Time for Politics:
How a Conceptual History of Forests Can Help Us Politicize the Long Term

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Abstract

In recent scholarly debate, the Anthropocene concept has been criticized for diverting attention from the political aspects of contemporary environmental crises, not least by way of the long timescales it implies. This article therefore takes on the matter of long-termism as an historical and political phenomenon, by applying a conceptual historical perspective. Examples are drawn from historical studies of forest politics. It is argued that conceptions of the long term, just like all concepts in political language, are historical and therefore problematic to legitimately define conclusively. Yet, many of the environmental crises looming in our time do indeed call for long-term perspectives. As a solution in accordance with its historical and democratic conceptual character, it is suggested that political long-termism paradoxically can and should be constantly deliberated and renewed in the short-term. Its conceptual history can then serve two purposes: First, history can offer *exempla* of how long-termism can be conceptualized and institutionalized in ways that encourage continuous deliberation and reconceptualization. Second, historical conceptualizations of the long term can be drawn upon, both negatively and positively, in this continuous deliberation.

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Forest Time as a Political Challenge

Since trees grow slowly, when dealing with forests politicians and administrations are faced with a particular set of problems. The forest has its own unrushed temporality and throughout history, politicians have grappled with the challenge of turning that organic and material long-termism into political time. As an example, the centrally administered and managed forest – planned, planted and harvested according to schedule – represents one type of political temporality, and the forest used as a commons represents a different one.[1]

In historical research, conflicts over forest politics have often been described as conflicts over the use of a particular space (Matteson, 2015; Sahlins, 1994; Sarles, 2006). But as will soon become apparent, forest politics are also closely intertwined with conceptions of time. It seems plausible that, as Caroline Ford puts it, "ideas about nature and landscape reveal how societies conceive of their past, present and future", yet, it is also likely that different and sometimes contradictory conceptions of time can exist simultaneously in a particular society, sometimes clashing in political conflicts over issues such as the forest (2004: 174; for a similar argument regarding time as a contested issue, see Andersson and Rindzevičiūtė, 2015: 2). In this article, historical examples of forest politics are used as cases of political long-termism.[2]

An apolitical long term: the Anthropocene attacked

After the Anthropocene concept's virtually viral success and initially almost omnipresent acceptance, a growing number of critical voices can now be heard on the subject.[3] As the discussion has unfolded it has attracted scholars from disciplines other than the natural sciences, and many of these have pointed out problematic aspects of the Anthropocene concept. For the critics, the problem is not so much when the new epoch might have begun (one of the much contested themes of the debate), but rather what the Anthropocene concept highlights, what it obscures and what kind of influence it may exercise on the academic and political discussion on global environmental degradation (see for example Hamilton et al., 2015; Robin, 2013). Whereas critics worried about the species-pride and embracing attitude towards human dominance of the earth system they saw in the Anthropocene concept, others, such as the self-proclaimed eco-modernists, cultivated the idea of a "good, or even great Anthropocene" in which a speedy technological and economic development would allow for human well-being and freedom to be decoupled from environmental damage (Asafu-Adjaye et al., 2015: 6).

A recurring critique of the concept is that it imposes a narrative that cleanses environmental degradation of all politics. One expression is the kind of biological perspective that Matthew Lepori has named species-talk. In his view, ”the enfolding of man into a single story, with a single past and a single future/demise, is the most powerful (and problematic) aspect of the discourse” (Lepori, 2015: 105). Within the Anthropocene narrative, humans are primarily seen as a species, not as a political agent. Sociogenic problems, in the words of Hornborg and Malm, are in this way ”naturalized” and ”depoliticized” into anthropogenic problems (2014). Particular political actions, social structures, historical conditions and events, political choices, economic systems, or ways of conceptualizing humans, society and nature – all tend to be engulfed by the category of evolutionarily conditioned behaviours. Politically speaking, acting according to some version of human nature is always a choice (for a discussion on Machiavelli’s argument about natural tendencies as eligible, and Quentin Skinner’s treatment of this topic, see Skinner 1986: 244 and Palonen, 2002: 96). Within the species narrative however, the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene appears as a unified and a-historical biological entity, cast as responsible for possibly fatal global environmental change, and as a consequence environmental destruction looks neither historical nor political.

In temporal terms, the Anthropocene focus on humans as a species tend to obscure events, understood in any politically meaningful sense. Without political aspects, Anthropocenic time appears as an evolution, not a history; it is, to borrow Heringman’s phrase, “history masquerading as nature” (2014: 145). The Anthropocene concept somehow blurs the demarcation line between natural and human time, and thereby depoliticizes the history of the environmental crisis we are in. This goes along the lines of Chakrabarty’s argument in his groundbreaking article from 2009, that that one of the implications of climate change on historiography is a ”collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history” (2009: 201). Devoid of history, the Anthropocene *anthropos* is no *zoon politikon*.

