The not-so-green Green New Deal: A Discourse Analysis for Sustainability in House Resolution 109

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Abstract:
House Resolution 109 mandates the duty of the United States Federal Government to the people of the United States to create a Green New Deal to combat the triple crises that people are currently facing. In order to understand this mandate and whether or not it is calling for sustainable changes, a discourse analysis was used to examine the discourse as text, interaction and context. This study seeks to fill in a gap of missing literature about House Resolution 109 due to its recent creation. The results show that while author Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez emphasizes her beliefs of democratic socialism throughout the text as well as economic-based solution, the document lacks strong sustainability and fails to address the intricacies of sustainable development.

Keywords: Green New Deal, Critical Theory, Sustainable Development, Discourse Analysis

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Summary:
The term Green New Deal first emerged after the 2008 financial crises in Europe and the United States. It has now resurfaced in United States politics thanks to Democratic Socialist Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez introducing House Resolution 109. House Resolution 109 mandates that the federal government has a duty to the people of the United States to create a Green New Deal to combat the triple crises that people are currently facing. Assessing this document through a critical discourse analysis leads to seeing the social democratic as well as capitalistic tendencies that are employed throughout the text while never addressing sustainable development directly.

Keywords: Green New Deal, Critical Theory, Sustainable Development, Discourse Analysis

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1. Introduction

1.1 Aim

The aim of this study will be to critically analyze House Resolution 109 (HR 109) for its perspectives on sustainability in general and strong sustainability in particular. In order to do this, the text of the resolution will be analyzed through a critical discourse analysis (CDA) and then the data will be interpreted with critical theory. The following research questions guide the study to fulfill the aim stated above:

- How does HR 109 describe and use sustainability?
- How are discourses, cultural norms, and contexts used in HR 109 to legitimize the document?
- What are the underlying messages and goals being communicated through HR 109?

1.2 Rational for Project

Since HR 109 was only recently introduced at the beginning of 2019, there is little to no scholarly articles or research available pertaining to it. Currently, the resolution is stuck in the House of Representatives and it is difficult to say whether or not it will ever make it out and move to the Senate where it has the potential to be made into law. HR 109 is still worth researching, though, as it reflects an important turning point within the United States (US) government as well as in the attitudes of people in the US. It is being commonly referred to as the Green New Deal (GND) by news outlets, politicians and average citizens alike. “The GND push has thrust climate change into the national conversation…and created an intense and escalating bandwagon effect. Politicians…advocates…wonks, and activists—everyone involved in green politics is talking about the GND” (Roberts, 2019, no page). The GND has great potential for immense changes to environmental, social and economic policies in the US but, making it a reality will require bipartisan work that currently is out of the picture in US politics (ibid). There is no question, though, that climate change and its effects are on the minds of people in the US and around the world as they are seeing the effects first hand through hotter temperatures and increased natural disasters—an article published by The Guardian shortly after the release of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report was released last November had over 30,000 shares on Facebook alone (Watts, 2018, no page). Thus, HR 109 warrants special attention and scholarly review. It is important to analyze the creation of, and language used in, HR 109 to understand the trends and beliefs behind it, whether or not it is feasible and, most importantly, if it will have the desired effects of combating the triple crises being faced in the US and other countries around the world.

2. Background

2.1 Green New Deal

The first iterations of a green new deal arose in political spheres after the economic collapse of 2008. The economic collapse was part of a three-fold crisis that encompassed social and environmental aspects as well as the obvious economic crises. This crisis was similar, at least in the social and economic aspects, to the Great Depression in 1929 (Asici & Bunul, 2012, p. 295). Following the Great Depression, U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) introduced the New Deal to help the U.S. recover from such a crisis (Asici & Bunul, 2012, p. 299). The New Deal focused on relief, recovery and reform by way of large government-led infrastructure investments, establishing new state agencies and modifying existing ones, including, the financial system. The policies implemented in this time “became an institutional re-
founding, reordering, and redirecting of the nation, for better or worse, that many Americans accepted, even though almost as many immensely disliked them (Luke, 2009, p. 15). In 2008 when the crises peaked, the idea of “surrendering” to similar state intervention and management of that during the New Deal era became increasingly appealing (ibid). The Green New Deal that was conceptualized in 2006 and popularized in 2008 aimed to solved the crises by replacing the fossil-fuel based economy with one based on renewable energy with help from public and private “green investments” (Asici & Bunul, 2012, p. 295). Parallel ideas sprouted in the United Kingdom through the Green New Deal Group and elsewhere with the United Nations Environment Program.

