanglement between the different indignation stories becomes most explicit. In one protest slogan - ‘I don’t have money to live on the moon’ (see picture on YfC Facebook page, 02/02/2020), protestors explicitly reject the project of the modern ‘take-off’ (here, captured emblematically by space exploration) and realize that only a few with ‘money’ can afford to escape the boundaries of the Earth. In another one - ‘I want to have children, but not on Mars!’ - activists tie their desire to have children with their terrestrial attachments.

The extension of the YfC fear to their ‘children’ and ‘grand-children’ brings an intimate dimension to their narrative of collapse; adopting a view from within, rather than the view from above of modernity. Ultimately, their fear is what allows the YfC indignation to move away from the modern conception of time and travel the conflicting temporalities of climate change: the wasted years, the clock that is ticking, human extinction, their own situation as youngsters in a society ruled by ‘older generations’. Finally, next to fear, the terrestrial imaginary also comes to life through the presence of humility in the stories of YfC: we, as humans, might ultimately be less important than the rest of the species around us. Unlike the modern imaginary that forecloses the possibility of imagining a world without capitalism or humans (Citton and Rasmi 2020), some YfC participants manage to envisage both.

**Concluding remarks**

This article set out to explore the competition between the modern and the terrestrial imaginary, as articulated by the YfC movement (the Belgian branch of the global Fridays for Future movement). Here, my analysis of their indignation reveals three main stories which help to understand the intricacies of this competition. In particular, whilst the struggle between the modern and the terrestrial sometimes takes an antagonistic form, the relationship between the two imaginaries is more complex. Indeed, the indignation stories of YfC reveals both oscillation and intersection between the two imaginaries. To
some extent, this goes back to the nature of indignation itself: by being both a typically modern affect and the affect through which modernity is contested, the YfC indignation acts as the very embodiment of the broader struggle. A typically modern ‘elevation’ against politics, together with the humility and fear of recognizing our terrestrial attachments. Overall, the fact that the YfC is itself a place of struggle between the modern and the terrestrial is indicative of the difficulty that lies ahead for modern Western societies to ‘land’.

In their stories of unworthy politics, I show how the disdainful extension of the YfC indignation reveals a view ‘from above’ characteristic of the modern imaginary. More importantly, I argue that their persistent hope in these same institutions forecloses the possibility of opening an alternative political imaginary. However, this modern attachment is counter-acted by the compassion side of their indignation; their care for the victims of the injustices they denounce, e.g. the younger and future generations, which opens a more terrestrial imaginary. In addition, in their demands for political solutions, YfC also depart from the modern emphasis on individual freand call for collective solutions at the political level; here there is an overlap between their modern outlook over politics (from above) and the terrestrial acknowledgement of inter-dependency.

In their stories of abuse, the anger and disgust at our ‘economy’ (capitalism, in particular) reveals a desire to depart from the modern imaginary. Their compassion for the ‘abused consumer’ and the extension of materiality to objects previously overlooked by modernity open a more terrestrial imaginary, despite their modern representations of the Earth. In addition, their self-indignation operated through guilt reveals a questioning of humans’ positionality vis-à-vis other nonhuman species, yet without glossing over existing inequalities that exist among humans.

In the stories of human survival, which serve as overarching indignation story, the anger and outrage in the face of the ignored sciences anchors YfC in the scientism of modernity. However, this modern scientism is precisely invoked by YfC in their attempts to bring us ‘down to earth’. In addition, their fear, an affect that is often treated as antithetical to indignation and criticized for perpetrating a modern imaginary of collapse, provides the affective background for the YfC indignation. In the context of YfC, fear constructs a more terrestrial imagination: images of stolen and doomed futures, but also, the intimate figures of ‘our children and grand-children’ which grant an intimate connotation to their narratives of collapse and embrace the conflicting temporalities of climate change.

In this article, I have attempted to document in detail how the indignation of YfC, in its narrative form, allows us to better understand the ongoing competition between the modern imaginary and the terrestrial. However, this article also presents limitations. First, the findings concern a limited period of time in the life of an ongoing movement and should be revisited in the event of new phases of mobilization. This is particularly true for the findings that relate to the YfC remaining hope in political institutions. Analyses into later phases of mobilization may reveal that YfC departs from these initial feelings and articulate more radical demands for political change at the institutional level. More broadly, the limited temporal and geographical scope of this analysis means that the findings can neither be generalized to the entire YfC movement, nor to other contexts of mobilization.
Second, the choice of capturing the YfC affective repertoire through indignation was both empirically-driven and deductive; indignation is the affect that captures the essence of the YfC repertoire of contestation, and an affect that produces stories, and counter-stories, in moments of bifurcation. Yet, this choice should not distract us from a broader analysis that may consider affective expressions that are less talkative and which may further our understanding of terrestrial imaginations. Future research should look into other affects that may articulate the modern vs terrestrial competition, by paying attention to other semiotic expressions that intervene in this process. The practice of school-striking, for example, may lend itself to such an analysis, given the importance of rituals in the evocation of terrestrial imaginaries (Citton and Rasmi 2020). Paying attention to these other affective expressions and practices is important to put the indignation of YfC in perspective. Indeed, the findings of this analysis alone do not allow us to determine whether it is indignation that makes the modern vs terrestrial competition visible, or whether the latter can take other forms. Here, I would tentatively argue that, whilst indignation does display an affective structure which facilitates the observation of this struggle – with features tied to the modern and other features displaying a terrestrial potential – it is rather a symptom of the broader struggle itself: the material contradiction between modern development and the physical boundaries of the Earth.

Lastly, this aspect opens paths for comparisons with other climate movements and protest cultures; for example where indignation is less prominent, either by conscious strategic choice, or because it does not belong to the affective cultures of other forms of climate activism, in particular in non-Western contexts. These comparisons are important to challenge some of the findings presented here and further improve our understanding of the modern vs terrestrial competition.

Notes

1. To be sure, these actors occupy what Latour calls an ‘Out-of-this-World’ political position to emphasize their denial of ecological boundaries. A position which may be seen as one of the most extreme forms of modern ‘take-off’, but should not be confused with the modern imaginary in its broader conception. The importance of Trump and other climate-deniers is emphasized to shed light on the terrestrial itself, by virtue of contrast and polar-opposition.
2. The explicit references to capitalism also varied across the material and were most prominent in the focus groups discussions.
3. For a contemporary definition of affective arrangement, see the work of Jan Slaby (2019, in Slaby and Von Scheve 2019, 109–118) who derives his conceptualization from the notion of *agencement* in the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

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