Another feature of the Anthropocene concept that potentially adds to its depoliticization is that it merges all kinds of specific and regional environmental issues into one, truly grand, narrative. Even such issues that are possible to address via normal political institutions on different levels, via municipal or national legislation for example, risk being conceptualized as part of a global anthropocenic whole, and as such impossible to exercise influence on. The power to order and give meaning to all kinds of phenomena is probably part of the extraordinary attraction of the Anthropocene concept. But it also risks diverting attention from the responsibility for particular instances of degradation as well as potential alternatives

in each such case. It also, perhaps more alarmingly, zooms our attention out from relatively short-term events such as concrete political decisions, even in cases when these strongly affect long-term processes such as global warming.

Conceptual history as a politicizing device

In this article, I attempt to apply a conceptual historical perspective in order to render visible the political character of a particular aspect of the Anthropocene, namely its long-termism.[4] Conceptual history proposes to address precisely the kind of de-politicizing tendencies that seem to make the Anthropocene concept problematic. Key to conceptual history is that it approaches political language not in search of correct definitions of concepts, but instead seeks to examine the concepts as arenas for political and social conflicts in concrete situations, and the concepts are then often regarded as actions in that situation (Skinner, 1969).

In analogy to political concepts, conceptions of time, or temporalities, can be objects of political contestation and conflict (Jordheim, 2004: 11). Competing ways to structure time are intertwined with concrete social and political issues. Taking the cue from Reinhart Koselleck, temporality is here to be understood as referring to historically variable experiences of time, such as ”progress, decadence, acceleration, or delay, the ’not yet’ and the ’no longer’, the ’earlier’ or ’later than’, the ’too early’ and the ’too late’, situation and the duration” (Koselleck, 1985: 94; Jordheim, 2012). In this article, long-termism is approached as if it were a political concept, as a political phenomenon with a history. As a deviation from normal conceptual historical methodology, it is here not associated with a particular term but is instead treated as a type of conception or time-line. Long-termism is here to be understood as a heuristic historical object, an analytical concept rather than a term indigenous to the sources. In order to examine long-termism, I turn to a concrete political issue that has been central to European politics for centuries: the forest. This article draws on earlier studies of forest politics, with special attention to the temporal dimensions as they have been described in these studies.

The Anthropocene Time Problem and Conceptual History

The Anthropocene evokes deep, literally geological, time. Environmental problems indeed often unfold over incredibly long timescales. Many kinds of plastic take hundreds, or even thousands, of years to decompose and the timescale of climate change is vertiginous; in the words of the climate activist and writer Bill McKibben "the next decade will decide what the world looks like for thousands of decades to come" (McKibben, 2015). Yet, there are very few political conceptions, let alone institutions, that correspond to these timescales. The Anthropocene concept does not present a solution to the problem of the apolitical long term in so far as it contributes to making the long term political. Rather, it adds to the depoliticized character of global environmental change as unrelated to any established political and historical timelines.

The need for long-term perspectives in environmental politics is complicated by the fact that political long-termism is being regarded as problematic for both democratic and historical and reasons. Political theorists have pointed to the various democratically problematic aspects of legitimizing intergenerational, long-term political claims (this discussion is larger than can be properly represented here, but see for example Thompson, 2005; 2010; Skagen Ekeli, 2005; Beckman, 2008; 2013).

From an historical point of view, political concepts, just like politics, are never timeless, but always situated in concrete time and space, embedded in particular circumstances, or, as Nietzsche put it, "only that which has no history is possible to define" (Palonen, 2002; Nietzsche, 1966: 820). Political concepts' meaning therefore lie in their use, and they have to be studied in relation to a particular historical context and not be equalled with the particular definition that happen to prevail in the historian's own moment.[5] This historicity of concepts has strong implications for the political long term. Intergenerational claims and regulations are not only potentially undemocratic in the sense that the future citizens affected by them do not have a say in their legislation, but also problematic in that they attempt to freeze the historically changing understanding of a particular concept to a particular definition. Kari Palonen suggests that this historicity "marks a temporal limit for normative conceptualizations, regarding them as temporary and precious, and thus rejecting the value of maximizing their duration". Since political language is historical and political concepts' meaning change over time, it is paternalistic and problematic to make long-term claims for future generations. According to Palonen, the temporal limitation of normative conceptualizations is comparable to the democratic principle of a temporal limit to government (Palonen, 2002: 103). Regardless of

some unclarity in this argument – such as how far off in the future the temporal limit to a concept's validity is to be set – Palonen's point is relevant to the Anthropocene discussion. Democratic legitimacy demands that political language maintains openness for contestation and deliberation over time. How can this insight be squared with the urgent need for long-termism in the midst of environmental crises?

The problem of long-termism in a political language that changes over time can be rephrased into the somewhat paradoxical suggestion that the long term perspectives that are actually called for in the Anthropocene need to be continuously reconceptualised. To square this, I suggest a new distinction in the discussion, namely between concepts of long-termism on the one hand, and the ways these concepts are legitimized and deliberated in a particular political language on the other. The latter is indeed historical and idiosyncratic to a particular time and place, whereas the former transcends in and stretches into the future.