In a similar fashion, HR 109, introduced in the United States Congress in early 2019, calls for the creation of a Green New Deal (GND) as a response to the multifaceted crises that the United States (US) is currently facing. Work in Congress is initiated in one of four principal forms: a bill, joint resolution, concurrent resolution or simple resolution (Sullivan, 2007, p. 5). HR 109 is a simple resolution because it is a matter “concerning the rules, the operation, or the opinion of” the House of Representatives alone and will only be considered by that chamber (ibid). In the US government system, bills or resolutions must be introduced in the House of Representatives, then passed through appropriate committees before being voted on. If approved in the House, it can then pass over to the Senate where it will, again, pass through the appropriate committees before being voted on. If the Senate approves the legislation it then goes to the President for final approval. If the Senate does not vote to approve it, the bill returns to the House to be altered or amended and can return to the Senate again after being affirmatively voted on in the House (Sullivan, 2007).

The crises mentioned in HR 109 are declining life expectancy, inaccessibility of basic needs, economic stagnation and income inequality. Furthermore, HR 109 claims that climate change is exacerbating “systemic injustices” (racial, regional, social, environmental and economic injustices) and is a national security threat (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019, pp. 3-4). The name “New Deal” is modeled after the New Deal that the Federal Government created during the Great Depression as described above (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019, p. 4). The document goes on to lay out many goals that the GND should accomplish: net-zero carbon emissions, create more jobs, create new/improved infrastructure, secure clean air and water for the people of the US, promote justice and equity, and more (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019, pp. 5-6). Next, the legislation calls for these “Green New Deal goals” to be “accomplished through a ten-year national mobilization” (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019, p. 6). This mobilization effort specifies many different goals for the United States ranging from overhauling the transportation sector to providing reparations to Indigenous peoples and many more sweeping social and economic goals. Sections of the document will be explained in more detail later in the paper.

3. Methods

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

To understand the meaning and possible potentials of HR 109 I have worked to contextualize it. Since the empirical base of this thesis is a document, the logical way to contextualize it has been through an analysis of the language used. In this work I have been inspired by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as it has been presented by Norman Fairclough (1989; 2010). Scholar Norman Fairclough has extensive literature on language and discourse. His approach to discourse focuses around his idea that discourse can be seen as text, interaction and context (fig. 1).
The starting point of any such analysis is the text itself; the construction of arguments, the actors placed on the scene, the kinds of words used to describe reality, problems and their solutions. However, the analysis does not end there, it goes on to discuss how and for what purpose the document was produced. In this case, HR 109 obviously was produced as a resolution for the House of Representatives to begin the legislative process, but the analysis of the production goes beyond that: how can we, in this case, understand the broader political purpose(s) of the production of the text. In a final phase of analysis, reactions to the text are also analyzed.

The major point of CDA is that text-producers should not primarily be considered as creative individuals, but rather as social actors, characterized by their societal positions and beliefs/values. Understanding a text then implies to understand how it represents social groups—classes, gender, ethnic groups, etc.—and also what roles it ascribes to these groups. Instead of limiting the study to the text or only the social context, critical discourse analysis seeks to bridge this gap and investigate how discourse shapes and reshapes social structures as well as how it reflects them (social structures) and power (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 61).

Political texts of this kind may be seen as having the production of ideology as its main aim. In modern society, power is often achieved through ideology and, moreover, the ideological workings of language. Fairclough describes these ideologies as “common-sense” assumptions that are implicitly embedded in the ways that people interact (Fairclough, 1989, p. 2). These “common-sense” assumptions manifest themselves in the recurrence of ordinary and familiar ways of behaving which then become avenues to legitimize social relations and differences of power (ibid). In other words, political texts can be seeking to link the ideas presented in the text and transform them into common-sense assumptions.

Discourse is commonly used in different ways such as making meaning of language associated with certain social fields or practices or ways of interpreting aspects of the world associated with particular social perspectives (Fairclough, 2010, p. 230). Fairclough argues that language is a part of society and is thus socially conditioned. That is to say, language creates society and society creates language (1989, p. 22).

In chapter five of his book *Language and Power*, Norman Fairclough provides ten key questions to examine the vocabulary, grammar and textual structures to conduct a CDA. A limited number of these steps, along with supplementary discourse analysis methods, will be used to conduct a systematic review of sections of HR 109. The ten steps are as follows:
1. What experiential values do words have?
   This first step in the CDA seeks to identify and comprehend “meaning relations in texts and underlying discourse types, and to try and specify their ideological bases” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 116). This can be done by identifying classification schemes, ideologically contested word usage, rewording and over-wording and meaning relations between words. Furthermore, step one investigates how ideological differences between texts in their representation of the world are coded in their vocabulary (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 110-111).