Bonnie Honig has made a useful distinction between what she names a virtue theory of politics, understanding politics as a way to achieve closure, and a *virtú* theory of politics, which instead recognizes and takes as a starting point the "perpetuity of political contest" (Honig, 1993: 3). Using Honig's distinction, long-termism can be seen as a virtue in politics, but as such its meaning will be constantly contested, and its legitimacy will thus constantly call for renewal in a *virtú* mode. Long-termism is a value that needs to be continuously renewed in the short-term. Along similar lines Michael Saward has argued that sustainability – a form of long-termism – cannot be legitimately constituted unless it is continuously deliberated (Saward, 2008). Mats Andrén makes a related argument in the case of nuclear waste management, another long-term issue in which the state, according to Andrén, constantly has to strive to renew legitimacy, a legitimacy that is necessarily always in crisis (Andrén, 2012).

If the conceptual historical perspective suggests to us that the meaning of long-termism cannot be decisively defined, its history can still be useful in the attempts to forge arguments that legitimize political timescales corresponding to the long-term character of the various environmental issues threatening our societies. The conceptual history of long-termism can be mined for experience and, anachronistically, even be used as a repertoire of *exempla* of ways to conceptualize and legitimize temporalities transcending human lifespans. In our current democratic systems, political legitimacy is core, and the call for conscious and persuasive conceptualizations of the long term urgent. Still, pre-democratic conceptual history can be drawn upon in the democratic legitimation of long-termism.

If we take seriously the idea that the legitimization of long-termism has to happen on a short-term, continuous basis, history can also serve a second purpose. Historical examples

can then be considered as institutional models for encouraging that kind of continuous deliberative activity.

The time of republican nature: Venetian forest administration

In his study of the republic of Venice from the 14th to the 18th century, Karl Appuhn examines the development of a sophisticated administration of mainland forests, which underpinned the city's success in the renaissance world. This administration cultivated a particular and idiosyncratic conception of nature. Well into the 18th century it maintained a view of nature, forests in particular, not as a mechanics of dead matter, but as a living organism, fragile and in need of careful protection, a view that Appuhn names managerial organicism.[6] The conceptualization of forests and by implication of time, was closely intertwined with a political language, "an explicitly republican idiom of the common good" infusing matters of resource management (Appuhn, 2009: 299).

Early 18th century exponents of this view refined the conception of the forest with distinctions such as that between *selva* and *bosco*. Appuhn lays out the meaning of this distinction as tightly intertwined with republicanism. Whereas both *selva* and *bosco* refer to the forest, the latter meant a forest managed according to principles of the common good, and for which private interest had been sacrificed. *Selva* on the other hand was used in the sense of wilderness, although a wilderness very different from the North American conception of a pristine nature, immaculately free of human interference. *Selva* was nature managed, but with greed and self-interest, against the common good, against the *res publica*. Nature and culture were not opposing principles, but instead intertwined with one another (Appuhn, 2009: 250–251, 275–276).

The threat of wood scarcity loomed over the Venetian Senate during all of this period, and it fostered the particular view of the relationship between society and nature. As Appuhn puts it, it was "the unique combination of a small territorial state forced to rely almost exclusively on domestic timber resources and a republican ideology that defined the public good in opposition to unfettered economic liberty [that] drove the Venetians to develop a form of environmental management that stressed the need to preserve an explicitly organic nature" (Appuhn, 2009: 290). As opposed to contemporary writers on forestry as John Evelyn (1620–1706), English founding member of the Royal Society and author of a famous treaty on silval

matters, Venetians forestry officials did not believe in manipulating nature to extract a greater profit. For Appuhn this mirrors a legal view of nature in contrast to an economic one (Appuhn, 2009: 284–286).

The Venetian republican system of forest politics was underpinned by an analysis quite close to the dilemma of the tragedy of the commons. Unorganized by republican institutions, humans would quickly give in to self-interest and devastate forests down to the last tree. In contrast, if regulated by a virtuous state, individuals could instead cooperate to cultivate the forest in a responsible and long-lasting way. The view that nature had to be managed morally also served as a legitimation of a certain geography of power in the Venetian republic. Mainland inhabitants under Venetian control, especially the elites, were generally regarded as more prone to self-interested and careless overexploitation of the forests. Yet, local elites could be infused with a republican sensibility for the common good if they were included in the implementation and enforcement of forestry laws (Appuhn, 2009: 262, 264–265, 273, 282).

If we interpret Venetian republicanism of nature as a temporality, it was not a matter of the state projecting into the future a precisely calculated scheme for value growth. Historians have underlined that the Venetian art of managing nature was an art of imitating, not changing it (Tafuri, 1989: 141–142; Appuhn, 2009: 275–279). Nature was inherently fertile and capable of satisfying essential public needs, yet it needed protection by way of state sovereignty. It should be preserved and renewed in its ideal state of balance, not altered or improved. This makes the Venetian case of conceptualizing the long term in forest politics different from the French and German cases discussed in the following. According to Appuhn, the Venetian forest administration diverged from its Northern European counterparts by not resting on a desacralizing view of nature and not commodifying trees by transforming them into something that had a calculable value (Appuhn, 2009: 283, 286). In analogy to the Venetian conception of nature, the republican long term was an organicist temporality of virtuous preservation and imitation of the natural world.