2. What relational values do words have?
   This step focuses on the words chosen by the author and how they depend on, create and communicate social relationships between subjects. This step is also concerned with the use of or lack of euphemisms and formal and informal language (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 113, 116-117).

3. What expressive values do words have?
   In this step, the analysis focuses on the implicit and tacit ideological views that are communicated through different discourse types. It is important to recognize that expressive values of words are often used as persuasive tactics (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 111, 118-119)

4. What metaphors are used?
   Step four focuses on how discourse is used to represent one or more aspects of an experience in terms of another. Fairclough stresses that different metaphors have different ideological attachments thus, this step of analysis is not limited to singular metaphors in the text but also the relationship between alternative metaphors (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 111, 119).

5. What experiential value do grammatical features have?
   In this step, the analysis seeks to look at ways in which grammatical forms of language encrypt events or relationships in the world as well as who or what are the dominant subjects of the grammatical features. This step also hinges on action processes in discourse and whether they stay active or are presented passively and positive and negative sentences (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 111, 120-125).

6. What relational values do grammatical features have?
   Question six seeks to focus on modes, modalities, eventualities and pronouns. Modes manifest in discourse through declarative, grammatical questions and imperatives while modality manifests through author authority. This step is looking specifically at words such as we, you, may, might, must, ought, and more (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 111, 125-128).

7. What expressive values do grammatical features have?
   In this step, Fairclough limits his analysis to expressive modalities. In other words, this step aims to analyze words such as may, must, cannot, should, etc. and the connotations (expressive value) that come with the use of those words (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 111, 128-129).

8. How are sentences linked together?
   This step is concerned with how simple sentences are linked together and the connective values of features of discourse. Step eight seeks to examine what logical connectors are used or not used as well as whether the connectors are characterized by subordination or coordination (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 111, 129-132).

9. What interactional conventions are used?
   This step seeks to analyze formulation in the text or, rewording of what has already been assumed or said. It also takes into account the turn-taking system and how different voices in the text dictate the turns of others (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 111, 133-137).

10. What larger scale structures does the text have?
    Lastly, step ten looks at broader patterns and ordering of words and subjects in the text as a whole (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 111, 137-139).
3.2 Limitations of study

This study will be limited in scope and depth due to time constraints. In order to do a thorough analysis, only section two and three of HR 109 will be analyzed in depth, the first will only be reviewed briefly. The linguistic analysis will limit itself to investigating discursive types by way of identifying classification schemes used in the text. As mentioned, the technique that I will use here is to look closer at the words being used in order to detect their ideological implications. The above steps influenced the process but were not followed directly due to time constraints.

HR 109 can be divided into three sections based on content and wording. The first section focuses on introducing the problems at hand: the crises of climate change and the related crises that accompany it. Ocasio-Cortez cites annual economic output loss, coral reef and biodiversity loss, heat stress, declining life expectancy, climate refugees and more as “related crises” (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019, pp. 1-4). This section begins on page one and ends at the bottom of page four. The middle section focuses on the potential goals of a Green New Deal (“Green New Deal goals”) and spans from page five to line five of page six. The last section, which begins on line six of page six and runs the length of the document, is about how to accomplish the goals set forth in the previous section through the “Green New Deal mobilization” (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019, p. 6).

All three sections are undoubtedly important pieces of HR 109 and contribute significantly to the call to action of creating a GND to solve the multifaceted crises being faced at present. The beginning section, however, presents facts and figures about the crises as well as historical anecdotes about the United States that lack the discursive depth that the other two sections have. These facts and figures are, for the most part, widely accepted and can be proven with scientific evidence from the IPCC Special Report, the National Climate Assessment or other sources. The overall textual structure and other literary aspects such as word choice and ordering could contribute to meaningful analysis but time does not permit this.

Often, CDA is used to analyze argumentative literary works which HR 109 could be considered, however; it states from the beginning the mission of the text: “Recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal” (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019, p. 1). Instead of focusing on arguing why or why not there is a duty of the government to create a GND, it focuses on the problem of, and the problems caused by the climate crises and how to go about solving them.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Critical Theory

In order to assess the results of CDA and understand and critique the connection between ideas and social practices present in HR 109, critical theory will be used. Critical theory originated with several German philosophers and social theorists who studied at the Frankfurt school such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and more. Critical theory provides the “descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination [of people] and increasing freedom in all their forms” and emerged alongside many social and economic movements in the 1950s onward (Bohman, 2016, p. no page). Critical theorists also seek to find human emancipation in circumstances of domination and oppression (ibid).