Considered as an addition to the repertoire of historical *exempla* to draw from in the deliberation of the Anthropocene time problem, Venetian forest history centers on nature as an organic condition for human society. Taking the Venetian republican idiom as an example would mean forging a political long-termism with a strong sense of nature's limits and fragility. It would also entail a constant concern for how the management of resources needs to be exercised in accordance with these limits, and simultaneously be justified in terms of fundamental political principles. As for the encouragement of a constant deliberation of the legitimacy of the long term, the Venetian republican model suggests an integrated conception

of nature and (political) culture, in which political virtues such as long-termism are kept alive in political discourse rather than institutionalized in a particular administrative body.

In his book on Venetian forest politics, Karl Appuhn makes the point that Venice could be an *exemplum* for our time. The Venetian political conception of the forest meant managing a whole with no outside to use as a reserve. The Venetians didn't picture expansion of the territory as a solution to the scarcity if wood, but instead set up a system for the forests already under their control. Interestingly, McKenzie Wark has presented a similar interpretation of the Anthropocene, as being the state beyond the realization that, on global level, there is no outside to our world where garbage or carbon dioxide can be dumped and forgotten. The Anthropocene is in this way a conception of radical immanence. (Appuhn, 2009: 302; Wark, 2015)

Enlightened Futures in the German Forests

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the age-old practice of cyclical harvests of trees became the object of governmental interest and regulation in different regions of Europe, and so did the timescales of the harvests. As pointed out by Paul Warde, the timelines were in many of the early cases, such as Louis XIV's 1669 *Ordonnance sur le fait des Eaux et Forêts*, set up to facilitate calculation of revenue and administration leases rather than with respect to actual silval life-cycles (Warde, 2011: 159–160). A qualitative shift in the history of political management of forests came with the development of a new kind of calculated scientific forestry in German states, mostly in Saxony and Prussia, in the 18th century. The new method divided the forest into a grid of equally spaced square cells, one of which was to be clear-cut and replanted each year in a precise rotation cycle. If the trees were best to be harvested at the age of 84 years, that meant that the number of squares in a particular forest should also be 84, and the whole harvest cycle would thus be completed every 84 years. (This example is based on Richard Hölzl's discussion of one of the earliest forestry manuals, *Lehrbuch für den pfalzbaierischen Förster* (1788) written by Georg Grünberger, mathematician and co-director of the Bavarian Royal School of Forestry in Munich. Hölzl, 2010: 435–436). Compared to a natural forest, a scientifically managed one was simpler; quantifying methods aimed at "the creation of uniform forests, consisting of single species and identically aged trees" (Whited, 2000: 27). The objective for developing rational forestry was to make calculable profits, and in

doing that foresters ”established a tradition of quantitative resource management” (Lowood, 1990: 316–317).

Wood was a crucial resource and important for states to control, but in establishing a system for controlling it, the forest gained a meaning beyond that of an important resource supply: forestry became a model political science (Lowood, 1990: 320–321). James C. Scott has famously argued that the kind of scientific forestry developed in Saxony and Prussia in the 18th century later became a blueprint for what he calls a high modernist way of “seeing like a state”. (Other historians have linked forestry to the formation of the early modern state. See for example Warde, 2006; Radkau, 2008. This literature is discussed in Hölzl, 2010: 437). The forest administrations cut a lens that rendered nature legible and manageable, a lens that could then be directed at other things (Scott specifically mentions rural settlement, urban planning, land administration, and agriculture. Scott, 1998: 11). And if forestry was a political science, it was one that promoted a particular temporality. Students of administration were taught to think far ahead, often in generational terms. The German forestry literature called for long-term administrative planning, the forester must be able to calculate ”more than one or two generations into the future” (Bechstein, 1805: 512 quoted in Lowood, 1990: 338).

In the German forestry literature of the 1780 and 90s the references to the offspring (*Nachkommen*) and posterity (*Nachwelt*) constituted a strong language that linked the new science to political administration. Around this time, the timelines for the regulated cycles of harvest in many German states were extended and differentiated in accordance with different species of trees. Hölzl cites the astonishing example of the Bavarian forest administration making a time plan for up to 420 years for the harvest cycle of oaks (2010: 439). This means that the German foresters of the 18th century planned for the 22nd. German scientific forestry is (arguably) also the origin of one of the most notorious concepts of long-termism in our time, namely sustainability (Hölzl, 2010; Stuber, 2008; Warde, 2011).

This political temporality was not unique to German foresters and state administrators however. A similar type of references to “posterity” and “posterité” were used in Evelyn’s *Sylva: Or a Discourse on Forest Trees* (1664) and in Louis XIV’s controller general of finance Jean-Baptiste Colbert’s *Ordonnance sur le fait des Eaux et Forêts* (1669) respectively. As Paul Warde has noted, by making references to future generations, these writers in fact appropriated a political language that was earlier used by the defenders of customary rights and the use of the commons. But the precise thing that was to be protected for posterity had shifted; it was no longer a matter of protecting the right to use the forest, now it was the actual timber itself that was to be preserved for future generations (Warde, 2011: 161).