4.1.1 Herbert Marcuse and One-Dimensional Man
I will draw specifically on the work of Herbert Marcuse and the ideas set forth in his book *One-Dimensional Man*. In his book, Marcuse offers a critical perspective on advanced industrial society and specifically critiques capitalism and the ways in which it limits human freedom. Capitalism has infiltrated industrialized society to such a point that it is creating ideology for the people (Marcuse, 1964, p. 10). Marcuse’s ideas about the one-dimensional man and one-dimensional society may have faded from the forefront of critical and social change theory; however, scholar Richard Box argues that the trends Marcuse identified in the 1960s have “deepened into continuing, stable practices that [are] difficult to dislodge or reverse (2011, p. 171). Furthermore, scholar Joseph Kellner writes,

“It is my conviction that the critical theory of the Frankfurt School continues to provide theoretical and political resources to draw upon to create theories and politics adequate to the contemporary era, an era of upheaval, unpredictability, utopian possibilities, authoritarian horrors, the resurgence of the radical right and as yet unforeseen crises and openings for social transformation” (1993, p. 46)

In “advanced industrial societies,” such as the United States, people’s freedom has been limited by technological progress in the name of capitalism. This progress has been the cause of one-dimensional thought and behavior. In other words, ideas, aspirations, and objectives that challenge the established capitalistic discourses are “repelled or reduced” to the ways of the existing systems (Marcuse, 1964, p. 14). Marcuse describes the most industrialized civilizations as having the following familiar trends:

“Concentration of the national economy on the needs of the big corporations, with the government as a stimulating, supporting, and sometimes even controlling forces; hitching of this economy to a world-wide system of military alliances, monetary arrangements, technical assistance and development schemes; gradual assimilation of blue-collar and white-collar population, of leadership types in business and labor, of leisure activities and aspirations in different social classes; fostering of a pre-established harmony between scholarship and the national purpose; invasion of the private household by the togetherness of public opinion; opening of the bedroom to the media of mass communication” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 23).

The above trends, despite being written many decades ago are almost all true in the United States today. The United States has experienced a steady increase in national economy as shown by the graph below, they are an economic power house and they demonstrate military and trade hegemony across the world.

![Figure 2. US Real GDP (In US Dollars)](Multpl, 2019)

With much of the current technologies, there is an “invasion of the private household” and opening of the bedroom to corporations and the government. Further, income inequality and special attentions to
corporations is massive in the United States (Needham, 2014, No page). Corporate and concentrated wealth are even problems listed in HR 109 by Ocasio-Cortez.

5. Results

5.1 Context

Over the past 10-20 years, climate crises awareness has been on the rise in the United States and globally. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was recently elected as the youngest U.S. congresswoman with a huge upset victory over ten-term incumbent, Joe Crowley. She identifies herself as a Democratic Socialist and came into office with quite a bit of momentum after her huge victory. She was backed by minority groups such as young people, People of Color and womxn (women). Ocasio-Cortez was born and raised in the district she represents (NY-14), in the Bronx, New York, to two working-class parents. Her father was a small business owner and her mother was a house cleaner (Ocasio-Cortez, 2018, p. no page). She studied economics and international relations at Boston University before becoming an Educational Director in the Bronx. When the 2008 financial crises hit, Alexandria had to take on two jobs to help her family keep their home after her father passed away (ibid). This experience gave her a much deeper understanding of how policies “impact…families beyond the white papers” (ibid).

As stated in the background, the ideal of a GND was previously introduced in 2008 by different groups as a means to combat the global economic crises as well as the environmental and social crises. HR 109 was published on the coattails of, and in response to, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report published in November 2018 the as well as Fourth National Climate Assessment (NCA4).

The IPCC is part of the United Nations and is tasked with “assessing the science related to climate change” (IPCC, no date). The IPCC was created in 1988 by the United Nations Environment Program and the World Meteorological Organization to provide governments and organizations with scientific information that they can use to develop climate policies and currently has 195 members (ibid). The report is published in five chapters and also includes an abridged version, the summary for policy makers (SPM). Although it cannot be confirmed, the author(s) of HR 109 probably used the summary for policy makers when writing the resolution since they are policy makers and the full document contains a great amount of nuanced language not accessible to all. The SPM has four main points: A. Understanding Global Warming of 1.5°C, B. Projected Climate Change, Potential Impacts and Associated Risks, C. Emission Pathways and System Transitions Consistent with 1.5°C Global Warming, D. Strengthening the Global Response in the Context of Sustainable Development and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty. All of the sections provide scientific data and present different scenarios for urban, rural and uninhabited places based on current warming trends and climate science. The section that is most evident in HR 109 is the last, though, as it says: “Strengthening the capacities for climate action of national and sub-national authorities, civil society, the private sector, indigenous peoples and local communities can support the implementation of ambitious actions implied by limiting global warming to 1.5°C” (IPCC, 2018 , p. 23). These sentiments about including marginalized groups and strengthening capacities appear in all three section of HR 109 and will be discussed further later in the paper.

The National Climate Assessments were mandated by the Global Change Research Act of 1990. The Act states that the US Global Change Research Program must deliver a report to Congress and the President no less than every four years that displays their findings and analyzes the impacts as well as current trends of “global change” on many different aspects of the US (USGCP, 2018, p. 1). NCA4 has two volumes: Volume I focuses on Climate Science while Volume II focuses on the Impacts, Risks, and Adaption to the aforementioned climate science in the United States (ibid). The report has twelve focus areas which are
closely reflected in HR 109: Communities, economy, interconnected impacts, actions to reduce risks, water, health, Indigenous peoples, ecosystems and ecosystem services, agriculture and food, infrastructure, oceans and coasts and tourism and recreation and breaks the US and its territories into ten different regions.

5.2 Positionality

HR 109 does not contain any first-person language in the text thus it is hard to say affirmatively who the narrator is; however, the author being Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez can be seen as an impersonal narrator because of the implications that come along with her being the author. The lack of first-person language also places the document in a technical context.

There are many stakeholder groups mentioned in the text. The main group of “others” is “frontline and indigenous communities.” Included in this group are: “indigenous communities, communities of color, migrant communities, deindustrialized communities, depopulated rural communities, the poor, low-income workers, women, the elderly, the unhoused, people with disabilities and youth” (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019, pp. 4, 6). Other groups of stakeholders who are mentioned in the text are: migrants, the Western United States, the 1%, farmers and ranchers, other countries, labor unions and workers cooperatives, civil society groups, academics, businesses, state and local governments, workers and business people. There is no mention of environmental groups and little mention of biodiversity or animals in the text. The focus is on the people and is rooted in the Democratic Socialist ideas to have more direct democracy of historically marginalized people instead of sustainability or sustainable development. The grouping of marginalized people is what Fairclough refers to as a classification scheme. Classification schemes can be used to either separate people who have different experiences or grouping together different versions of reality through discourse (Ewing, 2017, p. 2079). They can also be used to show how people think and act as social agents (ibid). By grouping these people with many different identities together, Ocasio-Cortez is subverting many of their individual experiences and creating a new, group narrative of their oppression and struggles. On one hand, this strengthens the argument for the responsibility of the government to because there are many people included in the group. On the other hand, though, it alienates the people in those groups and make them feel less important or involved. Since the intended audience is other policy makers and the goal is to get the resolution to become a law, she implements the first strategy.

5.3 Semantics

In HR 109 there are many instances of discourse that display different ideologies as well as ideological differences being masked through discourse. The biggest and most important basis for the text is that which is set up by the author: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. As stated above, she is a democratic socialist politician. According to the website of the Democratic Socialists of America, they believe that, “both the economy and society should be run democratically—to meet public needs, not to make profits for a few” (Democratic Socialists of America, No date). Furthermore, they believe that many structures of the government and economy must be “radically transformed” to make democracy more accessible to ordinary Americans. This manifests in the text many times. For example, when presenting how to develop the GND and, more specifically, the GND mobilization, on page ten, it is stated that transparency, collaboration, inclusivity and partnership with “frontline and indigenous communities, labor unions, worker cooperatives, civil society groups, academia and businesses” should be employed (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019). Aside from including businesses in this group of stakeholders, this group is representative of “ordinary Americans” and stays true to the mission of democratic socialists. She even specifically states that resources, training and education should be provided to “all people of the United States, with a focus
on frontline and vulnerable communities, so those communities may be full and equal participants…” (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019, p. 11). Re-emphasizing this point, she says again, on page twelve, “ensuring the use of democratic and participatory processes that are inclusive of and led by frontline and vulnerable communities…” (ibid). Throughout the resolution, there is a theme of communities, workers and frontline and vulnerable people which discursively echo the values of democratic socialism—putting these people at the forefront of democracy. The repetition of these groups of stakeholders also draws positionally from NCA4 where communities are listed first as being targeted by climate change and most vulnerable to the risks of the climate crises (USGCRP, 2018, p. 12).

There are also many mentions in the text about technology and infrastructure. The phrase “as much as is technologically feasible” is one of the most used in the text, being used five times. On page eight, it is used when talking about expanding energy manufacturing, upgrading existing manufacturing, eliminating pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the agricultural sector, creating zero-emission vehicles infrastructure and manufacturing, “clean” public transportation and high-speed rail. This could be seen as contradictory to the above ideals about community and “ordinary Americans” because the companies that would most likely be used for, and benefit from, said large-scale infrastructure updates, developing new technology, etc. are large corporations.