Interpreted as a temporality, scientific forestry was in many ways emblematic for 18th century Enlightenment ideas about progress and planning, and forestry became a model for the administration of other things.[7] As phrased by Robert P. Harrisson, "Enlightenment is a projective detachment from the past" (1992: 114). Just like a forest well managed, a *bosco,* somehow incarnated the preserved common good in the Venetian republican forest vocabulary, so the calculated forest subjected to the rotating harvest grid materialize a conception of time as the realization of progress and reason. And whereas the Venetian Senators imagined themselves to be protecting a vulnerable and living whole by resisting qualitative change, German forest administrators calculated in order to improve nature and increase value over time.

The German example throws light on several aspects of the Anthropocene time problem. Even if it might not offer an evident model for instituting continuous deliberation and renewal of long-termism as a political concept, the meticulous calculus of resource supply generations ahead nevertheless adds to the repertoire of possibilities to draw on in the forging of the political long-termism in the Anthropocene. German scientific forestry also directs our attention to the importance of the object of long-term concerns. German scientific forestry literature appropriated a political language that upheld the rights to the commons, but shifted it so that it instead conceptualized the long term as a protection of the timber as an object of property.

Restoration Time: French Forests in the 19th Century

Contrary to many other places in the world, hexagonal France did in effect not experience a net loss in forested land in the 19th century; starting approximately the first third of that century, the share of forested areas in France instead increased (Whited, 2000: 1–2). In the mid-19th century, ideologically disparate forces united under the new slogan of reforestation; conservatives, saint-simonists and liberals all called for the restoration of forests lost. This aligned them with the interest of a group of forest owners who wished to transition from coppice to timber production, a culture that demanded much longer timespans between the harvests. These forest owners were in favour of regulations that protected their exclusive use of the forest. This group managed to organize and exercise influence over the state, which resulted in large-scale reforestation (Kalaora and Savoye, 1986: 22, 24, 26–27).

At this time, a French version of forestry as political science emerged, with overtones slightly different from those in Saxony and Prussia. In France, it was the proponents of the new science of sociology who turned their eyes towards the forest.[8] Kalaora and Savoye have described how this new breed of sociologists studied the growing problem of poverty in the cities, and connected it to what they saw as a general desolation of the landscape due to the rapid clearing of forests.[9] Silviculture became a social science (Kalaora and Savoye, 1986: 21). Deforestation and the worker's question were regarded as aspects of the same phenomenon, namely changes in the landscape that drove rural populations to move into the cities (Kalaora and Savoye, 1986: 21). This supported the case for reforestation, as did a series of devastating floods in the 1840s, 50s and 70s, interpreted to be caused by deforestation (Ford, 2004: 179–180). To cure this complex problem, early sociologists recommended that the state reforested land, especially sensitive areas such as mountain slopes. If the landowners refused, their land should be expropriated (Kalaora and Savoye, 1986: 21).

In launching the reforestation campaign, the administration managed to impose a certain type of long-termism on its population. A particular narrative about the areas that were to be forested underpinned the project. Despite the fact that people had been living in these mountain areas for thousands of years, the proponents of reforestation regarded and treated them as essentially uninhabited spaces. Among foresters, the view prevailed that it was their task to return the mountainous regions to an earlier, original state: one of an Alpine forest (Whited, 2000: 4–5). The reforestation project in this way rested on a temporality turned towards the past, aiming to restore a forested paradise lost. In the name of an imagined historical forest, politicians and professors of forestry made strong claims for the future in the shape of planned and planted forests, on territories practically taken from the rural populations.

The rural populations themselves were often against these measures. The cause of the long term in the reforestation campaign was imbued with social conflict over the use of the forest as a space, as resource – and as time. Forests were no longer subject to common law, and earlier possibilities for the rural population to sustain themselves, such as the right to glean dead wood, were shut. This was true not only of France; as a young man, Karl Marx wrote a series of articles on the issue in *Rheinische Zeitung* published in October and November 1842. In them he criticized the new wood-theft law debated in the Sixth Provincial Assembly of the Rhine Province (Megill, 2002: 84–85). A series of important legal novelties in post-revolutionary France had entailed profound changes in the way the forest was conceptualized politically. The Napoleonic Civil Code had entailed a seismic shift in the fundamental relations between society and forests, as private property laws successively replaced traditional use rights

of the commons as the default principle for organizing space in society. In many areas, the population relied on the use of forests to compensate for a bad year in harvests, and in many places they continued their traditional use of the forest against the 1827 Forest Code, which first and foremost protected the landowner's rights and consolidated the privatisation of the commons. Sociologist Curtis Sarles argues that the Code was a compromise between private landowners and those in favour of stronger state interventions in silval matters. Clear-cuttings were in principle allowed, as long as they didn't interfere with national security by jeopardizing the supply of timber. When they did, however, the forest had to be guarded for future needs of the state (2006: 573–574, 577–580). Early 19th century sociologists pleaded for social peace and understanding, and argued for the reestablishment of what they saw as a former well-functioning order based on a community of interests between forest owners and the local populations (Kalaora and Savoye, 1986: 33). But in reality conflicts were harsh. From the 1820s and well into the 1870s, violence recurrently burst out as peasants resisted and even revolted against what they considered a limiting of their traditional use rights (Sarles, 2006: 576). Forest guards had their food supplies plundered, were driven from their homes and there were even occasions of murder (Sarles, 2006: 582; Ford, 2004: 180). Most famous and spectacular among these revolts was the so-called *guerre des demoiselles* in the Ariège around 1830 (Sahlins, 1994). The Forest Code and reforestation project thus also played out as a conflict between the state and the rural communities (Whited, 2000: 4).