Throughout the text there are many facts presented that are based on the IPCC Special Report as well as NCA4. There are also many evidentialities throughout the text which the author uses to complement these facts and keep the text relevant. Many of the evidentialities also display the democratic socialist views and background coming through in the text. On page five, line 22, she talks about the past, present and future oppression of people in the frontline and vulnerable groups. This utterance relies on the knowledge and acceptance of the historical injustices and oppression that has been committed to these people and an agreement that this was a negative occurrence. Even though there are no facts or figures presented about historical or current oppression, the evidence is still in existence outside the document. On page six and eight, she says, “as much as is technologically feasible” (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019). This evidentiality relies on the idea that technological advancements that could significantly influence the impact of the climate crises are within reach, both time and monetary wise. Again, there is no evidence provided in the text to prove that there have been major technological advancements in the past decades surrounding climate-related problems but it is generally known and accepted. She also mentions the environmental and social costs/impacts of carbon emissions on pages ten through eleven. This evidentiality relies on the basis of climate science and that carbon emissions and its subsequent effects are negative to the environment as well as people. One final evidentiality to address is the use of “good jobs” and “high-quality jobs” is used (Ocasio-Cortez, 2018, pp. 5, 11). In both cases, it is not stated what a good or high-quality job is but rather assumed that the audience knows what a good job is and agrees upon a definition. There is some clarity provided on page 12 where “high-quality union jobs” is used as well as other specification such as “family-sustaining wages, medical leave, paid vacations,” and more are listed, but these claims are still not backed up with factual evidence. The choice of language and lack of precision in it leaves room for Ocasio-Cortez to avoid difficult, technical questions that she may not know the answers to or may draw too big of partisan lines.

Aside from the evidentialities and facts there are also many claims in the text. One of the biggest claims is that it is the duty of the Federal Government to create a GND and fix this multitude of problems. On page five, Ocasio-Cortez say the government should “secure” clean air and water, climate/community resiliency, healthy food, access to nature and a sustainable environment for “all people of the United States for generations to come” (2019). This discourse not only develops exactly what the government has a duty to provide but also includes aspects of sustainable development and includes future generations.
Later in HR 109, even stronger and more implicative language is used to continue the idea that the government is responsible for helping the people of the US. In the third section, verbs are used to start every sub-point such as strengthening, supporting, training, upgrading, enforcing, etc. The most used words are providing and ensuring which continue to demonstrate that the author feels that the government has a duty to help its people. Pinning it on the government to provide and ensure many things such as education, employment opportunities, access to public lands and more (2019, pp. 11-13) could be linked to the author’s socialist and personal background, being influenced by her father’s illness and having to work multiple jobs to help provide her family.

Modalities are not utilized to a large extent in the text but when they are used, they are employed to guide the direction and goal of the document. On page six, the author says the goals described in pages one through five “should be accomplished through a 10-year national mobilization…that will require the following goals and projects…” (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019). Later, on page 10 she says the GND must be developed with transparency, collaborations and partnerships with the frontline and vulnerable communities and that it will require the goals and projects that follow (ibid). These modalities return back to the original claim that it is the duty of the Federal government to create a GND on page five.

Throughout the text, there are word pairings and specific word choices that affect how the audience reads the document. On page five, the author describes “good jobs” as being prosperous and contributing to economic security. The word prosperous has a connotation of being positive so the audience automatically thinks that more jobs and economic security are also good. On page seven, she chooses to use “dramatically expanding” and “massive growth” instead of only expanding and growth to emphasize the points.

Ocasio-Cortez uses broad and sometimes vague language to expand the reach of the text. For example, on page six, she says “climate-related disasters,” on page seven, “other climate impacts,” and on page nine, “other effects of pollution and climate change” (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019). By using this language, she expands the reach to possible future or unknown effects of climate change and broadens the reach of the text beyond what is listed in the fourteen pages of HR 109.

5.4 Broad trends and observations

The organization of the document is clear, easy to read and easy to understand. In the first section, pages one through five, the current crises are presented mostly through facts about the US economy as well as socio-economics issues such as the “racial wealth divide,” gender pay gap and hourly wage stagnation (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019). This beginning section, filled with facts, sets up a technological basis for the document and establishes legitimacy for the document.

Section two lays out many aspects that the GND mobilization should entail in order to solve all the problems set forth in the first section. However, in section three, the author begins by saying the GND mobilization should be developed through partnership with vulnerable and frontline communities. These two aspects seem contrary to one another and the ordering is something to take note of. It is not clear why the ordering is as such, but it could be that the “consultation, collaboration, and partnerships with frontline and vulnerable communities, labor unions, worker cooperatives, civil society groups, academia and businesses” (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019, p. 10) is not that important or realistic to the author and the plan will in fact be developed by the government alone.

Another interesting aspect of discourse to give attention to is how international actors are talked about in the text. First, international exchange is talked about positively and as a means to propel the US as an
international leader on climate action as well as helping other countries combat the climate crises but, later in HR 109, the attitude shifts a bit. On the second to last page, “trade rules, procurement standards, and border adjustments” are called for to stop the transfer of jobs overseas and grow manufacturing in the US. It seems as if the author’s view is that international trade and collaboration is good but only to a certain degree where it is helping the US remain a global hegemon while not taking away any of their economic opportunities for economic growth and prosperity.

There are many ideas repeated throughout the document such as economic growth, community planning, and building resiliency and infrastructure. There are also many lists in the document. One that occurs close to the beginning and then again at the very end is what should be secured for “all people of the United States.” This list is important because it occurs twice but is not the same in either iteration, furthermore it is the last part of the document and the last thing in the mind of the reader. In the first list, clean air and water, climate and community resiliency, healthy food, access to nature, and a sustainable environment are to be secured (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019, p. 5). In the second list, “high-quality health care, affordable, safe, and adequate housing, economic security, and access to clean water, clean air, healthy and affordable food, and nature” are to be provided (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019, pp. 13-14). The list shifts a bit from pages five to thirteen. Consequently, perhaps the ideas that are repeated in both lists (clean air and water, healthy food and nature) are the most important and fundamental aspects that should be accomplished through a GND.

6. Discussion

6.1 Sustainability in HR 109

6.1.1 Reification of sustainability

In the 1970s, Marcuse wrote about capitalism reifying the proletariat. Capitalism makes available the commodities that people believe will fulfill them and make their lives easier but, through the process of making them available, people become perpetually alienated from their labor and cannot afford the commodities that they have been made to believe will make them happy (Marcuse, 1979, p. 21). Further, capitalism demonstrates the “fact that the wherewithal for a better society is available, but that the very society which has created these resources of freedom must preclude their use for the enhancement of life” (ibid). In HR 109, it is being prompted to solve the economic, social and environmental crises through capitalism. Despite “achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions” being listed first on page five, followed by creating jobs, investing in infrastructure/industry and more points with economic focuses follow and dominate the text. It is clear that Ocasio-Cortez and the co-sponsors of this resolution believe that expanding the economy, creating more jobs and making our current systems more environmentally friendly will emancipate the very people and problems that this system has been marginalizing for many decades and centuries. As Marcuse describes, the advanced industrial societies of the world have turned into one-dimensional societies and the US is no exception. Capitalism and technology have created the illusion that happiness and prosperity are achievable for all through hard work and determination and even that solving the environmental crises is possible through the same system.

“The struggle for the solution has outgrown the traditional forms. The totalitarian tendencies of the one-dimensional society render the traditional ways and means of protest ineffective—perhaps even dangerous because they preserve the illusion of popular sovereignty. This illusion contains some truth: ‘the people,’ previously the ferment of social change, have ‘moved up’ to
become the ferment of social cohesion. Here rather than in the redistribution of wealth and equalization of classes is the new stratification characteristic of advanced industrial society.”
(Marcuse, 1964, p. 256)

Here, Marcuse states how the one-dimensional society is codependent on capitalism and works together to create the illusions of upward mobility while rendering change through typical methods, such as protesting, ineffective. Fairclough also agrees with this sentiment and says that “contemporary capitalism in some respects enables but in other respects prevents or limits human well-being and flourishing” (2010, p. 11). In HR 109 there is a consistent back and forth between trying to incorporate new means of change, redistributing wealth, and involving communities (especially marginalized groups) to develop the US and neoclassical economic ways of solving problems through economic growth. The latter has more weight in the text and is, therefore, the focus for Ocasio-Cortez and her co-sponsors. She aims to incorporate capitalism and economic growth into the democratic socialist ideology instead of focusing on sustainability or democratic socialism.

Since the 1970s and the publication of the Club of Rome’s Limits to Growth, scholars have been wary of continuous economic growth being used as a way to solve social and environmental problems. Capitalism has been the prevalent economic system since the industrial revolution. Thus far, it has contributed to many inequalities and environmental degradation therefore, it seems illogical that a GND, rooted in capitalism and economic growth—the very things that have created the current crises—can also emancipate the marginalized people and fix the problems. On the contrary, social practice theory scholars would argue that bringing about positive changes of consumption and other environment-effecting human actions depends on transforming practices to make them more sustainable, not on individual education or persuasion (Hargreaves, 2011, p. 82). In other words, the attempts at reifying sustainability could be useful in the long term. Instead of trying to convince people in the US they should consume less or spend their weekend picking up trash from their local park or waterway, the responsibility is shifted to the government, as Ocasio-Cortez claims, to make the people’s consumption, travel, and overall lives eco-friendlier.