The condition that made a large-scale reforestation project possible in metropolitan France despite the unrest was, in historian Tamara Whited's interpretation, a centralized and *dirigiste* forest administration (Whited, 2000: 4). The state forestry school in Nancy had been founded in 1824 for the education of the forest guards, and Sarles underlines the Nancy school's central role in depicting collective ownership as disorderly and a major threat to the French forests (2006: 578). Part of the education consisted in inculcating a specific ethic or *esprit de corps* in the future forest guards and administrators. Kalaora and Savoye describes this ethic as one that favoured stability and long-termism as a counter-weight to competition and progress. In other words, the French state educated administrators in the spirit of a counterbalance to the laws of the market. The school's model forest guard was no *homo economicus*; his temporal ethos was supposed to be the forest's own. Time, the members of the forestry corps were taught, was under no circumstances to be bargained with. Contemporary writers, foresters and politicians recognized and developed this position theoretically (Kalaora and Savoye, 1986: 27).

In Nancy the French state in this way founded an institution whose mission it was to counter commercial temporal forces, and to safeguard the interest of future generations in the form of forests. The forest guard was in a sense the future's deputy in the administration. Despite their contrary view on private property in relation to the forest, the ethos intended for the administrative body of foresters is in many ways reminiscent of the republican ideals promoted by the Venetian Senators described by Karl Appuhn. In the Venetian republic however, the safeguarding of the long term in the shape of forests was a responsibility that each Senator was supposed to uphold and let himself be guided by in his public function. In the French mass society one and a half century later, that ideal was instead placed in a particular administrative institution, with its proper rationale made to counterbalance other forces in state and society.

In the French case, scientific forestry stood against a traditional way of using the forest, which went under the name of *jardinage*. Whited contrasts the even-aged managed forests with the traditional method: "long associated with forests subject to use rights and with coniferous forests in general, jardinage –'gardening'– meant culling a prescribed number of individual, fully mature trees left to shade and protect younger ones". This method left the forest looking almost the same before and after harvest, older trees were saved as protection for smaller ones, and peasants often used these forests for pasture. The French authorities viewed this method as disorderly and difficult to manage, not least since illegal cutting was harder to detect. When German silvicultural methods were introduced and institutionalized via the creation of the forestry school in Nancy, *jardinage* was viewed with even more suspicion by the administration (Larrère and Nougarède, 1993: 80–85; Whited, 2000: 29). Tentatively, the practice of *jardinage* could be seen as an alternative – but loosing – temporality that stood against the one imposed by the state. In contrast to the scientific methods' discrete and standardized temporal slots, *jardinage* implied a continuous, even and flexible temporality.

French forest restoration history plays out as a conflict between two conceptions of the forest with their respective temporalities. The commons, with its practices of *jardinage* and continual temporality was successively and sometimes violently replaced by a private property model, balanced by an institutionalized *esprit de corps* long-termism of the state forestry personnel. Both are historical examples of long-termisms, and can be considered part of the repertoire for the forging of contemporary long-termisms in a democratic context. As for historical examples of institutional models that may encourage the continuous deliberation and re-evaluation of the long term, the French example offers a model in which the short-term effects of the market were countered and limited by a particular administrative body. The values

of long-termism were to be transmitted to the personnel of this body via a prestigious *grande école* education.

Imperial Geographies of Forest Time

If the projection of a long-termism was manifested in now uncommon forests in hexagonal France, the situation was different in the colonial territories of the expanding empire: restoration temporality had an imperial geography. In Algeria for example – invaded by French troops in the 1830s and proclaimed to be French territory in 1848 – the declensionist narrative of forests lost was used to legitimize measures that lead to extensive land degradation (Davis, 2007: 15).

When the French conquest started in the 1830s, the French occupying troops needed wood for their own supply and the administration was therefore from the beginning interested in Algerian forest issues. Imposing new legislation on land use and forest protection, the colonial administration failed to understand the complex local systems of collective land ownership and use rights, and instead considered almost all land state property, with only certain areas designated for the original population. This meant an outlawing of traditional ways of living off the land, and drove many Algerians away from their homes. In addition to their countless human victims, the colonizing forces in the early campaign also caused extensive damage to the environment, not least by cutting down forests and tree plantations (Davis, 2007: 29–34).

Diana K. Davis' study of the environmental history of French imperial North Africa, in some ways parallels that of Peter Sahlins' description of peasant revolts in the Ariège, in that it shows how French ideas on rational land were used to outrule local practices – with violent results. In 19th century Maghreb, what followed was, in Davis' words, that "a fundamental clash of perceptions and opinions regarding both forests and pastures, then, gave rise to two of the most important and long-lasting points of contention, and areas of repression, found in the entire colonial period", (Davis, 2007: 4, 12, 27; Sahlins, 1994).

Early on in the occupation, the French developed a historical narrative that used ancient Roman history and incorrect assumptions about North African ecologies to justify their own presence in the Maghreb. Roman remains in North Africa were taken as a sign that the region had been more fertile and densely populated in Antiquity, and that it was the local nomadic peoples' herding practices that had turned the land into an unnatural and barren desert.

In the Maghrebin landscape, the administrators read signs of a disorderly, careless and consuming relation to nature, a manifestation of the local population's unfitness for political rule (Davis, 2007: 37–41). In hexagonal France, an analogous narrative of historical carelessness with the forests on the part of the local population was at play, for example regarding the Alps (Whited, 2000). But whereas in Algeria the decline narrative was accompanying an important environmental degradation playing out simultaneously, in hexagonal France, it was instead used to underpin a reforestation campaign. The decline narrative about an original sin of indigenous deforestation diverted the responsibility of the environmental degradation pursued by the French colonial administration (Ford, 2004: 196–197). In Algeria, the French administered a politics of devastation posing as restoration.

If in hexagonal France a restoration temporality was promoted and carried out in the reforestation campaign, this silval temporal regime did not apply in the imperial periphery. The new even-aged forests planted in France manifested a long-term political and discretely managed time projected into the future. According to this temporal regime, time passing meant successively increased prosperity at a well-calculated pace. Meanwhile, in the imperial periphery no such future was laid out; instead future was erased as Algerian trees were destructed as part of the French military strategy.

Davis shows how a narrative about past recklessness with nature can serve to divert attention from, or even sanction, overexploitation and carelessness in the present. Telling an untrue story of the past can legitimize the exact kind of misdeeds of which the narrative pretends to be a warning. Fressoz and Bonneuil argue that this is in fact the underlying structure of the Anthropocene discourse. Central to the Anthropocene narrative is the idea of an ecological awakening or rise of an environmental consciousness, sometimes placed in the 1960s and 70s, sometimes at a more recent date. This narrative glosses over the fact that the reflection and understanding of environmental degradation has much deeper roots, and thereby obscures the historical forces that have thwarted those reflections and understandings. In that way, the awakening narrative is also a kind of depoliticization, as it blames modern society monolithically for environmental crises, instead of highlighting the different interests and forces that have stood against each other historically (Fressoz, 2012: 12–13; Fressoz & Bonneuil, 2013). The narrative of an awakening in the present covers the forces of interested disinterest in matters of environmental destruction. In the words of Rob Nixon "the forces of inaction have deep pockets" (2011: 39).

Conclusion

The brief episodic history of political long-termism presented here has demonstrated some of the complex dynamics that have imbued the concept in the past. Long-termism is potent conceptual stuff. In the past, it has frequently been used to impress central power on populations in political peripheries who lived with the forest and used it according to traditional temporalities. Political long-termism has been used to make claims to stretch power over space as well as over language beyond human lifespans. Nevertheless, these claims have sometimes been successful in the sense that in many of the historical examples forests have been left standing when conceptualized within this type of political temporality.[10]

In the Anthropocene, calls for long-term horizons for politics are legion. How else are political solutions to be found for issues like climate change with its wicked, (so far) slow paced, lagging, yet irreversible and non-linear temporality; or the structural and steadily increasing inequality in environmental destruction between the global North and South, fittingly labelled 'slow violence' by Rob Nixon (2011)? The looming anthropocenic and anthropogenic problems seem to call for clear and once-and-for-all defined concepts used to legitimize politics that limit environmental degradation for good. But if the historicity of political language recognized, once-and-for-all definitions of concepts cannot be the solution, as their legitimacy will always eventually wear out. Instead, the legitimacy of the long term has to be continuously renewed in the short term. On that matter, history can offer models for how to encourage the continuing deliberation of the term. From this point of view, questions could be posed such as whether it is the French 19th century model of entrusting long-termism to a particular administrative function, in this case the special *corps* of foresters, or the Venetian republican model of letting every Senator guard long-termism as a republican value that best correspond to the continuous legitimization and reconceptualization of the political long term.

History can also expand the repertoire to draw upon when forging political long-termisms for the Anthropocene. In the past, long-term temporalities have been interwoven in different kinds of political languages, and their meanings have shifted according to their social and political, but also conceptual, contexts. The political long term has been legitimized by reference to a cornucopian future or to a sumptuously verdant past to resurrect, it has rested on republican conceptions of the common good, on enlightenment projections of a future of progress and growth. Silval time has been imagined as fragile and always on the brink of scarcity, a calculable and discrete realization of improvement and value growth, or as describing a decline from a paradise lost caused by the un-enlightened. These histories can serve the

purpose of extending our political imagination in the continual deliberation and legitimation of the political long term.