6.1.2 Sustainable Development

The most widely quoted of sustainable development comes from the 1987 Brundtland Commission report: “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 8). Debates continue to go back and forth surrounding the best or ideal definition of sustainable development. It is widely accepted though, that “sustainable development supports and often enables, the fundamental societal and systems transitions and transformation that help limit global warming to 1.5°C” while also enabling the pursuit of climate-resilient pathways that can help achieve poverty and inequality reductions (IPCC, 2018, p. 22).

Sustainability is mentioned a mere four times in HR 109. On page 5: “To invest in the infrastructure and industry of the United States to sustainably meet the challenges of the 21st century…[securing] a sustainable environment,” on page 8: “Sustainable farming and land use…building a more sustainable food system” and on page 9: “Cleaning up existing hazardous waste and abandoned sites to promote economic development and sustainability” (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019). There is no definition of sustainability provided in any of these utterances which leaves it completely open to interpretation by the audience according to their own beliefs and background.
Furthermore, in the debates surrounding sustainability, scholars go back and forth about strong sustainability versus weak sustainability. Weak sustainability is characterized by ideas that natural and human capital can be substituted for one another and that natural, human and reproducible capital are an "aggregate, homogeneous stock." Additionally, it is theorized that natural capital can be used efficiently over time, can be replaced with more valuable or reproducible human capital and that maintaining and enhancing the value of aggregate capital stock is sufficient for sustainability (Barbier & Burgess, 2017). Strong sustainability, on the other hand, is rooted in the idea that natural capital cannot always be substituted, that certain environmental processes and functions that are unique and essential must be preserved, and that maintaining the value of the aggregate capital stock is necessary but not adequate (ibid). In HR 109 sustainability is talked about in a very weak sense and there is little lot of value placed on the environment or environmental capital (ecosystem services) for its own sake, it is only for the value that it gives to humans and their economy. On page five, she mentions clean air and water, access to nature and a sustainable environment. Preserving or restoring these things are all for the benefit of humans and the use of natural capital because nature is being valued intrinsically. Further, on page nine, she talks about restoring natural ecosystems and enhancing biodiversity. At first glance, these may seem to be instances of strong sustainability however, restoring ecosystems is being used as a way to remove GHG from the atmosphere and restore natural ecosystems thus, it is still for human use benefit (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019). Further down the page, enhancing biodiversity is being used to support climate resiliency of humans and communities (ibid). The document lacks a duty to restore and preserve nature for nature’s sake, not for humans.

7. Summary

The shining aspects of this text are democratic socialism and economic growth. These ideas are displayed in the construction of the document, the discourse used in the document and positionality displayed in the text. In the beginning it is stated that HR 109 is a response to the current climate crises but the overall discourse is not focused on a sustainable future to save the environment. The focus is on people affected by the crises, and even more so, the economic consequences that could result if the crises worsens. The most talked about topics are the “frontline and vulnerable communities” and the economy. The sheer repetition of these ideas demonstrates their importance over other topics in the text.

In any case, discourse in the resolution is being used in an attempt to spread a hegemonic idea of what green development should look like in the United States. Sustainable development, by common definitions, is not the focus. Rather, keeping the US a global economic leader while also helping marginalized groups rise to the middle class and enjoy the so-called benefits and freedom that capitalism has to offer. The working class is talked about in ways that are inclusive and focused but not so extreme that liberal politicians and even conservatives could not jump on board to support a Green New Deal. Ocasio-Cortez seeks to reimagine sustainability in terms of economic growth combined with her democratic socialist ideals which she definitely succeeds at. She uses the idea behind anything “green”—environmentalism—and turns sustainability into green capitalism. Overall, the document seems most poised to solve the economic crises first then the social crises followed by the environmental crises.

It is difficult to predict whether or not her ideas will be enacted in policy at the federal level but at the state level, smaller scale policies similar to the idealized GND have begun to be implemented. In Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, California, Hawaii and Washington, legislation is being considered or has been past that propose increases in renewable energy usage and decreasing GHG emissions (Storrow, 2019, No page). In April of this year, legislators in Washington passed a law (SB 5116) requiring 100 percent clean energy by 2045, a coal phaseout by 2025 and other stipulations (Merchant,
2019, No page). In New York, legislation has been passed to “eliminate 85% of its overall planet-warming emission by 2050 while offsetting or capturing the other 15%” (Kaufman, 2019, No page). These laws have only been enacted in left-leaning states, though. While they do show great potential for a national GND, it is still difficult to predict if it is feasible.

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