Notes

[1] In the article, no systematic difference will be made between silviculturally planned and managed forests and natural ones. Fully aware of the great difference this makes in matters of biodiversity, resilience to different kinds of stress etc., my purpose here is not to study forests and forestry as such, but to use forest politics as a case for examining conceptions of the long-term.

[2] Fressoz and Locher's examination of the climate concept's long history is relevant as a parallel to the device of using forest politics as a case to examine long-termism. Their argument is that that the notion of a human impact on the climate via deforestation in fact existed already in the 17th century. Scientists then started taking an interest in the climates of the past and formulate theories of how humans impacted it. Climate is therefore to be regarded as a concept that has merged with differing ideas about the government of things and beings since then. Whether the historical iterations of the climate concept are in accordance with the climate science of our day or not is not the point, but rather that the reflection on human impact on the climate and how that impact should be governed has a long history that merits attention (Fressoz and Locher, 2012; 2015).

[3] In the decade and a half that has passed since it was first coined, the Anthropocene concept has generated a literature that seems to be growing by the day. Apart for being the subject of a legion of special issues, conferences and even specialized journals, the concept made it to the cover of *The Economist* in 2011, and has been the subject of a number of exhibitions at major museums. In September 2013 the first issue of the journal *Anthropocene* was published, followed by *Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene* in December of that same year, and in April 2014 the first issue of the transdisciplinary *Anthropocene Review*.

[4] Several contributions to the call for a political history of the Anthropocene have been made. One example is Malm and Hornborg who suggest that the historical conditions for the development of fossil fuel technology – in their eyes the most important aspect of the Anthropocene – was social inequality. Since its conception, fossil fuel technology has then continued to amplify that inequality (Malm, 2016; Hornborg and Malm, 2014). Fressoz and Bonneuil instead propose that since the dawn of the industrial revolution, protests against its destructive forces have been manifold. Contrary to the narrative prevailing in historiography, industrial modernity has been accompanied by different elaborate

environmental reflexivities. A political understanding of the Anthropocene must therefore include an account of how these protests were silenced and those reflexivities inhibited (Fressoz and Bonneuil, 2013).

[5] In this argument I draw on a critique, developed mostly in the 1990s and early 2000s, of a particular kind of normative political theory. The critique was articulated by historically minded political theorists and conceptual historians, and its main target was a type of political theorizing often qualified as neo-Kantian, most notably in the tradition building on Rawls' influential theory and concept of justice. One of the critics was Kari Palonen who compiled and developed the implications for political theory of conceptual history, especially Quentin Skinner and Reinhart Koselleck's methodologies. Palonen articulated a challenge to normative political theory built on well defined, and by consequence timeless, concepts. Politics is never timeless, Palonen asserted, on the contrary it is always situated in concrete time and space, it exists embedded in particular circumstances. Frank Ankersmit has developed a similar critique. In his view, Rawls' device, the "original situation", was designed to move beyond historical contingency, but in doing so politics was cleansed of its main characteristics, namely historical concretion and the diversity of interests (Palonen, 2002 and Ankersmit, 1996: 2–4).

[6] On this matter Appuhn polemicizes with Caroline Merchant's classic argument of a general trend towards a "death of nature" in Europe and North America in the 16th century, inflicted by Baconian science and mechanicism (Merchant, 1980; Appuhn, 2009: 11–12). In her review of Appuhn's book Pamela H. Smith pointed out that the theme of a difference between Venetian and Northern European views on nature is hardly exhausted, and she stressed the need for more research that nuances and localizes such umbrella terms as the view of nature in the past (2011: 159).

[7] Hölzl interprets scientific forestry's strong impact on administrations as a success for the idea of social progress and a strong general belief in the government's ability to deliver that on the part of the public (2010: 439). Scott on the other hand argues that the kind of rule of which scientific forestry became emblematic, is doomed to failure due to its exceeding simplifications – not least in the conception of time it rested on. "Their temporal ambitions meant that although they might, with some confidence, guess the immediate consequences of their moves, no one could specify, let alone calculate, the second or third order consequences or their interaction effects" (Scott, 1998: 344).

[8] In this context, Ferhat Taylan's study of what he calls a mesological rationality is worth mentioning. According to him, mesology (*mésologie*) was a specific field of administration and knowledge developed in France from the mid-18th until the 20th century. Mesology took living beings' relations to their surroundings as both an object of scientific knowledge, a theme of philosophical reflection but also as a domain of political intervention (Taylan, 2014).

[9] In the 19th century, there were also widespread ideas about deforestation as a cause for alteration in the climate. In 1821 the Minister for the interior even asked all the prefects to send in data on how the climate had changed in their respective *département* in recent years. For an extensive treatment of this, see Fressoz and Locher, 2012: 579–580.

[10] On this matter, a wide range of judgements is represented in the literature. In the case of Venice, Karl Appuhn regards the republican forest administration as largely successful in managing the forest for military needs. In the French case historians disagree on this point. See for example (Whited, 2000: 4) for an historiographical discussion.

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